

Notes on Disparity

SAMPLE

ALSO BY ALEXANDRA SASHE

Antibodies

Convalescence Dance

Days of Earthly Exile

SAMPLER

Notes on Disparity

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Introduction

These poems – which were put away in a drawer, one by one, as each of them came to life – are the most personal (and thus the most complex) of any I have written. I began working on them when I first came to Vienna, at the time when I was, properly speaking, discovering poetry, being so fortunate as to have entered right from the start that *purely poetic* dimension, where Art exists for itself, out of its own inner necessity, and is very exigent to those whom it introduces into its most secret premises. I had the privilege of being invisibly guided by one of the best hands in this field – that of Paul Celan.

The first piece of this collection – the poem *Seuils* (*thresholds* in French) came to me as an *opening*, as an answer to my literary quests, and – as a *door* into what would become my life and my poetry, quite different as it appears now from what I understood by life and by poetry at that time: for at that time I was still living in Paris, and was making attempts to write prose.

From then on, having definitively found my voice in poetry, I would come to Vienna once a year – to be there, to write that which wished to be written, to weave myself into its tissue, to let myself be changed by it – until, years later, unexpectedly, I moved to Austria altogether.

The leitmotiv of this first poem is that sudden encounter I made *in* and *with* the city of Vienna: *in*, in that I found there, as it were, distinct future traces of myself, manifesting their life through sensations, objects, visions and longings; *with*, in that the city imbued my soul with a feeling of *home*, previously unknown to me – in a place where I knew no one, where above all I did not seek to know anyone, and whose language I did not speak. And yet this was a place where I felt a vital need to remain, to belong to, to be part of – which would lead, in a span of just a few years, to my complete transformation.

The poem *'Seuils'*, as I was working on it, taught me to delve into the very matter (*materia; matière*) of Language, and *there* to

look for and discern the hidden veins of poetics, and *there* to seek the vehicling force of poetry.

I felt that an unavoidable lot of an artist is an increasing if not mutism, then at least a certain aphetism and apocopism – for at some point, breath would be lacking, both through the excess of oxygen and through failing lungs.

(There exists a common misunderstanding that an artist works in order to express; or else, in order to transmit – a misunderstanding not unusual even among artists themselves. Yes, it must certainly be both – but only if an artist is not aware of doing either. The moment one tries to express or transmit something with purpose, and begins as it were to breathe consciously, one runs the risk of ceasing to be an artist – and the work, of being stillborn.)

And thus it was of necessity that the very first word of this poem, “*Lip-*” – which stands here for ‘spoken’, for ‘speakable’ – should be followed by the word ‘-locked’. This, however, I realised only much later, years after I had written this poem. The initial meaning of ‘*lip-locked*’, the way it came to me as I was writing, had a more personal and a somewhat deeper sense – which I will come to in the Notes to this section. I mention this now only to give a small illustration of how little we are the authors of what we do, and how much we are taught and enlightened by what we seem to have ourselves created. And privileged we are, if we grasp, as early as in the very process of creation, even half of what lies in the depths, and then – continue humbly by ear, following that subtle yet clear sensation of what we *should* do, and obedient to that quiet voice that tells us what we *should not* do, i.e. *not* to shape it through our own, *already known* to us, ideas and thoughts.

Today, as I exit the field of poetry, distancing myself from what poetry has dictated to me, and drawing nearer towards What has been dictating to Poetry, this book needs to come to its completion. And so I settle now yet for a while in my present mutism (a happy crowning of what in my case seems to have been a poetic apocopism), not knowing whether I have ever transmitted or expressed anything – to think the first would have been rather a presumption; to have tried the second, a falsification.

All I can say is, looking at this book from a distance, it seems to me that it reflects what I could not possibly have intended to express – and least of all to transmit, I being scarcely conscious of it – the relationship an artist has with the creative force itself: how one lives by it, lives in it, and how at the same time *it* lives one, lives through one, lives one eventually into what one is meant to become, pointing *upwards* at its roots (for that is where all the roots are), its first source: Word, *Logos*.

The creative force has its own means in dealing with us – and only in rare cases it does it directly, as it was in the case of the Prophets. In our case, be it word or sound or paint, these are not the means in our hands, but rather we are the means of these means in the hands of our Creator. But it seems to me that poets, more than painters or composers, undergo the loving and violent impact of the creative force that pierces them through, transforming their being into its own material. For the Language is so intimately woven into our human fabric, that working on the Language cannot go without being worked upon by it in return. So that what one writes – and all the more, what a poet writes – is then hardly distinct from oneself.

But, with all the intimacy of this book, no reader could possibly feel transgressing my private territory. For, again, it is the Language that writes, and I am only its tool, a means of its expression. What it intends to transmit, through me, I will never know: the reader, remaining attentive to the layers of meaning which seem to unfold at almost every line, will certainly receive it. For there will be nothing “by chance”, and no “bare coincidences”, everything that the eye may bring to the surface, every association one may have and every connection one may spontaneously establish with oneself – all of this would be pertinent. The reason for it is simple – and this is true in regards to every artwork – in each particular case, we are confronted with our own personal poem or painting or piece of music, receiving what is meant to be conveyed to us personally.

The Notes at the end of the book should help – not so much in understanding what lies beneath *my* poem, but rather in offering more substance for (and a better access to) that *metapoem* which should unfold within the reader.

I am not keen on ‘dissecting’ works, if only because, as I have previously mentioned, we are not *quite* their authors. Nevertheless, in the Notes, I would like to make a few small ‘incisions’ – the way I have done here with the ‘*lip-locked*’ – without altogether slicing into the matter, simply in order to establish the correct pace of reading, and to indicate the *width*, while the reader’s own application and sharpness should help with the *depth*.

SAMPLER A.S.

*We are in the very beginning, you see,
with a thousand things behind us and without act.*

‘Notes on the melody of things’

Rainer Maria Rilke

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1.

Seuils

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1.

Lip-locked,
place-ridden.

Happenstance casts
a cork anchor –
incision
into the closed parentheses

(as chance may have it,
may not,
may leave it open –)

a painless surgery on the ever-
healing-over

eventlessness.

Counterfeit coins of days –
small change,
loose change:

alms to myself, begging
at the corners of long
afternoons.

Eye
caught up in reflections (mis)-
carries the *ever*
along the two-weeks' diameter,
sets in a circle of
monologues

a seal to one's lips
partedness.

Full stop splits into colon
casts the dice
to unlace the street lights,
to step in – barely leave
ruins,

(a shortcut of the
two weeks' radius).

Else,
to step out:
name – less,
initials, less –
a letter:

silhouette, mired
knee-deep in mirrors

(a static railway-ever-
go-round),

from here
into here in your side
vision
via the *Schwarzenberggasse*.

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