

I.B. TAURIS

Passionate Being

Language, Singularity and Perseverance

Yve Lomax

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. . . I present the composition as an art product alone . . .

Edgar Allan Poe

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To begin again

You, you who are persevering in being, awake to a question stuck in your throat. You want to have the question ejected, and you sit up straight to do so, but you cannot spit the words out and have them heard spoken. You cannot throw the question out of your mouth, and you cannot do so because the words themselves have not already been formed.

Putting into words can be a risky thing to do; nonetheless, you are prepared to take the risk, and you are prepared to do so because you have a hunch that doing so is bound up with life – living – itself. But now, in the present that is *this* morning, not a word is uttered. Your mouth is open but language is not, at least not yet, happening. Does the question, by lodging in the throat, presuppose the existence of language? Your voice keeps silent.

As yet you cannot say the question, and you cannot say it because the words are not there awaiting utterance, pronunciation, enunciation; however, the question is making itself felt and in doing so forces from you a small noise. It is almost a sigh, not quite a cry, but it is not the sound of a word: verbalisation is still not happening.

A question is making itself felt in the present that is this morning, and what is felt is the question's asking. The question

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is asking and it is asking *you*. And in this asking what is moving through you is an interrogative sensation. What you, you and your voice, are being exposed to is interrogation: What can you say? But you say nothing.

So silent, silent there, where you are. A twofold silence: you neither, as yet, verbalise the question that is asking you nor, in response to its asking, say a word. And with this duplicated silence what you experience is unutterable powerlessness. *What can you say?* But you are saying nothing. And in saying nothing you experience a stillness the like of which you have never known before. But you are not petrified; you have not been turned into stone through fear, although it cannot be said that you are calm. You are not calm; for, with the silence and the speechlessness and the powerlessness there has come the feeling that you have been singularly thrown into question.

And there, in question, you are exposed to – and live – a time that you know not how to live. You live what seems to be the decisive time of a critical moment, the time when a decision is being made but as yet hasn't happened. It is an ordeal, but you, you who never have had a programme for the future, live it. And living it, living the silence of not a word spoken, your hearing wanders into your eyes and starts seeing. What do you see? What you see isn't something brought by sight. In fact, you are not even seeing something; for, what you are seeing is more than you can bear to see. What you are seeing is the limit of the liveable. It is an ordeal, but desire has not deserted you.

There is a question that, as yet, has not been put into words but which, nonetheless, has been insisting and asking you, although in response you have not said a word. The insistence of this unuttered question's asking has exposed you, you and your voice, to an interrogation – what can you say? But, so far, you do not say. Both voice and verbalisation have fallen silent and have become

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exposed such that neither can be presupposed; yet this silence, in which you have found yourself unutterably powerless, makes the question of what you can say forcibly return. The silence and impotence has, somehow, forced you to think: What can you say? The question is asking something of you, yet it is also asking something of language. To ask what you are capable of saying is also to ask what language is capable of saying.

The question of what you (and language) can say is addressing *you*. You are being forced to think, and the thinking does feel personal. Yet the thinking is also felt as an impersonal force running through you. Could you be anyone? What can *you* say? You could be anyone, and you could be anyone because the question is valid for all, and this matters. It is valid for anyone, any verbalising being. However, the question isn't indifferent; in its address – to you – it is such that it matters that it is *you*. And it also matters that the thinking that is happening with you this morning, the thinking that is both personal and impersonal, is making it necessary for you to respond verbally to the question of what you can say. To think the question of what you, you and language, *anyone* and language, can say makes it necessary that you say, they say, something.

It has become necessary for you to say, and you want to say inasmuch as you want to say the question that has not yet had language happen. You, you who are no exception in having a proper name, want to say; however, you know that whatever does become said will not have been said by a verbalising voice that has been presupposed. And moreover, if the existence of voice and verbalisation cannot be presupposed before an utterance is made, then it cannot be assumed that, in responding to the question of what you can say, you will be speaking your mind. But the question is addressing you and in so doing asks for a personal endeavour that, whilst going with an

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impersonal force, requires you to speak for yourself, in your own name.

To find out what you and language can say can only be found out by having you and language say. To know what you are capable of saying can only be known by enduring the interrogation that the question of what you can say brings. How can anyone tell, in advance, if they can endure it? What is required to endure it? Commitment? Critical activity? Desire? Just to be able, plain and simple? *What can you say?* The question calls for an interrogation; it insists. But has the question's call been born from interrogation by another; or, has it come from self-interrogation? Why should you be bothered to know this? What difference will it make knowing this? You are not indifferent to this question, yet it is only by way of finding out what you, you and language, can say, that you will be able to say.

