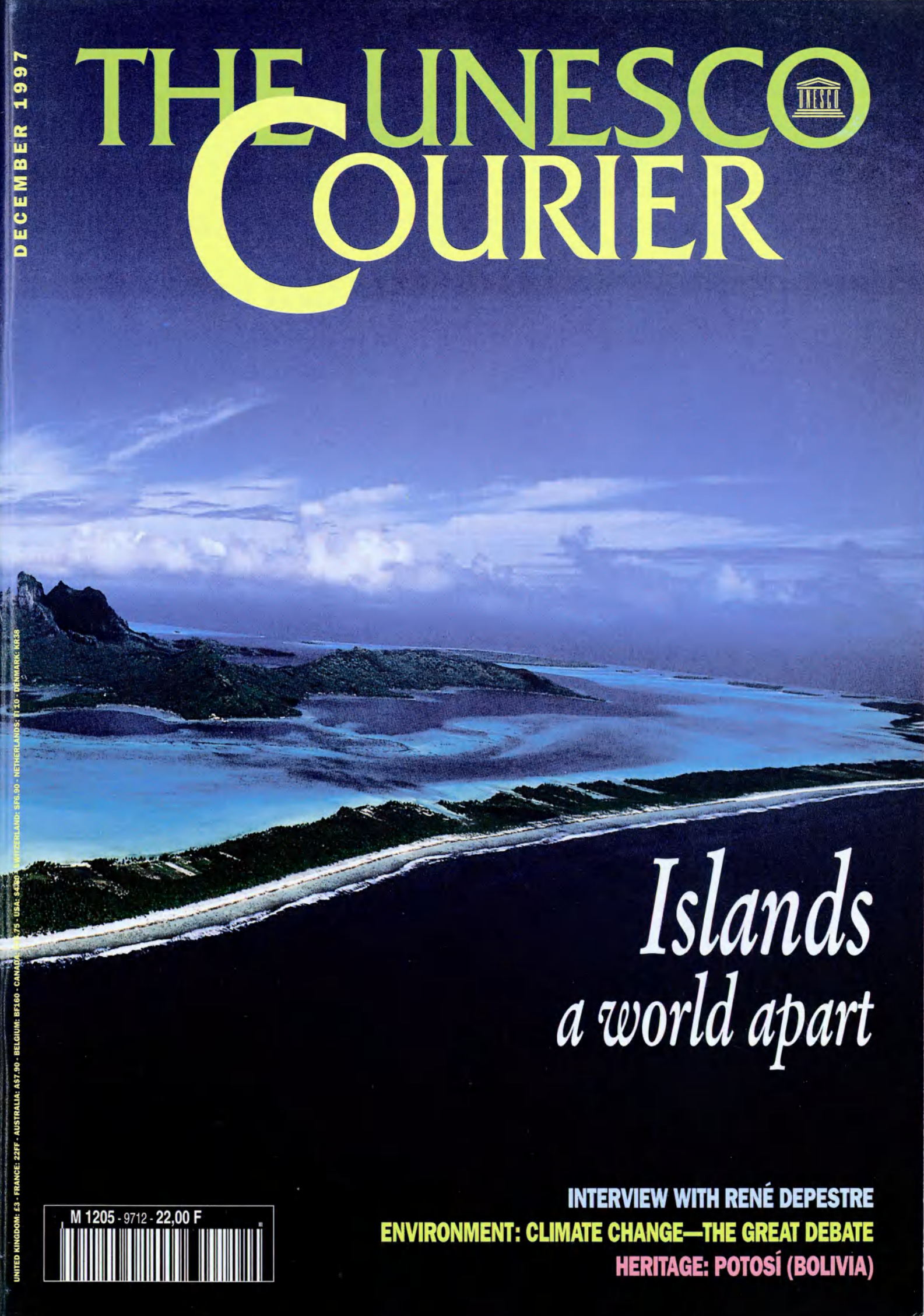


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## *Islands a world apart*

**INTERVIEW WITH RENÉ DEPESTRE**

**ENVIRONMENT: CLIMATE CHANGE—THE GREAT DEBATE**

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**international photo competition**

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The international jury for the competition on the theme of **Peace in everyday life** met at UNESCO Headquarters on 29 October 1997. It awarded the *UNESCO Courier - Nikon Prize* to:

**Eric Lesdema**  
for "War games"

It also awarded a *Special Jury Prize* to:

**Jordis Antonia Schlösser**  
for "Havana"

and honourable mentions to:

**Florian Haerdter**  
for "The Goutte d'Or quarter, Paris"  
and  
**Didier Lefèvre**  
for "Kabul"

The members of the jury were:

Chairman:

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writer

**Laurent Abadjian,**  
photo editor, *Libération* newspaper

**Manoucher Deghati,**  
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**Colin Jacobson,**  
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Director of *Autograph, the Association of Black Photographers*

**Keiichi Tahara,**  
artist/photographer

The prize-winning photos and those that particularly attracted the juries' attention during the shortlisting process and the final selection will be published in forthcoming issues of the *UNESCO Courier*.



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THIS MONTH'S INTERVIEW

**47**

**René Depestre**

*A noted Franco-Haitian writer looks back over his nomadic life.*



© Pascale Absi, Paris

HERITAGE

**36**

**THE TREASURE OF THE CERRO RICO**

by Pascale Absi

*An original folk culture in the mining city of Potosí (Bolivia), whose fabulous silver deposits once made it a byword for riches.*

# ISLANDS

## A WORLD APART

*Month by month* by **Bahgat Elnadi and Adel Rifaat** **5**

**Islands of the imagination** ..... **6**

by Robert Baudry

**Iceland's hidden fire** ..... **11**

by Thor Vilhjálmsson

**The Pacific: the coming of the ancestors** ..... **14**

by Antonio Guerreiro

**Solstice islands** ..... **17**

by Edouard J. Maunick

**The trials of Ulysses** ..... **18**

by Jacques Lacarrière

**What, my brother, is an island?** ..... **22**

by Lokenath Bhattacharya

**Easter Island's last secret** ..... **24**

by Luis Mizón

**Cuba's gold** ..... **28**

by Eduardo Manet

**Fact file** ..... **31**

Consultant: Luis Mizón

**Commentary Federico Mayor** **34**

**GREENWATCH Climate change: the great debate** by France Bequette **40**

**LISTENING Isabelle Leymarie talks to Steve Turre** **44**

**REFLECTIONS Funding a new home for Egypt's ancient treasures** by Samir Gharib **45**

**AUTHORS** **49**

**UNESCO COURIER INDEX 1997** **50**

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Bora Bora in the Society Islands (French Polynesia).

