



## From a Language That Exiles Me

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**Adonis**

**from A Language that Exiles Me**

Europe, as geographical locus, gets its name from the goddess Europa, who came from the land of Canaan, as I do. You know the legend: how Zeus, the Greek, kidnapped the Canaanite goddess. You also know how her brother Cadmos, whose name means "Orient," set out to find her, carrying with him the alphabet. But he did not find his sister: her body had vanished into the occidental earth. And yet he gave the alphabet to Europe, as if he wanted to celebrate the meeting between our Orient and your Occident, to found it on knowledge and the sharing thereof. Isn't that a first, a founding sign indicating that the Other, in relation to the land to which I belong, was one of the dimensions of the Self? Especially if one remembers that this Self gave Europe not only its name, but also that most profound element of its identity, the alphabet. Isn't this then not also a founding sign showing that the Other is the present and the future of the Self? Cadmos keeps on looking for Europa.

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I think that the danger threatening poetry in the future will be even greater than the danger it was exposed to by the ideologies of this century's totalitarian systems. Poetry risks becoming yet again an instrument in the service of technological or religious truth: we are going to witness an unprecedented return to the originary text, a political and ideological return toward a stadium where, meaning being considered an a priori given, poetry may no longer be anything but a simple variation on the first text, governed by didactic and rationalistic concerns. Truly original poetry will once again be dismissed as delirious language, madness. It will no longer be tolerated as a questioning but only as an answer, as something fixed and not as something moving. It will no longer be called upon to create meaning, but will be used as caulking for the fissures of time, so that time may again adhere to eternity's meaning, meaning's eternity. Orient and Occident risk walking toward the future in the footsteps of the past, a past which more than ever will be that of the sacred texts.

How will poetry face these dangers? I don't know. But I can try to sketch something that is beginning to take shape in me, something dream-like that wells up from my imagination and experience as if it were given me to live in the next century. To save itself, poetry will need to progressively espouse the unknown internal truths and refuse again and again to

be regimented from the outside by any kind of ideology, system, or institution. Manipulated by the two great machineries of technology and religion, the media will continue to increase their hegemony, while poetry will have to advance by exploring regions the invader cannot reach: the regions of the heart, of questioning, of wonder, and of death.

Indeed, before being a simple relation between words, poetry—the supreme expression of the human through language—is a relation with the world and with things. The original finality of poetry is to embody this relation; this asks of the poet a perfect knowledge of the world, a profound and authentic vision, and a highly refined sense of beauty. From a more traditional standpoint, poetry is seen as an ideological tool, an intermediary between the reader and the unknown, a fount of answers. But faced by this double oppression—technological and religious—this traditional view of the poem cannot survive, it will have to be transformed in its very structure. Just as the traditional concept of poetry has already broadened to exceed the limits of traditional forms of speech, so, in order to resist the utilitarian goals which nearly strangled it this century, in order to escape ideology, the structure of poetic language will have to open itself to more movement, and move always more toward a concept of the total poem. Perhaps the poet will infuse the poem-to-come with various elements from the theater, the novel, philosophy, science, history, things themselves and what's beyond them, the quivering of the body, and the questioning of reason. Drawing, architecture, and music will perhaps combine in the poem-to-come to create a total theater for all things and all languages. Such a development would inevitably lead to an ever growing polarization around a focal point located inside and not outside the human being. The poem would then become a node of energy leading the reader back to his own innateness, it would force him to ask and to answer his own questions. The poet will try to always go deeper into his innateness and to explore the dimensions of his language in order to better particularize the identity of the talking self and that of language. Poetry will create unprecedented upheavals in the system of language and thought. The shards of history and of the world will collide in the poetic text: poetry as the crucible where places and times, the ancient and the modern, science and the dream will meet. Poetry will focus always more on desire and pleasure.

Poetry will be like a sea gathering all the rivers and folding in their waters: loaded with desire, with pleasure, the poem will be transgressive. And yet, like the head of Orpheus, the poem will navigate on the river Universe, totally contained in the body of language.

Hegel said that art was a thing of the past. It pleases me to say: to the contrary, poetry is a question for the future, so much so that the future itself belongs to poetry, is poetry. Without poetry there will be no future. The time that would see poetry die will itself be just another death.

Poetry does not have a time: it is time.

(Translated from French by Pierre Joris)