

COLIN BROWNE / Kingfisher Annex: An Excerpt

...that multiform pilgrim species, man.

Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade*

Time tells, time's table, a flock—shore horses, dunlins. Who asks! (Whose ask?) Time's ache. The flood of what roars in and out grips and lets go, taking, with it, us, and lets us, taking, take, narrows, furrows, currents, crusts, arches, tidings, herring gyros. How

prosper the tide, prospector? This fence braids the wind. Where the table was set, the sand is sick. Tears in flukes, flash scales, you'll, you are, accomplice. To the east of the fracture columns the old houses were torched to cinders by city hall and sod trucked in.

'My grandmother lived there,' he told me. Where that belted kingfisher. Tide tables all. The city in May 1938 would be terribly familiar. The Georgia Street towers that mimic San José, Costa Rica, in 1971, are props. Pluck them off their foundations and flick them

into the sea, and you'll find Vancouver as David Bolster saw it: vain; skin-deep; on the make; harnessed to the next boom, any boom. Geography's curse. You'd think scenery might exalt a chancer's brain. *Ego*, David knew, *Red Cap* better, and *gate*, to *gate*, well, from

school, and *gaiter*. Every man's a mark but every man's not greedy. Bewildered says it. Is everything that unfolds an accident, or a fluke of providence? Can one endure the alternative? The hotel in the city's lost heart stood unfinished for years, girders and rivets

rusting in the rain. The intersection's sarcophagus to a ridge where corms lie dormant still. A woman carries home animals' hearts wrapped in brown paper. Gulls grill wharves at the hill's foot. Across the water, the slope blotchy with what gored it. The covert joke

is, it's called the 'Persian Properties' now. In 1931, developers projected on the North Shore mountains a vast and profitable enclave for the preferred few—white, nominally Christian (servants excepted). The incentives? Cheap labour, impotent local Bolshies,

property values pickled in exclusivity covenants: one's own kind. Today, hedges rise to six feet only; local trees to twenty-five, none foreign. You'd not want to be hatched in the old millennium's shadow. Not that it troubled the infant David Bolster, uncaressed by

hands other than his own until a few weeks before Zola's *J'accuse!* Am I wrong that these words were once taught in Canadian schools: '*Mon devoir est de parler, je ne veux pas être complice*'? The North Sea entombed his parents about the time the *Condor* broke up off

Cape Flattery. Bolster and his sister, whom he'd never again see, were lodged with kin, in his case Aunt Yvonne and her consumptive husband in Leeds. He took up piano and the bicycle, and with a precocious affinity for Brahms became a regional prodigy. On 'The

Kingfisher', a set of gleaming tubes and spokes, he won the North of England Cup and was in training for *La Tour* of 1915. He detrained in Flanders the following winter, a Lieutenant in the 18th Cyclist Battalion. Bicycles were a hazard in the freeze-up; 'The

Mercuries' became deft puppeteers. Bolster and his tinkerers would slither toward the enemy lines in darkness, dragging spools of wire and life-sized millboard dummies.

They'd rig no-man's land like a stage, clipping decoys to overhead wires, then huddle in

craters, clips at their cuffs. In a blizzard, David once gripped the hand and wrist of a buried man, consoling him for hours before discovering there was no man. At dawn they'd heave on the tripwires, the silhouettes rose up from the grave, the Hun, startled,

exposed himself, and the artillery calibrated....

...What's more precious than land to, or for the living? Land for the dead. The living fend for themselves. In 1927, the *Eurana* rammed the Second Narrows Bridge, followed by the *Norwich City* in 1928, the *Losmar* in

1930, and, on September 13 of that year, a sailing vessel refitted as a log barge, the *Pacific Gatherer*, gathered the central span to its reward on the bottom of Burrard Inlet. The only span to the North Shore was out for four years. The District of North Vancouver filed for

bankruptcy, eventually falling into receivership. Talk turned once more to a first narrows crossing. West Vancouver, years earlier, had offered land in return for a bridge. Businessmen A.J.T. Taylor and W.S. Eyre came up with a proposal, and, miraculously,

an investor. Thousands of acres of first growth mountainside west of the Capilano River for twenty bucks an acre and back taxes. It's the duty of capital to encourage increase by maximizing profits and minimizing tax payable; the benefits of moving money to Canada

were clear to Rupert and Walter Guinness. In 1931, British Pacific Properties Ltd.—their Trust being the major shareholder—acquired the lower slopes of the mountain range at an irresistible price, and financed, at Depression wages, an eighteen-hole golf course, a

school site, sewers, roads, water lines and, notably, a handsome suspension bridge—the Empire's longest—a take-off ramp for golfers gathering steam on Georgia Street. To will a suspension bridge skyward, with cables taut and in tune, is a triumph. To fly men into

the air on catwalks with buckets of rivets, hammers and paint is a proclamation of faith. When the brothers first disembarked in Vancouver, General Maude was marching on Baghdad, where he announced: 'Our armies do not come into your cities and lands as

conquerors or enemies, but as liberators.' Rupert, now the second Earl of Iveagh, and Walter, the first Lord Moyne, returned in 1934 to eyeball their investment. At the Vancouver Club Taylor fed them sockeye and whiskey; they smiled and shook hands.