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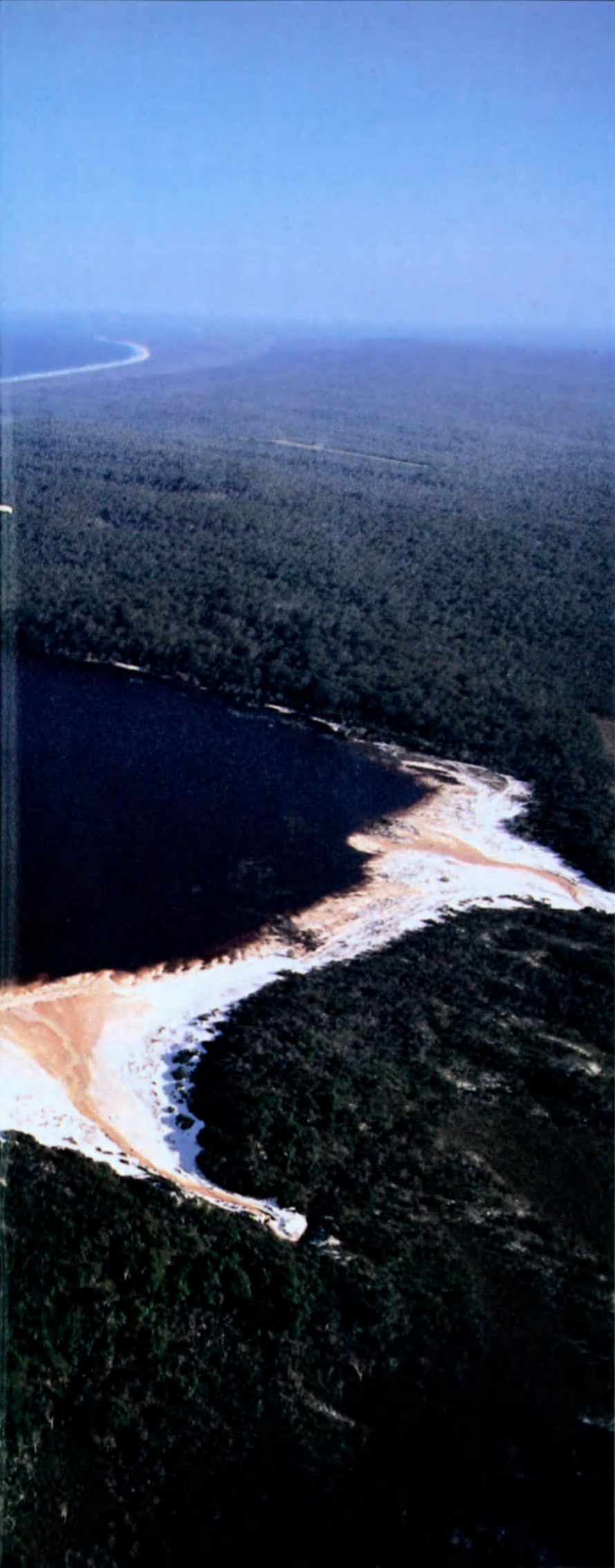
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between pages 2-3 and 50-51





## month by month

by Bahgat Elnadi and Adel Rifaat

Britain and Japan are island nations, economically powerful and highly influential in world affairs. But as islands they do not haunt our dreams. Jules Verne's mysterious island, Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island* and the island of Sindbad the Sailor on the other hand—though they do not exist—linger on in our dreams into adult life. This issue is mainly concerned with real islands that are also dream islands, with the myths that have been woven around them and with the interplay they generate between the imaginary and the real.

Islands are not the only things that inspire dreams. Deserts, mountains and twilight can also take us out of humdrum reality and lift us high above our everyday selves. But some islands inspire dreams with a very special quality of their own, the quality of evoking *wonder*. While the Sahara may be propitious to meditation, it does not fill us with wonder, as do Easter Island and Ithaca.

Why do such places have this very special, very elusive feel to them? Perhaps because it is possible to live on an island and feel one is living in another world, because the island-dweller's existence will never be an ordinary one. Islanders experience a sense of apartness, an awareness of the unreal within the real, of the permanent presence of the unexpected, a strange destiny in which every moment is an adventure.

Jacques Lacarrière puts it very well when he suggests that deep within this experience of a duality there may be a voyage into the deepest recesses of our own being, a long quest, starting out from what we believe ourselves to be, to discover what we really are, a winding odyssey that begins by taking us far away from ourselves and ends by bringing us face to face with the ultimate truth about ourselves.

Is our nostalgia for the wonderful island perhaps a metaphor for our yearning for the absolute? This is one of the avenues for exploration presented—with the compliments of the season—in this December issue. ■

# Islands of the imagination

BY ROBERT BAUDRY

## A guided tour of some of world literature's many fictional islands

Islands occupy a special place in our mythologies, often as the scene of mysterious or extraordinary occurrences. Being cut off from the rest of the world, they are depicted as sanctuaries where human contact can be fled and danger escaped, or as places of reclusion where atonement may be sought. Clustered together, they offer many a bay and inlet where boats can land. They may be the abodes of monsters. Upon their shores temples may be erected for the performance of bloody sacrifices; there, pirates may alight, bearing stolen treasures. Or they may be the last gateway to paradise.

Because of all these associations islands have always enjoyed special favour in the eyes of storytellers, particularly those who write of the supernatural.

But what is the supernatural? It may be defined as that which arouses in us a sense of mystery, a fascination before the revelation of Another World. This is the first theme of interest to us here—the division between our world and *another* world. But this other world is itself ambiguous: like Janus, it has two faces, one magical, the other monstrous.

### *Two different worlds*

Detached from the mainland, islands mark a separation from the everyday world. By their very nature, they suggest an individual identity, standing in opposition to a collective destiny. Representing in each case a world apart, turned in on themselves, islands are governed by laws different from those that hold sway in other lands.

Already in the thirteenth-century parody of Romance epic *Aucassin et Nicolette*, the place chosen to represent the very opposite of our world was an island, the island of Torelore, where women make war, where men give birth, and so on.

The mainland is the place of ordinary life; islands are where extraordinary things happen. They are the theatre of fabulous dreams, far removed from reality. Then again, where the mainland is represented in secular terms, islands embody the sacred, being the site of temples where sacrifices are performed—with good or evil intent. And in contradistinction

with our world of the living, islands often symbolize the inaccessible realm of the dead.

### *The solitude of islands*

The word "island" comes from the Latin *insula* and carries a sense of solitude, isolation, loneliness. A patch of land surrounded by the sea, a motionless boat washed by the waves, it is the perfect symbol of man, at once protected from his fellows and unhappily separate from them. Ambivalence again!

One thinks of course of all the Robinsons shipwrecked on a lonely shore, confined within a universe closed in upon itself. But, tellingly enough, the supreme example may be said to be Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Ill at ease in company, a lover of solitude, he sought refuge on the island of Saint-Pierre in the middle of Lake Biel in Switzerland, but found that the spot still was not isolated enough for his taste. So, having dispatched his lunch, he cast off in a boat which he left to drift upon the current. And there, in this floating island, lulled by the lapping of the waves, he gave himself up to daydreams that gradually developed into a trance of ecstacy (*Rêveries du promeneur solitaire*, 1782).

### *A place of refuge*

Small wonder then that this place of solitude has so often been seen as a refuge for those who wish to flee human society and all its trials.

What better illustration of this could be



"The embarkation of Tristan and Iseult", a miniature from a 15th-century manuscript of the Tristan romance.

A longer version of this article has appeared in *Ile des merveilles, Mirage, miroir, mythe*, Actes du Colloque organisé à Cerisy-la-Salle par le CERMEIL (Centre de Recherches sur le Merveilleux), L'Harmattan publishers, Paris, 1997.



A detail from *L'île heureuse* ("The Happy Isle") by the French artist Paul Albert Besnard (1849-1934).

© Giraudon, Paris. Musée des Arts décoratifs, ADAGP, Paris, 1997

found than that offered by the French writer Henri Bosco in *L'Enfant et la rivière* (1945). Borne away by the current to an island on the Durance river while asleep in a boat, the young hero discovers a quarry where cruel nomads are torturing a boy of his age. He sets him free and, stealing a boat, escapes with him to an oxbow lake off the river. There they shake off the fears aroused in them by their sinister pursuers. They thus find themselves doubly on an island: in stagnant waters protected by a wall of brushwood amidst hostile lands; and in a boat moored in those waters, forming so to speak an

island within an island. What surer refuge from the fury of those who would do them harm?

