

A LICIA GHIRAGOSSIAN

THE TRILINGUAL POET

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Poetry is the expression of our innermost being: dreams, ideals, passions, and emotions. However, it has ebbed through the tide of the modern technological age, which has crushed and distorted the soul of the individual human being. In such an unpoetic cultural environment, the appearance of souls dedicated to poetry is a rare phenomenon and deserves our appreciation and encouragement. Alicia Ghiragossian is one of those rare poets whose voice is singularly resonant and influential and has made an impact on contemporary poetry.

Born in 1936 in Argentina, to Armenian parents, survivors of the 1915 Armenian genocide, she grew up in the tradition of Spanish Argentinean poetry. With her first volume of poems, *One Day Five Voices* (1966), she was immediately acclaimed as an original poet and soon after won the "International Prize of Poetry" in Europe in 1967. The same year the Italian translation of her poems was published, "Being and Punctuation", with illustrations by Pablo Picasso. This very great honor to the budding young poet brought her international recognition overnight.

Her unusual talent received due appreciation by her own people when the Armenian government extended an official invitation to Alicia to honor her. Soon, her poems were translated into Armenian by the renowned poet Vahakn Tavtian (*Roots and Essence*, 1967). The publication received unprecedented national acclaim both in Armenia and its Diaspora.

Her poetry brought a new freshness and modernity to Armenian literature and made an impact on its development. Numerous young poets were inspired to follow her path and through Alicia's work there was a remarkable transfusion of new blood into Armenian poetry. Her books have become bestsellers in Armenia since 1967.

While in Buenos Aires, Alicia studied for a law degree and she was a lawyer when she moved to Los Angeles in 1971, where she practiced her profession. Her marriage in 1972 and the birth of her daughter, Lara, in 1973 were great sources of inspiration for her love poems and those dedicated to motherhood. Her poems are characterized by deep thought and clairvoyant perception, with rich metaphors, new analogies and sharp antinomies. She uses language with great economy to express profound emotions. She transcends the realistic world and reaches the metaphysical one, which is rooted in her being. Her poetry expresses the oversensitive pulse of modern times.

Alicia Ghiragossian's poetry has been so unique and original that it has given rise to a new School called "Metadimensional Poetry." This kind of poetry goes

beyond the known dimensions of reality into the metaphysical and eternal. For example, if the theme is motherhood, the concept will be metadimensional, that is, it should not stop at the first or second dimensions, which are ordinary, commonplace, and descriptive, but it should go on to the third, fourth, fifth, sixth or twentieth dimensions. Thus, the reader has a totally surprising, new perspective on the themes; a new world is opened before him/her and thus he/she enters a dimension that transcends known boundaries. In her *Introduction to the Beyond the Word* volumes, Alicia states: "We are interested in traveling very deep into the inner landscape of the soul (either of people or things), where the movement of atoms is registered; we are interested in being projected to the macrocosmos, to reach the cosmic forces and to be able to encounter the mysteries of the universe" (pp. 5-6)

In order to reveal this mysterious world that is intangible and haunting, she constructs an inner rhythm in her poetry that is free from old rules and is hypnotic in its effect; thus she transports the readers into a metaphysical universe full of mysteries. Alicia accumulates these effects through her surprising expression and unmatched analogies.

*Open arms
is the prologue
of a hug.
Open arms
is the sign
of freedom
but it is also the design
of a hurting Christ.*

*Beyond the Words
Love and motherhood (p. 70)*

Alicia's subjects are varied: love, motherhood, solitude, peace, prophesy, truth, mysticism, roots, pain, suffering. These themes are balanced with emotion and philosophy, heart and mind, spontaneity and intellect, depth and flight.

In her "motherhood" poems, we share her innermost conversations with her unborn child. She creates an altogether different dimension of motherhood, as the mystical dialogue between the mother-to-be and the child reveals the truth that the child is destined to create the mother-unlike the accepted concept which considers the mother-to-be the creator of the child:

you do not have life yet

and you bring life to me.
 People think
 I give you birth
 but we both know
 we give birth
 to each other.
 I
 the child
 you
 the mother.

Beyond the Words
Love and motherhood (pp. 81-82)

Her poems about God cause astonishment and wonder. She demonstrates a strange braveness and a novelty in poetical expression. In the closeness where she reaches the image of God, there is an encounter with the external or transcendental world:

And God
 entered my bedroom
 without slippers
 engraving the message
 with her footprints.
 We became friends
 at a glance.
 She already knew my soul
 and could recognize
 the scars from hurricanes
 on my back
 God was barefoot.
 And I rearranged my bedroom.

Beyond the Word
Meditation (p. 17)

Love in its emotional, passionate, and metaphysical aspects is revealed in her poems. She crosses the delicate veil of life and afterlife to follow the journey of her heart:

Love
 is the genius
 of existence
 The opposite of love
 is not just its absence
 but death itself.
 Lovers
 restore
 eternity.

Beyond the Words
Love and motherhood (p. 15)

The great disappointment of love, too, is revealed in a poignant manner:

I do not know
 when and how
 that poison
 became storm
 and destroyed
 the American plastic dream.
 It became a cancer
 and rootlessly pulverized
 promise and hope
 child and future

Beyond the Words
Love and motherhood (pp. 71-72)

Alicia's poetry is characterized by profound messages, rebellion against corruption and materialism in society, criticism, and human weaknesses such as envy, self-interest, and egoism. She is a poet who is concerned about purity, warmth, high human essences, and uprightness of the soul:

We must fabricate
 the vision of light
 and navigate through its rays
 to grasp the future
 detach it from time
 and build a new memory (p. 9)
 Where dreams are not
 the reverse of reality
 but life itself (p.10)
 Then we may have breathed
 the mystery
 and embraced
 the pure essence. (p. 10)

Introduction
Beyond the Words

Alicia writes in Spanish, Armenian, and English. This is quite unusual but, being an Armenian born outside her homeland, she was exposed to different languages and cultures, which has in fact enriched her poetry and given deeper dimensions to her creative work. She writes a given poem in the language that comes from her inner world. Each theme, and its treatment, is expressed in the language that is closest to the spirit behind the theme.

Her ethnic Armenian roots gave her poetry a deeper dimension. Her first encounter with her homeland created a revolution in her life. All along she had been in search for her identity; she wanted to know who she was, whom she belonged to, what her roots were, who her ancestors were, what cultural and racial heritage she had. She found the answers to these perennial questions during her first visit to Armenia in 1967. Later she revisited Armenia more frequently, and each time, she accumulated new sensations, which turned into poems written in the Armenian language.