



THE
POETRY
INTERVIEW 2

Senior Editor Charles Pinch with Ayman Eldesouky

Ayman Eldesouky is a 'renaissance' man, something easily attested by glancing at his impressive credentials. He is fluent in Egyptian, Arabic, Farsi and a number of Middle Eastern tongues and when he speaks his words are full of heart and a-brim with passion. While his English is good, he wisely defers the translation of his Arabic poems to scholars with a greater understanding of the nuances and harmonic depths available to the poet in English, which, along with Arabic, is the other great language of poetry.

Sitting and listening to Ayman read his work and watching the animation that fires his features, especially his eyes, is a unique and pleasurable experience that adds greatly to an appreciation of his poetry. Welcome, Ayman, it's an honour to interview you.

CP: *How old were you when you first became interested in poetry? What was your first poem about? Was this kind of endeavour encouraged by your parents?*

AE: I was 14 years old and the first poem was about my mom. I read this one during the celebration of Mother's Day at my school.

CP: *As I said elsewhere in this issue Arabic is a language of poetry. What is it about the language that makes it so. Has Arabic undergone a linguistic evolution, evolving from earlier, perhaps less sophisticated models?*

AE: The Arabic language is completely different from other languages. The sound of the word has meaning in itself, especially in poetry. It is also different than the old Arabic language. It is more like modern standard Arabic that suits modern life. In other words, it is like the difference between Shakespeare's language and Amanda Gorman's Language in the way of forming poetry.

CP: *During one of our conversations, you mentioned the image of the paddle and the story of a mythical female relating to it and how it imagined the poetic experience. It points to the fact that in your language there is a life beneath the words that cannot be directly expressed. Can you elaborate on this?*

AE: Eman (the girl who passed away in her 20s) left a legend behind her. Every single moment she lived among us she was carrying stories of love, joy, and life. Riding a small boat in the tiny river at my village was her joy all the time. I took the paddle as a symbol of these moments, but instead I made it move through the throat. It is the way to try to move the river into me without the ability to speak as it cut through every word that can describe the emotions. The image speaks instead of a sentence or a word.

(Eman: watches us from her rainbow, and the paddle moves slowly into my throat)

CP: *As a poet, how do you compare Arabic with English. Do you believe that the subliminal beauties of the former are picked up by English. Are the two languages even remotely similar as a medium for verse? Do these differences diminish the power of writing when translated one to the other, that is from English to Arabic and Arabic to English?*

AE: As I said before, it is completely different, especially if it comes to the translation from Arabic Language into the English. For example, it is so hard to translate the sound of pain that is written in a word with two letters into English unless we imitate this sound which wouldn't be the same. It is more like you translate the meanings behind the words, but not the actual language.

CP: *Why did you chose Mohamid El Mesry to translate the two poems we published? Do you feel he was able to capture the 'soul' of your poetry to the English ear? Do you feel anything was lost in the translation?*

AE: I chose him because he is a poet in the first place. He was able to understand and feel the meanings that I wanted to send to the reader. Also, his work in translations was well known all over the country. He was able to capture the scene and delivered it in a very good way that was not so far from the original writing.

CP: *Where do you get your ideas? I mean, what inspires your poetry? Is it generated from an outside experience or does it derive mainly from ideas and thoughts you muse upon? Do events in your daily life influence your poetry?*

AE: Life experience of daily living drives me to write. If it comes to a dream or a future vision, it is different, but it is still about the relationships between that vision and the daily living.

CP: *How would you define yourself as an artist? Is your poetry intuitively composed or do you write a number of revisions for each poem?*

AE: I belong to the modern school in writing. I write whatever I feel through images that can touch the reader from the first moment. Sometimes I write a number of revisions for some poems, especially if I am using the topographic methods in forming my feelings such as the empty spaces, squares, or any shapes on the page.

CP: *Getting into a little bit of linguistic theory here, do you feel there are structural limitations and a syntactical body of language, be it Arabic or English, which inhibit aspects of the poetic experience from being expressed?*

AE: There is no structural limitations when it comes to modern writing because I don't follow the language's rules in my poetry. I believe that the rules sometimes can limit the experience from being expressed. For example, the (#) icon has meanings behind as it as hown, but you can not translate it into a word or it will be less effective in the poem's body.

CP: *Personal question. When you are talking to me do you think in English before speaking or do you think in your native tongue and then translate it into English?*

AE: Usually, I think in my native tongue first then translate into English

CP: *Who are your literary influences? Are they all Middle Eastern or have you found inspiration from some the great writers/poets in English, French, German etc...? Who do you consider outstanding writers? What writer/poet do you admire most and why?*

AE: I spent 40 years in Egypt. Most of my literary influences came from great writers there such as Afifi Matar, Adonis, Amal Dunkel. Also, I find Lorca one of the most important poets who changes many of my views.

CP: *What do you see as the future of poetry?*

AE: It is hard to say if the future of poetry will be effective or will have the ability to change lives as we saw before in old times, because it is more personal now than before. It still has the power to touch people, especially if it talks about similar experiences in their daily lives.

Thank you, Ayman, for taking the time to share with us. Keep writing!