

Author Interview

Bay Crossings: Is there really a “Pacific Freighter” magazine?

Paul Duclos: No, it’s a composite of several trade publications serving the shipping community. The novel’s protagonist – Eugene Bryan – is a composite of an industry journalist.

BC: You seem to suggest that it’s a pretty glamorous industry, too.

PD: Glamorous in the darkest sense, I suppose. Wasn’t Satan the glamorous angel? There isn’t anything very *pacifc* about this, either. Containerized shipping is not a peaceful business.

BC: And Eugene Bryan is not the noblest of men, is he?

PD: Clearly, he’s troubled. A vain, homophobic, womanizer always looking for the main chance.

BC: He’s flying his own flag of convenience?

PD: Exactly. And he’s able to quickly become an adept business writer because the barriers to entry are so low.

BC: The portrayals of other trade journalists are far from flattering too. Are they all such vulgar opportunists?

PD: No worse than journalists you’ll find in other fields of endeavor. Remember, this book takes on the art world, too, and paints a rather bleak picture of misguided humanitarian organizations.

BC: But isn’t the novel sort of an indictment of globalization in general?

PD: No. It is an acknowledgement of it. Hardly a ringing endorsement for mass migration, however.

BC: The back story is really a father/son tale. Both men are going through a sort of mutual recovery after Mrs. Bryan dies in a car accident.

PD: Yes, although it’s been fifteen years since that occurred. Eugene is an only child, and had really been spoiled up to that point. His transition into manhood was sudden and violent.

BC: There’s considerable violence in this book, particularly where cars are involved.

PD: Yes, a car kills one of the key characters in the first paragraph of the first chapter. Automobiles are often deadly vehicles. When they are not crashing into things, or running people over, they’re used for abductions.

BC: What about the violent sex contained in these pages?

PD: I’m an Irish Catholic. It’s to be expected.

BC: Is there a redemptive message in any of this?

PD: We’re all at sea at one time or the other. Love conquers all, is a reassuring theme. But in the end, one’s faith must be based on something more than that. W.H. Auden says it beautifully in his poem, “Leap Before You Look.” Safety is an illusion. Embrace risk, and commit yourself completely to life.

Leap Before You Look

W. H. Auden

The sense of danger must not disappear:

The way is certainly both short and steep,

However gradual it looks from here;

Look if you like, but you will have to leap.

Tough-minded men get mushy in their sleep

And break the by-laws any fool can keep;

 It is not the convention but the fear

That has a tendency to disappear.

The worried efforts of the busy heap,

The dirt, the imprecision, and the beer

Produce a few smart wisecracks every year;

 Laugh if you can, but you will have to leap.

The clothes that are considered right to wear

Will not be either sensible or cheap,

 So long as we consent to live like sheep

And never mention those who disappear.

Much can be said for social savoir-faire,

But to rejoice when no one else is there

 Is even harder than it is to weep;

 No one is watching, but you have to leap.

A solitude ten thousand fathoms deep

Sustains the bed on which we lie, my dear;

Although I love you, you will have to leap;

Our dream of safety has to disappear.