This was about the time that the *Velos*, a Greek vessel chartered by Yulik Braginski and his Irgun colleagues, managed to deposit 340 Polish Jews on the shores of Palestine without being apprehended by the Royal Navy. Dominion government approval for the

bridge took two years. The local Indian Agent and the Superintendent-General of Indian Affairs in Ottawa promptly sold a strip of land in the village of Xwemelch'stn, on Capilano Indian Reserve No. 5, to the First Narrows Bridge Co. with the blessing of

Section 48 of the Indian Act. An agreement was signed, a trifle offered in return. Not a crumb of land that changed hands that day, or previously, or in the years to come, belonged to any of the principals. Xwemelch'stn residents had no recourse, being

forbidden to vote until 1960 when John Diefenbaker, embarrassed by Commonwealth peers, amended the Electoral Act. Lord Moyne, a pal of the Churchills, became chair of a committee reviewing the *Cinematograph Films Act 1927*. He went after 'Quota Quickies',

closing loopholes that had sent Columbia Pictures north to the old Willows horse barns in Victoria to churn out a dozen 'British' B-movies. Ken Bishop's Central Films collapsed with two Rita Hayworth photoplays in the can. Victoria mourned. Lord Moyne went

sailing. The golf course opened to the public. In 1937, long after the boxes had been stolen or sold off and the remains destroyed, the Geographical Names Board of Canada named the mortuary island in Vancouver Harbour Deadman Island. Workers had long

since demolished the Skwx_wú7mesh villages of Chaythoos and X_wáyx_way in Stanley Park. Chaythoos was razed in the 1880s; the new ring road was graded with the bones of August Jack Khatsahlano's ancestors. He was about twenty then. 'We was inside this

house when the surveyors come along,' he told Major Matthews, 'and they chop the corner of our house when we was eating inside....' Over a hundred years later, not far from where the surveyor sank his axe, a TV reporter inquired of an elder whether

Vancouverites would be asked to return stolen land when claims were settled. The elder gazed at her. 'We've been here for thousands of years,' he said. The reporter tensed up. 'Look at it this way,' he said. 'This is our Jerusalem.' On July 7th, 1936, the shovels

came out; on March 31st, 1937, work began on the Lion's Gate Bridge. In Ottawa, just days before, the Canadian Defence Committee had assigned the Committee on the Treatment of Enemy Aliens on the Outbreak of Hostilities to compile names of alien

subversives, in concert with the RCMP. Hungarian-born sculptor Charles Marega had been lobbying Fred Taylor for the bridge gig, a couple of lions couchant at the span's south end. He needed the money. 'I would have preferred the lions to be in bronze or

stone,' he wrote, 'but it has to be cheap, so they will be done in concrete, which annoys me, as I could have otherwise have made both lions from one model.' He died two months after the installation, with eight bucks in the bank. One of the creatures is the

tomb for Fred Taylor's baby shoes. That year André Breton published *L'amour fou*. MOMA's Christmas show was 'Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism.' *Time* saw Breton as a thicket: he 'frequently dresses entirely in green, smokes a green pipe, drinks a green

liqueur and has a sound knowledge of Freudian psychology.' Untrue for the most part, and 'sound' insults, but the sartorial note might checkmate an infamous lumber jacket. David Gascoyne rendered Breton with clarity: '...our unceasing wish, growing more and

more urgent from day to day, has been at all costs to avoid considering a system of thought as a refuge.' What if you lived the spirit of his words? Is refuge like virtue? Breton later put the bruise on Gascoyne for flirting with God. Palestinian fedayeen ambushed

agricultural workers in March 1937 near the Jewish Colonization Association's Mesha colony in the Galilee. '... a party of British police with a Lewis gun arrived at the scene and drove off the attackers, killing one and wounding two others.' Here began the long

season of terror, of mutual bombings and assassinations, of carnage in public places, of reprisals—*'We have left undone those things whiche we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is no health in us'*—all to secure the claim of our

fathers, the right to plunder the other's graves. Who controls the land takes the upper hand. Blood, blood. The red smell of it. A pistol that year began its journey to Cairo. The First Narrows suspension bridge, pre-fabricated in Montréal, would be 1,550 feet long

with a high tide clearance of 200 feet, independent of temperature or load. Ten thousand tons of steel. As for his sexual being, David might have named its heat, but the nights flew by, and the days. And Jean? Sex was the unnamed third person in the room. For reasons,

perhaps, of their vocation and the failure of their ambitions, it became a habit, blessed by familiarity, to use their stage names. Their west was a two a.m. Chinese café, the cops, the drunks, the Friday night cowboys, poker players, politicians, Indians, the ghosts, the

girls. Streets were wide, windy, banked with snow. Jean spoke often of dignity. David observed a sandy-haired man shaving and wondered, 'What was it? What did he love? Why was he in a nation founded on no idea, in which what mattered most was concealed,

where obsequiousness, acquisition by stealth and repressed insolence were virtues?' Lord Moyne, who, with Lady Vera Broughton, was the first to cart a live Komodo dragon home to England, concluded a voyage and published a new book, *Atlantic Circle*, with

