

“THE PROCESS OF WRITING THEM IS WHAT CHANGED ME”¹

ON STACY SZYMASZEK’S WORK(S) SO FAR

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Stacy Szymaszek may mourn the loss of the singular. Cry out that the self collides (and colludes) with multiple personas, pronouns and bodies. Like Oppen before her, Szymaszek is looking for “the meaning of being numerous,” for a self that is not a myself, but an ourself that chooses to, and then finds, connections.

In Szymaszek’s work, the poet is not an I, but both the I and the persona (James in *Emptied Of All Ships*, Eustace in *Hyperglossia*); the poet and the other “filter[ing] myself though the Roman poems of Pier Paolo Pasolini”² (in *The Pasolini Poems*); the I that can only “find a lyric after 100 hours of staring”; the I where “one known through anecdote vanishes.”

Szymaszek brings in the outside, emptying the authority from the personal and replacing it with a relocated conversation both in and of the crowds. The individual and individuality are cast aside here as the perspective performed in the poems is not positioned as *the* perspective but as many perspectives that are layered and unstable:

“to be both more than I what I am or less than what I am”³

As Szymaszek expands the field of what may be available for inclusion in poems, she challenges the splitting of the world into the known and the unknown, the private and the public, event and aftermath, the body and the state. Pulling in the outside of the self, Szymaszek’s work makes a place “where intercourse can occur, while another part of her soul begins a new adventure in form and in name” — a present commons where the act of writing, being a “twiner of speech” and a “sayerer” is what may change you.

In an interview on Ray Bianchi’s “Chicago Postmodern Poetry” (chicagopostmodernpoetry.com), Szymaszek discusses the relationship “internal and external” source material in her writing process: “I need to relate to the book—nouns, adjectives, images, object, ideas—while I’m making a community of words in this other field.” So too do the ways Szymaszek scores her work call attention to the drawing from different places/times/mouths/tongues into one object/locale/breath—what constitutes the particular poem as site of disclosure and encounter. “[I]n my version,” Szymaszek writes, “I see from a variety/of angles.”

Szymaszek’s poems draw from and stitch together disparate bodies of source materials into an other field that pushes forms of lyric and elegy up against facts, testimonies, and record. “I was once a private person before this,” she confesses, where

“this” is the need to identify, explain and repair a present “value in no ledge/I mean knowledge.” Recognizing that the “same noise” may be heard “under/ different conditions” is also recognizing “my figure / within / it’s landscape” — that one’s practices are able to configure a circumstance.

Not unlike a source book of potential procedures for figuring out how we have been figured, Szymaszek models re-formations of community via re-imaginings of language:

“to grasp protocols of public speech, body language, and garment and wanders in and out of commerce and solitude with a set of difficult motives, such as: to elude detection and to find company”

For Szymaszek, finding one’s company entails finding what “is common” and yet asking “who can say they.” This is what Charles Bernstein would call a poetics that imagines “the public square, the town green, a Central Park of our poetries, where, leaving the solitude of sustenance of our rooms or communes, we might jostle against one another, unexpectedly mingle, confuse our borders: reconfigure ourselves, reconstitute our affiliations, regroup.”

As the title of Szymaszek’s newest collection, “Hyperglossia,” suggests about the attention of the personal—the condition of “glossia” refers to speaking in tongues, and “hyper” to bridging points within an entity non-sequentially—being in the company of Szymaszek’s work where “accretion leads to household” is to find company in a many-tongued house “where residence” is held.

Hyperglossia introduces a form that is able to acknowledge and perform the choral, jettison the actual from the possible, jump from ship to other sinking vessels, and make a “model of a city within a city” to configure “entry into another ledger” of the aftermath as a particular tonguing. By enacting instead of representing, Szymaszek speaks to, from, and against the bruised states by evoking said and unheard, glossed over, omitted, and erased speeches. This is a writing that diagnoses and instructs how the body and its parts may be constituted by discourse: by that urgent “speech-producing anatomy” as a practice that configures a circumstance.

Notes

¹ from <http://www.kickingwind.com/5406.html>

² from <http://www.kickingwind.com/5406.html>

³ from <http://xpoetics.blogspot.com/2009/03/cynthia-sailers-introduction-to-stacy.html>