

A Note about Words

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All of us who write in this country, with this language, from the unknown beginner to the writer who has a more or less achieved body of work behind him, we all know the importance and the role of words. And if we do not, if we forget, it is necessary to recall it often. Insofar as we do not, words themselves will hasten to remind us.

All other artists, musicians, painters, sculptors, artists of the film and theatre, they all have at their disposal various visible and tangible means that they use to express themselves with. Only the writer has nothing else but words. And only to us is entrusted the task of making of ordinary, inconstant and varying words, which all people use for their vital needs, the means of artistic expression and, if possible, a work of art.

Of course, we do this unconsciously, that is we use words without always thinking of each word individually, separately, or of the importance of words as such. And this is right, the only way to do it. The French poet who said, more or less, that words are thin planks thrown over the abyss of meaninglessness, to be run rapidly across, using them but not halting any length of time upon them, was very right. And yet, on the other hand, from time to time it is worth giving a thought to our tools and implements and review our attitude to them.

Obviously, a cold study of a dictionary, a conscious search for the invention and combination of, unusual words leads nowhere at all, and that the greatest of skill in this kind of work will not provide a work of art but, in

the best of cases, a curious experiment. Art is not constructed from such words, and does not gain its life from them, but from those that, at good moments, leap out of our consciousness and give body and clothing to our thought or our feelings. But for this to happen, for us to find the right word for the moment, we have to be on a good footing with the language that we are writing in, we have to be in an intimate and permanent relationship with it, more so than other people, and in a different way. With much more effort and responsibility.

And language, language is human life, aware and unaware, visible and concealed. Outside life there is only a deadly silence. There is no word that has no connection with life, as there is no plant that has no soil to feed it. It means that we have to be close to people and their lives, listen to their speech, absorb it, think it over, live with it as with our brother. And then we shall be able to do what is wanted, that is, to tell to people, in their own, known language our, new artistic truth.

It is on this attitude of ours towards people and their speech, towards life, that is, that the attitude of words to us at the moment when we need them depends.

That is all. No other games and skills, no racking our brains will help. Words cannot be wrung from your fountain pen. If we try, even if we "succeed", the words are not alive, they do not warm, do not illuminate, they say nothing to anyone. Dead, on the dead page, they speak only of our wrong-

headed, impossible experiment. Because if we get away from human life, expressed in human speech, this is at once felt in our writing. Our words bear witness against us. All our efforts are wasted in advance. And as soon as we once again set up contacts with any form of human life, and these forms are innumerable and highly diverse, our words gain the warmth of life and the power of conviction, they turn into a previous, obedient means for the expression of our artistic thoughts. And more than this: the word becomes the work.

Accordingly, words come differently to all of us at various times of our lives. Sometimes they are great, dark, immobile things, like stones along the wayside, and sometimes they are transparent, multi-coloured, light and variable, like crystals, dew and clouds. And they are always subject to unexpected metamorphoses and the eternal fluctuation of death and resurrection.

In fact, there is no end to words, nor to our passionate battle with words, for a word, nor to our lifelong search for the fertile and creative word. And this, coming from living people and human actions, and human dreams and desires, passing through the prism of the artistic spirit, becomes (on occasion) the work of art. We can never completely grasp the laws of this process, as we cannot grasp the laws of love. And language, as Kafka said in a letter, is our love until the grave.

Translated by Graham McMaster