

JOHANNES BOBROWSKI

Valéry or the Beans

Well, that is a fabric, a piece of leather, so finely made it lets the light shine through. It is so impenetrable and enduring it can be stretched over living and dead things without tearing: stretching over a broken skeleton as over a beanstalk, which can grow and move and possibly blossom below it, if the beans can still find earth in the pot enough to cover the roots, some air which comes through the pores of the leather.

This fabric, yellowish-white, pulled over books and edges, makes here a sharp contour, there – over the beanstalk – a few irregular curves, expands in one place and over there lies lightly and can be worn by silent movements of living leaves, stems of red and white blossoms.

I wanted to write a portrait but I didn't succeed. An elderly gentleman, tender and at the same time taut in the flesh which retreats under a golden uniform, a member of the Académie, with a small sword, a beautiful hat on his arm. It did not succeed. I have given too much to the beans, to the stalk, which is a martial plant, still under a fine yellowish leather fabric, which lets the daylight shine through.

*translated by Richard Deutch
with Craig Powell and Rudi Krausman*