### *The island as a stepping-stone*

Such places can be reached only at the end of a long journey. This embodies a process of initiation which often leads the hero from one island to another, each representing a different experience, until he reaches the ultimate island, the *ultima Thule*, a fabulous land that the early European geographers regarded as the furthest northern limit of the known world. ▶

► Everyone knows Homer's *Odyssey* and *Sindbad the Sailor*, one of the episodes in the famous collection of Arabian tales known as *The Thousand and One Nights*. Fewer people know the early Irish epic known as *The Voyage of Brendan*, which recounts the maritime expedition of the ancient Celtic god Brendan, threading his way through a labyrinth of fabulous islands, each more extraordinary than the last, or the later *Voyage de Maëlduin*. Surprisingly, *The Voyage of Brendan* was to be adapted into Latin in the ninth century under the title of the *Navigatio sancti Brandini*, with the Celtic god becoming a Christian saint; and then, around 1121, into Anglo-Norman, by an archdeacon of Rouen, Benôit, before being widely translated and circulated in Europe.

### A place of atonement

But islands are not always shelters, refuges, havens of grace; nor momentary halts on the way to some other destiny. Enclosed by the sea, they can naturally serve as places of atonement.

What better example is there of this than *Robinson Crusoe* (1719)? It tells the story of a young man who, instead of minding his own business in England and earning a living like his parents, takes it into his head to follow a perverse bent for adventure. Providence therefore punishes him for the crime of scorning the pursuit of honest trade at home by casting him upon an inhospitable desert island, uninhabited by man or beast, without food or tools. Such is the real meaning that Daniel Defoe wished to give to his story. However, the old myth of the blessed isle exercised so powerful

a hold on his readers' imaginations that before long this place of purgatory came to be seen as a paradise and inspired a score of imitations, known generically as "Robinsonnades".

### The home of monsters

Offering as they do a setting different from that of the ordinary world, remote islands naturally lend themselves to visions of monsters who are assumed to be their denizens.

Thus it was that Ulysses was at one moment exposed to the danger of being turned into a swine by the perfidious but enticing enchantress Circe and, at another, shipwrecked on the island of the Cyclops where he ran a serious risk of ending up like his companions as the one-eyed giant's breakfast.

But perhaps the most fabulous catalogue of island monsters created by the fertile Celtic imagination as embodied in the visions of seafarers is to be found in *The Voyage of Brendan* and, in particular, in *Le voyage de Maëlduin*, which speaks of one island inhabited by starving ants as big as ponies and another by a fearsome horse with razor-sharp hooves bristling with blue claws.

Following this tradition of island monsters, later writers added their own: the creatures devised by a mad scientist in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) by H. G. Wells; the charming cannibals in *Typee* (1846) by Herman Melville on Nuku-Hiva in the Marquesas Islands; the loathsome figure of the sadist Vorski sacrificing and crucifying his victims on the sinister island of Sarek at the far end of the earth in *L'île aux trente cercueils* (1920) by Maurice Leblanc.



Right, detail showing Iceland (top left) and marine monsters from a map of Scandinavia by Olaus Magnus (1490-1557), a Swedish ecclesiastic and scholar whose history of the northern peoples appeared in many editions and translations.

© Jean-Loup Charnet, Paris. Institut Tesson, Paris



And in our own time, was it not on an island that the safari hunters discovered the abominable *King Kong*, the giant ape in the famous American film (1933) directed by Merian Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack?

### The home of fairies

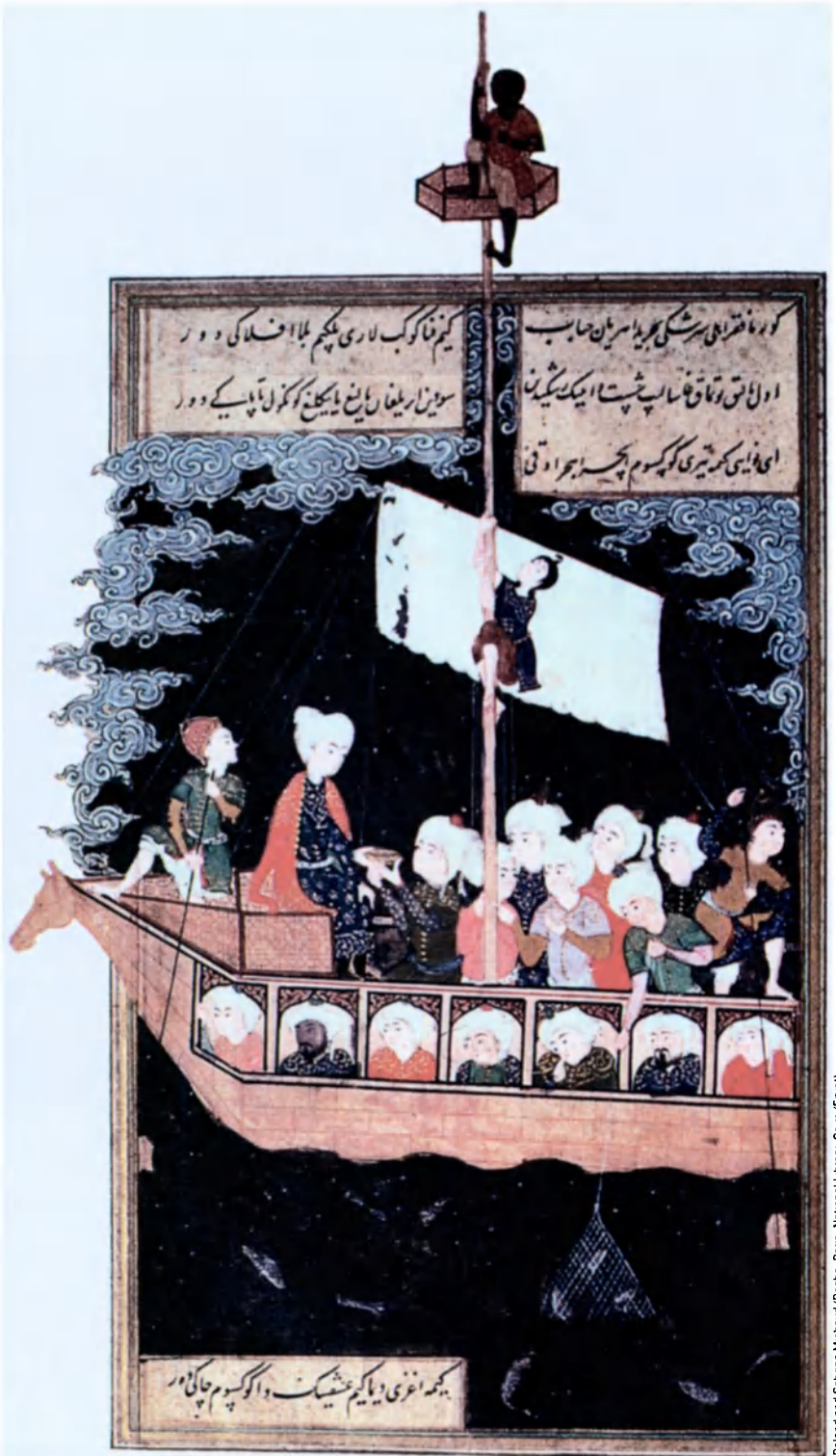
But just as, in the world of the imagination, islands may be depicted as being the abodes of monsters, so they may also be regarded as the home of fairies. The bewitching, terrifying Circe in the *Odyssey* finds a counterpoint in the friendly and helpful Calypso. The dangers and horrors encountered during *Le voyage de Maëlduin* alternate with wondrous experiences. On one island grow magical apples whose sweet juices provoke an ecstasy akin to death. On another there is a palace reached by a crystal bridge where a fairy woman dwells. She offers the companions a cheese in which, as in the legend of the Graal, each one finds the taste he most prefers in the world. For them, the three months they spend in the palace last three years and end only with the appearance of a fantastic bird, the bird of their regained youth. . . .

