

Escaping into the Present

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Ugly Things (A Song)

—Teresita Fernández

In an old worn-out basin
I planted violets for you
and down by the river
with an empty seashell
I found you a firefly.
In a broken bottle
I kept a seashell for you
and coiled over that rusty fence
the coral snake flowered
just for you.
Cockroach wing
carried to the ant hill:
that's how I want them to take me
to the cemetery when I die.
Garbage dump, garbage dump
where nobody wants to look
but if the moon comes out
your tin cans will shine.
If you put a bit of love
into ugly things
you'll see that your sadness
will begin to change color.

from *Breaking the Silences: An Anthology of 20th Century Poetry by Cuban Women* (Pulp Press
Book Publishers 1982)

It's Monday Morning

—Barbara Crooker

mid-November, the world turned golden,
preserved in amber. I should be doing more
to save the planet—plant a tree, raise
a turbine, put solar panels on the roof
to grab the sun and bring it inside. Instead,
I'm sitting here scribbling, sitting on a wrought
iron chair, the air cold from last night's frost,
the thin sunlight sinking into the ruined
Appalachians of my spine. I know it's all
about to fall apart; the signs are everywhere.
But on this blue morning, the air bristling
with crickets and birdsong, I do the only thing
I can: put one word in front of the other,
and see what happens when they rub up against
each other. It might become something
that will burst into flame.

from *Small Rain* (Purple Flag, 2014)

After

—Octavio Paz

after chopping off all the arms that reached out to me;
after boarding up all the windows and doors;
after filling all the pits with poisoned water;
after building my house on the rock of no,
inaccessible to flattery and fear;
after cutting off my tongue and eating it;
after hurling handfuls of silence
and monosyllable of scorn at my loves;
after forgetting my name;
and the name of my birthplace;
and the name of my race;
after judging and sentencing myself
to perpetual waiting,
and perpetual loneliness, I heard
against the stones of my dungeon of syllogisms,
the humid, tender, insistent
onset of spring.

from *The Poems of Octavio Paz*, translated by Eliot Weinberger (New Directions, 2018)