

LIMITED ACTION

Stéphane Mallarmé

Translation into English by Mary Ann Caws, first published in *Stéphane Mallarmé. Selected poetry and prose*. New York: A New Directions Book, 1982, p. 107-110.

Several times a Colleague came to me, the same one, this other, to confide in me his need to act: what was he aiming at – since his approaching me announced on his part also, young as he was, the concern with creation, seemingly supreme, and success with words; I repeat, what did he mean exactly?

Unclenching your fists, breaking off with some sedentary dream, for a violent tête-à-tête with the idea, as when a fancy strikes one, or moving: but this generation seems not very concerned – even beyond its lack of interest in politics – with the desire for physical exertion. Except of course, with the monotony of winding along the pavement between one's shiny bones, according to the machine at present in favor, the fiction of continuous dazzling speedway.

Acting, leaving this aside, and for the one who only smokes as a beginning, meant, oh visitor I understand you, philosophically to effect motion on many, which yields in return the happy thought that you, being the cause of it, therefore exist: no one is sure of that in advance. This can be accomplished in two ways: either in a lifetime of willing and ignoring it, until the explosion – that is thinking, or in the outpourings now in reach of the prudent gasp, the daily newspapers and their whirlwind, determining in them, in one sense, some strength – which several will dispute, whatever it is – with the immunity of no result.

As you like, according to disposition, plenitude, haste.

Your act is always applied to paper; for meditating without leaving any traces becomes evanescent, nor should instinct be exalted in some vehement and lost gesture that you sought.

To write –

The inkstand, crystal as a conscience, within its depths its drop of shadow relative to having something be: then take away the lamp.

You noticed, one does not write luminously on a dark field; the alphabet of stars alone, is thus indicated, sketched out or interrupted; man pursues black on white.

This pleat of somber lace which retains the infinite woven by a thousand, each according to the thread or the prolongation, its secret unknown, assembles distant interlacings where there sleeps some luxury to take account of – a ghoul, a knot, some foliage – and to present.

With the indispensable nothing of mystery, which remains, expressed little.

I do not know if the Host circumscribes perspicaciously his domain: it will please me to mark it out, and also certain conditions. The right to accomplish nothing exceptional, or lacking in vulgar bustle: anyone must pay for it by being omitted and, you might have said, by death as a person. His exploits are committed while dreaming, so as to bother no one; but still their program is displayed for those who care nothing about it.

The writer must make himself, in the text, the spiritual actor either of his sufferings, those dragons he has nurtured, or of some happiness.

Floor, lamp, clouding of clothes and melting of mirrors, real even down to the exaggerated jerking of our gauzy form around the virile stature stopped upon one foot; a Place comes forth, a stage, the public enhancement of the spectacle of Self; there, through the meditation of light, flesh, and laughter, the sacrifice of personality made by the inspirer is complete; or else in some foreign resurrection, he is finished: his word from then on, reverberating and useless, is exhaled by the orchestral chimera.

A theater hall: he celebrates himself, anonymous, in the hero.

Everything as the playing out of festivals: a people bears witness to its transfiguration into truth.

Honor.

Be on the lookout for something similar –

Will it be recognized in these suspicious buildings detached by some banal excess from the common alignment, claiming to synthesize the miscellaneous bits of the neighborhood? If some facade in the forwardlooking French taste makes an isolated apparition on some square, I salute it. Indifferent to what is uttered, in this place and that, as the flame with lowered tongues runs along the pipes.

Thus Action of the kind agreed upon, literary, does not transgress the Theater, limiting itself to a representation – the immediate disappearance of the written. Let it end; in the street, somewhere else, the mask falls; I have nothing to do with the poet: perjure your verse, it is gifted with only a feeble outer power. You preferred to feed the remainder of intrigues entrusted to the individual. Why should I make it clear for you, child, you know it just as I do, retaining no notion of it except by some quality or lack which is childhood's alone; this point, that everything, whether vehicle or investment, now offered to the ideal, is contrary to it – almost a speculation on your modesty, for your silence – or it is defective, not direct and legitimate in the sense that impulse required just now, and it is tainted. Since uneasiness was never enough, I shall certainly clarify, however many future digressions it may take, this reciprocal contamination of work and means: but first was it not good to express myself spaciouly, as with a cigar in convolution whose vagueness, at the very least, traced its outline on the raw electric daylight?

A delicate being has, or so I hope, suffered –

Outside, like the cry of space, the traveler perceives the whistle's distress. "Probably," he persuades himself, "we are going through a tunnel – *the epoch* – the last long one, snaking under the city to the all-powerful train station of the virginal central palace, like a crown." The underground passage will last (how impatient you are), as long as your thoughtful preparation of the tall glass edifice wiped clean by Justice in flight.

Suicide or abstention, doing nothing, why? – Time unique in the world, since because of an event I have still to explain, there is no Present, no – a present does not exist... Lack the Crowd declares in itself, lack – of everything. Ill-informed anyone who would announce himself his own contemporary, deserting, usurping with equal impudence, when the past ceased and when a future is slow to come, or when both are mingled perplexedly to cover up the gap. Except for the first Paris editions supposed to divulge some faith in daily nothingness, inept if the malady measures its duration by a fragment, important or not, of a century.

So watch out and be there.

Poetry, consecration; trying out, lonely in its chaste crises, during the other gestation as it continues.

Publish.

The Book, where the satisfied spirit dwells, in case of misunderstanding, is obligated, by some struggle, to shake off the bulk of the moment. Not personalized, the volume, from which one is separated as the author, does not demand that any reader approach it. You should know that as such, without any human accessories, it happens all alone; made, being. The hidden meaning stirs, and lays out a choir of pages.

No more arrogant denial of the moment, even in the celebrations: it is to be noticed that some chance forbids to dreams the materials to fight with, or favors a certain attitude.

You, Friend, must not be deprived of years because you parallel the deaf drudgery of the many, the case is strange: I ask you, without judging, for lack of sudden preambles, to treat my information as a madness, I admit it, rare. However, it is already modified by this wisdom, or this understanding, if that's all it is – risking on some surrounding condition, incomplete at the very least, certain extreme conclusions about art which can explode, diamontinely, in this forever time, in the integrity of the Book – to play them, but and by a triumphant reversal, with the tacit injunction that nothing, pulsing in the unknown womb of the hour, shown in the pages as clear and evident, is to find this readily or perhaps another which this may illuminate.