



Book Review: Bring Me One Of Everything by Leslie Hall Pinder

By Gordon Hauptfleisch, BLOGCRITICS.ORG
Published 03:44 a.m., Friday, February 24, 2012

"I'm told there used to be the continual sound of singing on these islands and now silence."

These words from the journals of a legendary anthropologist constitute a tall order for depressed and directionless British Columbia writer [Alicia Purcell](#), who has been commissioned to write the libretto for an opera based on the life of the late [Austin Hart](#), the scientist himself. Having gained renown - or disrepute, largely depending upon cultural perspective - Hart, before he put a rifle to his head and pulled the trigger in the mid-1950s, cut down the largest remaining stand of totem poles in the world, ones he was trying to salvage but ones that originally belonged to the Haida tribes of the Queen Charlotte Islands.

As chronicled in Leslie Hall Pinder's third novel *Bring Me One Of Everything* forty-something Alicia - compelled to consult present-day Haida tribe members, Hart's friends and family, and his personal journals - tries come to terms with past-history sacrificing of the sacred, for the sake of museum exhibitions (and - not up for debate - the ultimate though unforeseen warehousing of the surplus). Included in the mix of all she meets is an old friend of Hart's who brings her up to speed on the spiritual realm the anthropologist and his associates were "in the thick of" - since the "real source of riches was in songs, in the stories, dancers wearing the [stone] masks."

If the method to the madness comes by way of music, Alicia is in her workaday element. Perhaps less so psychologically, as she finds herself preoccupied with the mystery and inscrutability of Hart taking his own life at the zenith of success, especially in light of her own suicide attempt during her 20s, the "major event" of her life that she "had not fully escaped." As she grapples with such personal issues - which also includes a touch-and-go reconciliation with her cancer-ridden but estranged mother Sophia, a broken-off romantic relationship long-gone sour,

a self-absorbed, "nervous and over-excited" composer, and her own demons and eccentricities.

Alicia suspects, as Pinder subtly traces, that any personal development comes with the professional territory. At first, shovel at the ready, Alicia's keen on commiseration, having a "cool, cerebral desire" to "find out what a person thought or what a person felt at that settled point of no return . I wanted to know how he had disentangled himself from all his commitments." But it isn't long before inspiration hits, the creative juices are gushing, and work has commenced in crafting words "precise enough to bring Hart alive in the libretto - that tough grappling with the language that I so loved searching for a word that might be just right, hoping it would be the abracadabra for his life." Indeed, it's like magic: "To use art to resurrect a dead man. For the first time, in a very long time, I felt the simplicity of happiness."



An emotion subject to change, of course. We've come to expect that Alicia is not usually in the habit of acting on such optimistic impulses on the rare occasions she has them, and when she does it may be rendered with Pinder's sly and understated humor: Upon a romantic reconciliation of sorts much later in the story, for example, Alicia reminds herself that "I hadn't really thought of sex since being in Vancouver. I'd been considering Sophia, illness, death - but not The Little Death." And anyway: "I was drunk. The Little Drunk," even finding occasion to giggle, though "I never giggled. I was regressing."

In any case, no matter how fleeting or simple the happiness is or isn't, there are plenty more pages to go, characters to meet, plot points to plot, and twists to turn, all in the endeavor to elucidate the intrigue and obsession that the

enigmatic Austin Hart holds for Alicia. What part does her careful scrutiny of his life and work - whether pedestaled or warts-and-all - play, if any, in the protagonist's true transformation? Is it exemplary enough to sustain it for an ingrained change, to turn Alicia around from being the troubled, suicidally-iffy loner she was at the start of the book?

With a sure-handed command that comes from [Leslie Hall Pinder's](#) previous experience as a lawyer defending native clients in the highest courts of Canada; and a craftsmanship gained from the writing of two previous and acclaimed novels, along with her current opportunity to devote to writing full-time - a fourth novel is in the works - there's a cohesive elegance and lyrical quality at play throughout this enticing read. The full narrative, marked by the author's flowing and seemingly effortless prose, makes for a rewarding mix of fiction and fact, complex and many-layered, immersing the reader into evocative hues of local color and a sense of place made vivid by Pinder's attention to detail and descriptive nuance. It's a little magical.

Or, to put it another way: [*Bring Me One of Everything*](#) is the abracadabra.