

Dia Art Foundation

# Patrizia Cavalli and Rosanna Warren

Readings in Contemporary Poetry

Monday, October 21, 2013, 6:30 pm

## Introduction by Vincent Katz

Rosanna Warren born in 1953 in Fairfield, Connecticut. She studied painting at Yale, graduating in 1976, and received an MA in 1980 from The Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University. Her most recent books of poems are *Ghost in a Red Hat* (2011) and *Departure* (2003), both from W. W. Norton. Her book of criticism, *Fables of the Self: Studies in Lyric Poetry*, was published by W. W. Norton in 2008. She has also published a translation (done with Stephen Scully) of Euripides's *Suppliant Women* (Oxford, 1995) and has edited several books, including *The Art of Translation: Voices from the Field* (Northeastern, 1989). She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She is the Hanna Holborn Gray Distinguished Service Professor in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago.

In *Fables of the Self*, Rosanna Warren writes about Dante's Divine Comedy that readers "find there a vastly complex medieval theology...This is not the hunger I bring to the poem. What struck me was the spiritual psychology...poetry to be tasted, gnawed, turned on the tongue." Warren grew up among poetry, and, despite her devotion to the visual arts, was seemingly a born writer. Thus, it is interesting to have her take on Dante — not as a thinker, a landmark in literary history, but as a maker of sensual textures. Similar senses of "poetry to be tasted, gnawed" draw us back repeatedly to Warren's own poetry.

Her poems are about things, but they are equally about language, and her modernity comes through in passages in which she limits herself to description, however sensual. There is frequent recourse to the classics in Warren's work — to ancient Greek and Roman poetry, a terrain she knows intimately — not to mention her translations of Pierre Reverdy and Max Jacob. Many of Warren's poems begin from without, as meditations on works of art, historical texts and figures, or photographs. She has written a tautly observant poem about pornography and a harrowingly present, yet respectfully distanced, elegy to her father, the poet and critic Robert Penn Warren. There is a haunting poem for her mother in the hospital that one is tempted to call erotic. But her most powerful elegy may be a more recent poem, entitled "Mediterranean." In it, eschewing mundane details of reality, Warren composes instead an image of "gold dust light, where a moment before / and thirty-eight years before that // my substantial mother strode before me in a straw hat, bathing suit, and loose flapping shirt, / every summer afternoon . . ."

One of her most exciting poems, to me, is entitled "Porta Portese," which refers to an animated outdoor market at the edge of Trastevere in Rome. Here, Warren's language pulses with the rhythms that surround anyone who enters this uncharted zone. We sense the excitement of exchange, of potential, and the poem makes a political and social point as well. Finally, though, "The Tiber / leaks yellow between its legs venerable / venerable duty-free luxurious silken rippling / classical waves sold and soldered solved reflected here — " Get ready for the most modern classical waves around and join me in welcoming Rosanna Warren to Dia.

Patrizia Cavalli was born in Todi, Umbria, in 1949. She has published six collections of poetry in Italian. The English translations of those titles are: (*My Poems Will Not Change the World*) (Einaudi, 1974); (*The Sky*) (Einaudi, 1981); (*The All Mine Singular I*) (Einaudi, 1992); (*Poems*) 1974–1992 (Einaudi, 1992); (*The Forever Open Theater*) (Einaudi, 1999); (*Lazy Gods, Lazy Fate*) (Einaudi, 2006); and *Datura* (Einaudi, 2013). She has also published translations of Shakespeare and Molière. *My Poems Won't Change the World* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2013) is the first anthology of Cavalli's poems to appear in English, with translations by Mark Strand, Jonathan Galassi, Rosanna Warren, Jorie Graham, Kenneth Koch, J.D. McClatchy, David Shapiro, and others. Cavalli lives in Rome.

Patrizia Cavalli is renowned in Italy for her performances, often attracting large crowds of all ages, who hang on her every word. This September, with the publication of her first book in English, Cavalli has begun conquering the Anglophone world as well. That her editor, Gini Alhadeff, assembled a stellar group of translators helps, but it is the poems themselves, on the page, as much as on stage, that carry the day.

Culled from earlier collections published in Italy from 1974 to 2006, *My Poems Won't Change The World* is an epic really — an epic of a very particular Roman woman, but also an epic of the daily life of anyone. In plain language, with occasional verbal zingers inserted, Cavalli writes poems that sound like someone casually speaking, and in that way, through her poems, she opens herself to the audience, and they to her. They are poems of love, erotic poems, poems of longing, poems of what Allen Ginsberg called lacklove, and

also they are poems of mortality, of aging, of changing, of anger, frustration, and elegiac poems.

There is a delicacy in the delineation of daily things balanced by an intelligent obscurity that refuses to pin things down literally. Thus, a very short poem of hers reads in its entirety, in J.D. McClatchy's translation, "You no longer play, you only eat, / Yet your neck is so thin. / And you are covered with fleas!" She can bring humor even to loss, but she retains a mystery: this poem addressed to an aging animal could equally well be addressed to another human being. Which animal is it? And whose?

The bi-lingual edition here published makes it ever apparent that these poems exist first in Italian: "Riportami al mio limite / circondami, con le carezze segna i miei contorni, / col peso del tuo corpo dammi corpo" she writes near the end of "La giornata atlantica" ("The Atlantic Day"). Those are the words she wrote, with their specific weight, their specific body. But now we have another poem, based closely on this poem, this one composed by Jonathan Galassi, who writes, "Bring me back to my boundaries, / embrace me, mark my contours with your caresses, / embody me with the weight of your body." This is the magic of this book, a new magic, created for this moment, and now you are about to experience the magic live. Patrizia has arranged a very special performance tonight, in which she will read her poems in the original Italian with the translations projected simultaneously. Please welcome Patrizia Cavalli to Dia.