To have had your voice and language's speaking become silent, to have been thrown into question and become exposed to an unutterable stillness and unliveable time, to have found yourself powerless, has enabled – yes, enabled – the question of what you can say to come. You cannot presuppose the existence of anything, but impotence is turning back on itself – you are experiencing thinking. And what you are experiencing here is not thinking of this or that but rather something of the order of potentiality – what *can* you say?

The question rings in your ear, and you cannot stop it. And that you cannot stop it makes you ask if, on this morning, this morning that will last god knows how long, *singularity* can be said. As yet you cannot say this word; you do not know how to say it.

What can you say?

It is asked of you that you say.

TAKE I

Opening

No one other than myself can respond to the question ‘What can you say?’ No one other than myself can say. I may not have wished for the question to have come but at least, with it, I do not stand accused. For sure, the question asks for interrogation of myself and language, and in so doing makes us inseparable, but it is not imputing blame. The question’s inquiry has not come because of culpability; rather, it has come because a silence – speechlessness – made it such that a verbalising voice could not be taken for granted. Yes, the question came because a presupposition could not be made.

The question is asking me to find out what I am capable of saying, and there is no other way to find out than venturing to say. It would be the same for anybody. Anyone could be asked the question but it is *you*, you and language, that has to say.

To say what you can say requires that there is saying; it is unavoidable. You may think that you require some other – superior – voice to speak so as to say what you can say, but even for this voice there is still the matter of saying. You may think that you need to acquire an additional language so as to tell of what you and language can say, but even for this language, this metalanguage, there is still the matter of saying. Saying is

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unavoidable. So, with the question of what you can say imploring you, you cross your fingers and pray that you can say.

What makes it so that utterances can happen? What makes it so that sticks and stones can be said? Indeed, what makes it so that I can tell you that I love you, that I can recount the words of a novel, a philosophical work or, indeed, the words of a woman who has said how difficult she finds it to live on such little money? I'll say it is the very thing itself indicated by a word, which is neither the concrete word itself nor the thing to which the word might be referring but that 'being said' has been rendered possible.

That 'being said' has been able to come into existence is not because someone has the ability to make a meaningful statement about this or that. Indeed, it is not about someone – me or you – being able to make an actual utterance, which perhaps breaks an awkward silence or helps a friend with a problem or communicates an intention or painful news. Rather, it is about language being able to make saying possible.

What I'm praying for is the very thing that makes anything whatsoever sayable. That 'being said' can come into being, that it can issue from my mouth, your mouth, anyone's mouth, is thanks to an ability that can 'make sayable'. And not knowing what qualifies me to say it, I'll say that language exists as this ability. Now, I could say that certain things in the world have sayability – they can be said. But what I'm trying to say here, and I'll admit there is tentativeness, is that sayability is the thing itself of language. To make sayable is what language *can* do.

What 'being said' first and foremost announces is not a flower blossoming beside a motorway but, rather, the existence of a mode that is simply that of being-in-language. Most of the time we pay no attention to this announcement or mode; nevertheless, with the flower blossoming beside the motorway there is, in being

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said, an appearance in language, and what this appearance shows us, even if we ignore it, is that language *can* let appear. And first and foremost, this *can* refers not to the letting appear of this or that (the flower, the motorway) but, rather, appearing itself. And as for this appearance of appearing itself, I see it no other way: it is *only* opening.

What I am trying to say is that the ‘can let appear’ that appears and is announced with the mode of being-in-language is precisely what I have been calling ‘sayability’. And to say this is to say that sayability is, in itself, nothing other than opening.

On this morning, my thinking is being held captive by the thought that sayability is the thing of, and the very taking-place of, language itself. And what is also holding me captive is the thought that this ability to make sayable doesn’t in itself say anything. I cannot deny it – I am being forced to think. And what I am thinking of here is voicing without this being the voicing of something or somebody. What I am thinking of is the voice alone.

I say ‘the voice alone’ but by this I do not mean merely the sensuous sounds of vibrating vocal chords. The voice I am thinking of is soundless, and soundless in the sense that, although it is immanent in everything that is said, written or spoken, it doesn’t say anything. This voice – alone – doesn’t say anything, and it doesn’t say anything for it is *only* opening. However, perhaps the word ‘voice’ brings with it a burden it cannot unload.¹ Perhaps the *only* opening that is holding my thought captive is better called ‘revelation’.

What the mode of being-in-language immediately reveals is revelation. But, it has to be said, this revelation doesn’t reveal this or that; for, what is revealed is revelation itself. Revelation in itself reveals no-thing; it reveals nothing that could be said to have hitherto stood behind it or before it. What revelation

itself reveals, and forgive me if this sounds obvious, is pure unconcealedness. Indeed, revelation itself, *pure* revelation, is nothing other than openness.

