"A Blackbird at Polanesi"

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One beautiful evening, at the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a friend brought us to see the little village of Polanesi high above the Ligurian coast. To get there we would normally have taken the Via Aurelia, but we couldn't get to it because the traffic was completely blocked. Later, having reached our destination by a different route, we could look down on the Aurelia where the traffic was bumper-to-bumper. There had been a major accident and the entire road was blocked. From our perch on the hillside, on the way up to Polanesi, it looked like a war had broken out and these were the refugees.

Not long afterwards we were standing in a tranquil *piazza* in front of a little church and the silence was so intense that we could hear every note of a blackbird's song. On the wall of the church was a plaque dedicated to 'The Fallen of The Russian Campaign' and it wasn't hard to make the connection between the visible signs of distress on the Aurelia, people whose lives had been turned upside down by an accident, and the Russian invasion[,] the result of another iteration of fascism, but not very different in essence to that which led the young men of Polanesi to die on the Russian Steppe. Not coincidentally the Via Aurelia was built to allow the rapid deployment of Roman legions to the northern territories of the empire.

From this came the poem "A Blackbird at Polanesi", which I wrote simultaneously in English and Italian.

Incidentally, the hamlet of Polanesi is a neighbour of the town of Recco which, between the months of November 1943 and June 1944, because of a strategically important railway bridge that still runs through the town, was so badly bombed by the allies that over 90% of the medieval town as razed to the ground. They missed the bridge. Since I wrote the poem, Mariupol has suffered the same fate, but without the partial exculpation that the bombing of Recco was necessary to stop the supply of Nazi troops at the Gustav Line.

"A Blackbird at Polanesi"

and in the evening at Polanesi
high above the traffic
massed bumper to bumper
on the old Via Aurelia
which goes all the way
back in time to Rome

a lonesome blackbird sings
his melancholy lovesong
to the olive trees
the little church
the stone commemorating
the dead of the Russian Campaign
and the heedless silver sea

but we listen on the car radio
to news of the siege in Kyiv
a million refugees on the road
and try to imagine the roar
of artillery fire
in what was once a home
thinking fascism makes
a new face in every generation

"Un merlo a Polanesi"

E la sera a Polanesi
in alto lassù il traffico
ammassato paraurti contro paraurti
sull'antica Via Aurelia
che va fino in fondo
indietro nel tempo a Roma

canta un merlo solitario
il suo malinconico canto d'amore
agli ulivi e la chiesetta
la lapide che ricorda
i morti della campagna di Russia
e il distratto mare d'argento

ma ascoltiamo alla radio
le notizie sull'assedio di Kiev
un milione di profughi per strada
e proviamo a immaginare il ruggito
del fuoco dell'artiglieria
in quella che una volta era un casa
pensando che il fascismo fa
una faccia nuova a ogni generazione