

EXEMPLARY SUICIDES

by Enrique Vila-Matas

Sellerio Editore, Palermo, 1994.

186 pages. € 7.75

This short volume describes the probable route to suicide taken by ten unknown victims with completely different backgrounds, in ten different towns, and ends with the last letter by the Portuguese poet, Mario de Sa'-Carneiro, *amigo de alma* of Pessoa, in which he announces his plan to end his own life.

The book can be interpreted from a solely literary, poetic point of view, but it provides such minute details and descriptions of circumstances, experiences and emotions to render it a sort of "scientific" manual - a *bignami* - of suicidology.

In *Death by "saudade"* the author presents a child's discovery of suicide: "it was the first time I had heard of an act called suicide which occasionally evolves in people ...but I soon realised what a lonely act it must be... an infinity of versions ran round the school... the only point of agreement was that the father had been tempted to jump and had leapt into the abyss..."

In *Rosa Schwarzer comes back to life*, the author describes the protagonist's anguish, solitude, ambivalence, anger and suicidal ruminations: "A horrible death, she thought as she sought in vain to dismiss that awful temptation... She couldn't let that unrepeatability pass her by, that unique chance - to be the sixth to take their own life on the same day".

In *Iris Nera's nights*, Vila-Matas relates a suicide pact: "...when everything was darker and gloomier than the night, Catone and I were the only ones left, ashamed to be still alive, ashamed that we hadn't had the courage to take our own lives". And Victoria's father, the first to mark the boundaries to his existence... he of all people who used to reassure us when we started thinking about ending our lives. "There is no hurry," he would say. "If it weren't for suicide I'd have killed myself a long time ago. Suicide is an affirmative act, you can do it whenever you choose, what's the hurry?"

We learn from Vila-Matas' book by rediscovering poetry, taking us beyond the numbers in which suicidology all too often becomes entrenched.

Paolo Scocco