And what fabulous figures have been imagined by storytellers and writers: the fair *Iseult*, worker of miracles in Ireland, towards whom Tristan lets his coracle drift at the will of wind and waves; or the Fair Queen ruling over Andersen's *The Garden of Paradise* who perfumes with flowers the Island of Bliss, a delightful place where death is unknown and where the hero is carried by the east wind; or again, the charming female Robinson portrayed by Jean Giraudoux in *Suzanne et le Pacifique* (1921).

### Treasure Island

The secret wonders so readily associated with islands may thus be embodied in places of enchantment or fairy figures, but they may also take the form of fabulous treasures. The most perfect examples of islands containing such treasures are of course depicted in *The Count of Monte-Cristo* (1845) by Alexandre Dumas and *Treasure Island* (1883), by Robert Louis Stevenson.

This powerful myth still exercises its full fascination today. Pierre Mac Orlan in *Le chant de l'équipage* (1918) sends his hero to the West Indies in search of pirates' treasure, which he finally discovers much nearer home—an adventure similar to that which befalls the protagonist of Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clézio's recent novel *Le chercheur d'or* (1985). And why not also mention *Red Rackham's Treasure*, the strip cartoon adventure featuring Tintin drawn by Hergé, ever keen to revive the old legends that haunt us?



A 17th-century Persian miniature depicting a voyage by Sindbad the Sailor, a hero of *The Thousand and One Nights*.

### The last stage in an initiatory journey

So numerous are the horrors and obstacles bestrewn the path of the hero, so many exploits must he perform in order to reach his goal, that his progress towards his island destination often resembles an initiatory journey which culminates in a revelation.

Ulysses, embarked upon his circuitous journey that leads from one island to another, finally returns home where he is able at last to address the shade of his dead mother. Gilliat, by surmounting all the tribulations of cold, water, hunger, thirst and fear, achieves merit, only to be disappointed before finding ▶

© Roland and Sabrina Michaud/Rapho Paris National Library, Cairo (Egypt)

- ▶ a consummation in his fatal union with the sea, as related by Victor Hugo in *Les Travailleurs de la Mer* (1866).

Elsa Morante's *L'Isola di Arturo* (1957) also ends with an initiation which includes the ultimate ordeal, the revelation of the last and cruellest mystery of life. And in his allegorical tale *Al Hayy ibn Yaqzàn*, the twelfth-century Moorish philosopher Ibn Tufayl describes a kind of Muslim Robinson Crusoe who, after being abandoned as a child on an island close to India, is able by himself, in this place conducive to meditation, to discover the laws of nature and to penetrate intuitively to the mystic truths.

### The other side

We now come to the very edge of the world, where the other face of reality is revealed.

In Homer's *Odyssey*, the island of the Phaeacians, skilled seafarers accustomed to rowing from one world to another, embodies this idea of passing over, of moving from one reality to another. In *Le voyage de Maëlduin*, what the hero perceives is also an island, but a strange island divided by a wall. On one side of the wall are black sheep, on the other, white sheep. When a white sheep is moved to the other side, it at once turns black. When a black sheep joins the white sheep, it immediately becomes white. The wall is clearly a boundary separating two worlds.

### Paradise

All these islands are but ports of call, last outposts, places of initiation, gateways to the island of the Other World, final goal of the Adventure and of the Quest, crowning point of this labyrinthine journey. Islands of the Blessed in the Hesperidean gardens of Greek

mythology; *Emain Ablach*, the Faery Isle of the Celts, the Island of the Dead, from Procopius to Maurice Leblanc—such are some of the myriad guises assumed by the same theme.

It is always an ideal island, the island of another world. Where else indeed does *Gilgamesh*, the earliest Babylonian epic, place the terrestrial paradise, other than on a remote and inaccessible island, at the furthestmost limits of the Earth, beyond the waters of death?

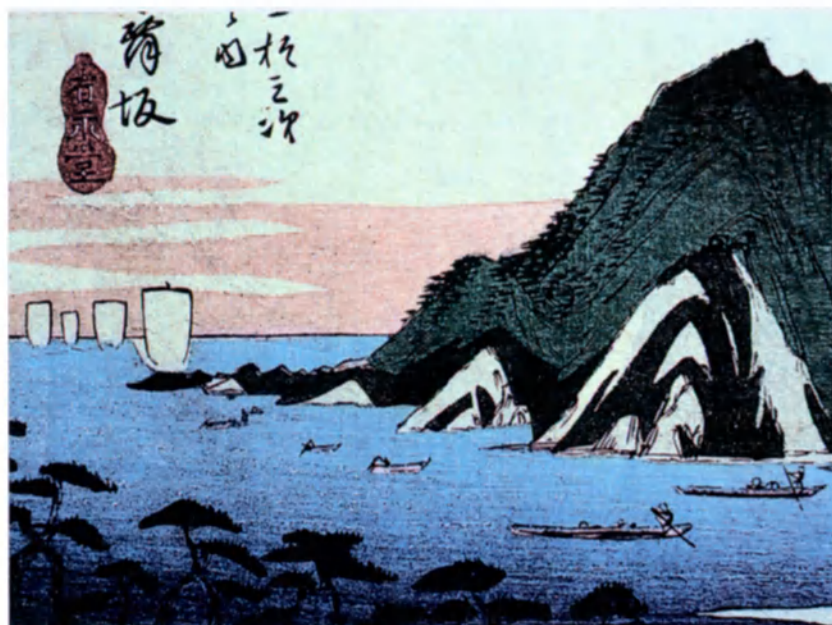
Why, from Plato to Aldous Huxley, from Thomas More to Tommaso Campanella, have the perfect cities of so many *Utopias* been located on islands? Surely for no reason other than a desire to leave behind the paltry routines of everyday life and recreate elsewhere the ideal city to which we aspire.

### Journey's end

We have been able to do no more here than touch on some of the huge number of works centred on islands.

It is none the less clear from the few examples cited that the myth of a wondrous isle has enjoyed such exceptional favour because it naturally lends itself to the traditional themes of the narrative art, particularly adventure stories and tales of the supernatural: escape away from and out of the world, sea and mountain, solitude and shelter, treasure, fairies and monsters, paradise and ecstasy, and many others.

All these themes form a kind of constellation with the island at the centre, around which they gravitate as though by magnetism, like so many planets around the sun. And these planets may in turn suggest other themes which, by association, cause us to envelop in mystery any island at all, no matter how ordinary in itself, and to identify it with the fabulous realm of myth. ■



A print by the Japanese artist Andô Hiroshige (1797-1858). It is one of a series entitled *Tôkaidô gojûsan tsugi* ("Fifty-three Stages of the Tokaido"), published in 1833-1834.

© Perno-Explorer, Paris

# Iceland's hidden fire

BY THOR VILHJÁLMSOON



© Ragnar Axelsson/Liaison Int/Hoa Qui, Paris

**The modern-minded traditionalists and hard-headed dreamers who live on an island of extremes**

Iceland. Not a very inviting name for the prospective tourist turning the atlas round with an indolent finger while looking for somewhere to relax. What can people make of it, especially since another country that reaches all the way to the North Pole and is little more than snow and ice is called Greenland?

But unalluring though its name may sound, Iceland is a country that invites and welcomes people who possess the gift of curiosity, are ready to use their eyes and ears, and let their sense of fantasy revel in the unique scenery that awaits them. People of the kind described in the Bible as “seeing they do not see and hearing they do not hear” would be well advised to go elsewhere.

