



Parliamentary Poet Laureate



POETRY CONNECTION: LINK UP WITH CANADIAN POETRY

Oana Avasilichioaei (1977 –) was born in Romania, lived for many years in Vancouver BC, and currently makes her home in Montréal. She holds an MA in Literature and Creative Writing from Concordia University. As poet and translator (from Romanian and French to English) she has published in journals across the country, and regularly performs from her work in Canada and abroad. Her books include *Abandon* (2005), *Occupational Sickness* (2006), *feria: a poempark*, (2008), *Expeditions of a Chimæra*, with Erin Moure (2009), and *We, Beasts* (2012). Avasilichioaei's recent projects include transformations of text into performative, oral work.

Oana Avasilichioaei's practice as a poet includes experimenting with her poetry both on the page and off the page, in a staged or performance setting. Here, her performance of "Song of Water" explores the intersections between language and technology, and the possibilities in translating poetry through sound. Her use of vocal manipulations adds additional layers to the poem, creating the watery environment of which the poem speaks.

Poem for discussion:

Song of Water

From: *We, Beasts*

Wolsak & Wynn, 2012

- Give me water, befriend my here
- There, my habit, is the well that reverses
- Give me water, sing my here
- There, my habit, the spring is a murmur of grasses
- Give me water, surrender my here

- There, my habit, the well's route veins deep
- Give me water, light my here
- There, my habit, is the gurgling flow of the spring
- Give me water, glimmer my here
- There, my habit, the well is the hill's percussion

For discussion:

1. The poet talks about her “way of being in the world” as mediated through various languages. Is sound another language? How is she working with sound to translate the poem?
2. How does the poet’s use of technology in her performance affect the meaning and context of the poem? Do you gain a different understanding of the poem after seeing it performed?
3. The poet manipulates her voice in performing the poem. Does this create other/new voices within the poem? Who or what might these voices be?
4. How does the language of this poem establish a rhythm? Discuss how the performance of the poem creates the same “percussion” of the spring in the poem.
5. If we think of her poem as music, not just text on a page, what is the shape or structure of the composition? Can you distinguish different “instruments” in the poem? How do these “instruments” translate the content of the poem?

Writing prompts:

1. Take your favourite line from “Song of Water.” Use this line as the first line of a new poem that you will write. Make every odd line a statement, and every even line a question.
2. The lineation, or places where the line breaks, in “Song of Water” creates a rhythm and structure for the poem. What if the lines were broken in different places? Look at “Song of Water” as though it were one sentence or one chunk of text without punctuation –

Give me water befriend my here there my habit is the well that reverses give me water sing
my here there my habit the spring is a murmur of grasses give me water surrender my here

there my habit the well's route veins deep give me water light my here there my habit is the
gurgling flow of the spring give me water glimmer my here there my habit a hill is the
spring's percussion

Now choose different places to break the lines from the original poem. What kind of structure and rhythm does your version of "Song of Water" have?

3. Mimic the ten-line structure of "Song of Water". Every odd line will begin with the same phrase – for example, instead of "Give me water," try "In another tomorrow." Begin every even line with the same phrase – instead of "There, my habit," try "We strain against." Choose a subject matter for your poem that deals with a deep fear or a strong desire.
4. Everyone in the group or class is to write down everything they hear over the course of five minutes in sentences or phrases on a page. This can include more than the sounds people make – for example, sounds outside, sounds in the building, sounds in the body. Once your page is full, cut up the page so you have a series of phrases or sentences. Put these sentences in a hat or bowl. Take turns drawing sentences from the hat. The order you draw the pieces of paper in is the poem. Transcribe it. Notice what sounds repeat and the differences in the description of these sounds. The group or class can use this as a first draft that each student may individually revise, choosing to retain or discard any element of the poem, but working on strengthening the piece.
5. "Song of Water" could be considered a list poem. Write your own list poem, repeating the same turn of phrase (as with "Give me water"). You can use one of the following sentences for creating your list poem:
 - I am listening to (*or for*)
 - I am afraid of (*or to*)
 - If only
 - I used to think
 - The taste of
 - The smell of
 - The feel of

Avoid short sentences (I am afraid of bees, I am afraid of ghosts, I am afraid of the dark); try to write out more complex or complicated sentences. Try to vary the content and variety. Once you have 30 sentences in your list poem, try to rearrange them in the most interesting order possible – look for progression, juxtaposition, and repetition of theme or content.

(Notes prepared by Kathleen Brown).