Lady Vera's photos. 'The journey of my yacht *Rosaura*,' he wrote (it being a 1210 gross ton former Newhaven-Dieppe packet), 'had certain definite objects, namely, to visit the pure-blooded Eskimos and the sites of extinct Norse settlements in southern Greenland,

to collect pottery and other archaeological specimens of central American cultures, and to make zoological collections.' He'd a ship's monkey. He was a grave robber, or a grave robber's boss. Who, pray, of our triumphant party, is not? In pine forests flickering with

siskins and chickadees, beside oceans pulsing with fish, gentleman adventurers ransack the precious necessities of the dead. On May Day, 1938, employed and unemployed men rallied at Lumberman's Arch on the site of the old village of X_wáýx_way to protest the

national assault on workers. Jack Lawson, the first Mac-Pap to return home, with the president of the Spanish General Worker's Union, and exiled novelist Ramón José Sender, gave a closed fist salute to fallen comrades. The slaughter, they said, has begun.

Between the beaches, workers were joining forms in the ferns for 6" gun batteries. When Dick and Sophie stepped down onto the platform on May 27th, supporters of the Relief Project Worker's Union still held the post office and art gallery. Dick and Sophie could

do the show in their sleep, and often did. They were due to go on that afternoon at the Victory in Vancouver, a grimy vaudeville parlour weeks away from demolition. That night, steelworkers would clamber to the peaks to secure the cables. Steel wire is

treacherous; it expands, kinks and flips in the hot sun. Onshore winds ventilate the narrows at dusk, and with rip tides racing, a splash of fins and a heron's craaok, steelworkers begin pulling and bolting strands, one-by-one, into the forty-ton concrete

anchors buried deep in the rock and under Xwemelch'stn. Tuned with a mallet, a tuning fork and a wrench, these are the strings of a 1,550-foot lyre straddling the narrows, its resonant chord humming out over the harbour. Dick and Sophie press against the

curtain; Sophie yanks at her skirt, Dick rubs his specs against the moth holes in his tunic. He's two days into a bout of Bell's palsy. The *Attratto*, ferrying 1400 refugees, is gliding through the Mediterranean night sans running lights, looking for a light on the beach. On

their first date at the Victory, the manager hired a pit orchestra—Great War veterans, if you believed the program—loyal sons of Britannia. Not one, a decade later, is alive. The fellow on the horn fell in while fishing. One was run over by his own Ford. At any rate,

times are tough. Dick glances at the Mrs. perched on the edge of her bench. Her son has rheumatic fever; with the old man gone she likes to speed up the numbers. She flips to the first sheet. Sophie peeks through the curtain. In December, 1941, a broken-down cattle

boat, the *Struma*, flying the Panamanian flag, anchored off Istanbul for repairs with 769 Jewish refugees aboard. Without a British guarantee of entry into Palestine, the Turks let no one ashore. For nine weeks, in desperate circumstances, they waited. The Rt. Hon.

Lord Moyne, now Colonial Secretary, claimed the problem was not Britain's; the quotas were firm. No concessions. They should return to Rumania. Turkish police boarded the vessel, a battle ensued and its boilers exploded, killing all but one, who swam ashore. No

attempt was made to rescue survivors. In 1942, Lord Moyne became Deputy Resident Minister of State in Cairo, then Resident Minister with responsibility for Persia, Africa and the Middle East. His foreword to Ronald McIntyre's *Films Without Make-Up* appeared

in 1943. On November 6th, 1944, Eliahu Bet-Tsouri, aged 22, and Eliahu Hakim, aged 17, members of LEHI—known as the Stern Gang—waited outside his Cairo residence, jumped onto the running board of his car and gunned him down. Attended by King

Farouk's physician, Walter Guinness, who'd spanned the herring-thronged narrows, did not last out the night. Bet-Tsouri and Hakim were hanged in Cairo the following March. A third man enters. His suit is not pressed. He's sweating, and sits away from the others

placing his hat on his lap. Jean looks at David, and nods to the manager's widow, who finds a sprightly syncopation in the first notes of 'Roses of Picardy'. A belted kingfisher, high on a cottonwood, leans into the wind. A grandson in Xwemelch'stn walks to the tide.