People who live surrounded by sea have a particular way of perceiving themselves and the world. For Icelanders, the ocean has always been both an invitation and a deterrent—and in spite of modern technology it still is. Through the centuries young seafarers who braved its perils to reach other countries and other people passed a rite of initiation into adulthood. They

returned matured by their experience, accepted as people worth listening to, people with a tale to tell. Homecomers were ready to feel and understand more profoundly their own scenery, the magic of their own island.

For centuries the people of Iceland looked out at the sea and the sky from shore, cliff or mountain, their backs itching where wings tried to sprout. In the blue opening of the clouds on a overcast day they saw golden towers beaming at them, princesses winking from balconies, and crowd-packed streets. All the wonders of diversity lay before them. The courts of kings waited to be immortalized by the gift of poetry that ripens in solitude and grows in silence.

## *Loneliness and silence*

Behind them lay a vast country whose landscapes—by turns wild and protective, mild and fierce, hostile and gentle—are constantly being shaped by warring extremes. Fire lurks beneath the glacier's shining white shield where it meets the cloudless sky. You feel that nothing is ▶

Iceland, an island in the North Atlantic ocean, is a land of glaciers, volcanoes and geysers. The capital, Reykjavik, top, is located on Faxa Bay in the southwest of the island.



**Svartsengi geothermal plant, above, provides Reykjavik with hot water. The diversion of its surplus production into a lava field has given rise to the Blue Lagoon (foreground), whose mineral-rich waters have a temperature varying from 25 to 35°C.**

► remote and that you can see all the way to the end of the world. You see the lava-fields ruffled into contorted figures imprisoning eerie beings, monsters sacralized in stone, anguished souls waiting to be released from the purifying tortures of Purgatory. For centuries they have moaned in the wind as they watched the solitary traveller go about his business.

These travellers were richly endowed by the storytelling of their people—of their grandmothers, of the taciturn, reluctantly eloquent farmer-fishermen who were their fathers and grandfathers. They grew up in a demanding land which offered the senses food for observation and thought. They benefited from having to learn very early how to survive the sudden whims of unpredictable nature, and bear the burden of loneliness and silence amidst the wind's roar. The distance between one farm and the next may be so great that you have time, while crossing a mountain or finding your way through a blizzard, to compose in your mind a yarn to tell the people on the farm you are making for and satisfy their hunger for news, for words, for sagas.

Telling stories has carried the Icelanders through the centuries, through good times and bad. It was in Iceland that the Sagas, that body of universal literature, were written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, mainly in a language that could be easily understood in all

the countries of the north, as well as in Viking settlements in Ireland, Yorkshire and other parts of the British Isles, and in Normandy.

It has actually been said that Icelanders do not take any fact entirely seriously unless it can be used in a story or a poem. On a superficial acquaintance, this may not seem true of modern Icelanders who seem to be absorbed in the superfluities of fashion, technological gadgetry and other wonders of modernity. But it is part of our nature, a result of the fact that we lead double lives, being at the same time ultra-modern and ancient, natural and supernatural, surrealistic dreamers and super-realistic technicians.

### *The Viking spirit*

It is often said that Icelanders can trace their ancestry back to the Viking seafarers who came from rocky northern countries and learned how to build boats that elegantly resisted the fury of the raging Atlantic. The Vikings had already sailed southwards and eastwards before settling in Iceland. They had penetrated into the vastness of Russia, voyaged up the Seine to Paris, and journeyed to Sicily and Rome. Then, with only the stars to guide them, they found this strange island and settled there. Before that they had made landfall in Ireland and took slaves from this civilized nation with a rich literary tradition.

In 930 the settlers in Iceland established the Althing, today the world's oldest parliament. In the year 1000 paganism was officially renounced and Christianity was accepted. The slaves brought from Ireland merged with the Viking people, losing their language but fertilizing their masters' creativity. Civilization develops as the vanquished enrich their rulers' souls and become the ultimate victors.

In 1262 we lost our independence to the Norwegian king and later to the Danish kingdom, under which we remained as a kind of colony. Our situation gradually deteriorated and a chapter in our history ended in 1550 with the downfall of the Catholic church, which had been the only effective bulwark against foreign royal power and colonization. With Protestantism we moved into the dark ages of our existence. "Everyone died who could", says a character in a book by our Nobel prize-winning writer Halldôr Laxness. Our *risorgimento* was partly due to an explosion of poetry and romanticism in the last century led by realistic leaders who gained first autonomy in internal affairs, then home rule at the turn of the century, virtual independence by the end of the First World War, and

finally the re-establishment of a completely independent republic in 1944.

After independence Icelandic society was jerked out of its medieval pattern of life and work. Until then life had been limited to herding and cultivating barely fertile ground, rounding up sheep in autumn and bringing them home from their summer mountain pastures. As the men of the farm cut the grass, they would recite epic poems whose words were carried away by the wind. Serious conversation was rare with anyone except your dog and, on Sundays, your horse. On the rare occasions when a foreigner appeared in your farmstead he was led into your lowly grass-thatched abode and then you sent for the clergyman to converse with him in Latin. For centuries, fishing was done by small crews in rowing boats.

This may be all behind us, but it is still within us. Our isolation has been definitely broken. Now we go up into the mountains to seek anew its ancient privileges, and recharge our spirit in the wilderness beside a rushing brook while torrents roar in canyons in the background and the colours explode into our eyes. ■

Rugged moorland landscape of Manalaugard in the south of Iceland.



© Boursiller/Dureux/Hoa Qui, Paris

# The Pacific: the coming of the ancestors

BY ANTONIO GUERREIRO

Creation myths and ancestor worship are widespread in the Pacific islands



© Antonio Guerreiro, Paris

A ritual canoe race on Iriomote in Japan's Ryukyu Islands. It takes place during Shichi, a festival held to obtain a new year blessing from gods and ancestors.

The world of islands that is the Pacific Ocean embraces very many different cultures. But from the Ryukyus of Japan, to Samoa and Tahiti, local mythology largely agrees on how the islands came into being.

In the Japanese archipelago of Yaeyama, rituals and oral tradition recall the customs of Oceania. A myth current in one of these islands, Ishigaki-jima, tells how the gods and the ancestors created them.

Once upon a time, it goes, the sun god

ordered another god, Amang, to come down from the sky to create an island on earth. Amang did so and mixed sand and earth with the end of his spear. From this mixture, the first island sprang. Then, in the pandanus palm forest which grew up on the island, he created the hermit crab, *amang-cha*. Next he gave the crab human seed, and a pair of human beings, a man and a woman, eventually emerged from the crab's hole in the sand.

On the west coast of the neighbouring

island of Iriomote-jima, the inhabitants use annual events, such as the year-end *sabani* canoe races, to invoke the blessing of the gods and the ancestors for the coming year. Such benediction is in the form of the *yuu*, which brings prosperity and plant growth from beyond the horizon, from the sky or from the deep—vague places where the gods and the ancestors also live.

At the festival of Soru (in the seventh lunar month), the dead and the ancestors are invited back to the village, to the houses where they were born. There they receive offerings, and celebrations in their honour go on for three nights. A group of masked young people, the Anggama, conjure up through dance the community of the dead and the ancestors.

### *From nature to culture*

The man and the woman from the story of the creation are the ancestors of those who settled in the Yaeyama islands. Many variants of this myth are to be found in the islands of Hateruma, Taketomi and Miyako. Among the Austronesians of Belau, Samoa and Tahiti, the creation is seen in a similar way—out of chaos, with life descending from the sky to the earth



**A modern wooden figurehead from an Asmat dugout canoe. The Asmats are a fishing people of New Guinea.**

© Charles Lénars, Paris Jayapura University museum

or the sea. In the stories, small sea creatures such as fish, crabs, worms or shellfish give birth to a child or to the first human couple.

