

EMILY GROSHOLZ

Equal and Opposite

for Jean Starobinski

Reaction is the movement that cannot resign itself.
It is not just a tool, it is a task. The writer must react!
Reaction is the spurring of resistance,
Invention of response.

Knowing only what opposes us, uncertain how to manifest refusal
And overcome Goliath—so inexplicable, unjust, ungoverned—
The writer somehow refuses to consent
To things as they stand.

The writer must react: this is a Kantian imperative, a duty,
Yet indeterminate. A warning in the wake of evident danger
That comes without the guarantees of theory
Or promise of success.

Reaction is above all personal, written—enacted in speech—
By individuals facing impersonal forces, who must answer
Although we see now as through a glass
Darkly, not face to face.

The writer sets to work not knowing what will finally emerge
From personal reactions, aiming only for admissible response,
Between a past whose meaning is a riddle,
And a half-hidden future.

We hope to find the causes that make us live, but it is we ourselves
Who look for our beginnings. We are the origin of the long search
For origins, and poetry is always the imitation
Of human action.