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# WORLD LITERATURE IN REVIEW

## FICTION

Rudolfo Anaya. **The Man Who Could Fly and Other Stories.** Norman. University of Oklahoma Press. 2006. xiii + 197 pages. \$19.95. ISBN 0-8061-3738-X

THE PUBLICATION of Rudolfo Anaya's collected short stories is a logical and worthy contribution to the Chicana and Chicano Visions of the Américas series. The wide-ranging thematic breadth of Anaya's short fiction expands his estimable reputation as a preeminent Chicano writer and popular mystery novelist. The seventeen previously published stories (1976–98) originally appeared in notable Latino and multiethnic literature publications as well as in collections of American, New Mexican, western, and environmental literature. "The mystery of life and good stories moves us forward," writes Anaya in the preface to the collection.

Here the stories of life's mysteries range from the mundane (the barrio teenagers in the cautionary tale "Dead End") to the cataclysmic (the deformation of wildlife in the ecocritical tale "Devil Deer"). In between these extremes, the demons and delusions and the hardscrabble hopes and dreams of ordinary people are never very far from view in Anaya's stories. He also reaches for

mythic proportions with speculative and fantastic tales of characters who leave what he calls "the circle of pretend" to explore indigenous spirituality and customs, such as a Maya quest near Uxmal ("The Village That the Gods Painted Yellow") and a time-traveling conflation of ancient and modern Machu Picchu ("Message from the Inca"). "Each character lives in a particular landscape and in a unique and critical time," Anaya also asserts.

Along with Anaya's more familiar southwestern settings (including his beloved llano) appear the Israeli desert, Nazi Germany, and pre-Colombian and present-day Latin America. Of special note in *The Man Who Could Fly and Other Stories* is Anaya's explanation in the preface of his theories of storytelling and writing, topics he incorporates into several stories, most notably "B. Traven Is Alive and Well in Cuernavaca" and the metafictional "A Story," but also "The Place of the Swallows," "The Man Who Found a Pistol," and the collection's one new story, "The Man Who Could Fly."

Catharine E. Wall  
Claremont McKenna College

Maryse Condé. **Victoire, les saveurs et les mots.** Paris. Mercure de France. 2006. 255 pages. €16.50. ISBN 2-7152-2570-9

ANY BOOK Maryse Condé publishes now causes reverberations throughout the vast expanse of her work. It darkens the silhouettes of her preoccupations and familial fears. Condé's "récit" about the maternal grandmother she never knew provokes an authorial "malaise," even though the author only saw her in a sepia photograph. Perhaps because Victoire had skin of a "blancheur australienne." Perhaps because she learned from her mother that Victoire "se louait" as a chef. Thus, Condé's desire to document herself about Victoire Quidal revealed itself early in young Maryse's life although she would go to, and write novels about, Segou and South Africa before writing *Victoire*.

Like much of Condé's recent fiction—*Le cœur à rire et à pleurer*, for example—the author documents her family experience in Guadeloupe. In *Victoire* as well, she describes photos, draws from interviews, consults letters, and quotes local newspapers in her role as archivist and biographer, but she also invents and fictionalizes, as her metatext clearly indicates. Perhaps this creative verbal blend of fact with fiction brings the author closer

to the savory concoctions of her mysterious grandmother.

I appreciated Condé's feminine genealogy, her attempt to trace postslavery families and routes, to chart the life of family members after slavery transformed itself into economic exploitation. With sparse records, she creates a sense of family, the family that surrounds Victoire, a name given to her by Father Lebris because she was the unique victor after her birth cost her mother of less than fourteen her life.

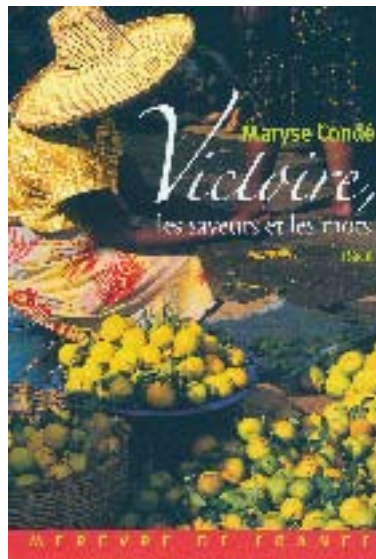
Although Victoire has a family, she was not always fully nurtured. Because Caldonia, the woman who brought her up, didn't think to enroll Victoire in school, she remained illiterate. Furthermore, she couldn't speak French properly; thus, she remained silent in social situations, especially when her daughter started aiming for assimilation into the island's new black elite.

Already introduced in *Here-makhonon* and the primary focus of *Le cœur*, Condé's mother, Jeanne, is central to *Victoire*, as it is primarily through her mother's eyes that the author learns about her grandmother. Jeanne Quidal, especially after her marriage, is concerned about race and social class. Victoire works for Anne-Marie and Boniface Walberg, the "blanc pays" that lodged, and provided for the education, of young Jeanne. Much like Reynalda in *Desirada*, Jeanne will react not only against her mother working for an affluent white family, a form of neoslavery, but also against the intimate relationship Victoire establishes with it. Her "amitié exceptionnelle" with Anne-Marie was expressed through their appreciation of music and through their early-morning walks, Victoire three steps behind, along Nassau Road to

early mass. Her long-term relation with Boniface went beyond friendship and provoked the ire of Jeanne because of its apparent asymmetry.

The title immediately calls our attention to the link between "saveurs" and "mots." Not without some repetitive insistence, Condé conceives of her link to her grandmother in terms of creativity. This reader appreciates the archaeological digging she did, the archival work of social reconstruction, a trifle more than the rather tenuous link between the two creators, the establishment of which, nevertheless, does resurrect Victoire. *Victoire, les saveurs et les mots* is clearly not Maryse Condé's most polished work, but in it she plunges us further into her imagined worlds.

Robert H. McCormick Jr.  
Franklin College, Switzerland



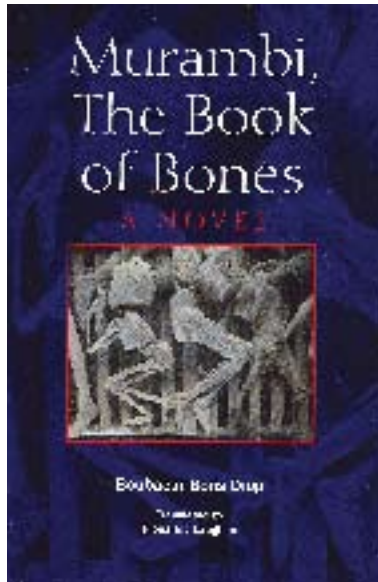
Boubacar Boris Diop. **Murambi, The Book of Bones.** Fiona McLaughlin, tr. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006. xix + 181 pages. \$16.95. ISBN 0-253-21852-7

MURAMBI, THE BOOK OF BONES, by Senegal's Boubacar Boris Diop,

powerfully confronts and memorializes Rwanda's genocide. Its terse language records both images of graphic horror and the motives and emotions of those directly involved in the events, while staccato first-person testimonies from victims, perpetrators, and others touched by the genocide interweave with, and so punctuate, the third-person account of the Hutu-Tutsi Cornelius Uvimana, an exile returning to discover his family's fate.

