

Differentia: Review of Italian Thought

Number 8 *Combined Issue 8-9 Spring/Autumn*

Article 28

1999

Poems

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Recommended Citation

La Barre, Adele R. (1999) "Poems," *Differentia: Review of Italian Thought*: Vol. 8 , Article 28.
Available at: <https://commons.library.stonybrook.edu/differentia/vol8/iss1/28>

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Adele R. La Barre

Storm Screen and Siding

for Livio

It seems to me on a day like this
when memories of last year's freshening,
like a faint green mist,
slide ankle deep over the corpse of winter and blur
the soot pocked snow
that there might be reason enough for cracking the window

an inch or two.

Listen, I do not not mean to deceive you
with allusions to sacred transparencies
to birth from decay. To the contrary.
I tell you that
last Spring's bud will not bloom again,
and if that ash that darkens the snow was once

your father

no Great Potter will spit on the ashes
to knead your father back again.
What was true for our fathers will be true for us
as it always was before. Let it go.
There will be time enough to dust the sill.
You think you see him

beyond

window upon window upon window
laminated with grey spit
looking back at you with eyes
like crocus bulbs and lips of broken ferns.
I'd say, it's likely only a mirror,
but your teeth bleed dust. So best not
be opening your mouth to tell me again
how the storm and screens are new —
the panes

hermetically sealed.

Selinunte

Temple C, Selinus or
 Temple of Hera, Paestum
 ca 460 BC

The earth still bears the scorch marks
 As from shadows of passing clouds
 Which no longer lower over this land.
 A scrap of tin shades me like a parasol.
 Behind, the girders of the city
 Are blasted limp with the bowed spines
 Of suppliant women.
 At dawn, their melted questions
 May unfurl like ferns,
 But in the unrelenting light of noon
 Their ragged collapse is the profile of the horizon.

The dust on my upper lip smells
 Like the fired red tape from my brother's cap gun.
 My mouth is dry and my tongue is tacky.
 The water of the River between us is
 Undrinkable and treacherous along this loop.
 I search across it with eyes of dried mud
 From which no shoot can spring. Nor will.

Yet on the bank far opposite, the eddies
 Mouth a narrow muddy beach
 Overhung with sodden branches
 Bowed low by poisonous russet fruits
 With thin bursting skins.

There is no timber to construct a bridge.
 Perhaps a small buoy of memories
 Would float — of the caw of hawks
 Extinct on this burnt continent
 Or of sweet peppers in oil with charred flecks
 And a few seeds clinging to the lips
 Of sliced roasted flesh.

Perhaps I could swim.

He searches for me with blind eyes
 The color of an Homeric sea
 Where heroes drown and
 The daughters of kings are abandoned,
 Hears the drowning call of a swimmer,
 And tosses coins.

Through the arch of his legs

Looms a temple all columned
 of fluted marble flawed with black veins
 Like the whorls of hairs
 On his thighs.

His house is built into the slopes
 Beneath the temple's stylobates.
 Rain runs down the corrugations
 of the tin roof and collects
 In cisterns vaguely fragrant of his ribs.

Irises under the eaves
 drinking the runoff show
 the yellow fur on the undersides
 of their tongues.

To enter, I must leave desire at the door
 like an umbrella.

For the Kroisos Kouros on Christmas Eve

Kroisos Kouros from Anavysos
 Athens, National Archaeological Museum
 ca. 525-515

O kouros of archaic dreams, fists
 Sucking light into enormous thighs, just
 Your fragile Proconnesian ankles
 Veined with black silk hair, just
 The back of your colossal marble stride, just
 The swollen cold of your stone thumbs.

Apollo's sun's gone black before Bethlehem's star.
 A child squalls and stretches
 Out His perfect tiny fists
 For the nails - shredded
 Into tinsel now. Millenia gone,
 And no carol, no canticle can
 Resurrect the pagan sun, can
 Sing in the fluted columnar throat, can
 Pry open petrified fists
 For the broken fingers of kore's hand.

No it's not marble dust, just
 Flour from the Christmas baking
 I'm wiping with raw palms down
 The belly of my apron, just
 The stone quiet of the snow
 Sculpting the blacks between us.