

Reflections on the First International Poetic Ecologies Conference, Université Libre de Bruxelles, May 2008

by Arpine Konyalian Grenier

Crossing the tarmac, the final hop, the boarding pass, shoes off, yes, yes of course I will work on the chocolate and beer in Brussels. There but not there I am, woozy and beaming, part of the landscape female, villager and city dweller female, deeply rooted in yet uprooted from several cultures and languages, music, poetry, science, art and major setbacks brewing my genderless mind, societal or private, as indicated. However, to lose what is given, the certainty, at the same time stand ground, not into but through, evading colonization and quantification is my main agenda.

We're at the Country House Hotel facing Heroes' Square. The hotel lobby is crowded and noisy. I hear someone back and forth in impeccable French and English. Her name tag spells Franca Bellarsi. I remember she is the convener of the Poetic Ecologies Conference, the first international conference of its kind to be hosted in this country, organized by the Department of Languages and Literatures of the Université Libre de Bruxelles. I am a delegate. It feels good.

Good four days of conferencing and connecting during several parallel panels running from 9AM to 11PM, poetry readings in-between, add to that two coffee breaks with scrumptious mini-desserts, a healthy lunch and later dinner. The participants are post-modern, eco-conscious poets and scholars from all over the world. First-timers, old-timers, everyone is here because it matters. It being poetry and ecology.

I think poetry opens hearts and minds to dialogue, be it the emotional and metered text of yesteryear or the cutting edge sound and sense of today. The commitment to repetition and return plagues me. Braids of thought, words, phrases and circumstances where edges of writing meet, none overtaking itself or the other. Nature has no duality, I hear. Like water it flows and ebbs without competing, is continuous, non-restrictive, inclusive. Poetry (and politics) are most effective when they utilize these principles. (That may be the only kinship between them, as unlike fiction or critical discourse, poetry has nothing to say. Art bitten by poetry longs to be freed from reason, said Maritain. I am happy to remember this.)

Concept to content to sound relationships are exquisitely well articulated here, the outer, the inner, the global, the personal. No dazzle by wit or conceit. The longing to connect just because we're human overshadows the politic of the human. This is innovative exploration/ exposition as it resists definitions to avoid exclusion: Seamus Heaney's Elemental Eco-poetics, from Spain; Metaphysical Conceits and the Re-naturalization of the Mind, from Germany; Catastrophic Thinking and Poetic Remedy, from Canada; the Eco-ethical Poetics of Found

Text, from the UK; the Mobile Non-places of Post-nationalist Identity, from Ireland; the Chthonic Voices of C.D. Wright; Sustainability & Modern Australian Poetics. Neither self-consumption nor self-sufficiency is in vogue.

How about deleting the verbs and words like self. I am reminded that the physical is not in conflict with the ideological, that laws of nature inhabit long range patterns, each element, variable or formula affecting the other, language as yet another dwelling opening up, evolving in and of nature along its cultural constraints. I am reminded that mutually exclusive states create conflict, that our poetic ecologies need a creative vision and adherence to it, exposing, denying, re-evaluating, freed of gendered tropes, self absorbed, instinctive, less observant, more open.

Circumstance does not bring satisfaction. I must bring satisfaction to it. Seeing steadily and wholly the vastness of nothingness that belongs to no one, I am woozy and beaming again. There can be no colonization or quantification. Categories validate and collapse. Turning away from them is to be informed by them. Therein lies dialectic we need not dominate or subjugate. In a world too fast paced for metaphor and irony, change and chance continue to rediscover language and create new symbols and metaphors. I want to slow down to recruit and discern the process. To write is to die, for it is to move from one world into another, a world in which one has nothing, no country, no language, no grammar, no knowledge, said Cixous. I feel a meta-linguistic polytonality that disowns itself to be carried over to other terrain where poetic engagement occurs with ethics, spirituality and aesthetics. It is apocalyptic in nature.

In Brussels, the sun goes down around 10 PM in May. It is a joy to walk downtown or take the bus in the wee hours of the night, alone. There is history, hospitality and respectability everywhere. These are the Belgians. They take pride in the multi-cultural and multi-lingual challenges facing them. They welcome change. Professor Bellarsi is not only touched by an angel, she is one, with a flock of mini angels around making sure delegates are well taken care of.

At the airport, Judith and I are on the same flight to Washington DC where I will say goodbye to her and continue to Tucson. We are early. We buy chocolates with our left- over Euros, munch on, talking faintly. Escaping the elitist and the insular, we have been traveling the poetic ecologies of heart, we decide. There were no protagonists, antagonists or narrators, only participants. It feels good to know we can choose to align with the poetic ecologies of our natural state of being, the Heisenberg Principle and *maya*, Higgs' neutral non zero and *maya*. We're good. Good Good.

Arpine Konyalian Grenier's work has been described as a mosaic of narrative that takes us out of our provincial concentration on American life to encompass broader social and geopolitical issues with a decidedly urban and postmodern sensibility. Her poetry and translations have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies. A former scientist, musician, financial analyst and author of several collections of poetry, Arpine presently lives in Tucson, AZ..