The novel underscores how oversimplifying history distorts understanding and thus impedes healing. For Cornelius's foreign friends in Djibouti, Rwanda's genocide stems from ancient ethnic hatred. Yet despite having fled Rwanda as a teenager during earlier violence against Tutsis, Cornelius idealizes his country as hatred-free. The text ultimately exposes both views as dangerous oversimplifications and bares instead the complex tangle of issues, including the racial constructs of the German and Belgian colonizers, whose interplay deepened inherent differences among Rwanda's ethnic groups.

Holocaust allusions further stress this point. An older man critical of the errors made by Hutu militiamen recalls "that Frenchman who wanted to kill all the white Inyenzi (cockroaches)." When his son responds, "He was a German," the father adds, "The white man was much better organized than you but he failed." Later, trying to grasp how his compatriots came to regard their neighbors as Inyenzi, Cornelius remembers a friend's plea to Floridians from whom he sought American support for intervention: "Would they say that the Holocaust was just a simple case of ethnic killing between Semites and



Aryan? . . . What would you have done at that time if you had been able to prevent the Final Solution by simply putting some pressure on your government?"

*Murambi* also critiques the role of France in the genocide. Early in his homecoming, the still-naïve Cornelius ponders writing a play about a French officer who, fearing his cat's death in the "genocides," spurs machete-loving soldiers to "find" the Ethiopian gardener who has perhaps taken his beloved animal. Later, Cornelius learns that his Hutu father, Dr. Joseph Karekezi, callously facilitated the mass murder of Tutsi refugees under his protection, including his own wife and children, before escaping Rwanda under the protection of Colonel Perrin, a French officer assigned to Operation Turquoise. But Perrin, who came to see him as a monster, forces him to abandon his beloved dog. Mirroring the attitudes of Cornelius's imagined colonel, the doctor's affection for his pet serves to highlight his indifference to the suffering of his family.

Through his father's brother, Simeon, who once enabled his escape and now ensures that he see and hear whatever might help him to grasp the truth of what happened, Cornelius at last fathoms the depth and complexity of the Rwandan genocide. Appreciating his uncle as "a storyteller of the eternal," he vows "tirelessly [to] recount the horror. With machete words, club words, words studded with nails, naked words and . . . words covered with blood and shit." Boubacar Boris Diop's chronicle admirably fulfills its protagonist's intention.

Michele Levy

North Carolina A&T University

Kjartan Fløgstad. **Grand Manila**. Oslo. Gyldendal Norsk. 2006. 416 pages. Kr. 379. ISBN 82-05-35924-5

NORWAY'S MOST SIGNIFICANT postmodernist writer, Kjartan Fløgstad (b. 1944) has contributed to a number of genres, including poetry, the short story, the novel, and the essay. He has been recognized primarily as a novelist, however, and received the Nordic Literary Prize in 1978 for his novel *Dalen Portland* (1977; Eng. *Dollar Road*, 1989). *Dalen Portland* told the story of early-twentieth-century industrialization in western Norway, with Fløgstad's home community of Sauda—lightly fictionalized as Lovra, the site of Union Carbide Corporation's wholly owned subsidiary Electric Furnace Products Company—as its setting.

Fløgstad also published a series of other novels in which he continued his chronicles of Norwegian twentieth-century life through a mixture of old and new literary styles—referred to by Fløgstad as "compostmodernism"—as well as by a combination of serious and popular genres. Characterized by

irony, humor, and outlandish puns, Fløgstad's work has been very well received.

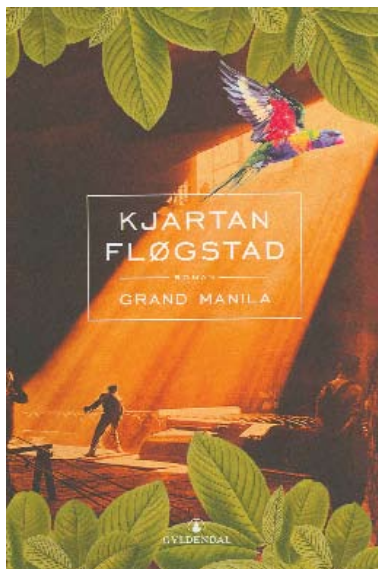
*Grand Manila* tells the story of two generations of several families associated with the factory in Sauda/Lovra. The older generation consists of typical Norwegian factory workers of the 1950s, while their children have increased options in life. One of these young persons becomes a historian and the book's narrator, but little information is given about him. His voice is similar to that of the unobtrusive narrator in John Huston's film *The Life and Times of Judge Roy Bean* (1972)—about which Fløgstad has written with admiration in the title essay in *Loven vest for Pecos* (1981; *The law west of the Pecos*)—and the novel's temporal structure, too, is similar to that of Huston's film, as a story from a somewhat romanticized past is followed by a coda through which its major lines are continued into a period of decisive historical change.

As usual in Fløgstad's novels, however, the local story plays itself out against a broad international backdrop. One of the key characters in *Grand Manila* is a Finnish Sámi named Jerry Dørmænen / Jorma Törmänen, who fought on the side of the Reds during the Finnish civil war in 1918 and barely escaped being executed by the Whites while fleeing to Norway. Fløgstad shows that the conflict between socialism and the reactionary forces in Finland is structurally similar to the exploitation of Norwegian workers by the managers of the Union Carbide Corporation, who exposed their workers to slow death by silicosis both in Sauda, Norway, and in such places as Kanawha Valley, West Virginia, and showed a

similar disregard for human life in Bhopal, India.

*Grand Manila* ends with the dismantling of a landmark crane at the dock in Lovra/Sauda and may thus be viewed as a memorial to a form of Norwegian industrial life that is no more. The work may also be read as an obituary of the Union Carbide Corporation, however, which after the Bhopal catastrophe fell on hard times and in 2001 became a wholly owned subsidiary of Dow Chemical.

Jan Sjøvik  
University of Washington



Yasmina Khadra. *The Attack*. John Cullen, tr. New York: Nan A. Talese / Doubleday. 2006. 257 pages. \$18.95. ISBN 0-385-51748-3

HAVING EXPLORED political violence in Algeria and Afghanistan, Yasmina Khadra addresses the Israeli/Palestinian question in this powerful new novel, which traces the Conradian journey of Dr. Amin Jaafari, a naturalized Israeli citizen born of

Bedouin Arabs, into the dark heart of Israeli-occupied Gaza, to fathom how his beloved wife, Sihem, became a suicide bomber. Khadra's intense, sometimes feverish prose, less nuanced than in earlier novels, embodies Jaafari's response to the hell that engulfs him.

Jaafari's first-person narration records both Israeli prejudice against Arabs and acceptance of Arabs as equals. A bombing victim whom he treats insults him continuously; suspicious police detain him as he returns to his upscale, predominantly Jewish neighborhood. But Jewish friends stand by him throughout the ordeal, particularly Kim Yehuda, a female doctor, while his patients write the Health Ministry in his support. Meanwhile, the Holocaust narrative of Kim's father inserts Israel's history into the novel, thus contextualizing tales of Palestinian victimization that Jaafari later hears.

