

2021

Castelluccio

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Recommended Citation

Ras, Barbara (2021) "Castelluccio," *Birmingham Poetry Review*. Vol. 48, Article 64.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.library.uab.edu/bpr/vol48/iss2021/64>

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Castelluccio

In the thirteenth century, they built a town of stones,
so that the sun could slap each one like a drum and the town
could thrum to itself and to those walking slow enough to hear,
which was most, since the shade had already been exported
to a city with higher rents and ruins that calls
to tourists in dead languages, but here, where you can bet
not a shop sells artificial tears, though maybe rat poison
and definitely bleach, an old woman wearing a mishmash
of shapeless clothes can ask a stranger from another world
strolling by in chinos and a white shirt to help her carry
her bags of garbage up the hill, and together step by step
they climb to the rhythm of light beating the walls
as if she and he had spent a lifetime together in Castelluccio,
celebrated for lentils that bloom wild yellow-green in spring,
and between the two, perhaps they share a disdain for fireworks
or the pain of a daughter lost to anarchists or a son to war,
but no words pass in the absence of a common language.

You could stand for a long time on the height, gazing
into the valley below, recalling expressions like
I've got a bone to pick with you or rehashing why
your grandmother washed your mouth out with soap,
or you could follow the town's lanes that each end in wind,
with no lessons to teach you how to eat it before it eats you
with its voracious, effective lips, and you could wonder how
one minute life pours out wine, the next, vinegar, or whether
to return to the weather-beaten table outside the market,
where you'd sat staring mindlessly at a bunch of lavender
drying under a slab of stone but now crave—the flowers,
a bouquet you could carry home, put under your pillow,
so that their smell could lull you to sleep when the climb
down from insomnia is too steep to make alone.