Pure revelation is in no way chaste, far from it; unremittingly, it is openness. And that, surely, deserves to be called passion: to reveal revelation itself is to reveal the '*passion* of revelation'.² And so, I now find myself saying that the thing itself of language is passion and irreducibly so. Truth be told, I find myself unable not to say that the ability to make sayable is language having passion – the *passion* of revelation. The passion is the openness that is revelation in itself.

I say 'the passion of revelation'. I could equally say that the passion of language is pure communication: what 'being said' first of all communicates, even if we choose to ignore it, is that language has the ability to make something communicable. Language is able to 'make communicable' and this *communicability* is nothing other than ability to be *only* opening, which is, precisely, the pure passion of communication itself.³ However, being this passion, *having* this passion, doesn't as such make a communication that tells us about this or that state of the world or human affairs; in other words, nothing is communicated of gorgeous flowers or gory occurrences.

Now, the *only* opening that is the pure passion of communication or revelation may reject being figured as a soundless voice; nevertheless, it does present me with a 'communicative emptiness' in as much as with it nothing is actually said. And hearing the word 'emptiness' prompts me to ask: Are we only concerned to hear language say something, say something about something? But when we only hear language speaking about something – a gorgeous flower growing in the garden, a gory murder that has happened – what we ignore is the communicability and the being-in-language that is occurring. However, in attempting to

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respond to the question ‘What can you say?’, which has come because a verbalising voice could not be taken for granted, the speaker here is finding it impossible to *not* pay attention to the existence of communicability.

What becomes said to me and by me can be hurtful, as hurtful as sticks and stones hitting bones, yet on this morning I cannot help but see innocence in the openness that I’m thinking is the passion and taking-place of language itself. I say ‘innocence’ and I mean this in the sense of an open face that is before you and hiding nothing whatsoever. Perhaps the innocence of an open face brings too much of the infant with it, yet let’s not forget that in Latin *infans* is precisely that which is unspeaking. To see in the word that which is an open face is to see that which is *only* opening; indeed, it is to see a communicative emptiness where, akin to the infant, meaningful discourse is not yet spoken. But is this open face, this communicative emptiness, more than we can bear to see?

Why should I ask this? On this morning I am held captive by the thought that the taking-place of communicability is the taking-place of language, and in trying to find out what I am capable of saying I am finding that the taking-place of language is what, most of the time, we presuppose. And hearing these words said begs the question: What is happening when, in speaking or writing, the taking-place of language is presupposed?

All sorts of things are said in our world – horrible things, flattering things, informative things – and that such things can be said is, at least for me, thanks to communicability taking-place and language giving itself. However, it can so happen, and does happen, that this giving is taken, and taken in the sense of an acceptance that it – the taking-place of language – has already happened. For sure, such an acceptance may be unwittingly made yet what happens with it is that the giving is transformed into a

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given. And when the taking-place of language is taken as given it is not only taken for granted, which is when you would say 'it goes without saying', but also taken as having already happened. Indeed, in being taken as given, the taking-place of language slides into not only an antecedent position but also a sup-position. And what happens here is that the taking-place of language sinks into the form of a presupposition: it goes down to a place beneath and there, beneath, becomes covered. In short, language's open face – the passion of revelation – ceases to be seen.

Obliteration

When presupposition takes hold what becomes established is not only a *before* but also a *beneath*. With presupposition there is the *pre*, which establishes anteriority and antecedence, and then there is the *sup-position*, which installs a realm that is underneath, beneath or, in other words, hidden below. Through establishing anteriority and antecedence, presupposition leads me to believe that something is already there and, as such, can be taken as given. Presupposition gives me a before in time, which as it were 'goes without saying'; however, it also puts into position a realm beneath that remains hidden from me.

Two people are speaking. They are talking about this and that. *What a lovely day. That was a kind thing she did.* Yes, they are happily nattering away (no argument on this occasion); but, is their experience of language one of presupposition?

An awkward silence is just about to be broken; a novel is just about to be written; an accusation is just about to be made; a declaration of intent is on her lips – and in advance of a word being spoken, or written, has it been presupposed that language *is*? How can we speak without making such a presupposition? Would I be able to speak? Would *you*? How can we speak without presupposition?

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How can we speak without presupposition? Is this the question that I have been unable to spit from my mouth and which brought forth the asking of what I can say? Truth be told, I cannot say. But I do have a hunch that the question of how to speak without presupposition will not go away.

