

ANCIENT MEMORY, ETERNAL HOPE: THE POETRY OF XENIA BAKRAN-SUNIC

The Old Life Is Dead. . . / L'Ancienne Vie Est Morte. . .
Poems in English and in French/Poemes en anglais et en français
Xenia Bakran-Sunic

Translated into French by Antoine Pinterovic
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Reviewed by Juleigh Howard-Hobson

“We have lost the cosmos. The sun strengthens us no more; neither does the moon. In mystic language, the moon is black to us, and sun is a sackcloth.

“Now we have to get back the cosmos, and it can't be done by a trick. The great range of responses that have fallen dead in us have to come to life again. It has taken two thousand years to kill them. Who knows how long it will take to bring them to life.”

—D. H. Lawrence, *Apocalypse*, V

Thus opens Xenia Bakran-Sunic's book of poetry, and it is a fitting opening for a book that expresses a profound melancholy for what has indeed “fallen dead” and, simultaneously, contains a guarded hope for a future where our sacred bond to the cosmos (to nature within us and outside us)—the source of our strength—is brought back to life.

This volume contains 52 poems, each of which is printed in the original English and in French translation. Indeed, every portion of this book—from the varied review notes to the preface—is presented in both languages.

The slimness of the book belies its scope. This is a book about everything: our past, our present, our future, the cosmos, and the sacredness of their connections. There is also a sense of loss, a sense of the darkening of our Western civilization, which has lost its roots in the cosmos and is being sucked into the widening vortex of

technological modernity. Yet the memory of what we once were gives us hope that light and life will be born anew.

The title poem, "The Old Life is Dead" (p. 76), is typical of the evocative nature of Bakran-Sunic's work:

The old life is dead,
 The new one re-emerges;
 Out of unknown darkness
 That sways the disturbed heart
 In the dark column of blood pulse,
 Where true priests of life
 Will find their domain,
 And the hero worship will prevail
 In the religious depths of undaunted being;
 Where sacred Eros still carries the light . . .

Rebirth will come when Western man returns to the sacred grove of nature and reconnects with the pulse of our blood.

The themes of nature, blood, the sacred, memory, and rebirth are found again and again in these poems, recurring like musical motifs, imparting a sense of unity to the collection. Examples of such deft echoes include:

And lead me to your Temple of Beauty
 So I can pour libations
 To the honour of the ancient sun fire
 Of warm blood feelings -
 And pray for a different way of living.

— "Nameless Goddess" (p. 50)

And lost the ancient memory
 Of your true warm blood selves
 In the Sun's flaming times of yore . . .

— "The Shadow's Death" (p. 60)

And Mnemosyne enters
 With wreath of wild flowers
 On the wings of Northern wind,

And plays the music,
Of the lone wolf howling in the wilderness –
That echoes through the ancient memory
Of blood consciousness and wild yearnings.

–“We Shall Meet in the Temple of Silence”
(p. 90)

The Old Life Is Dead . . . is a beautifully inspiring collection of poems, written by a marvelously talented poet. It is impossible to choose a favorite among them. Each offers its own delights, and together they breathe hope into what feels like modern culture’s unending march into oblivion—the oblivion of so much that so many of us hold sacred.

It was little wonder to learn that this brilliant poet is married to the philosopher Tomislav Sunic. Like has always attracted like.

The last lines of the last poem of this collection are as moving as they are memorable. It is fitting, I think, to end this review with them, for they contain—to this reviewer—the essence of the whole collection:

The violets will always flourish in my blood stream
Despite the autumn and the winter,
Because memory is a powerful thing.
The violets will flourish despite those
Who want to obliterate the feelings they no longer have.
In the perfect silence of the trees,
In our Sacred grove,
We kneel down and give our vow
To the eternal fire of Life.

–“Vow to the Eternal Fire of Life” (p. 116)

*Juleigh Howard-Hobson is an award-winning formalist poet, as well as an essayist and editor. She is the author of **Sommer & Other Poems** (Portland, Ore.: Ravenshalla Arts, 2007) and **The Cycle of Nine** (Portland, Ore.: Ravenshalla Arts, 2009) (Ravenshalla@yahoo.com).*