

TWO BRIEF ITEMS

A place called Balzi Rossi, near Ventimiglia - familiar to anthropology scholars due to significant fossil finds - was often mentioned in pre-Schengen news items about illegal immigration between Italy and France. Along this arduous stretch, trains are forced to slow down, making it possible to jump off and enter French territory without passing border inspections; but then the way down is very steep and dangerous at night. This short item was printed alongside another about a teenage boy who committed suicide by throwing himself off an overpass of Milan's eastern ring road. Tormented by classmates for his effeminacy, he left a note: "I hope to wake up in a gentler world".

Even today, these two brief news stories, so coincidentally juxtaposed, seem effective in describing the common ground between two forms of exclusion. This is the subject of my new book, *Croci rosse e mezzeluna* (Noi e loro), from which the three texts that follow, related to more recent experiences, are also drawn.

I

He wanted to overcome the solid the inevitable

Gouge the five hundred euros

Into the red wall

And steer along the gouge

Down between the crags where

The Riviera train brakes

The Kurdish illegal immigrant

Who plunged headlong yesterday

From the arduous path along the cliff face

Between Menton and Ventimiglia.

II

Gentle. Young fragile lovely

And gentle. It was your curse

Only one

Way out

Off the railing of the overpass

Hoping to wake up

You said so in the note

In a gentler world.

The two of them said tomorrow night

The two of them said tomorrow night

Together there was more

That they could do,
So long as you
Don't mind it's not a palace.
The bed will do.

And so scratching his neck, a finisher
And polisher of machine parts
Under the sign that was urgently
Seeking personnel with experience
In aluminum foundry
Met a milling machinist with two years' experience
Next to him there shaking his head coffee in hand.
As the five-a-side match began to summon back
The operators of engine lathes
And the welders with drafting experience
The little group drifted apart.

These days we tend to just talk to each other,
With them insulting us, but cagily,
Sometimes even I will only catch on later.

Piazza Augusto Imperatore

Closed for ages due to construction work
It's an illegal parking lot
Piazza Augusto imperatore
Around the mausoleum.
There are three Egyptians who are running the business
Plus a helper, a young nephew
Nabil Alì, on the midnight shift.
To get me to expound on Italian words
He'd flash a smile, for just stopping by I would be feted
With beer or ice cream, with a lighter. He'd wait for me
Going over the conditional tense
Written out in pencil on a notepad.
One evening the police cars

Broke the spell, the uncles arrested
And for him a warning to steer clear.
But he knew I might pass by
And so a plaintive call
Broke the silence of the cops on duty
“Down here... down here”, coming from below,
Two lit embers in the darkness, his eyes gleaming
From the heart of Augustus.

Da QUI. APPUNTI DAL PRESENTE - Franco Buffoni, traduzione di Johanna Bishop 2007 - Per gentile concessione di Massimo Parizzi