Fully developing neither Jewish nor Arab characters, Khadra foregrounds Jaafari's internal crisis over the news that his wife, killed in the attack, likely perpetrated it. Given their many years together, their comfortable life, and the shared love upon which Jaafari adamantly insists, he initially rejects this. Targeted by angry neighbors, subjected to police interrogation, he remains intransigent. But when Sihem's last letter confirms its truth, he must understand why.

Wary of Israeli police and suspicious Arabs, Jaafari travels backward in time and space from his last days with Sihem to their origins: Tel Aviv, Bethlehem, Jenin. Through militants of all kinds, from

the young potential "weapons" to their leaders, he begins to grasp the complex woman he saw as he wanted to, not as she was. But Sheik Marwan, their spiritual guide—and Sihem's—eludes him.

Though each place further bares his compatriots' wretched circumstances, Jaafari maintains his belief in the sanctity of life before whatever cause might violate it. Mocked by one Islamist for his desire to remain "in a golden cage," Jaafari denounces the former's "dreams of redemptive violence," countering, "You have chosen to kill; I have chosen to save." When a chance meeting with a wise old Israeli raises the issue of why such hate exists between two peoples so closely linked by blood and culture, Jaafari suggests, "First of all, give God back his freedom. He's been hostage to our bigotries too long."

Like *Wolf Dreams*, *The Attack's* finale recapitulates its beginning, here a bombing graphically narrated by an unknown, dying victim. The novel answers its unstated question when Amin goes to Jenin to prevent his niece from becoming Sheik Marwan's next martyr. A crowd awaits the sheik, who soon arrives. Suddenly Jaafari details chaos, horror, and his own hallucinations, those of a dying visionary. The Israeli missile that kills him with the sheik he sought will likely spawn new sheiks and new attacks. Yasmina Khadra thus underscores the futility of violence while evoking the horrors that enmesh colonized and colonizer in this tragically conflicted land.

Michele Levy  
North Carolina A&T University

Riek Landman. **De leafdes fan Janne.** Ljouwert, Netherlands. Friese Pers. 2006. 255 pages. €17.50. ISBN 90-330-0552-2

*DE LEAFDES FAN JANNE* (Janne's lovers) completes a trilogy by Riek Landman that began with the character of Grandmother Jentsje, continued with Mother Marte, and concludes with Marte's daughter, Janne. The time span covers the entire twentieth century.

A trilogy that focuses on the woman figure of each generation invites comparisons. Jentsje, who did most of her living in the earlier part of the century, emerges, not surprisingly, as the strongest of the three. After all, times were hard for a daughter of the laboring class who was mostly dependent on her own inner resources for survival. Her daughter, Marte, lives through the trying years of the Depression and World War II, yet never develops much initiative to alter or shape her life. She is the most passive of the three, accepting what happens, though often not with approval. Her daughter, Janne, is by far the most restless of the three, reflecting the unsettled times of the 1960s and the explosion of new technology, trends, and mores.

As the title indicates, this third volume continues to focus on the love life of the main character. The nature of that love life, however, inevitably reflects social change. What would be the subject of scandal in Grandma Jentsje's time is in Janne's time the subject of jokes, candid conversation, and even jealousy. Janne's beauty and spark never fail to attract the attention of the opposite sex; Janne, in turn, is hardly a reluctant lover. Author Riek Landman, with apparent relish, introduces the reader to some

steamy sex scenes that reflect both the sexual liberation of the times and of her main character.

But what to the reader is intriguing and fascinating about Janne is her restive and ultimately unsatisfied spirit. She spends some of the turbulent years of the 1960s in a hippie commune in Amsterdam, where free sex and drugs are a staple of life. She returns to Friesland, where she finds neither lasting satisfaction in teaching nor in marriage. She finds intense stimulation and joy in her involvement on the stage, but that, too, is temporary. Also temporary are the loves and lovers she has taken on throughout her life. Now in her sixties, she confronts the loose ends of her life and comes slowly to the realization that she has been in search of the father she lost at an early age to a violent accident. She's been attracted to men who reminded her of her lost father. And the pain of losing, of abandonment, kept repeating itself. At the same time, she shares with her mother, Marte, the fear of losing her self-control, her freedom, and her independence when yielding her heart to another. Thus, when Leon, the one true love of her life, resurfaces and gently reminds her of his love for her in the end, Janne is not ready to recommit, though her heart desires it strongly.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of this trilogy is as a documentary of life and love in the twentieth century. But certainly the grandmother and her granddaughter also surface as engaging and provocative character studies that make for a satisfying reading experience.

Henry J. Baron  
Calvin College

Claude Louis-Combet. **Visitations.** Paris. José Corti. 2006. 87 pages. €13. ISBN 2-7143-0923-2

———. **Cantilène et fables pour les yeux ronds.** Paris. José Corti. 2006. Bérénice Constans, ill. 82 pages, ill. €13. ISBN 2-7143-0924-0

*VISITATIONS*, a collection of new shorter prose works, draws upon and reworks many of the key themes of Claude Louis-Combet's writing: the collision of the erotic and the sacred, the pivotal status of the body, and the contested yet crucial status of Christianity within the narrator's project. Many of the texts tread a fine line between parody and homage: the scenarios and imagery of Christianity form the backdrop to intense explorations of sexuality (*Marie; Véronique*). Most striking, perhaps, is *Véronique*, the story of an artist who struggles to reconcile art, sexuality, and spirituality. *Véronique* is captivated by the image of her vagina, which is imprinted by chance onto her bed sheets by her menstrual blood.

The later narrative is concerned with a dual loss—that of her lover, who has entered a monastery, and that inscribed within the image, which can never be repeated and which is later understood as a "miracle." While such a narrative is not without a whiff of scandal, the agenda pursued is, in fact, a subtle and provocative one. Much of *Véronique's* fascination lies in her status as an artist: art is both a means of remembering the lover and of crossing a spiritual divide. For *Véronique*, though, painting and printing prove poor substitutes, testifying to "l'insuffisance de l'art à combler l'absence, à tenir lieu d'amour quand celui-ci, sublimé à l'extrême, ne peut plus sauver ceux qu'il a brisés" (the inability of

art to fill the void, to stand in for love when love, sublimated to the extreme, can no longer save those it has destroyed).

Art, for Louis-Combet, bears the only hope of filling the void: the narrators of this author's *mythobiographies* often occupy the role of the latter-day hagiographer while documenting their own loss of faith. While their projects offer at least the possibility of an earthly palliative to spiritual dereliction, Véronique can never hope to recapture the print that is the key event in the narrative: at first she respects its uniqueness; when, in despair, she attempts to reproduce it, her tracings produce no image. In this, her story taps into a rich vein of experimentation around the body in Louis-Combet's work, which equally characterizes *Cantilène et fables pour les yeux ronds*. These texts (several published previously as limited-edition livres d'artiste by Editions Shushumnà) turn to the other key inspiration in Louis-Combet's fiction: mythological sources. While inhabiting a different frame of reference from the Christian-inspired works (*Où* draws upon a bas-relief depicting the interlocked bodies of a woman and a snake in the Musée des Augustins in Toulouse), they share the treatment of the body as a richly ambiguous narrative motor. *Où* gives birth to a snake, which she suckles at her breast before it enters and consumes her. The sensual union celebrated here is at the same time a fatal one.

