

REVIEW OF *GLOUCESTERBOOK*
BY JONATHAN BAYLISS

Reviewed by Richard Amero

I am on my second read of the *Gloucesterbook* by Jonathan Bayliss (Protean Press, Rockport, Mass., 1992). What strikes me first is the author's wry approach to business, cultural, geographical and other—you name it!—matters. *Gloucesterbook* is not an easy read because style sometimes overweighs substance. Bayliss, or his narrator, suggests form determines content, which means whatever you want it to mean. (As Yeats puts it: "How can you separate the dancer from the dance?") Long passages of dialogue seem to be displays of learning—often made-up—or wit that has outworn its surprise. For an ex-Gloucesterite there is novelty in guessing the origins of the eponymous words Bayliss uses to describe the layout, history and some of the people who vitalized Gloucester. Except for Ipsissimus Charlemagne, also known as Charles Olson, historical ascriptions are unclear. Finding prototypes is, however, a guessing game that adds nothing to the novel. As with other writers, readers should take everything at face value and ignore or wrestle with symbolic implications . . . such as the archetypal creation of Ibi Roi, a Viking shepherd dog who is the center of a pack of dogs who do strange things at Vision Rock (read Whale's Jaw) in Purdeyville (Bayliss's name for Dogtown, which name he used to designate the real Gloucester.) Jack London gave Buck in *The Call of the Wild* some extra-dog (but not supernatural!) characteristics, but his canine was not as lovable and did not wag his tail as roguishly as Ibi Roi.

The average reader may be willing to ignore the problem of sources. (Who cares how much Shakespeare took from Holinshed?) Bayliss is, however, generally honest about acknowledging his indebtedness to previous writers. Herman Melville gets several nods, as does George Borrow, Laurence Sterne, John Keats, William Henry Hudson, Jack Kerouac, Hesiod, and Virgil. As far as I can discern Plato and Aristotle function as a source for jokes and puns. (Does St. Paul fare much better?) Without finding direct collaborations, one is tempted to find echoes of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Francois Rabelais, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Walt Whitman, D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and countless others.

If the book didn't interest me, I wouldn't be re-reading it, while also trying to extend my vocabulary and acquaintance with quantum physics and anamnesis by looking up esoteric references. The book begins by describing the problem of a business executive who is intent on writing a thesis to qualify for an MBA by way of a correspondence course conducted by Ipsissimus Charlemagne. (This Olson did not do!) Then it skips to the philosophical and sexual dilemmas of Caleb Karcist, a Gloucester native and sojourner, whose chief motivation has to do with homunculus erectus. Caleb is selfish and calculating and, like Bayliss, a master of saying many things simultaneously. He is involved with an Anglican-Benedictine Order as an altar boy (while he may or may not agree with the two ordained priests who are its main and only representatives in

Gloucester.) Both priests make money on Wall Street (the Graveyard) with Caleb playing a supporting role.

I take the theological parts seriously as, I suspect, does Bayliss. Maybe there is such a thing as counter entropy. Caleb, however, can't see beyond his phallic tumescence, which apparently is not formidable though he is circumcised and, on one occasion, a recipient of fellatio. His turn-down of a homosexual overture by one of the priests comes across as a magnificent defense of heterosexuality.

From consulting the Internet, I find that Jonathan Bayliss is a Democrat (Catholicrat) in politics who can write clear and short expositions using simple Anglo-Saxon words. His or the narrator's criticism of Republicans (Protesticans) in *Gloucesterbook* is lighthearted as is his critique of the changing economy of Gloucester in which developers and tourists are displacing Catholicrat low-wage factory workers and defacing man-made but festering artifacts. Surely there is much anguish and unemployment among "Cynics," or dog-loving, pilgrim-hating natives who chafe under the dominance of dog-hating, pilgrim-loving, Rate-of-Return oriented "Puritans." It is the never-ending battle between "Satanic mills" and "green and pleasant land" (God and Mammon?) that William Blake described in his poem **Jerusalem**, or so Ipsissimus (Maximus?) and Caleb (Caliban?) would have us believe.

Maybe readers may find sarcasm in Bayliss's use of Gloucester doings and scenes as a foil for Caleb and his mistresses, priests and drinking companions, but it eludes me. Perhaps in other parts of the trilogy man's inhumanity (or indifference) to man will get a going-over. Aside from abstruse flights into philology and joyful vignettes into sexual hanky-panky, glimpses into nature's change of seasons, and the thrill of being a passenger on a commercial airline, I found the descriptions of factories, wharves and machines to be exhilarating. Bayliss goes where few—even technical writers—dare to go. (I recall Communist writers who in Stalin's Nightmare specialized in this sort of thing.) The mechanical depictions of hoists, gears, bridges and iron works may not be transparent (some knowledge of geometry and trigonometry is required), but they convey an image of industry at rest and at work in soaring and wrenching terms. Such furor is the essence of Sturm und Drang.

There is much to like and to marvel at in this book. It is worth a third read.