

Maria Pap, January 27, 2010

The art of the impossible

Motto: *"...if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle?"*

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I enjoy immensely Helen MacInness's books. I can read them over and over again, even if by now I know all the plots and the happy or sad endings. Most of her books are spy-stories, mainly from the cold war era. What fascinates me and endears her writing is not just the cleverness of the stories, the reality of her characters, but above all her stance about freedom, human dignity and justice.

Behind all her books you can sense her commitment and strong views about the role and responsibility of the West in trying to keep that delicate balance of power but upholding all the values of a liberal and free world, of showing an alternative for millions of people, who saw none of it.

Coming from a background where communism was not just an idea but an oppressing everyday truth, I find her books describing closely a reality which changed our lives, thinking and behavior for generations to come. The reality of a police/state has been shattered but it takes a long time and perhaps a new generation to heal, to have the courage of hope and the responsibility and accountability of our lives and deeds.

As in all works of fiction, most of the time there is a clear dividing line between good guys/bad guys, between truths/lies, between clashing ideas and values, between the open fights and the hidden war, yet the message and characters do not suffer from schematics. The good cause manages to survive defeats and traitors and there is always hope. Hope for those who fight and hope for those **for** whom the fight is going on.

Her books, while entertaining millions of readers, are a clear call against oppression, fear, **and** against everything which threatens our fragile human world. Her books are a reminder, that even if officially the cold war is over, there is another battle **raging** on, sometimes bloody and messy, sometimes subtle and almost unrecognizable. It is a battle which does not have geographical barriers, a battle where most of the time **it** is hard to dichotomize, where the dividing line is so blurred that in facing the other/the enemy, you may find facing yourself.

Policies and values are shifting, more and more people join the stream of migration either of their **own** free will or constrained; cultures clash **and** old prejudices melt away as new ones take their place.

This is not just a fight between different ideas and conceptions about human communities, it is not just a fight about values, but ultimately **it** is about survival, about the world we call Home.

We are all of us in it, willingly or not, and according to our values and position, our background and upbringing, we fight for our world (**small 'w'**) or our World (**capital 'W'**.) It is the same word, with a small difference---**lower case or upper**, yet this small difference talks about two worlds apart. The first one is about the person, the surrounding, the community, the relationship, that which I can contain, that to which I can relate, for which I can struggle, which I can hate or love, which touches my everyday life in a palpable way. The second one is about the human community, about the interdependent web of all existence, something far beyond my eyes, my scope, something which I will never **be** able to hold, to understand, to love or to hate completely.

To bring together these two worlds looks like the act of the impossible, yet as far as I understand **about** the work of the UU office at the United Nations, that is what you are trying to achieve: expand this small world of ours, where we feel mostly comfortable and secure, to the whole World and make the whole World a safe and peaceful home for humankind, a small world.

Is this possible or is it just a dream, which may devour the dreamer?

There is no easy answer to this question, **nor** just one. You definitely say yes, I definitely say no, and both of us could be right, according to our circumstances.

Let me explain: I say this dream is not possible, because I already have a hard time in dealing with my small world. I am the weak, the poor, the sick, and the defenseless. My horizon is about today, about myself and my family, about nourishment and water, about clothes and a safe abode. My life and my concerns start and end with me and those around me. Do not think that I am selfish or unfeeling, but I have no emotions and thoughts to spare for others, I need them all for survival. I may not even know that across borders and continents there are millions of other men, women and children in my situation, fighting for the gift which belongs to all of us: life. I am not interested in politics; I know nothing about decisions and resolutions.

I have no knowledge, no choice and sometimes no hope. I am just a pawn in a big game, where I do not know the rules and I am threatened by each move.

From where I stand every new day counts as a victory and every night brings the fear of an unfulfilled tomorrow. This is my small world---I cannot, I do not, I dare not look beyond it. What for? I know things will not change, it is impossible.

And yet, there are people who say: this is not impossible.

The work of the United Nations, the work of the UU office at UN, the work of individuals and groups in the UU congregations, are all geared toward proving the answer is yes.

Have you ever considered why your answer **is** yes?

If you did, I am sure you were able to build up a wonderful argumentation based on different factors like human rights, education, the Unitarian Universalist principles, care and concern for other people, for our world, the heritage of freedom and tolerance and so on and so forth. These are all driving forces behind your answer but not the whole truth.

For me, and I may sound harsh, it all boils down to this: your answer is yes, because you can afford it. Please don't misunderstand me, this is not a judgment, it is a statement of facts.

It is not your fault, nor your virtue that you live in a world, where most of the time the concepts of freedom, justice, human dignity, peace or economic stability continue to have meaning.

It is not your fault, nor your virtue that you are highly intelligent, well educated and knowledgeable people in the ways of the world, who can make choices, who have ideals and try to live according to them.

It is not your fault, nor your virtue that because of your circumstances, you are able to see beyond your small world, that you are able to think not **in lower** case but in upper **case**.

What I am talking about is privilege. Privilege to live in a free country, in a democracy, privilege to belong to a church with like-minded people, privilege to be educated, loved, helped, privilege to see the bigger picture, privilege to choose your cause and your fights.

But privilege comes with a vengeance: the sense of responsibility. It is a price which some are unwilling to pay, while others are taking up double loads to make up for the selfish.

Responsibility can be taught, can be expected but cannot be enforced. You do not have to be poor or weak to burrow yourself in your small world. You do not have to be uneducated, unprivileged to shut yourself from the others, pursuing your own ends. You do not need any excuse to step aside and let others save the world. Why should you? It is not your duty!

But some of you still think it is. Some of you are still trying to act out the impossible- some, but not enough.

That is why you need to sound the call.

You need to sound a clear call in order to be able to fight this battle. You need to sound a clear call to wake up not just the UU's and not just the Americans, but all those like-minded people across the world, who are willing to join you, who are not afraid of the impossible.

You need to remember that you are fighting for those who cannot fight for themselves, that your work is giving them voice, alternative, hope, life, future.

From where you stand this seems still possible.

I am waiting, I can do no more. Not yet. Perhaps when your World will touch mine, I will be able to see beyond today, beyond my world-perhaps I will be able to see hope and rejoice that you have proved me wrong.

“Our world is one world...where our hearts can hear a different call.”

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