

The relationship between pastoralism and poetry is curious, this subtle thread that winds through the millennia. I'm not referring to the many pages that have been offered over time to those who feed on literature, from the lyric poets of ancient Greece to the "wandering shepherd" of Leopardi's verses, with his sweet "night song"; from the singers of so many fictional Arcadias of our seventeenth century to D'Annunzio's "September, let's go. It's time to migrate," which is one of the few things about the poet that moves me; perhaps it's because September is the month that matters to me. Nothing to do with idyllic and bucolic poems, with shepherd boys blowing their flutes in the shade of an oak tree, with shepherdesses dancing and embroidering; with this world that isn't the real one, but rather how it's painted by the envy, nostalgia, and regret of those who dwell in the city and among books. I'm thinking of poetry that is a living word, that isn't written but relies on the voice, that accompanies and escapes. To the poetry of true shepherds, whether among the rocks of Abruzzo or the deserts furrowed by caravans, when they cultivate the same question as the poet from Recanati: "What are you doing, moon, in the sky? Tell me, what are you doing, silent moon?"

They too know how to make the most of the time necessary to immerse themselves in universal time, in the silence that can shape words. But then those words become imbued with their days. They welcome toil and rest, the rarefied dawns and fiery afternoons, the pace of transhumance and nights in the stables.

And it is for those words that I am now climbing the road that Pietro Leopoldo, Grand Duke of Tuscany, wanted to build, an extraordinary feat of engineering to reach the Duchy of Modena and from there the Brenner Pass and Austria. A road that never ended, but entirely within the family estates.

Once a simple carriage road, with dust that blinded and clogged the mouth. If it rained, it was even worse, the tires sunk in the mud. And if the snow was heavy, it cut off entire villages.

It doesn't seem real today when there's asphalt and the cars line up in rows, in winter for the ski slopes, in summer to enjoy the cool air. But those were times when hunger struck hard, and if it wasn't hunger, it was sweat, it was getting up before dawn for a crust of bread.

Several years ago, I had the idea of investing my savings in a house by the sea. Then, by chance, I ended up in these parts, and again by chance, I was shown a cabin for sale, above the tiny village of Rivoreta, embraced by the surrounding peaks.

I fell in love with it at first sight. This would be my sea, clouds instead of waves. I dreamed of a world apart, an Apennines like Heidi's Switzerland. I ended up paying a certain price for my naivety. I raised the white flag a few months before Covid, longing for deckchairs and umbrellas for the weekend. Afterward, I couldn't stop gnawing my elbows. I imagine the family now enjoying that cabin, and I tell myself that, in some way, I too was happy there.

Perhaps I had been fooled by the imagination of a city poet, perhaps it had been an idyll capable of enduring until it was swept away by the test of reality. But it was there that I discovered the poets of the mountains: shepherds and farmers who accompanied their work and celebration with words. Not far from me, a few bends below, lived Luigi Ferrari, better known as Gippetto del Bicchiere, the last great improvising poet. He had lived a long time, and the mountains had changed more rapidly than he had, because, as we know, when you're old, it's easier to stay the same, the way you've always been. He died when one world had dissolved, another, who knows?

Soon his octaves would be suitable for historical reenactments and for entertaining vacationers. But above all, these had been the places of Beatrice Bugelli, known to all as Beatrice di Pian degli Ontani: the shepherdess poet who, without even knowing how to sign her name, had amazed and enchanted the city poets, or as they were called then, the poets laureate.