Often the couple consists of a brother and a sister, whose incest becomes the foundation of human society. The couple's first child is usually an aquatic creature or an incomplete human being.

In the Ryukyu Islands as in Polynesia, these myths go along with stories about floating islands or floating lands that the gods have immobilized through various stratagems to create the world of islands which humans gradually settled. The creation myths usually present this settlement as a transition from nature to

**A canoe race held during a folk festival in Papeete harbour, Tahiti (French Polynesia).**



© Bruno Barber/Hémisphères, Paris



Ritual offerings are made to the tutelary god on the island of Iriomote (Ryukyu Islands, Japan). Far left, the offerings being prepared by the priestess. Left, the "divine family"—the priestess, her brother and two assistants—during the prayer ceremony.

Below left, a stone *tiki* on Huahine in the Society Islands (French Polynesia). The *tiki*, a highly schematic engraved or sculpted portrait of a man, is a widespread feature of Oceanian art.

► culture. They hark back to the way of life of ancient maritime communities in Southeast Asia and on the edges of the East China Sea, based on fishing and gathering seaweed and shellfish.

### *The original link*

For the Pacific peoples, genealogy, traced from a founding ancestor, establishes an order of precedence among all the clans and descendants or "houses" which make up an island society. Such genealogy is part of the "framework of origins" which brings together the status of

communities, social ranks and individual titles according to criteria legitimized by myths and ancient stories about settlement of the islands.

The Polynesians "remember" the ancestral migrations which brought them to the islands where they now live. Oral history preserves the names of major ancestors who came from the other side of the ocean and are revered as gods. All the details of these voyages (the names of canoes, the chiefs, priests and the famous artists, as well as the objects, plants and animals they brought with them) are familiar to the descendants of the founders.

In the minds of the indigenous peoples, the origins of the islands and their settlement are connected. This link is ritually reaffirmed at great annual festivals. Veneration for ancestors permeates all social life. Once upon a time they came from the sky and the sea, and now they turn up in the islanders' dreams, enabling the living to communicate with the spiritual world of gods and impersonal natural forces.


These relationships with the ancestors take many forms. Some prestigious goods, like ceremonial objects or those used in rites such as births, marriages and funerals, have a collective value, because they make the link between the ancestors and the living—the transmission of spiritual power (*mana*), the ancestors' blessing of the living.

Depictions of ancestors, whether full-face, sitting or standing, are among the most powerful works of art in Oceania. In wood, stone or ivory, they are found from eastern Indonesia to Polynesia. The finest and most dramatic examples are on the eastern edge of the Pacific, on Easter Island, where the huge *moai* erected on dry-stone terraces by the shore recall the *mana* of the divine ancestors to which the inhabitants of the island once gave sacrifice. The long-eared *moai* look out across the sea whence the spirits of the ancestors came, sentinels of the route they took.

Opposite page, the shores of Whitsunday Island, Queensland (Australia).







# Solstice islands

BY EDOUARD J. MAUNICK

Departing sun darting into abysses  
who know that lands to lands are joined  
that beneath the vast ocean vestments  
roots advance from islands to peninsulas  
from archipelagos to continents from here all  
around  
that everything and everyone come together  
from east to west from pole to pole  
in a singular place of transient flesh. . . .

what can be seen other than the trace  
of a long immemorial journey  
with the equator as unique compass  
and You and me and Us and the Others  
sailing between life and death  
thinking we know it all and knowing nothing  
betrayed by the witch of History  
with her deep draughts of fake solitude. . . .

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(Two stanzas from "Les îles solstices", a poem  
published in *Désert-Archipel* [1983] by  
Edouard J. Maunick. Translated from French by Michael  
Fineberg)



© Bridgeman/Giraudon, Paris British Library, London

# The trials of Ulysses

BY JACQUES LACARRIÈRE

There are more than 1,360 Greek islands. Many are just bare rocks, home to a few seagulls. Others are a little bigger but have no water or other resources. They too are uninhabited, except by wild goats and seals. I've been to many of these small islands and always come away with the same feeling of having lived for a few hours like one of my great childhood heroes, Robinson Crusoe. I feel like that even if I know lots of other people have been there before me.

I would sit on an outcrop a few metres above the sea, amid bushes of thyme and oregano buzzing with bees, and watch fishing boats and yachts pass in the distance. They couldn't see me. Mocking, crabby-sounding gulls wheeled above me, staring and shrieking at me, even louder when I went near their nests. Their agonized cries always sound like the laments and entreaties of desperate people, which explains the old Greek belief that these

creatures were actually people changed into gulls as a result of a curse.

There is nothing imaginary about these little islands, but their unusual, unexpected or odd appearance and the danger they represent for sailors must have won them an aura of uncertainty and mystery from the earliest times. People also wonder why some more than others among the hundreds of islands in the Aegean Sea have given rise to enduring legends of Greek folklore.

Take Anaphi, a small volcanic islet between Crete and Santorini whose name, already known in ancient times, means "island of revelation". It has practically no vegetation and just a port and a village and a single spring. The island reputedly rose up out of the sea on the orders of Apollo to give refuge to the Argonauts caught in a night-time tempest.

Legend says the Argonauts saw the island when a huge flash suddenly lit up the whole



## A modern poet's fresh interpretation of the meaning of the Homeric hero's epic voyage

"Ulysses and His Companions Embarking after the Trojan War", a 14th-century Italian miniature.

sky and revealed it to them. The same kind of thing is said about many islands in the Mediterranean and in all seas in volcanic areas of the world—islands that suddenly rise up and then disappear as quickly as they came, but are never forgotten.

To the ancient Greeks, islands were not the product of natural phenomena but were usually the result of a god's wish. Hence the idea of their uncertain destiny, that even the biggest and apparently most solid of them could suddenly slip beneath the waves like Atlantis. They are shifting universes, unstable and threatened, at the mercy of the elements and the whims of the gods. Zeus himself couldn't make a whole continent disappear at once, but an island he could.

And so the Greeks' dream island is also a utopia from which danger and uncertainty have been banished, islands of tranquillity in a chaotic world, isolated but also protected, places where you can live off your own resources. In short, a paradise where nothing is forbidden, where there is no serpent and above all no surveillance or interference by the gods.

World history is full of imaginary islands. They include Alcina (in Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*), Altruria (in William Dean Howells' novel *A Traveller from Altruria*), Antangil

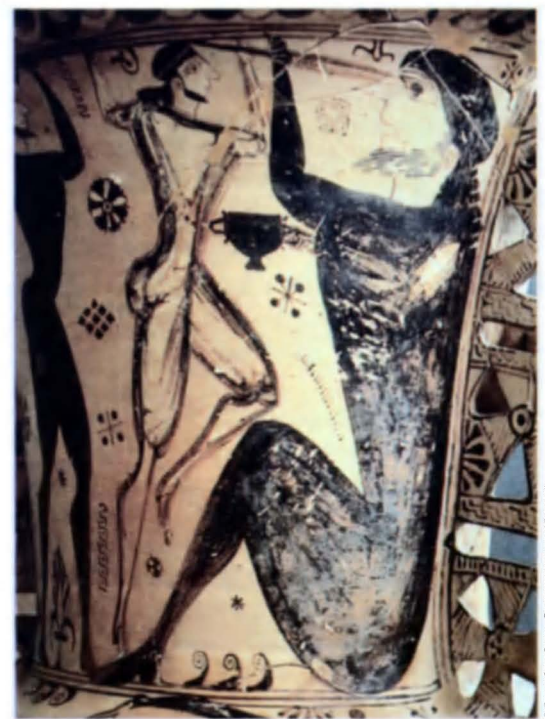
(in Joachim du Moulin's *History of the Great and Admirable Kingdom of Antangil*), Atlantis (described by Plato in the *Critias*), Balnibarbi, Laputa and Glubdubdrib (in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*), Barataria (dreamed up by Cervantes), Bensalem (in Francis Bacon's *Nova Atlantis*), the Island of the Blest (described by Lucian of Samosata in his *True History*), the Island at the End of the Earth (Edgar Allan Poe), Edgar Rice Burroughs' Caspak, Circe's island and Calypso's island in the *Odyssey*, Ikaria (in Etienne Cabct's *Icarie*) and the island of the Immortals (Jorge Luis Borges).

