



G. Paolini, *Suspense. Breve storia del vuoto in tredici stanze*, Florence: Hopeful Monster Editore, 1988.

Edited by the artist this book presents a painstaking subdivision of iconographic and textual content – preceded by the pieces “Ultimatum” and “Prologue” – into thirteen chapters: “A. Antefatto” [Antecedent], “2. Doppio gioco” [Double-cross], “3. Atlante” [Atlas], “4. Palais des Mirages”, “5. L'altra figura” [The Other Figure], “6. Qualcuno o qualcosa” [Someone or Something], “7. Proscenio” [Proscenium], “8. Trompe-l'œil”, “9. Da zero a nove” [From Zero to Nine], “10. Vertigo”, “J. The Private Life”, “Q. Quadrante” [Quadrant], “K. Vanitas”.

Anna Paolini Piva's story “Hotel de Cuba” completes the book in the role of “wild card”.

The sections from “Antefatto” to “Quadrante” offer a broad selection of images from the artist's work between 1960 and 1987, integrated with numerous notes and reflections that have mostly appeared elsewhere, whereas the non-illustrated section “Vanitas” includes a series of brief, previously unpublished writings.

ULTIMATUM

Anyone calling himself an artist today is one (even if he only considers himself such). So two lines could do, sparing the reader the other twenty-eight granted for a response to the question¹, a question that is moreover inexhaustible... From saying to doing is a distance unbridgeable, precisely, by words.

The artist today knows he can express himself *less* than the others. It is he who, alone and for all time, experiments every day the elusiveness, or the inexistence, of expression. Which, if it manifests itself, will not manifest itself *in* him, reserving for him only the bitter task of giving voice to it. And he, the artist, knows before the others that the image that will be his to discover is not his but everyone's, even if is not for everyone. In spite of appearances, his destiny imposes upon him an absence from the scene of the world, an exile of time and place.

I have no idea of the role I might have played over the last few years. I do have an idea, though, of the role I might not play in the next few years. I'll stand aside: only in this way will I no longer belong to myself.

I'm thinking for example of the monastery of Fiesole or a “remote” frontier (places already spotted or evoked in my previous excursions: *Una lettera sul tempo*, 1968; *Museo*, 1970-73; *L'angelo sterminatore*, 1987) where Fra Angelico, or Henri Rousseau, drew the clear outlines of their own existence.

No more openings, interviews, reports... quotations, percentages, shipments... A priceless life, I'll honour my commissions (real or invented *ad arte*), consigning the results to whomever I wish: gifts of friendship, repaid with a contact (no contract, brief visits).

So, see you soon.

¹ This text was written in February 1988 in reply to the question “Why are you an artist and what does being an artist today mean to you?” which the periodical *Flash Art* put to various Italian artists. Cf. *La parola agli artisti*, in “Flash Art” (Milan, Italian edition), no. 147, December 1988 - January 1989, in the supplement “Flash Art News”, p. 13.

[p. 3]

PROLOGUE

Just as we saw a moment ago, even before opening it, this volume in itself offered a form and a colour: a green square that immediately evokes a gaming table, and it's here that I'm about to set out the various and mutable faces of *solitaire* or patience.

Suspense in fact is the name of one of the many games belonging to this category of pastime – it illustrates the title-page of the chapter “The Private Life” – and is an explicit reference to the ambitious uselessness of this book.

The cards (writings, images), which from this page onwards offer themselves to the eye, constitute the exposure – this is precisely the word used to define the distribution of *solitaire* cards on the table – and are therefore the values and figures (thirteen) corresponding to the suits (four) which are also the walls of a room.

Or, if you prefer, by *solitaire* we might also mean the facets of a diamond and its multiple reflections that chase one another as far as the eye can see.

In either case, as the subtitle suggests, the protagonist is the missing card (the face), the one concealed from the rules of play (play of reflections) which guides the itinerary of observation.

We have invented days, months and years to mark intervals, expiries, rituals that animate the emptiness of time. I'd like to hope I'll be excused for the liberty of abusing the perfect square of the page by listing atlases, mirages, dizzy spells and vanities that at bottom have nothing to do with anyone, maybe not even this writer...

[p. 9]

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES

Imagining and diverting, behold in three words the secret of anyone who knows how to *recount*, meaning how to tell himself and others something that makes a clean sweep of material time, clears the field of slothful hesitations...

If I weren't afraid of being misunderstood (but what should a “correct” interpretation still respect if submitted to the vanity of such an argument?) I'd be tempted to identify in the genesis of the sublime the need for a way, for a game aimed wholly at checking the unopposed advance of hours and minutes, at transferring the imperturbable circularity of clock hands to the golden proportion of a picture or page.

As for “imagining”, everybody is all too liberally entrusted to his own exclusive and precarious resources. That which concerns the image – its abstract yet corporeal tragicalness that seems moulded in the folds of something untranslatable, irremediably separate – expects no response: the image is there, it *looks* at us.

What instead *concerns* us is this “diverting”, the only exit from the darkness of an imagination without escape. “To distance, remove, turn elsewhere (*divertere*)”, the empty pronouncements of the dictionary seem to fill up with consolations: it is the word, the distance of language, in brief, that allows us to look, to not feel we are under surveillance by the mute ciphers of the calendar.

[p. 257]

GOOD MANNERS

We are all well aware that a tie is not that strip of cloth, coloured and made up in that way... Lighting a cigarette or sipping from a glass are not so much that portion of alcohol or tobacco, the chemical effect those substances produce in us.

These “things”, that is to say, are not what they are but what, thanks to them, we believe ourselves to be. Furthermore the tie gets crumpled, the cigarette goes up in smoke and the glass empties: brief perfections, moments of truth in the sea of daily errors...

Another thing that appears to belong to the same category as the three I was examining now stands out on the table, here in my studio: a blank canvas, virgin yet saturated with past and future, it shows itself for that which it is not.

[p. 267]

NATURE IMITATES ART

The air that envelops the sunset, the complete and hospitable beauty that attends that hour of the day, suffers however from an implicit limitation, a fatal precedent: the morning had been even more splendid, a clearer and more transparent promise...

Yesterday, for once, the comparison was overturned, so much so as to make you think: "each hour of the day is more beautiful than the other", and the onset of night certainly didn't jeopardise the outcome of the spectacle.

But then, seen in succession, this precise instant of today, already so perfect, is somewhat less marvellous than its counterpart of tomorrow; will the last breath be the gate of paradise?

All in all, beauty = infinity? These cypresses and these olive trees are here, beneath the sky, ready to give way. Poor neglected delights, yet patient and cordial...

[p. 271]

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Translated from the Italian by David Smith.