

The Gazelle

Gazella dorcas

Enchanted one, how can the accord of two
selected words achieve the rhyme that now
comes and goes in you as if on cue?
Both lyre and leaves are rising from your brow,

and everything of yours already flows
in simile through love songs, whose words lie
as light on one's lids as petals of a rose,
when one no longer reading shuts his eyes

to see you there, carried away, as though
each limb were loaded with leaping, and delays
from firing just so long as the neck upholds

the head to listen, as when one who bathes
in the forest pauses, suddenly stopped cold,
the lake reflected in her sharp-turned face.

The Solitary

No: a tower shall rise within my heart
and at its upper edge I'll be installed —
where nothing else exists, once more the hurt
and the unsayable, once more the world.

Another thing alone in the immense,
becoming dark and then illuminated,
another final, yearning countenance
banished into the never-to-be-sated,

another most remote and stony face,
responsive to its inner gravity,
while vastnesses that kill it silently
compel it on to ever greater bliss.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Roman Fountain

Borghese

Two basins, one that rises from the other
out of an ancient marble cistern's round,
and water gently bending from the upper
to water that below it, waiting, stands,

which mutely meets its gentle whispering,
and, as it were, in cupped hands, secretly
shows it the sky behind the greenery
and darkness, like an unfamiliar thing;

it spreads out calmly in its lovely bowl,
not feeling homesick, circle upon circle,
just sometimes dreamily, trickle by trickle,

settling down the mossy hangings to
the final mirror, making its basin smile
gently from below as it slips through.

The Balcony

Naples

Arranged as by a portraitist up there
from the constriction of the balcony,
and tightly bound as if in a bouquet
of aging oval countenances, clear
at evening, they look more ideal, more
moving, as if like that eternally.

These sisters, who are propped on one another,
who seem as though from far away they yearn
for one another without hope, and lean
their lonelinesses, one upon the other;

and then the solemn silence of the brother,
who's self-contained and full of destiny,
yet for an unobtrusive moment, he
reveals an unseen likeness to the mother;

and in between, drawn out and moribund,
not for a long time kin to anyone,
unreachable, the mask of an old crone,
held up, as if in falling, by one hand;

meanwhile, a second hand, more withered yet,
as if it were continuing to slide,
hangs down before the woman's dress, beside

the countenance of the young child,
who is the last of them, attempted, faded,
crossed out again by bars of the balustrade,
as if still undefined, as if still not.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Portrait of My Father in His Youth

Dream in the eyes. The brow as if in touch
with something far away. Enormous youth,
unsmiling captivation in the mouth;
before the full-dress ornamental trim
of the slim aristocratic uniform,
the saber's basket hilt and both hands, which
wait, calmly, not impelled by urgency.
And now almost unseen, as if they'd be
the first to fade, the distance in their grip.
And all the rest self-camouflaged and shrouded,
effaced as if we didn't understand,
and from within its own depths, deeply clouded —.

You swiftly vanishing daguerreotype
in my more slowly disappearing hands.