With the question ‘What can you say?’ there has come the matter of language being able to ‘make sayable’ – should I be surprised by this? Perhaps the matter of sayability is precisely what the question is asking me not to overlook. Should I be surprised that I have found myself thinking of sayability – or, in other words, communicability – as the very thing of, the very taking-place of, language itself? Indeed, that the question came because speech fell powerless does make me wonder if the question is begging me to see that, in responding to it, the taking-place of language hasn’t already happened but is, in whatever I say, happening there and then. Which is to say, happening *now*.

So, I am wondering if the question ‘What can you say?’ is wanting me to experience not some language content but, rather, the very speaking of speaking. Is the question wanting me to ‘undergo an experience with language’¹? Is it wanting me to undergo an experience with language other than gathering or promulgating information about it? Is the question, which could be asked of anyone, wanting to have the very taking-place of language to be experienced without presupposition?

– *What can you say?*

And for a moment the question silences you. You don’t know what to say. You cannot say. But the question insists. It returns. And you start saying. A silence so huge had grabbed you by the throat and roared in your ears, but in that silence language touched you with what it can do: language can give

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communicability, which is what puts us in contact with mute things and constitutes the event of language. And for a moment so fleeting that it is almost gone before it arrives, you speak without presupposing the existence of language. And in this instance, so brief but nonetheless glorious, there appears before you an absolutely exposed – open – face. And for once, the taking-place of language has morning and arises without obscurity.

If the taking-place of language ceased to be presupposed it would not, so to speak, ‘go without saying’. But hearing these words said brings a question I hardly know how to ask: How can that which doesn’t say or communicate anything come to say itself? Facing this question, I am unsure as to what to say. I cannot say. But what I can say is that communicability is not a ‘something’; it is merely an ability, a capacity – a *passion* – to communicate or signify. Communicability doesn’t communicate or signify anything, but it is the very thing by which an actual communication becomes possible; without it there would be no ‘being said’, no meaningful discourse or, as some would say, linguistic signification. Communicability is not a something, yet it is precisely that which gives me a way to tell you about a flower that, blossoming besides a motorway, caught my eye. (Do you want to hear that? Does it interest you? Or would you rather hear of a murder that never needed to happen?)

Communicability makes communication possible; however, as soon as something is actually said, and meaningful discourse takes place, it becomes the very thing that is obliterated. Even though meaning is never a straightforward matter, even though there is wavering in the way words signify, what happens when an actual communication happens is that language’s open face comes to refer to something that is external to it and we are granted (no matter how precarious it might be) meaningful discourse.² Language – *lingua* – is now saying something. And now it is a

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matter of what is said – *Do you know what he said? – He didn't say that, surely!* The tongue is wagging and language's open face falls silently into oblivion.

It would seem there is a lack of way for communicability to say itself in that which it grants. How on earth can a 'communicative emptiness' *not* go without saying? For sure, the wagging tongue can speak about it, but, in so doing, it will have been turned into a something about which something is being said. In short, it will have become an object of communication. For communicability to be spoken of in actual discourse it takes on the form of a something, but becoming such a something it yet again becomes erased. Or to put it another way, the event of language, which is happening now, doesn't say itself when I – and language – speak about it, which is precisely what is happening now.

So, there is a lack of way (or, at least, so it seems) for actual discourse to say the very event – communicability – that makes it possible; but, hearing these words said, a question comes howling: Is there no other way than that of deeming language's open face to be unsayable? I acknowledge the 'lack of way', the aporia as some would say, but with this acknowledgement am I to simply accept that language's open face is *unspeakable* and that as such there is no other option than to presuppose it? Would you find happiness in having communicability placed in the realm of presupposition and, at the same time, abandoned? (Would you find happiness in having a communicative emptiness bear a negativity?)

TAKE 3

Division

On this morning that will last god knows how long, I have been unable to ignore what 'being said' first of all announces, which is not a flower blossoming beside a motorway but, rather, being-in-language. With my hearing wandering into my eyes, what I have been unable to overlook is language's open face. For a moment this face was conspicuous, and I could not look away. For a moment so brief, but which seemed so long, I saw a communicative emptiness. For sure, this emptiness gave nothing to say, but a terror was not struck in my heart; for, with this emptiness what I saw was the appearing of appearing itself. And what I also saw was how meaningful discourse had come to presuppose and abandon this appearance because the communicative emptiness was quite simply, for it, unspeakable. And seeing the word's open face left 'so abandoned to itself' I found myself wondering what I could say.¹

– *What can you say?*

I would be the first to admit that I could be going round in circles; nonetheless, I'll hazard to say that because the taking-place

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