

CONCLUSION

Hédi Bouraoui's flight around the globe is coming in for a landing – if only a temporary one. Like Virgilius's and unlike Samir's, Bouraoui's does not “crash and burn”, but carries hope for the future of the “global village”, a hope articulated by male and female artists, and by couples who, together, come close to Virginia Woolf's concept of androgyny.

The titles of all six novels point to the crucial role of the female in conveying Bouraoui's transcultural vision. *Bangkok Blues* might seem to be a possible exception, but one “sings the blues” for suffering in love. The original title of *Bangkok Blues*, moreover, was *Lumaison*, a neologism suggesting the ephemeral nature of the “liaison” of Koï and Virgilius. Koï thai, a modern woman of the Far East, opens the eyes of the Maghrebian Virgilius (Maghreb means the West according to Eastern and Middle Eastern perceptions) to an ancient past which is alien to him. She accomplishes this, however, largely by her silence, the gaps in her speech, and above all by the symbolism associating her with the hand, the khamisa, which in the Maghreb wards off the evil eye.

Retour à Thyna seems to name a place, not a woman, but Thyna, the Roman Thaenae, becomes identified with the heroine, Zitouna, whose name, signifying olive/olive tree, also, in its last two syllables, evokes/sounds like Thyna. Zitouna's mission, moreover, is to bring ancient Thyna back into the womb of the mother, the Médina. An amateur (lover of)

archaeologist, she also promotes the dead Kateb's work, and assumes the function of talespinner in the marketplace.

La Pharaone was originally entitled *Nilamourir*, again a neologism equating the Nile ("Nihil," suggests François Bruzzo 9) with « amour » and « mort », the love/death theme which has haunted literature from the beginning of time (see Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*). As is the case with *Lumaison*, the original title underlines the role of the couple. But *La Pharaone*, the final title, sends the reader in the direction of the female characters, the modern Moslem Egyptian Imane, the Frenchwoman Francine, the Canadian Margaret and her daughter Betty, and the ancient Hatchepsut, the female Pharaoh, who dared to adopt male attributes to consolidate her power, a power to promote, above all, peace, justice, and tolerance: "Make love, not war."

In *Ainsi parle la Tour CN*, we encounter two heroines, one apparently inanimate, the CN Tower in Toronto, which only discovers its female identity in the course of the novel, and the other, the mystical Amerindian Twylla Blue, who brings the totemic Moose-Spirit, the « Esprit-Original », to "impregnate" the Tower with values of nature and the acceptance of difference. The love of man and woman expands outwards, as a stone thrown into water creates wider and wider concentric circles. The Tower, finally, is in love with all the characters who enter and leave her, especially the First Nations and the recent immigrants, the marginalized in Canadian society.

The title of *La Composée* signifies a woman, Héloïse, who turns out by the end of the novel to be more the "composer" than the "composition." Architect, painter, scholar, finally the author of her own story in epistolary form, Héloïse, like Hatchepsut, assumes the right to speak only at the end of the novel. In so doing, she shatters all of Samir's misperceptions and misconceptions, and he is left with only the "Black Box" of his crash.

La Femme d'entre les lignes foregrounds the female role, that of Lisa/Palimpseste, but she is to be read only "between the lines," subtended, to be decoded by the artist/protagonist and the reader/detective. In some ways this novel presents the opposite side of the coin of the female role: a heroine, Lisa, who is given to self-surrender, complete immersion in her artist (hero? lover?) – or, perhaps, in his work, an ambiguity which torments the narrator. But, as in *La Composée*, there is a sting in the tail of this text: the Muse, Lisa, chooses to disappear and is replaced by the more comba-

tive, aggressive Palimpseste, who confronts and confounds the narrator. In effect, again, the Muse strikes back.

Not only do these women assume the right to speak – in Zitouna’s case, in a very public performance – they seize love just as they do language. Not for them the “biological tradeoff” implied by Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) in which women either produce babies or books. With the possible exception of Lisa, none of these women fear commitment, including Twylla’s to the Malaysian Zinal, and Hatchepsut’s to her scribe/architect Senmut/Kabar. But even Lisa/Palimpseste seems to question not her own commitment, but the narrator’s lack of it.

Love does not, however, prevent these women from critiquing, even at times satirizing, the male point of view. If Koï restricts herself to correcting Virgilius by her silences, the other female protagonists assume a more active role. Zitouna is, more than anyone, aware of Kateb’s debauchery, though there was no doubt of her reluctant attraction to him. The shy Mansour becomes the love of her life, but she is conscious that she needs to take the lead in their relationship.

In *La Pharaone*, Francine waxes sarcastic about Barka’s fixation on the long-dead Queen. But when he follows Hatchepsut in death, it is Francine who pieces together his fragmentary notes, with the aid of Imane, including transcriptions of Hatchepsut’s tablets. Francine transcends sexual jealousy – as Hatchepsut at a crucial moment could not – to the point that the Frenchwoman *becomes* her imagined rival.

Turning 360 degrees in one hour, the CN Tower strives for a balanced view of all her characters, showing special sympathy for the Amerindians, Pete Deloon, Twylla Blue, and Moki, and for the recent immigrants, Souleyman the African and Symphorien, the half-mad poetic Frenchman. The two French Canadians *de souche*, Marc Durocher and Marcel-Marie Duboucher, while in the final analysis dangerous, are treated for the most part like comic relief. The least sympathetic character, from the Tower’s point of view, is Kelly King, who is at the controls and has inherited the power and the racism of impervious old Anglo-Canada. Like Francine in *La Pharaone*, Twylla transcends sexual jealousy – Kelly, as sexual predator, has seduced her husband Pete – to become a mentor to Kelly.

With Héroïse, in *La Composée*, we reach a kind of apotheosis of the heroine as artist. The most powerful character in the novel, she is, like Koï thai, silent for the first fifty-odd pages, but she comes into her own with a vengeance. As multi-talented artist and principal speaker, she repudiates all

the male voices recounting her tale, particularly those of Jean-Marc Léger and Samir Arhab, to tell her own story, valorizing only the father she has herself chosen, Ali Ben Mokhtar, the old writer.

Lisa/Palimpseste, in *La Femme d'entre les lignes*, seems at first antithetical to Zitouna, Hatchepsut/Francine, Héloïse. Worshipful in the extreme, almost sycophantic, she turns on her putative “creator” at last (perhaps alerted by the sad fate of her only serious predecessor Rose), steps down from the pedestal, and refuses the passive role of Muse. The psychological violence of this text produces a sharp concussion in both narrator and reader, leading to a “shock of recognition” that to ignore the female principle is to cripple, even paralyze art, and to falsify human history. For woman must and will emerge (as in Homer’s day) from “between the lines.”

All of Bouraoui’s novels have completely open endings, inviting us to speculate beyond the last page. But each new novel sets off on a different voyage into space and time, crossing cultures and genders/genres. His entire *œuvre* to date should be regarded as a “work in progress”. We await his next lyric novels to learn our new temporal and spatial destinations, and the roles of male and female artists in exploring the trajectory.