

18-10-2011

Andrea Zanzotto was and is a 'writer after the war' - after the I. and II. WW. Which is to say that vanishing, disappearing was one of the deepest experiences of his life. Born in 1921, he was virtually able to hear, through the stories and the memories of his mother, even the thundering of the cannons during the 1914/1918 war, positioned along the frontier close to his Venetian home village Pieve di Soligo. "where in minuscule little boxes / they've collected the splinters of the young men done in". But what comes 'after the war'? It seemed to Zanzotto that mankind had extended a military zone across the world, a keep-out-zone. Zanzotto's poetry, in reaction, is reduced, it moves downwards to a 'new altitude', to the altitude and otherness of the small stalks of grass and herbs and of the 'small stalls'; it breaks down sentences into particles, into tiny elements of meaning, into stops and silences; it recedes into small dwellings and villages; it commemorates the 25th of April - the end of the Second World War in Italy - by something smaller and less pathetic than ethos, pathos and sentiments, by something low down and simple and prosaic like the foot standing on and supported by the soil - and it finds something which is neither cradle nor grave nor sign, something infinitely tender - almost a different, fugitive, fleeting, evanescent planet.

*Always more with them, so gently, into the heath
I take turns with myself, amidst pieces of war protruding from the earth,
a flower takes turns with a sky
inside the springtimes of the decomposing bones,
a yes takes turns with a no, but little
differentiated, in the faint
in the slender stems of this rain*

Zanzotto's answer to the military zones is defencelessness-no definite distinction between yes and no, between life and death. The poet dies in his poems. Long before Andrea Zanzotto's sudden death on Tuesday, 18th October 2011, the poet was taking turns with the dead.

Peter Waterhouse, Chicago Review, 2011