

A Born Classic to which One Cannot Remain Indifferent: On B.W. Powe's Ladders Made of Water (Stream Elsewhere Press, 2024)

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A Born Classic to which One Cannot Remain Indifferent: On B.W. Powe's *Ladders Made of Water* (Stream Elsewhere Press, 2024)

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Ladders Made of Water, by Canadian writer, poet, philosopher and scholar BW Powe, is a genuine “work in progress” that obviously forms part of a trilogy that began with the amazing Blakean book, *The Charge in Global Membrane* (2019), and will be completed, as announced in some sections of the book I’m discussing here, with *Mysteria* (to be published in 2024). This second part of Powe’s trilogy reflects on questions about how human beings are impacted by the environment and vice versa; on what the act of reading means today; how its space-time relationship is reflected in an act of resistance; and its importance in times of social media and ideological discourses that often turn into violence against the other. It’s also impossible not to recall his reflections on Marshall McLuhan and Northrop Frye, two important Canadian thinkers who inaugurated a rather *sui generis* stream of thought, within which BW Powe certainly belongs, continuing it, problematizing it, and, above all, making it new.

As I mentioned above, *Ladders* continues the work begun in *The Charge*, another brilliant work by Powe, which belongs to the visionary tradition of English-language literature in the vein of William Blake, Emily Dickinson, and Walt Whitman—just to mention a few references in Powe’s poetics.

However, *Ladders Made of Water* is above all a work whose merits must be assessed within itself. Perhaps the best clue to this can be found in its own form, which can be taken as a miniature encyclopedic form. In this book, Powe works on writing in different registers: poetry, lyric, aphorisms, probes and, above all, essays that offer poetic-philosophical reflections in small doses, without ever embarking on attempts at easy answers, favoring the cryptic character of his concise and meaningful writing. In this sense, Powe opens doors, or rather, finishes ripping them off their hinges, as he himself announces in his previous work, “The doors of perception have been ripped off their hinges in data-web saturations. Meaning: we’re not standing on one side of a door or another” (Powe, 2019). In “*Ladders Made of Water*” we see this image unfold in the puddle of water in which the poet’s daughter sees trees reflected. Trees made of water. Trees that exist on the other side of the pool, actual “Palm-phantoms”. Trees that, like the Ladders, are also a literary symbol of the *Axis Mundi*, a point of contact, an opening to the visionary experience, so easy for children, so rare for most adults. The desire to be water that the little child expresses in the poem is difficult to decipher. There are no easy answers. Powe privileges exploration...

Ladders produces an authentic anatomy of the present time that began with his 2019 work. In the opening chapter, the poet deals eloquently with the climatic, pandemic and spiritual crisis we’re going through, in an essay of great poetic diction—presented, on the occasion of the MEA Conference organized by PUC-Rio—my *alma matter*, by the way. In it, Powe announces that he speaks from “where culture, faiths, lyrics, songs, visions, sites, stories and myths

coincide", invoking the Spanish poet and playwright, Federico Garcia Lorca.

At its heart lies a witty reflection, or as the author calls it "Fractals", on the works of Jacques Ellul, Teilhard de Chardin, Simone Weil, Marshall McLuhan and Anne Carson. All of them, authors whose intellectual contribution is echoed in Powe's work as a whole. The poet's repertoire is truly vast, but this intertextuality does not denote any kind of academic pedantry. One can find in its sections a wide array of reflections that range from popular literature to mythopoetic recreations. In the beautiful and ironic, "Homily on Harry Potter", a sample of the strong satirical vein in the poet's work, we are confronted by a disturbing question: "[...] but who / speaks now / for a desert child, for / those crammed in wards / during a brute pestilent / time?". In "Manna", a recreation of the Edenic myth, where poetic language plays the while of a *pharmakon* that is both the healing and death of Adam and the prosperity of Eve and her offspring. In short, Powe's work is a great homage to literature: an invitation to flourishing and expanding awareness through myth, metaphor and imagination. Creating possibilities and openings to new forms of perception. It's surely more than a pleasant read. It would also be commonplace to say that it's a necessary one, because it doesn't meet any prescriptions. It would be better to say that it offers what is called the experience of reading a classic; a text with multiple meanings that demands many readings and is never exhausted.