

patrizia
cavalli

my poems
won't change
the world

selected
poems

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FARRAR STRAUS GIROUX
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Something that the object never can take in,
an empty bucket that won't carry me.
I held the silent months in a wide weave
which was supposed to flash forth in full voice.
I tried to speak and it unraveled on my tongue.
It's neither net nor coat, it's only a screen;
I capture nothing and it won't cover me
but separates one silence from the silence.
That other labyrinthine and interior sound
practiced alone as I walk along the street
or waking up, did not emerge,
held off from me.

ROSANNA WARREN

No, love surely isn't a feeling,
it's an obsessive line of thought
about the mystery of how we learn.
I take in your face and hold it fast
but then I lose it quick as a wink, and take it back,
I add and subtract, I register
each shade of change: a tightrope-walking thought
always about to fall—
love doesn't hold.

ROSANNA WARREN

Almost always when we hear that someone's died,
someone we liked but hardly ever took
the trouble to seek out, we think:—but why
didn't we meet more often? Now he's gone
and maybe I never really let him know
how much I admired him. It's a poor affection
that never becomes manifest in an act.
Like in those dreams when a longed-for good arrives
just at our fingertips, but we can't reach it.
And then, what a waste, every posthumous honor,
every slather of praise and celebration.
Because what possible pleasure or advantage
could someone dead derive from any of this?
All this is true, but it's a stupid thought.
Because being alive, in fact, is nothing but
the luxury of a delay, a dallying
in the possible, suspended between too little
and too much, but always out of place,
feeling that one can,
one might, in a juicy, imaginary present,
a fat and beckoning pastureland
now abandoned. Death alone,
that doesn't exist in itself, makes absolute
a time cut short: all we retain
is the thought of the absent one, a motionless
stunned and defenseless thought where imagination
cannot enter. That's why we fall back
on memory: what we once knew as an open world
becomes history, a history that settles
in the mind, so that the person no longer here
should be an ultimate assured intact
present eternity.

ROSANNA WARREN

I want my own good, what can I do about it?
I don't even know how or where to begin.
Why does an unshakeable certitude seize on me
whenever I desire to grasp my ill,
whereas about my good, I've no idea,
not the slightest idea of what to do?
Maybe because ill is all exuberance
of spirit that swells to overflowing,
and, leaping beyond its banks, reveals
excess of matter, total lack of measure
which spills out in a multitude of forms,
a dissonance exalting all that is,
and not what's missing. So if I look for it,
I find it, just by moving around a bit,
exerting myself, wanting it. Whereas the good,
being an absence of substance, withdraws
from every form and hides: when I look for it,
good becomes its own ghost, I think I've caught it,
and suddenly it vanishes. If then
ill is a more and good a less, how can
I want anything, what can I hope for? Every
longing brings damnation. Thus it's clear
I ought to stay quiet here where I am, without
a clamoring mind, but innocent
of everything, even of the good,
even resistant to it.

ROSANNA WARREN