

ARTS

Second coming of Moses

by Matias Milet
The White Line
 by Daniel David Moses
 University of Toronto Press



"My sense of writing is finding the strength and truth in the language," states Daniel David Moses, a native poet and playwright, who read at Harbourfront's recent International Festival of Authors, and has just put out a new book of poetry, called *The White Line*.

Moses' Delaware ancestors, forced northward, crossed a border that did not exist before the European conquest. In his poetry, something similar happens: language shows its ability to move across established boundaries.

Moses has been described as "operating as an artist, not as an explainer or apologist for his people." But to arrive at that point, he's had to organize and think politically. He's founded a Toronto-based support group which organizes and publishes Canadian natives who want to make a career of writing — without "whitewashing" themselves.

The group was formed in response to widespread racism amongst editors, who often tell native writers that: a) their work is too Indian and won't be understood, unless a White character is added who the readers can identify with, or b) the work is not Indian enough; it does not conform to general expectations of how Indians live.

Although Moses works politically for the improvement of conditions for Natives, he does not turn his plays or poems into vehicles for self-righteous ideology. He declines to do so out of a deep care for language. He suspects that language gets corrupted, as

much when it's used to achieve an immediate political end, as when it's used "to sell Coca-Cola".

The language we speak today," Moses explained, "has become so utilitarian that most of us don't know what we're saying. . . . When I told a group of pre-schoolers that each of their names had a meaning, that meant a lot to them. Today we don't even give people that much."

In *The White Line*, we are given a powerful language, which works in mysterious and unnamed realms. Occasionally, this mysterious aura becomes a weakness because in trying to be elusively suggestive, a poem will just end up being too obscure. But at their best, the poems bring us into a space of shifting referents, where the words are simultaneously about the printed page, about feelings, and about the natural world.

"Dogged dirge" reminds us of the usually forgotten root of a common word: "Another dog dead — and the child in me/ will not be comforted. The child holds on/ — holds on doggedly, as if mimicry/ could atone . . .".

In another poem, the materials of the writer are — literally — used to describe a scene: "[the clouds] let an electric/ white rising sun erase the dark. The land/ too bright to read in the glare. . . ." It's as if in this poem the "spill of ink" goes off the printed page and turns the world into a poem. In "The Line", the reverse happens: the imagery makes us see sentences and questions, with their persuasive movements as things of this world; we connect them in the same way we might connect the combination of a boat, fishing line, lure and fish.

Moses succeeds in finding the strength of language by crossing boundaries between script and the real world. His work starts from the knowledge that there are humorous, vital, even surreal images built into any language. A point illustrated in some native languages. For example, in one dialect the name for a kettle is the equivalent of "duck-pail."

In *The White Line*, Moses reminds us that this interesting ambiguity also exists in the English language.



Sitcom-Movie

by Mattia Magnatta

Sibling Rivalry
 directed by Carl Reiner
 Columbia Pictures

I should write a book. It would be called "Stay at home and watch it on video." Not all (movies) would be included in my book of course. Have you ever tried to watch *The Last Emperor* or *Out of Africa* on video? Not the same. However, in the chapter of my book entitled "The Rise of the Hollywood Sitcom-Movie." I would certainly include *Sibling Rivalry*.

You may be scratching your head and thinking: what the hell is a sitcom-movie? Well . . . I think it's a new genre . . . (nothing to do with culture, here folks, only bland commercialism and marketing that have created a new type of product. . . . er . . . I mean . . . film)!

So a sitcom-movie has the same plot-line and actors/actresses as a situation comedy. You see, in Hollywood the motto is not "give the people what they want," but rather "give the people what they've already seen on TV. So it's not surprising that one of the producers of *Sibling Rivalry*, Don Miller (responsible for bringing you such riveting shows as *The Waltons*, *Dallas*, and *Eight is Enough*), would try to package a vacuous script within the sitcom format.

This movie is really about TV people doing standard TV-type things. Marjorie Turner (Kirstie Alley of *Cheers*) is a bored housewife who decides, after some convincing from her wild sister, to "fool around" on her doctor-husband Harvey (played by Scott Bakula of *Quantum Leap*). He is a doctor first and husband second; he spends all his spare time reading a specialized medical journal called "Inside

Intestines."

Seizing the opportunity, Marjorie eventually ends up in a hotel room with a complete "stranger" whom she meets in a grocery store. After a session of energetic lovemaking, the stranger dies of a heart attack. (The "stranger," we later find out, is actually Marjorie's brother-in-law, whom she has never met).

Alley succeeds in getting laughs by being both hysterical and tearful. However she is overshadowed by the character of Nick Meany (played by Bill Pullman), a tacky, cheesy, venetian blind salesman, who also thinks that he's killed Marjorie's brother-in-law.

Here I come

to save the day



As an added TV touch, *Sibling Rivalry* exploits the cliché of "exact opposites" in family members. This inevitably leads to the creation of "cardboard characters," who are either boring, upstanding members of the community, or socially exciting, bohemian social outcasts.

While pretending to deal with issues such as marital infidelity and domestic squabbles, *Sibling Rivalry* is little more than a quasi-entertaining piece of fluff. Complete with soapy music and the inescapable "and they lived happily ever after . . ." ending. This one is ideal for heavy TV viewers . . . please enjoy.

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