In *Visitations*, meanwhile, the body is both the seat of sin and the sublime object of contemplation. Following her realization of the impossibility of reproducing the print, Véronique is the victim of another affliction: she can no longer

visualize her own face. Out of this experience comes the paradoxical project of the self-portrait, which she completes by superimposing a fragment of the printed cloth upon the image of the face. The work of art both is and is not realized: "la pratique du fragment" takes on a heightened significance, in which expression takes place through the inexpressive and in which art achieves something like a reparation.

David Houston Jones  
University of Exeter

Ramón Saizarbitoria. **Rossetti's Obsession**. Madalen Saizarbitoria, tr. Reno. Center for Basque Studies, University of Nevada. 2006. 189 pages. \$19.95. ISBN 1-877802-60-3

IN 1862 Elizabeth Siddal, wife of painter and poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti, passed away from an overdose of laudanum, an opium derivative popular among writers and artists in Victorian England. Stricken with grief, Rossetti buried with her original versions of many of his poems. He later became obsessed with the interred verses, believing them to be of extraordinary quality and, in 1869, had his wife disinterred in order to reclaim them. This striking tale is played out in a contemporary setting in *Rossetti's Obsession*, a recent translation of the 2001 novella *Rossetti-ren obsesioa* by Basque novelist Ramón Saizarbitoria. The text was originally published in *Gorde nazazu lurpean* (Bury me beneath the earth), a collection of novellas by the Gipuzkoan writer, which, in Spanish translation, claimed the 2001 Premio Nacional de Crítica.

*Rossetti's Obsession* tells the story of a respectable, if undistinguished, Basque writer who manages to seduce Eugenia, a profes-

sional woman from Madrid, on the strength of a brief erotic text that he composes for her. The affair is fleeting, however, and the protagonist quickly loses interest after its consummation. It is not long before he falls head over heels for Victoria, a fellow Basque whom he happens to meet at a conference in London. Victoria, an art gallery agent, takes him on a literary tour of the city and shows him the tomb of Siddal, having recounted for him the sordid tale of Rossetti's verses. It is a story that will be played out again as the protagonist tries to retrieve the note he had sent to Eugenia, now with an eye to winning Victoria's heart. His quest to recover the text raises a host of fascinating questions regarding the relationship between the author and his work, the reader's claims on a text, the relationship between writing and the body, and on the connections between the literary and visual arts, not to mention the challenges faced by writers working in "minority" literatures. It is to Saizarbitoria's credit that these questions emerge naturally from the tale he has to tell: it is a thoughtful and engaging novella, and the author's propensity for understatement and wry humor only sets in greater relief his ability to create some truly memorable images.

Saizarbitoria has been at the forefront of innovation in literary Euskera since the 1970s, at a time when the Basque language was just beginning to emerge from decades of official repression. His early texts were distinguished by their tour-de-force exploration of the literary possibilities of a language with an ancient history but a short literary genealogy. *Rossetti's Obsession* offers a snapshot of a writer fully in control of his medium. The translation from

Euskera, by Saizarbitoria's daughter Madalen, is extremely graceful and often elegant. The Center for Basque Studies at the University of Nevada, Reno, is to be congratulated for including this title in their Basque Literature Series and thereby giving an English-reading public a chance to become acquainted with one of the most important writers of the Basque Country.

David Laraway  
Brigham Young University

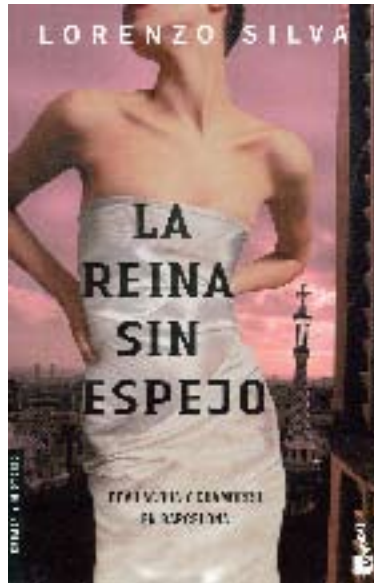
Lorenzo Silva. *La reina sin espejo*. Barcelona. Destino. 2006 (© 2005). 379 pages. €17.50/€7.95. ISBN 84-233-3775-8 (3843-6 paper)

WHILE ALICE crossed through the looking glass and safely lived out her psychedelic adventures, the eponymous reality TV queen of Lorenzo Silva's thriller lived out her adventures without the benefit of a magic mirror and is already dead on page 1.

The criminal investigators assigned to this case are Rubén Bevilaqua ("just call me Vila") and Virginia Chamorro, both of whom work for the revamped Spanish Guardia Civil that, with the exception of the three-cornered hat still worn by officers assigned to protect official buildings, otherwise operates much like a U.S. federal law-enforcement agency—light years removed from the gypsy harassers in Lorca's foreboding *Romance de la Guardia Civil Española* (1928).

This is not the duo's first crime case. Previously, they have been detailed to Mallorca, Costa del Sol, the Canary Islands, and, now, Barcelona (see *WLT* 73:2, p. 305; 76:1, p. 220; and 77:2, p. 146). In each story, Silva uses crime as the modus operandi for diagnosing a

particular segment of present-day Spain. In this story, loosely structured on *Through the Looking Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), Neus Barutell, a female version of Geraldo Rivera, has been murdered by someone who did not like her



over-the-top investigative reporting that jeopardized one of Barcelona's most lucrative industries, the exploitation of underage girls from the former Soviet bloc.

Along with the thrills that Vila and Chamorro provide with their hunting down of a corrupt cop and brutal pornographers who set up elaborate film studios in Barcelona warehouses, the author also lets us get up close to the two investigators who reveal their most intimate feelings, especially their fears and inadequacies relating to Vila's divorce and Chamorro's delayed maternity. In addition to a more mellowed pair, what's new here is their use of technology and innovative schemes. Computer files, text messaging, and the ubiquitous cell phone that facilitate the prostitution

of the eastern girls lead eventually to the demise of their masters.

Stylistically, the author allows Chamorro and Vila, who are narrating the story through flashback, to express themselves in terms that reflect their university studies in astronomy (Chamorro) and psychology (Vila), which sets the tone of this novel apart from fatuous-sounding English murder mysteries and the American hard-boiled detective stories. Nevertheless, Silva's protagonists are young and inject their otherwise urbane discourse with the colorful and uninhibited idiom of Spain's new generation.

Up until now, Lorenzo Silva's crime writing has confronted contemporary societal issues in Spain like the destruction of the environment by greedy and corrupt developers and local politicians, the lack of security at nuclear installations, police officials on the take, and human trafficking. Perhaps at some point in the near future he will take on that other burning issue in Spain that has been a constant since the 1960s: the activities of the Basque Homeland Party (ETA).

David Ross Gerling  
Sam Houston State University

Scott Snyder. *Voodoo Heart*. New York. Dial. 2006. 278 pages. \$24. ISBN 0-385-33841-4

TO HAVE STEPHEN KING quoted on the cover as saying that Scott Snyder's *Voodoo Heart* "just blew me away" is quite a recommendation for a first book. But King fans may not find enough horror or fantasy in this collection. What they will find, however, are a series of well-plotted narratives told in a style nuanced just enough to carry off most of the strangeness.

