

**RENÉ CHAR**

**OLDER IMPRESSIONS**

**TRANSLATED BY STUART KENDALL**

*The few older impressions that I will offer have often appeared at the intersection of an enduring reading, in the words of Jean Beaufret, of Martin Heidegger's great texts and of the daily exercise of a human life that many of us have attempted to equal, without describing, in depths and heights. They are an homage in respect, recognition, and affection for Martin Heidegger.*

... In the moment in which we are living – I am thinking of those who are seized with a certain hypnosis that spreads through the climate of an epoch – hope, this uncertain reassurance, is truly the only active language, and the only foil susceptible to being transformed through a positive movement. We are bound to attest that this hope is not naïve. Poetry is the solitude without distance amid the surrounding bustle, which is to say, a solitude that has the means to entrust itself. At dawn, one is the enemy of no one, except of the executioners. For Hegel, philosophy, from a commonsensical point of view, is the world in reverse. For some, from the point of view of equity, poetry is the world at its best. Even if it is prey to a pessimistic nature, he who accepts, wittingly or unwittingly, the perspectives of the future, should convince himself that overreliance on this pessimism is hope without rupture, the hope that something unforeseeable, wherein we will distinguish a favor, or, on the other hand, an hermetic spell will rise up, and oppression will be momentarily overturned. Doesn't thinking the worst show respect for others? It seems that poetry, through the pathways it follows, through the proofs that it has made concrete, constitutes the relay that permits the wounded being to recover new forces and fresh thoughts. Poetry only rarely gleans indulgences, instigator of little offences, fantasies. Its originality doesn't wander into a house of straw.

... The word passes across the individual, defines a state, illuminates a sequence within the material world; it also proposes another state. The poet does not force the real, but liberates a notion that it should only leave in its authoritative nudity.

... In 1945, we thought that the totalitarian spirit had lost, with Nazism, its terror, its subterranean poisons, and the ovens that defined it. But its excrements were buried in the

fertile unconscious of men. A species of colossal indifference in regard to the recognition of others and of their living expression, parallel to ours, informs us that there are no longer any general principles or hereditary morality. A flawed movement brought this to us. One will live by improvising on the level of one's neighbor. Hunger becomes thirst, thirst won't make us swim. An insane intolerance surrounds us. Its Trojan horse is the word *happiness*. And I believe it to be mortal. I speak as a man without original sin on a present earth. I do not have a thousand years in front of me. I do not express myself for the men of the future who will be – undoubtedly – as unhappy as we are. I respect what comes. We have a habit, a temptation, of extending the clear shadow of a grand ideal in front of what we call, for convenience, our path. But this winding line does not even have the choice between the flood, the foolish field, and the fire! Significantly, the promised golden age only deserves its name at *present*, hardly any more. The perspective of a joyful paradise destroys man. The entire human adventure contradicts this, but to stimulate rather than to overwhelm us.

... How can poetry be liberated from its oppressors? When poetry, which is enigmatic clarity and hurried rush, discovers its oppressors, it cancels them out.

... We need to learn to live without a shroud, to replace the heights, to broaden the sidewalks, to fascinate temptation, to push the new word to the first rank to consolidate evidence in it. It is not an assault that we continue on, it's something more: a patient imagination in arms introduces us to this state of incredible refusal. For the preservation of an availability and for the continuation of the mercilessness of the not I.

... We are of a line that feels constricted by strictly intellectual summations. Heresy rescued vain orthodoxy early.

... The poet is traversed by passing wills; this old nutrient, so similar to the cuckoo, the veiled realist, absolute idler!

... The poet has no mission; all told, he has a task. I have never proposed anything that, once the euphoria has passed, threatened falling from on high.

... Succumbing is the risk, but for a luminous publication that can contain me without making me suffer for finding myself there.

... Why does the word “poet” come across me so often? So that there should be more space at the height and less error over a poorly revealed identity. Out of the necessity of conserving the essential shadows.

... To create is to exclude. What creator does not die in despair? But can one despair if one is torn apart? Perhaps not.

1950, 1952, 1964

“Impressions Anciennes” (Paris: G.L.M., November 1964). An homage to Martin Heidegger published by Guy Levis Mano during the same month that Gallimard published *Commune Presence*, an anthology that helped define Char’s work as an oeuvre. Char included “Impressions Anciennes” in *Recherche de la base et du sommet*, an anthology of his collected prose, in 1971. Reprinted René Char, *Oeuvres Complètes*. Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1995, pgs. 742-44.