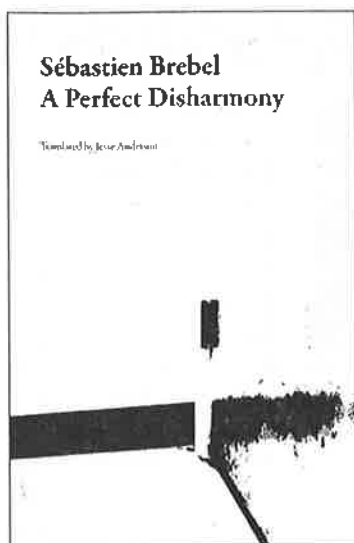


A PERFECT DISHARMONY

Sébastien Brebel

Translated by Jesse Anderson

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Fiction readers will be pleased to discover *A Perfect Disharmony*, the 2013 short story collection by French philosophy professor Sébastien Brebel, in this translation by Jesse Anderson. Brebel has always had glamour—stark maxims and cinematic metaphors pervade the gloom of his first two books, *Francis Bacon's Armchair* and *Villa Bunker*—but these new vignettes about sex, aging, and power find him condensing his prose and building nuance into it with a classicism seldom found in English.

Examples of Brebel's epigrammatic strategy abound and delight: "Her coquetry, along with the misunderstandings that have resulted from it, has gradually been replaced by a superficial attitude of unfounded enthusiasm" ("Reservation"); "Her heels are too high, and her low-cut red dress gives her the feeling of having been invited to a ceremony whose purpose she's forgotten" ("Off-Season"); "He died of cardiac arrest, and she never felt anything more for him than a silent, rarely expressed affection, that some might have judged deliberately austere" ("Sunday Afternoon"). And then there's this gem: "When her parents told her they were getting a divorce, visibly relieved by a decision that had taken more than twenty years to make, due to concerns that a hasty separation would bankrupt the modest capital which years of work and savings had allowed them to accumulate, she took the news lightly, and received a shower of castigation in return" ("Metamorphosis"). Brebel used to need an entire paragraph to present a character or situation, but *A Perfect Disharmony* reminds one of classical French prose as Camus described it: efficient, attentive, and unwilling to deliver messages.

Brebel rarely references literature, but in *Francis Bacon's Armchair* the protagonist said this about Knut Hamsun's novel *Hunger*: "Hamsun's words were written for this moment, so that I could live in this moment exactly as it was meant to be lived in, in all its darkness and uncertainty, words written not to give me a glimmer of hope, but, on the contrary, to help me close my mind to any thought of redemption." In *A Perfect Disharmony*, Brebel has written a book for a public that craves fiction the way this character does.

— Erik Noonan