Mosaic Orpheus
by Peter Dale Scott

Reviewed by Andrew Vaisius

The poems in Peter Dale Scott’s *Mosaic Orpheus* are mostly long, with a tendency to wander here and there. I would think that a poet who sees fit to include footnotes and bibliographies after a number of the poems might be a tad stuffy, or pretentious about his trade, but Scott certainly isn’t. The son of F.R. Scott – one of Canada’s first truly modern poets – Peter Dale Scott combines his politics with his poetics, and we are richer for it.

The poems are deceptively simple. One run-through is generally enough to crack their intention and meaning, but their brilliance comes after several readings. I travel past the obvious to the subtle interconnectivity of things in Scott’s world, while he travels as a senior citizen through the world with his sensitivity and wisdom up front:

the darkness deep inside us
should be like the jungle in Thailand

where we may acknowledge the presence
of unseen pythons and kraits

but our actual sensations

.........................

are of lazy butterflies
and flowering lianas) (166–7)

Scott writes as a Buddhist and a lover, world-weary but totally engaged and undefeated.

“What is life? This unpredictable, this surprise/ That liberates us. . . . / I’m seventy-four. Anything can happen.” (95) Those are words to live by, as is the implication of this statement: “What matters most is unrecorded” (176). Scott pushes us along in his search for truths rather than *the* truth, through Thailand, Berkeley CA, the Eastern Townships of
Quebec – wherever he is witness, however is his being. The only problem arises when his idiosyncratic world pretends to be conversant in the poetry of everyman and woman.

Still later Jack invited me
to think he might have been the “Carson”
who tricked Bill Pepper with the lie
discrediting his book on Martin Luther King

so that we still do not know for certain
who was behind King’s murder
any more than about the Kennedys’ (74)

That is a lot to bite off, let alone chew. It’s a Noam Chomsky genre of poetry. He takes it macro a page later when he writes:

The American dilemma: to heal this world
we must become intimate with it
but the search for political truth
will lead one deeper and deeper into falsehood (75)

Yet even that statement does not make Jack Terrell or Bill Pepper anything more to his readership than paper figures, compared to the powerful lives of King and the Kennedys. Do I have a life long enough to research his bibliographies and chase down his name-dropping? I’d rather that instead of referencing Naipaul, Yeats and Morton, Scott let the sunshine or starlight he wakes to wake us also to that distant light.

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