I will stop the list here, at the letter I, because it will take too long to get to U and the distant lands of Utopia and anyway the letter I is especially interesting when talking about Greek islands.

### An epic homeward journey

Only three of them start with I—Ios, the supposed birthplace of Homer, Ikaria, where Icarus is said to have fallen to earth on his flight from Crete, and Ithaka, the birthplace of Ulysses. Of the three, Ithaka has played a key part in Greek dreams about their islands. Ulysses' wife Penelope was also from there, as was his son Telemachus. It was where the voyage to Troy began and where it ended. In Homer's epic, it was the ideal island—a place to settle, but also a place you left and returned to, a place apart from the world but living from its links with it.

Ulysses is an excellent example of an inhabitant of such a place—someone often away from the island, sometimes exiled, someone who felt intensely homesick. This was even the first ▶



Polyphemus the Cyclops has his eye put out by his prisoner, Ulysses. Detail from a 7th-century-B.C. Greek amphora.

© Dagli Orti, Paris, Eleusis Museum (Greece)

► meaning of nostalgia, a Greek word which means pain or longing (*algos*) to return home (*nostos*). To be or feel nostalgic is to want to return to your native land, which time or distance separate you from and which becomes, in the hearts and dreams of faraway sailors, what was later, in the songs of the troubadours, the dream and the desire for the distant princess.

So what about Ulysses the nostalgic? At the end of the Trojan War, after ten years away, Ulysses wanted only one thing—to return to Ithaka, his island, and get back his throne and his Penelope. But the pride, the touchiness, even hatred of the gods got in the way. Poseidon, god of the oceans, did not forgive Ulysses for causing the defeat of the Trojans through his invention and use of the Trojan Horse, and did all he could to stop him returning to Ithaka.

With a fair wind and fine weather, a good boat would take a month and a half to get from Troy to Ithaka. It took Ulysses ten years, during which he lost all his companions one after another and endured a whole string of mishaps which are still an epic catalogue of the monsters and marvels of the sea.

But the point about this eventful homeward voyage is that it was precisely when he reached Greek waters, where everything should have been perfectly familiar to him, that he encountered all the monsters and marvels in an entirely imaginary context.

Don't look for the Laistrygonian islands, the land of the Cyclopes, the rocks of the Sirens, the palace of Circe or Calypso's cave. They're everywhere and nowhere. Each rock, creek, gully, cove, gulf or bay, every mountain, cave, ravine or gorge can conjure them up. Even the land of the dead where Ulysses ventured after visiting the palace of Circe can be identified as several places in Greece and Italy.

### *A voyage of self-revelation*

But the striking misfortunes which befell Ulysses turned what was to have been, or should have been a routine journey into a voyage of personal initiation and self-revelation. He did not, like other sailors, just have to face the sea, the wind, the waves and the tempests, or just human or natural enemies. He came face to face with the inhuman, the horrific, even the hellish.

Navigation has never involved such challenges and excesses and only Ulysses and his mythical cousin Jason had to confront these extraordinary things, running into and grappling with the creatures of imaginary worlds. At some points in the *Odyssey*, you get the feeling that Ulysses, like Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, is passing through the looking-glass of reality to find himself on the other side of time and space.



Every journey should have a purpose and every dream a goal. For a long time, perhaps since the beginning, the trials of Ulysses—whether instigated by Poseidon or due to the negligence or foolhardiness of Ulysses' companions—have been regarded as obstacles, delays and arduous detours on his return journey. As time wasted fighting monsters, avoiding the Sirens, consulting the dead and even falling into the lily-white arms of Calypso.

Everything in fact—weather, companions, monsters and gods—seemingly conspired to stop the islander from returning to his island. Ulysses' hopes and strength were worn down by these struggles. After so many years, what is the value of a king without subjects, a husband without a wife, an islander without an island? Without Ithaka, Ulysses was like someone with a vital organ missing. He lacked all that he needed—homeland, subjects, wife and palace—in order to become again what he had always been: a ruler.

But heaven and earth conspired against him and a relentless god brought storms. All the challenges posed to Ulysses by monsters and phantoms, the illusions and the shadows that he had either to outwit or fight head on and that are seen as so many perhaps inevitable delays on his journey home were also, when the story of the voyage was told, so many songs, expectations and hopes in the hearts of listeners and later, of readers.

### *An inner journey*

There is another possible interpretation—a stronger and more solid one, I think—of these tragic and turbulent travels, with the constantly-delayed return and the endless ordeals. It was made at the beginning of this century by a Greek Alexandrian poet, Constantine Cavafy, in a poem called *Ithaka*, which lays bare the hidden meaning of the myth by shining an unexpected new light on the trials of



"The Return of Ulysses", a 15th-century painting (Siene school) on a large Italian wooden coffer or cassone.

Ulysses the islander. Cavafy said the real meaning of the *Odyssey* was that the things sent to try Ulysses were not obstacles to his homecoming but vitally enriching detours so that he would return to Ithaka matured by his victories and the things he had learned.

Ulysses left Troy as a soldier, a sailor and a war hero and finally reached Ithaka after learning the secrets of life, death, strength and wisdom. He left as a man and returned as Man. The trials not only hardened him but changed his spirit. He triumphed over brute force (the Laistrygonians), over monsters (the Cyclopes), over magic spells and having his men turned into animals (Circe), over feigned seduction (the Sirens) and even the irresistible charms of love with the nymph Calypso. So to his warrior feats at the gates of Troy, he added the triple crown of wisdom, truth and love. Through his trials, he had a complete experience of body, heart and mind.

Cavafy said the real purpose of the voyage was not to arrive but simply for it to take place. For Ulysses, it was as much a return to Ithaka as a long, vast and fertile return to himself. Cavafy obliges us to re-read the *Odyssey*, the greatest poem of discovery to be written about the sea, in this completely different light. Ithaka is the opposite of a promised land. It is a conquered land, conquered from the elements and from worldly illusions. A land conquered through the slow, difficult but inspiring lessons learned from encounters with monsters, women and islands.

You who dream of being Ulysses, remember that if you meet a Circe, a Calypso or a Nausicaa, you will one day have to leave them if you want to find your Penelope again. And when the trials are over, the sea will murmur to the Islander on the shores of the rediscovered Ithaka the names of those he had to vanquish or love before he could become a man. Like the Nereids of the foaming sea and memory, like the spray of the waves, healers at last.