King fans will recognize the solitary protagonists, people who can't really be known, even by their friends and lovers. Though they have recognizable names, neither are places very significant; characters are not rooted in the particular soil of any place. Neither origins nor histories seem to explain them; they are what they think and what they do. Four stories feature characters whose lives are shaped by an impulsive decision to leave a place that might have become home—to run away, to pursue a spouse or lover, or simply to move on. Those characters who stay in one place seem drawn to spy into the lives of others to fill out something lacking in their own.

Most impressive are the unusual situations and turns of action in which Scott Snyder places his limited people: a man chases a blimp on which he imagines his girlfriend is traveling; men create careers out of disabling injuries; a barnstorming pilot picks up a runaway bride as a partner; in the title story, a wrecking-yard employee first meets his girlfriend at an aquarium and buys an old house within spying distance of a women's reformatory.

While such situations and their resultant outcomes don't always unravel satisfactorily, one does keep reading. After reading each story, too, a fascination with these fellow creatures makes one regret the final period that severs them from the rest of their lives.

W. M. Hagen  
Oklahoma Baptist University

Géza Szávai. *Aletta bárkája*. Budapest. Pont kiadó. 2006. 285 pages. ISBN 963-7265-40-6

GÉZA SZÁVAI's new novel, *Aletta bárkája*, is a strangely attractive book, hard to categorize. It is not really a historical novel, though the plot takes place in the first half of the seventeenth century, soon after the arrival of Protestant Dutch missionaries in Japan. It is not a proper love story either, for the heroine, being a foreigner, is totally in the power of the Japanese hero, in the sense that due to a cruel edict from Edo, he could kill her with impunity at any time. At the same time, love undoubtedly plays an important role in tying Aletta Huebler to Kojima Miki. Perhaps one could call the book a novel dealing with the "clash of cultures."

The story begins in the 1630s when Catholic and Protestant missionaries are vying with one another for the conversion of the Japanese into Christianity—a rivalry that eventually ends with *sakoku*, the rout of all Christians in Japan, which ushers in two centuries of isolation. But the events told in the novel have a powerful hold on later generations of the Japanese, so there is a kind of "legend of Kojima Miki" handed down from father to son and grandson.

The novel of Géza Szávai, a Transylvanian-born Hungarian writer in his mid-fifties, is a largely successful attempt to re-create the atmosphere of old Japan and the relationship of a Japanese nobleman with a European woman. It shows how the clash of cultures can be mitigated and partly bridged by the love of two human beings, how mutual attraction can overrule tradition and binding social obligations. What is at stake here is not

the personal survival of the protagonists but the survival of their two Japanese children, who, according to the law laid down by the contemporary ruler of Edo, should have been killed immediately after birth. While relating the story of tall, red-headed Aletta and well-built but stocky Kojima Miki, Szávai paints memorable vignettes about nature as well as moments of rare intimacy between two people separated by race, tradition, and law but bound together by strong sexual attraction, increasing understanding, and tenderness. We see the Japan of the period mostly through Aletta's eyes, so the language is often biblical; its solemnity is being contrasted, but not diminished, by the use of the most intimate, explicit words and expressions between the lovers. Géza Szávai somehow manages to make his exotic, most unusual, and occasionally cruel story both believable and enjoyable. This is no mean achievement from a writer who, as far as we know, has never visited the Land of the Rising Sun.

George Gömöri  
London

## VERSE

Enis Batur. *Ash Dîvan: Selected Poems of Enis Batur*. Saliha Paker, ed. Clifford Endres et al., trs. Jersey City, New Jersey: Talisman. 2006. ix + 149 pages. \$15.95. ISBN 1-58498-049-4

THOUGH WIDELY CELEBRATED in his homeland, Enis Batur has been one of Turkey's best-kept secrets. A prominent publisher (with Yapı Kredi Publishing House in Istanbul), editor, and art critic as well as a distinguished poet, *Ash Dîvan: Selected Poems of Enis Batur* is the first of his many works to appear

in English. Batur is prolific, and has earned the appellation once given to Ahmet Midhat (1844–1912): “kırk beygir kuvvetinde bir makina” (a forty-horsepower engine).

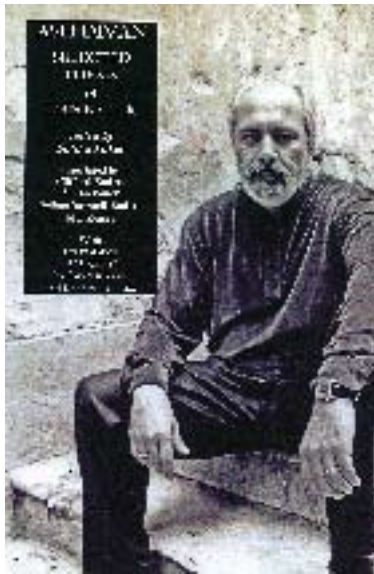
The translators—Clifford Endres, Saliha Paker, Selhan Savcigil-Endres, and Mel Kenne—had their work cut out for them. Seldom have they shied away from difficult tasks, taking poems from *The East-West Divan* (1997), *Papyrus, Ink, Quill* (2002), *The Divan of Aggravating Circumstances* (2003), and including the whole of his important long poem, *Abdal’s Dream* (2003). Indeed, some would say Batur has no “easy” poems. The Turkish is richly worked, beautifully textured and nuanced, excursive and peculiarly labyrinthine in weaving its cerebral narratives. And yet the translators have worked together in various pairings to produce what must surely be some of the finest translations we have from Turkish into English. The opening lines of “FUGUE XVII” give a brief indication of the many tonal properties (present in the Turkish), which the translators carry consistently through the book:

“So,” she’s asking, “Where and when, really, do you begin your book?” “Hard to say,” says the poet. “I think it’s only clear later: poetry’s like a progressive disease—usually well advanced by the time you diagnose it.”

Cemal Süreya rightly described Enis Batur as “unlike anyone else.” Few Turkish poets have written of the city so viscerally, and of Istanbul in particular, a city that wears history like a cheap perfume, and its haunted post-Ottoman urban psyche. This sense of “unlikeness”

is clear to see here in English. And it is perhaps because no single voice among the translators dominates that we feel the music we hear—unique, yet strangely familiar—is as close to Batur’s as it can be. The poet himself says in the preface: “When I read through the present book, I saw *my* world and heard *my* voice flowing into a foreign tongue, reflecting there. I think this is a rare achievement.” It is, indeed.

George Messo  
Al Khobar, Saudi Arabia



Jacqueline Bishop. *Fauna*. Leeds, United Kingdom. Peepal Tree. 2006. 76 pages. £7.99. ISBN 1-84523-032-9

IN HER POETIC DEBUT in book form, Jacqueline Bishop reproduces voices and visions of Jamaica’s past, but she avoids the illusory comforts of nostalgia by recognizing that her access to the past is altered and incomplete. “And who is to say / I am remembering it right . . . after . . . after . . . / God knows how many years! / There was no island-paradise; or perhaps there was.”

