



Vise and Shadow: Essays on the Lyric Imagination, Poetry, Art, and Culture

Peter Balakian

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Peter Balakian is a renowned poet, scholar, and memoirist; but his work as an essayist often prefigures and illuminates all three. "I think of *vise* and *shadow* as two dimensions of the lyric (literary and visual) imagination," he writes in the preface to this collection, which brings together essayistic writings produced over the course of twenty-five years. Vise, "as in grabbing and holding with pressure," but also in the sense of the vise-grip of the imagination, which can yield both clarity and knowledge. Consider the vise-grip of some of the poems of our best lyric poets, how language might be put under pressure "as carbon might be put under pressure to create a diamond." And shadow, the second half of the title: both as noun, "the shaded or darker portion of the picture or view or perspective," "partial illumination and partial darkness"; and as verb, to shadow, "to trail secretly as an inseparable companion" or a "force that follows something with fidelity; to cast a dark light on something—a person, an event, an object, a form in nature."

Vise and Shadow draws into conversation such disparate figures as W. B. Yeats, Hart Crane, Joan Didion, Primo Levi, Robert Rauschenberg, Bob Dylan, Elia Kazan, and Arshile Gorky, revealing how the lyric imagination of these artists grips experience, "shadows history," and "casts its own type of illumination," creating one of the deepest kinds of human knowledge and sober truth. In these elegantly written essays, Balakian offers a fresh way to think about the power of poetry, art, and the lyrical imagination as well as history, trauma, and memory.

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