

## A tribute to Carmine Melino

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I was thinking of what was appropriate to write in celebration of Carmine's life, but since I could not find any unifying theme, I have decided just to put a few sentences and images together. Indeed, this very variety is itself symptomatic of the plurality that was Carmine.

I had the privilege to meet Carmine in the late '80s when my scientific collaboration, and soon to be a solid friendship, with Gerry started. Over the next several years I was very often in via Lorenzo il Magnifico, Rome, with the opportunity to regularly enjoy the friendship of Carmine's entire family. Unfortunately, Carmine's wife passed away too early (similarly, I lost my father in 1988), and Carmine suffered greatly from this tragedy. I am sure this contributed, together with his physical problems, to his partial isolation from the world that was interrupted by funny electronic messages to Gerry during the last summers spent in Capri. I would particularly like to remember a trip we did together with Carmine, Gerry and his mum to visit their country house in Irpinia; at that time Carmine was in good shape and we had a great time chatting about academic life and Italian politics in the car. Of course, after reaching the house we had to celebrate with a glass of good wine. However, thinking again of Carmine, the recurrent image that comes to my mind is his open smile that never changed, even during the last years of his life

when he could not communicate very well in any other way. I am sure his life was not so easy during the last few years. However, he never complained of being alone and found refuge in writing both huge hygiene textbooks and a vast collection of poems. I am convinced that Gerry was collaborating with him on the preparation of the books, with his "artworks", and this was a major motivation for Carmine and represented almost an umbilical link with his beloved son. Reading the books he wrote I realize that he really loved Gabriella's children, his grandchildren, and I was touched when during the funeral they both played remembrance music for the last time for their grandfather. Thanks to Gerry, I have the privilege to go often to Capri, and each time we visit Carmine's tomb facing the Gulf of Napoli that immortalizes his link with the city in which he studied. We also revisit Capri's unique landscapes that Carmine loved so much, an affection that was recognized by awarding him the island's honorary citizenship.

For almost 20 years I have directed the unit of Cell Biology and Electron Microscopy at the National Institute for Infectious Diseases "Lazzaro Spallanzani" in Rome and my laboratories are located inside the building dedicated to professor Vittorio Del Vecchio, who was the Director and an important co-worker of Carmine during his academic career at the Institute

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of Hygiene, Sapienza University of Rome. However, writing these sentences, I just realize that there is another link between me and Carmine that I never thought before, the pleasure to write poems. However, even though I will never reach the number and the beauty of the poems written by Carmine, I have decided to conclude these few words by dedicating to him one of the few poems I wrote more than 10 years ago in a moment of my life in which I felt quite lonely. I never thought to publish these private words and no one knows them, but I think this the only occasion in which it makes sense to do it. The poem is in Italian and I do not want to translate it into English, because this would compromise its meaning and it is a private heartfelt tribute to a very kind man, a quintessential Italian, an excellent scientist and poet, CARMINE MELINO.

VITA

*Esisti davvero?  
A volte mi sembri un sogno...  
Un sogno senza speranza, futile come il fumo, inutile,  
opprimente, quasi insopportabile.  
Ma esisti!  
Ti materializzi ... sei tangibile, hai un passato riflesso  
in una storia evolutiva.  
A volte mi appari bella e lucente, a volte deludi, toc-  
cando dolorosamente le corde più profonde della  
mia sensibilità. Sei crudele... a volte generosa...  
Che miracolo il pensiero! Come pensiamo?  
La memoria, l'anima ... entità senza biologia e senza  
razionale. Qual è la tua essenza?  
Una biologia trascendente che sublima l'inesistente.  
Esistiamo davvero?  
O pensiamo di esistere? È affascinante l'intrigo di com-  
prenderti, forse non ha senso la tua scomposizione?  
Ma ho paura di perderti ... e mi aggrappo all'inesistente.*

Fort de France Airport (Martinique)

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