Because she represents memory as a problem to be explored rather than a certainty to be privileged, Bishop can turn cliché—Jamaica as “island-paradise”—into a moment of private and public reflection. Likewise, while the voices of her ancestors often inspire her, Bishop creates a complex family portrait that includes absence and injury. Fully capitalizing on the incomplete quality of the “snapshot,” one speaker says that her “father is the man / who is always / at the edge / of the photograph; the man who is never / looking straight at the camera.” And with unsettling directness, Bishop writes about incest and the complicit role played by the speaker’s mother: “She taught me . . . to forgive my grandfather / and take it. She taught me that this was what it meant / to be a woman.” As these excerpts suggest, Bishop unobtrusively makes form reinforce content, using short lines to achieve the effect of the snapshot and longer lines and enjambment for weightier revelations.

Often writing in a lean, direct style, Bishop is at her most imaginative in the second section of the book, in which she uses characteristics associated with tropical flora to reflect concisely upon a variety of social relations: “Don’t you know the names / They call you? / Flame-of-the-Wood, Jungle Flame, Jungle Geranium. / Come back / from living by yourself / at the edge of the woods.” Here Bishop’s poems have less to do with memory and more to do with the intricacies of power that structure women’s daily lives. In these poems, women, like plants, don’t always cooperate with the forces of cultivation and containment. Bishop’s imagery and

metaphor ensure that her dedication to strong, independent women draws upon imaginative identification rather than overt exposition. "My daughter cannot understand / my love of moist places—out in the wild— / and why I could never / spend my life in any of the now-popular public parks, / or, like her, in someone's private garden." Compassionate and insightful, Jacqueline Bishop writes poems that are both intimately personal and richly committed to Jamaica's human and natural history.

Jim Hannan  
Le Moyne College

Magda Cârneci. **Chaosmos**. Adam J. Sorkin & Magda Cârneci, trs. Buffalo, New York. White Pine. 2006. 93 pages. \$14. ISBN 1-893996-78-6

IN *CHAOSMOS*, Magda Cârneci has been equally well served in her U.S. debut by Richard Jackson's introduction, which describes major themes and effects of poems that create "a world that is chaotic on the local level and cosmically ordered on a larger scale" and by Adam J. Sorkin's translator's commentary, which places her in the context of Romanian poetry since the 1980s and discusses, in eloquent detail, the collaborative process of translation as "a transgressive effort not just to enter another's psyche empathetically and intellectually but literally to become it, to be another's tongue and soul in the target language."

This must have been far from easy, since in the final section, "A Vast Reader," Cârneci calls for a remote polymath to "encompass in the dazzling crystalline lens of his single, all-embracing eye" every-

thing in the universe, past, present, and future.

For herself and her fellows, the poet insists "That we see. That we live for ourselves in the moment. / The Here. The Now. / All at once. Instantaneously / In a flash. In no time. A long moment, eternal." This is one of the more sedate passages in the poems in "The Vision," her first section. In "Into the Body" she goes far beyond Whitman's desire to embrace all. Instead of singing herself, she desires in "A Sea of Flames" that everything possible will be "one single body, vast, pulsating, with one composite / Face." Identity dissolves in cosmic cycles disintegrating and renewing in eternal Big Bangs, "joyously transforming into one another, / into everything, into nothing, in a blinding vortex."

Part 2, "Cosmic Burial," uses some of the same images to describe the collapse of a love affair, the hope that a cycle will renew the fervor, and the desire to be consumed, to death or life, in "sun incandescent matrix fiery vulva."

The poems in part 3, "In the World," are, as the title indicates, more localized in setting, although some of the imagery carries over from the first two sections. On the whole, the poet is more willing to trust "my enormous insane hope" that "In the end / disorder reaches perfection." Or not, since the photographic print of the universe—a conceit that echoes the book's first poem—will be devoured by the mysterious "He" who recurs throughout the text.

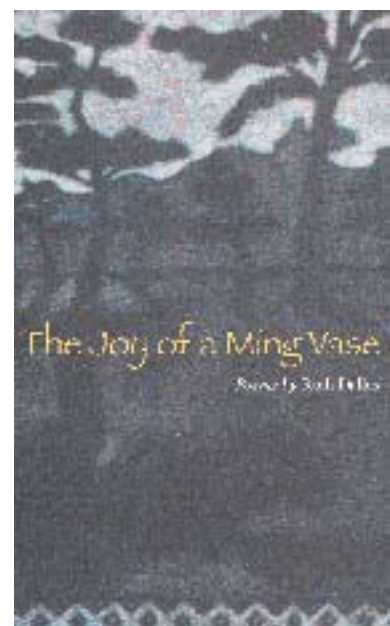
The poems of *Chaosmos* call for two different and equally rewarding ways of reading: abandoning

logical coherence in favor of wild movement in the first two sections; slowing down to savor the insights about more common experience, rather than atoms and galaxies, in the third.

Robert Murray Davis  
University of Oklahoma

Ruth Dallas. **The Joy of a Ming Vase**. Kyla Cresswell, ill. Dunedin, New Zealand. Otago University Press. 2006. 60 pages, ill. NZ\$29.95. ISBN 1-877372-30-7

*THE JOY OF A MING VASE* is a beautifully produced volume by one of New Zealand's poetry doyennes. Ruth Dallas was born in 1919, her first collection of poetry came out in 1953, and her collected work in 1987. This latest collection is of work since then. Her literary career was at its height in the 1960s and 1970s, a period when a conservative modernism swept all poetically before it in New Zealand, and to which Dallas's work remains faithful. These poems, too, show



strongly rhythmic cadences; language that is straightforward and contemporary yet seldom colloquial; much use of metaphor; a few “poetic” words; and a fondness for endings that point up what the poet has been saying. There is in this poetry, then, a sense of the continuing tradition of romanticism so persistent in New Zealand poetry. The format of the book seems almost to emphasize this with its board cover, page marker, glossy paper, brown font, and *sumi-e* influenced drawings.

Nevertheless, Dallas’s voice is her own. Her poetry’s distinctiveness lies in the way it moves from detail to wider focus, even to generalization. “A Blue Jar” begins with a jar: “Round as a full moon . . . blue as a periwinkle flower” and goes directly on to talk of “perfection,” its “eight centuries” of age and its “communication . . . mind with mind.” This approach can be effective, though it occasionally smacks of the romantic trait of pressing for a desired reader response.

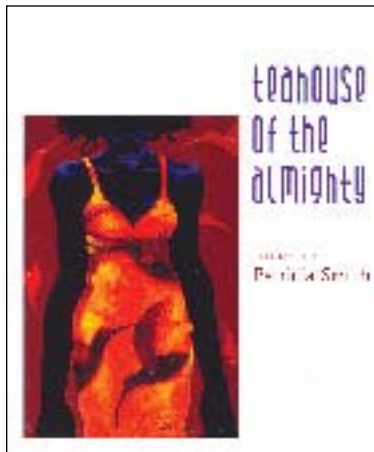
Dallas has the ability to enter the minds of people from far times and places, such as in “A Dutch Painting,” having us think about the “girl-wife” with the book “she has been set to read” rather than the jeweler husband.

Dallas was an early exponent of haiku in New Zealand, and this book includes a double spread. Her deftness is shown in “gentle touch – / a grasshopper’s feet / crossing my own.”

These are all short poems, some brief as haiku. *The Joy of a Ming Vase* is varied and affords a satisfying read. A reviewer risks sounding patronizing in mentioning Ruth Dallas’s age—but we must

salute a mind vigorous with poetry, ebullient with the skill of its craft in its eighties. How many younger minds could write as nimbly, tersely, and with full awareness of allusion without letting the precedents weigh heavily, as in “Yeats bends a line / Like a bow / Fits an arrow / And lets fly”?

