

# Differentia: Review of Italian Thought

---

Number 3 *Combined Issue 3-4 Spring/Autumn*

Article 28

---

1989

## Poetry

Marina La Palma

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/differentia>

---

### Recommended Citation

La Palma, Marina (1989) "Poetry," *Differentia: Review of Italian Thought*: Vol. 3 , Article 28.  
Available at: <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/differentia/vol3/iss1/28>

This document is brought to you for free and open access by Academic Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Differentia: Review of Italian Thought* by an authorized editor of Academic Commons. For more information, please contact [mona.ramonetti@stonybrook.edu](mailto:mona.ramonetti@stonybrook.edu), [hu.wang.2@stonybrook.edu](mailto:hu.wang.2@stonybrook.edu).

## Echo: Perfected

You're wondering if the paths through these hills share a common starting point or whether they meander and branch out to various points. Interesting question.

Women, says a friend of mine, vary widely (in sexual matters, he means), while men are much more similar, standardized, maybe.

I am / you are / we are / she-he is  
Again and again they are or will be  
Perfected by the appearance of money,  
which stands for something else.

There are intersections, sums and differences.  
It is not grammar, believe me, constituting  
a desperate attempt to create permanence  
in a sort of flux.

Wood is consumed to ash by a process we call fire;  
physical bodies also consumable under the stars.  
Possible orders of function, grinding persistence.  
Is it *doing* that does things?

And invention? All right never mind.  
Too much noise inherent in the subject.  
How about Body first? Mine, yours  
an observed one, even: lover, egret, goldfish.

What threatens to overturn our minds'  
equilibrium is not disorder but any order  
that does not match the provisional ones  
we construct for ourselves

---

They speak of “working landscape”  
versus chaos, which itself is not random,  
not without order of a highly complex kind.  
But difficult to read.

Why is “anthropology”  
the study of human cultures  
while “gynecology”  
is medical practice confined  
to the female reproductive apparatus?

Why is “patrimony”  
everything of value — physical,  
civic, or spiritual —  
passed on from previous generations  
while “matrimony”  
refers to the legal yoking of male  
and female in bourgeois society.

Distinguishing characteristics of this body are:  
one: veins, highly prominent.  
two: a general boniness (emerging in my late 20s)  
three: lack of melanin in the skin  
so that it remains quite pale  
or at most turns temporarily pink  
when exposed to the sun,  
then promptly reverts to beige.

And why am I telling you? This isn't  
confessional poetry. Wrong decade.  
How many “why”s can a poem (or any text  
for that matter) sustain? How many “you”s

---

Is it possible some of those lost  
or discarded pages were the critical ones  
that might have supplied, even now,  
the missing meaning?

Could they have contained the key phrase?  
Are they perhaps alive somewhere, and growing,  
like the children whose faces  
adorn or deface our milk cartons  
The way certain neighborhoods  
in particular cities  
take hold of the imagination  
indefinitely haunting the dreamscape.

There's a special place in my heart  
both for elegance and its reverse.  
I'm addicted to a certain formalism  
(my own definition, of course)

To aim for inelegance is  
a kind of exercise — pathetic,  
like a drunk trying to appear sober  
is transparent and laughable.

A carefully ordered landscape  
The surface of the sea.  
Not opposites. You know.

While these forms have a life of their own  
I think I think I think. These tasks are  
— what's the word? — *arduous* to perform.

## Stars, Belief and Blood

Like Miriam of the desert  
(the second desert)  
who came from nowhere,  
really, and kept moving  
under the wheeling night-jagged sky

Be grateful and pleased  
Write between her lines,  
if you must.

Take a pair of scissors  
Cut up the pink shirt

Unfettered by any reactions

It's an old one, after all —  
used Ralph Lauren  
picked up at Flip when it still  
existed.

Under the shirt: beige skin  
(over bones, as we know)

Don't worry, this is produced  
along with your blood,  
which you did not design but make  
and make.

Use it like ink to record  
both Determination and Fear.

Remembering so many things  
that you must have forgotten  
a million more. These keep recurring  
coming back, rotundly  
cyclic . . . hence cynical.

Some belief is better than none.  
All belief leads to trouble.  
One's belief is worth fighting for.  
No belief can ever be "true" . . .  
An so on.

Anything just to keep on going,  
not interrupt the rhythm  
not stop the breathing  
lines, words, salad  
from being tossed

Even ersatz mementoes will do  
for Invention.

## From the *Contras* series

### 1. *Open & Shut*

No one lives in this world.  
Each of us locked  
in a broad, clear solution.  
Beat against walls to find problems.  
Not even him. He doesn't know his own  
extremes. The key to his life is this  
lack of self-recognition.  
You've known others like him,  
but never one so intensely  
& arbitrarily bound to  
things that are out of reach.

If only there was  
a way to open and close.  
I never learned the tricks  
of that trade — and suspect  
I will come more and more to regret it.  
“Nonsense”  
says the editor who always  
stands behind my chair. (That's why  
I face the doors: I wanna  
catch her coming in some day.)

"No one's trapped," she snaps.  
"Yeah," I say, (yes?)  
"but I mean their *limits*."

Do it again. Talk about a way of  
writing that slants to the left  
Indicating  
Reversal of the hemispheres  
and a medieval indifference  
and a way of making rhythm  
vanish at the point where it appears.

## 2. *Displacement*

On the one hand the incomparable  
comfort of eating, filling the mouth  
As lovely as when a Baby pulls  
the soft milk nipple and skin of its Mother  
into itself. The whole feeling mouth.

And on the other: outside  
in the cold, dark night each decision  
lurks like a sentence, awaiting its verb.