

Hédi Bouraoui. *NomadiVivance I: Narratoème*. Toronto: CMC Éditions, 2016. 156 pp.

### **NOMADIVIVANCE: TOWARDS THE FUTURE**

Hédi Bouraoui's new experimental collection, *NomadiVivance*, which utilizes as its title another of his *mots-concepts*, marks a nomadic Ulyssean voyage to the literary future. It embodies a variety of forms, drawn from sports, the mass media, book reviews, meditations on contemporary life, and some complete surprises. The title *Noma-di-Vivance* encapsulates the notion of "nomaditude," the poet's wanderings along "the royal roads of imagination" (7).<sup>1</sup> The syllable "Di" set off by hyphens, emphasizes the act of speech – the "dit" – the oral tradition on which Bouraoui draws so deeply. And "Vivance" stresses the art-life dialogue, the idea that art offers a slice of life, but imbues it, as R.P. Blackmur suggests, with form and meaning.

Hédi Bouraoui characteristically envisages art as a ship, navigating changes and risks, and refusing all anchorage (7). The ship sails on his beloved Mediterranean Sea, the cradle of Occidental and Oriental civilizations, and the literary metaphor is linked to the harsh realities of today's headlines: of desperate refugees from Syria and Africa braving a stormy sea in quest of their "Cap Nord" – Europe and the West. He notes that these are only the most recent migrants in a history of pluri-cultural and pluri-civilizational crossings, or *traversées*, going back to Ulysses and beyond.

A keynote of all his work is a rejection of what he calls "*la binarité infernale*" (8). He is endlessly inspired by the everyday life and customs of the countries and continents he has visited, and sees no cleavage between "us" and "them." By the same token, he rejects the infernal binarity of fixed forms, experimenting with novels, novellas, tales, poetry, experimental theater. As he says, he mixes these more or less fixed forms "just for the love of separating himself from tradition and putting his own particular stamp on the work" (8). This rejection of the traditional is figured by the geographical, spatial metaphor of voyages, or crossings.

While he claims that he never reflected on the art of the novel like Henry James or André Gide, that is exactly what he is doing here – but his concerns go beyond the novel,

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<sup>1</sup> All translations are mine. Page references are to the original French text.

or narrative, to other blended forms of the imaginary. He marks the death of conventional narrative during this third millennium, and launches instead his poetic ship, exploring a broader relation between art and life than fiction as we know it can delineate. As he defines his current project, “If I distance myself somewhat from fiction, I insist on treating reality, in confronting it face to face... in the raw state, without framing it with all the customary fictional techniques. No more narrative points of view, heroes, villains, rich, poor, not even a ‘central intelligence’ through whose eyes we witness the unraveling of a plot.”

Bouraoui sees the poet rather as a “chronicler” (11). For him, truth is found in “interstitial writing” (10). As Edith Wharton once wrote, “. . . the deeper meaning of the story was in the gaps” (*Ethan Frome* 4), or as, for bell hooks, truth is seen best from the margins. He proceeds to a poetic definition of the “*Narratoème*”: it crosses over genres (prose/ poetry). It is an interpenetration of narrative forms, a crossing over of the most varied cultural contents (12). He views it as a synthesis of writings which, by virtue of *being* writings, are all literary productions: philosophy, religion, politics, drama, biography, etc. The coherence stems from the fusion of diverse ingredients. In this particular collection, he adds the dimension of the critical poem to the *narratoème*, embracing the domain of creative criticism.

Finally, he defines the term *NomadiVivance* itself, stressing the theme of mutation: “Life is made of eternal changes until death” (13). His own changes are characterized as “nomaditude.” If he pitches his tent somewhere, it is only temporary: “The *mot-concept* that I launch contains in itself the essence of nomaditude, and it speaks because it ‘*dit la Vivance*’ [speaks of life].” His poetic take on the real is a means to combat the “tsunami” of misinformation bombarding us from the mass and social media, a Tower of Babel of languages (14).

These texts represent a moment in time seized by the very act of writing. By the same token, the author’s perception is valorized or completed by the reader who fills the gap. He has left a “*Béance*” in the text for the reader to fill (15). The texts serve as witness to the new century with its “tragic-political incomprehensible convulsions.” He seeks to narrate the eternal flux and reflux of life, and compose them into “Mosaics of writing,” the “mosaics” evoking the Canadian mosaic, as well as the ancient Roman

mosaics found in his native Tunisia, near his home town of Sfax, as well as those displayed in the Bardo Museum in Tunis. If these represent a past buried and almost forgotten (even attacked in the case of the Bardo), they are also a link to the present, and can create a new path to the future.

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