Bernard Gadd  
Papatoetoe, New Zealand



Patricia Smith. **Teahouse of the Almighty.** Minneapolis. Coffee House (Consortium, distr.). 2006. 91 pages. \$15. ISBN 1-56689-193-0

*TEAHOUSE OF THE ALMIGHTY* is Patricia Smith’s fourth poetry collection and numbers among several other publications, including children’s books and a historical text. In addition to being a writer, Smith is also a performance poet who has taken the stage at a range of venues including international poetry festivals, Carnegie Hall, and the Sorbonne in Paris. She has appeared in the film *Slamnation* and in HBO’s series *Def Poetry Jam*.

Smith says that in *Teahouse of the Almighty* she resists succumbing to the urge to unify the poems

with a theme, and she suggests that her collection is an “unflinching snapshot” of her life. This decision is apparent in the range of subjects her poems address, from the soul-shattering drama of everyday life evident in news headlines to the liberating and uplifting power of poetry. But despite her lack of intent to spin a thematic web, Smith’s pieces are underscored by a reverence for the raw drama and passion of human existence.

Several poems address this drama from an intriguing angle by exploring incidents that have made their way into the news. “Boy Dies, Girlfriend Gets His Heart” chronicles the bizarre series of events that lead to a fifteen-year-old boy donating his heart to his girlfriend and her body’s subsequent rejection of that heart several years later. Smith deftly uses the complications of the transplant to explore the complexities of romance when she writes, “The fickle traitorous heart is a need / no one misses. In heaven, / they keep one beating / in a cage, purely for show.”

Religious passion takes center stage in some poems, and Smith describes her collection as, among other things, her “discarded Baptist upbringing.” In the poem “Map Rappin’,” Smith engages religion as a rousing form of spirituality: “Mama say the Lord enters you in stages, / first like a match lit under your skin. . . . Mama say lie still and wait for glory to consume you.” This rousing and visceral quality of spiritual pursuit is also evident in the poem from which the collection takes its name: “Splintered wood seats, carved across with / curses and desperate two-syllabled

prayers, / strain to hold the quivering weight of / the devoted and the hard questions poised / by their thirst." In this—as in several of her poems—she places religion within the cold and mundane context of a quotidian existence, the lens through which she seeks to explore life throughout the collection.

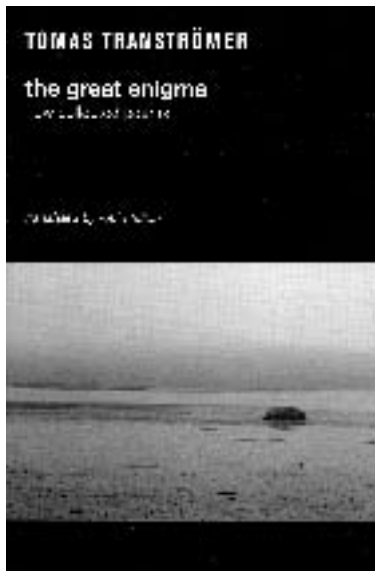
*Teahouse of the Almighty* is a vibrant and passionate meandering through life, its ordinariness magnified to expose its pain and exhilaration. The language is sensual and captures the broken moments of our everyday existence.

Andrea E. Shaw  
Nova Southeastern University

Tomas Tranströmer. **The Great Enigma: New Collected Poems.** Robin Fulton, tr. New York: New Directions, 2006. xxii + 262 pages. \$16.95. ISBN 0-8112-1672-1

NOBODY LIKES to reiterate the obvious when writing about a poet whose international reputation hardly needs a boost. His or her own poems already do so. In the case of Tomas Tranströmer, however, to say that he is one of the greatest living European poets is not as evident as one might expect. Although he has been present on the world literary stage for many decades now, including in English translations published in the United States, his output is rather slim, no doubt partly due to the fact that he had kept a day job as a psychologist for many years. Yet Tranströmer, a poet par excellence, who was born in Stockholm in 1931, deserves our attention precisely because he occupies the elusive spot reserved for the privileged few whose importance and validity is judged by quality, not quantity.

In the present gathering of all of Tranströmer's poems, Robin Fulton, a fine poet in his own right, reminds us that Tranströmer is above all a metaphysical poet of vivid images and haunting sceneries that transcend the time and space of their localized, Scandinavian origin. Line after line, the poet writes of the mystery of our being, be it either the much-discussed-by-critics state of hovering between waking and dreaming, or the harshness and brutality of the bare, gray, and misty northern landscape, where existence equals the constant negotiating of physical and psychological barriers and frontiers. Indeed, the great mastery



of Tranströmer is his ability to present both the tangible and metaphysical North that is not devoid of light, a place where we, the readers, upon entering through the poet's door, rediscover ourselves in "the tent of calm."

In addition to translating all of Tranströmer's books of verse and

writing a valuable introduction, Fulton ends the collection with the poet's prose memoir, *Memories Look at Me*. To be sure, this has nothing to do with the current popularity of memoir, which is both aggrandizing and somewhat dubious. Quite contrary, the prose memoir is an integral and self-sustaining part of Tranströmer's oeuvre. In a series of short recollections, we learn about the poet's upbringing in Sweden, mainly by taking a glimpse into domestic scenes that surrounded the future poet, his nature expeditions, schooling, and introduction to poetry. There is plenty to rummage through. In the section devoted to museums, which also includes recollections of insect hunting and collecting, Tranströmer writes, "I moved in the great mystery [of the natural world]." Thanks to his poems, we do, too. A reader doesn't have to look far into this splendid collection to partake in the same sense of discovery of a realm that is as mysterious in its infinity as it is joyful and rewarding.

Piotr Florczyk  
Wilmington, Delaware

## MISCELLANEOUS

Yves Bonnefoy. **L'imaginaire métaphysique.** Paris: Seuil, 2006. 163 pages. €19.50. ISBN 2-02-086456-8

TEN ESSAYS, largely appearing previously in various publications in Italy, Belgium, France, and Switzerland, are offered in *L'imaginaire métaphysique*, with a foreword that argues their continuity of preoccupation, one that is soon apparent and, indeed, at the epicenter of Yves Bonnefoy's magisterially

focused and yet stunningly diverse oeuvre. What is at issue here is that ontologically diverting desire at the heart of the “metaphysical imaginary,” both desire and dream, synonymous with the thrust of a gnostic craving for an *other* world that poetry only, Bonnefoy senses, “poetry which is not art, poetry which is both unbridled imagination and adherence to the greatest simpleness of existence,” can adequately counterbalance. “Poetry,” Bonnefoy affirms, “is wanting the here and now to assume precedence over dreams,” a precedence the prestige of language and concept and intellectualized structure ever pull us away from, privileging not the “absolute inconceivableness” of the absoluteness of givenness but rather the relativity of proud human rationalizing and equation of being. As the delightful poem *Bouchée bée* will emphasize, there is strength galore in the wonderments of an “unknowing” that involves assent to the mystery of the One. The power of the “metaphysical imaginary” is thus such as to draw one away from the “intimacy—the truth, the beauty—of finiteness,” the conceptualization and excarnation the former involves disallowing that other “infinity [at the heart] of the slightest existing [—and of course mortal—] thing.” That all-pervading modern and still hypercontemporary melancholia afflicting writers and nonwriters alike comes, Bonnefoy argues, essentially from “loving an image of the world knowing it is but an image.” Poetry presents itself as a refusal of melancholia’s “ambiguity,” as an obstinate “reminder, a designated direction” of a telluric connectedness that “prescribes that we not be

