

Reckoning & Redemption
An Interview
With Karen Palmer
By Jeffrey C. Robinson

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The BLOOMSBURY REVIEW

Hockey Sur Glace

Stories

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Imagine: a sweet little book about hockey. Yeah. A sweet collection of short stories and poems about a sport Canadian poet Al Purdy calls a combination of murder and ballet. Even the appearance of the book smacks *doux*. Its size is intimate, the whole as clean and tactile as a puck. The collection is bracketed by quotes at the beginning and end, like nets defining goals. And the cover sports a winter-lit, Brueghel-like photo by Bill Binzen, showing a pickup game on concourse ice.

To say that these stories are about hockey is misleading. They're about reflection, what might have been. Hockey is the pen. Yet underscoring all of it, as much as the action and involvement of the game, is its correlative: ice. It glistens as the perfect metaphor for several of the characters' detachment, their ability to deflect.

"Wellesley College for Women, 1969" is about loss of innocence and a future unknown. The narrator, a senior at Harvard, sets out from Cambridge for Wellesley for a Sunday hockey-skating-study date with his girlfriend Alice. He feels best that day playing hockey on the lake where he launches into some "wild wheeling and reversing," then loses everybody and scores. He attributes his betrayal of Alice while she studies to the events of 1969: "The world was crazy." Assassinations, Vietnam.

In another story, "Hockey Angels," a married man living in California with his wife and three daughters recalls two individuals he identified as hockey angels when he was a kid: one, a local boy, who fell through the mill-basin pond ice when the narrator was 11 in northern Rhode Island; the other, Brother John Connell, his American history teacher at the parochial school he attended. Brother John served with his order in East Pakistan for a couple of hitches until forced to return when the fighting proved dangerous. Both hockey angels knew peace in the face of adversity.

REVIEWER: Nancy Coggeshall

"Le Rocket Nègre" centers on one of the last river skaters from Montreal. Despite the nickname, Tommy O'Brian was not a true black. He was almond-colored, and his eyes were emerald green. The long pass of his life is covered from games on a frozen St. Lawrence River, where a freighter serves as a backdrop for a goal, to "a narrow lane of cobblestones that shone like turtle shells in the easy rain" on the Left Bank in Paris.

Hockey's spectacular slap shot is antithetical to the subject of "Additional Consideration," an academic treatise on the sleep shot. The slap shot is signaled by a windup at shoulder height and can exceed speeds of 100 mph. The sleep shot is used to connect sotto voce while skating around the inarticulateness of love.

The beauty of the story "The Injury" inheres in its rhythm—a sure, steady stride suggesting the momentum of a team warming up, circling the ice together in the skate.

The stream of consciousness is narrated by a factory worker, permanently benched by a Bauer blade that just happened to hit at the back of his right skate and

slice through the leather to the tendon and bone as smoothly as a razor blade through a bar of common bath soap.

LaSalle's appreciation of winter and ice is evident throughout.

In the thin sunlight of the December afternoons, everything ... took on the diluted softness of a watercolor.

There is also his awareness of the cultures in which hockey thrives. Mill towns in New England, winter clubs in Illinois.

But the theme expressed in the story "Van Arsdale's Pond," in which a group of boys go looking for ice, touches all the tales, lifting them above the locker room and the edge of the pond.

Concerning what became of somebody in life, as with what kind of ice you might find, there often seemed little more than sheer chance.

The title says "Hockey," but this is what the book is about.