

**Donna Italiana**

Lady, I cannot help myself in you. There is the  
 song of three thousand years, of little old men with the  
 eyes of saints, they walk on the hillsides in the mid-day heat,  
 ghosts, wishing me well. They are my grandfathers, and my great-grandfathers,

and the ancient men that kept my ribs burning at monte cassino, in the  
 air above my brother's corpse, in the shelled house in arezzo, in

rimini, where I sat, spread-eagled on the sand; they kept the ribs  
 burning through the cold montreal nights, and in baltimore, behind the  
 cold hospital where my father died. The ribs burned all the nights of my

life, my gentle men, my grandfathers, ghosts in the hills behind  
 arezzo, burning their gentle eyes at night. Woman, I touch you

and remember everything, you open your mouth and laugh and I hear the  
 wind in trees beside the cathedral, the wind that weeps at nothing,

running through my shirt, past the skin I have devised for myself,  
 to the ribs, and the ribs sing, cooling. You are that much

gentleness. Yours is the only laughter that can persuade me.

It was that day upon the hill-top, I looked down over the parapets  
 of my town, into the hand of noon; hives of sun over the rivers,

pathways I imagined over distant slopes, farmyards kneeling over the fields  
 of grass, behind me the scent of pine from the public gardens; at that

precise hour, I heard you, I felt you toss your head back, and your laugh  
 persuaded me. like the country of my youth. I cannot help myself

in you. Only you persuade me that the hills were white. Only you  
 persuade me, that the ribs burn less and only when a woman is

the country that I love.

—*Pier Giorgio Di Cicco*