dream’s idolater, but, neither, that we accept ourself as iconoclast.” No destruction, no blind worship. Poetry becomes in this way an act and a place of “moral experience [which] takes it over aesthetic revery” and allows for a “loving critique” of our ways of relating (to) What Is. Two other fine recent poems, *Pasant, veux-tu savoir? précédé de Ales Stenar* (Editions VVV, 2006), reveal a manner of relatedness to being plunged into what we may deem the sacred, but one that is nameless, the screeching of seabirds or the ceaseless burning glory of the ordinary—of smile and suffering. What sacredness is there, however, is wrapped in no dreamed alterity, no aestheticized hygiene. It is Pousin’s handful of earth, no more, for what more could be truly desired, truly embraced? Pure *présence* in a language alert to its shimmering temptations, seeking rather that luminous and beaming nudity *présence* may yet afford.

Michael Bishop  
Dalhousie University

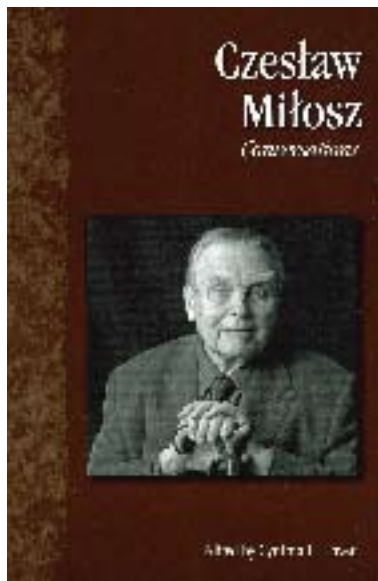
Denys Johnson-Davies. **Memories in Translation: A Life between the Lines of Arabic Literature.** Naguib Mahfouz, foreword. Cairo / New York. American University in Cairo Press. 2006. 139 pages + 12 plates. \$19.95. ISBN 977-424-938-0

AFTER A CAREER of some sixty years in translation from Arabic into English, Denys Johnson-Davies has written an interesting memoir about his experience as a translator and about the Arab authors he translated. Following the narrative of his experience, one is struck by the fortuitous turns in the life of the boy he was in an English public school who abandoned the

study of Greek and Latin—to study Arabic in Cairo, then London and Cambridge—and who eventually became “the leading Arabic-English translator of our time,” as Edward Said described him, and the one who “has done more than anybody to translate modern Arabic fiction into English and promote it,” as Naguib Mahfouz affirmed.

By his count, Johnson-Davies translated twenty-eight books from modern Arabic literature: novels, short stories, plays, and some poetry, and latterly books of the Hadith, Prophet Muhammad’s reported sayings and acts (translated with Ezzeddin Ibrahim) and one short book of al-Ghazali (d. 1111 A.D.) about Islamic teachings on food, table manners, a host’s obligations, and the like. He also wrote a large number of children’s books of Arab folktales and history and is currently collecting material for translating Moroccan short stories, and more material for a volume of short stories from the United Arab Emirates.

Having lived long in Egypt, at one time teaching translation and English at the University of Cairo, Johnson-Davies came to know and translate many Egyptian authors: Tawfiq al-Hakim, Yahya Hakki, Yusuf Idris, Naguib Mahfouz, and many others, whose writings constitute the bulk of his translations. But he also lived in Beirut for a shorter time, where he met Yusuf al-Khal, Tawfic Sayigh, Boland al-Haydari, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, and other leaders of the Arab free-verse movement; but poetry was not his realm and he felt “that it takes a poet to translate poetry.” Yet he later published a selection of Mahmoud Darwish’s poetry under the title *Music of Human Flesh*, his



only venture in verse translation. He traveled and lived briefly in other parts of the Arab world—Syria, Iraq, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Morocco—and he met with writers he had translated or would later translate. In the 1960s he started in London an Arabic literary magazine, *Aswat*, which published some of the best Arabic writing of the period. Later he established the Heinemann Arab Authors series, which brought wider attention in English translation to some of the most creative Arab novelists of the time.

Johnson-Davies is not only an excellent and prolific translator to whom we are thankful, but he has been so when modern Arabic fiction has been enjoying a vibrant florescence after tentative beginnings in the first decades of the twentieth century. I wish he wrote more on his impressions of the Arab authors he knew and translated; for he writes less and less about them as his memoir proceeds to its end.

*Issa J. Boullata*  
Montréal

**Czesław Miłosz: Conversations.** Cynthia L. Haven, ed. Jackson. University Press of Mississippi. 2006. xxx + 217 pages. \$50 (\$20 paper). ISBN 1-57806-828-2 (829-0 paper)

OURS IS AN AGE in which the intimacy of physical proximity and interpersonal exchange has been replaced by rather uncertain coexistence of anonymity and perpetual fleetingness of experience. We e-mail and text-message, but we don't talk, or not as much as we used to. Daily we are reminded of the alleged superiority of the latest electronic devices brought about to advance our ways of communicating. With the single push of a button, we can express ourselves and understand others, or so we are told. The result is that we continue to live on the go, and so do our thoughts, feelings, and emotions.

A good place to begin sorting them out would be with this collection of interviews with the late Czesław Miłosz, splendidly edited and published under the aegis of the distinguished Literary Conversations Series of the University Press of Mississippi. Miłosz's greatest gift remains his ability to provide answers to ever-compelling questions of human existence. Two years after his death, having barely accepted it as a fact, we turn again and again to the great master, searching for previously overlooked gems born under his pen.

It is no coincidence that this book has appeared in print; more are on the way. What we have here are eighteen interviews conducted between 1980 and 2001 by both journalists and the likes of Adam Michnik, Joseph Brodsky, Robert Faggen, and Anna Frajlich. However, because the interview-

ers had somewhat disparate backgrounds and reasons for seeking an interview with the poet, the book as a whole feels rich in material and depth but also a bit uneven in terms of the quality of the questions posed. Hence, what is most praiseworthy about the book is the goal behind it: mainly, its aim to recreate for an American reader the idea of what kind of reception and attention Miłosz had experienced in the United States after winning the Nobel Prize. Starting with a great introductory essay, the editor has managed to bring to light a man who was not only a poet and a great master of literature, both compassionate and of piercing intellect, but also a man who was no stranger to humor and laughter—a man of contradictions to some, perhaps, but one whose mind seemed to be pumping on all cylinders at all times.

For someone who may be new to Czesław Miłosz, this book demonstrates that his erudition and an aura of grandeur did not overshadow his modesty or his profound sense of responsibility to the universe and language. The biographical timeline and expansive bibliographical notes only add to the sensational feeling of being brought closer to him. Reading his answers to questions about his background, his views on history and politics, religion and poetic language, we wish we could be there ourselves and ask him one more question, or two. What would it be?

*Piotr Florczyk*  
Wilmington, Delaware