Here is this magic poem:

*When you set out for Ithaka  
ask that your way be long,  
full of adventure, full of instruction.  
The Laistrygonians and the Cyclops,  
angry Poseidon—do not fear them:  
such as these you will never find  
as long as your thought is lofty, as long as a rare  
emotion touch your spirit and your body.  
The Laistrygonians and the Cyclops,  
angry Poseidon—you will not meet them  
unless you carry them in your soul,  
unless your soul raise them up before you.*

*Ask that your way be long.  
At many a summer dawn to enter  
—with what gratitude, what joy—  
ports seen for the first time;  
to stop at Phoenician trading centres,  
and to buy good merchandise,  
mother of pearl and coral, amber and ebony,  
and sensuous perfumes of every kind,  
sensuous perfumes as lavishly as you can;  
to visit many Egyptian cities,  
to gather stores of knowledge from the learned.  
Have Ithaka always in your mind.  
Your arrival there is what you are destined for.  
But do not in the least hurry the journey.  
Better that it last for years,  
so that when you reach the island you are old,  
rich with all you have gained on the way,  
not expecting Ithaka to give you wealth.  
Ithaka gave you the splendid journey.  
Without her you would not have set out.  
She hasn't anything else to give you.*

*And if you find her poor, Ithaka has not  
deceived you.  
So wise have you become, of such experience,  
that already you will have understood what  
these Ithakas mean.* ■

(From *Six Poets of Modern Greece*. Chosen, translated and introduced by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard. Published by Thames and Hudson, London, 1960 © Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard 1960)

# What, my brother, is an island?

BY LOKENATH BHATTACHARYA

Where the waters  
of the Ganges  
meet the ocean

■ The memory of a folk-song heard in childhood, in a dialect of Bengali, comes back to me:

What, my brother, is an island once you've left it?

It's nothing, nothing, nothing.

What, my brother, is an island if it's not yourself?

In our ancient texts, too, insularity is the self, covering and surpassing the universe. They describe Jambudvîpa (island of Jambu) as one of the seven immense insular land masses, all symbols of fertility and abundance and each surrounded by one of the seven seas of salt water, sugar-cane juice, wine, clarified butter, curds, milk and fresh water. Jambudvîpa is

India itself, marked at its centre by the golden mountain Meru, on which stands an enormous *jambu* (rose-apple) tree.

Another tale almost as old as eternity describes the meeting of the Ganges with the ocean. The Sanskrit epic, the *Mahâbhârata*, tells how the sage Kapila, lost in meditation in the nether world, burned to ashes all the 16,000 sons of Sagara, a king of the Solar race.

Another sage, Bhagîratha, through long asceticism and persistent prayers, made the river Ganges descend from heaven to sanctify the victims' ashes, thereby creating the ocean, one of the Sanskrit words for which is *sâgara*, from the name of the king, Sagara.

To celebrate that sacred event, a three-day

Pilgrims sailing to the island  
of Sagar in the Ganges delta.





A sandbank in the Ganges near the Indian city of Kanpur.

© Raghuraj Singh/ANA, Paris

bathing festival and fair are held each year on the Indian island of Sâgar near Calcutta in the Ganges Delta, a huge, low-lying, densely populated, fertile area belonging partly to India but mostly to Bangladesh.

The delta's westernmost island, Sâgar is awesome and mysterious in appearance, and regularly swept by cyclones. It is here that the Ganges once met the ocean, and although strictly speaking the ocean is now further away, sky and water remain the island's all-pervasive backdrop.

The festival is attended by many millions of people—devotees, saints, frauds, cheats, tourists, all combined—representing all Hindu sects and all the states of India. Some of the *sâdhus* (holy men) who make the pilgrimage to Sâgar are ascetics who stay naked all the year round and practise the most rigorous physical disciplines. They live as hermits, and this pilgrimage is the only occasion when they leave the isolation of their caves in the Himalayas, where the descent of the Ganges originally took place.

The island and the pilgrimage also feature in *Kapâlakundalâ*, a love story set against a background of gruesome rites published in 1866 by the pioneering Bengali novelist Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. *Kapâlakundalâ* is a vivid account of how a young man returning from the Sâgar Island pilgrimage rescues an innocent maiden from the clutches of a practitioner of human sacrifice, a hermit-priest whose body is smeared with ashes from a funeral pile and who holds, as a cup, a skull in his left hand. The maiden and the young hero are destined to be his victims, a fate from which they narrowly escape.

Such esoteric practices were once a part of life in this region. The very shape of the Ganges Delta, with the vast tract of forest and swamp forming its lower part and known as the Sunderbans, evokes the human female organ (*yoni*), and the cults and images associated with it: womb, vulva, origin, source, nest, home.

And thus it is that the cycle becomes complete and we return to our starting point: what, my brother, is an island? ■



© Frank Lechenet/Hémisphères, Paris

# Easter Island's last secret

BY LUIS MIZÓN

The only Polynesian island where traces of an indigenous script have been discovered

The azure waves which break on the shores of Easter Island have come all the way from the far edge of the Pacific Ocean—a thought which makes the place seem even more isolated than it looks. In the night sky, the bright stars of the southern hemisphere seem to be far-off sister isles exchanging winked messages with the huge stone statues that dot the island like a tribe of dozing giants.

Easter Island has many faces—obscure, extraordinary and mysterious. There's the island you see, as described by explorers, and

then the hidden one, of caves and tunnels and the secret lore its inhabitants share. There's the island whose history is lost in the mists of time and the island depicted by scientists, artists and travellers. All these dimensions overlap, interlace and whisper to the others, like so many primal echoes. Works of art and tourist trinkets apart, Easter Island is a place the West has invented to fantasize about.

From the air, it looks like a boomerang hurled from another planet slap into the middle of the ocean. A 118 sq. km triangle of rock with its high point to the northeast, facing towards the islets of Polynesia, and its flat part in the southwest, looking towards the

Top, a sanctuary of giant statues or *moai* near the shore of Easter Island. Some *moai* wear a kind of headpiece of red volcanic tuff.



far distant coast of Chile. At each corner of the triangle is a volcano. In the left-hand corner is the almost-perfect cone of Rano Kau. In the right-hand one, Rano Rarako, on whose slopes are the biggest group of giant stone statues (*moai*). In the northern corner is Rano Aroi, next to Mount Terevaka. Nearly all the islanders live in the village of Hanga Roa, near Rano Kau.

The nearest inhabited land is 3,500 km away.

### *A mysterious script*

Easter Island is the only Polynesian island where ancient writing has been found. Its meaning is an impenetrable secret.

Even though it was confined to such a small geographical area and used by the tiny handful of people who lived there, the writing shows evidence of a sophisticated civilization. Who were these people? When did they get there and where did they come from? Did they bring their civilization and writing with them? What feelings, thoughts and values did these incomprehensible markings once convey?

Landing on this remote spot in the middle of the Pacific vastness can only have been a mistake or the result of a mishap or piece of good fortune. The discovery of the island in 1722 by Europeans, in the person of the Dutch Admiral Jacob Roggeveen, was a bad



Detail of a *rongo-rongo* or "talking wood" tablet from Easter Island.

© Yves Gellier/Agence/Hoa Qui, Paris

omen. The island's population then was 4,000; it had been reduced to 1,800 by 1863, 600 by 1870, a mere 200 five years after that, and only a few more in 1911. The nineteenth century was ruthless with non-European cultures. Easter Island's only resource was its manpower and a few patches of farmland. But its poverty hardly protected it against colonial rapacity.

In 1862, a fleet of pirate slavers from Peru came looking for workers for the guano industry and made off with more than 1,000 of the islanders, including their king, Kaimokau, his son Maurata and the elders who could read the writing on the stone tablets known as *rongo-rongo*.

The French consul in Lima eventually managed to get a hundred-odd of the deported islanders repatriated, but by then they were infected with smallpox and on their return they contaminated the rest of the population. The secret of the Easter Island script probably died with the victims of this catastrophic epidemic.

The earliest research on the inscriptions was done between 1864 and 1886, when an attempt was made to categorize the markings or compare them with other undeciphered scripts—from ancient India, for example. There were three stages in these attempts at decipherment, each linked with a figure symbolizing a period of the island's history and a specific tablet.

### *The bishop of Tahiti's tablet*

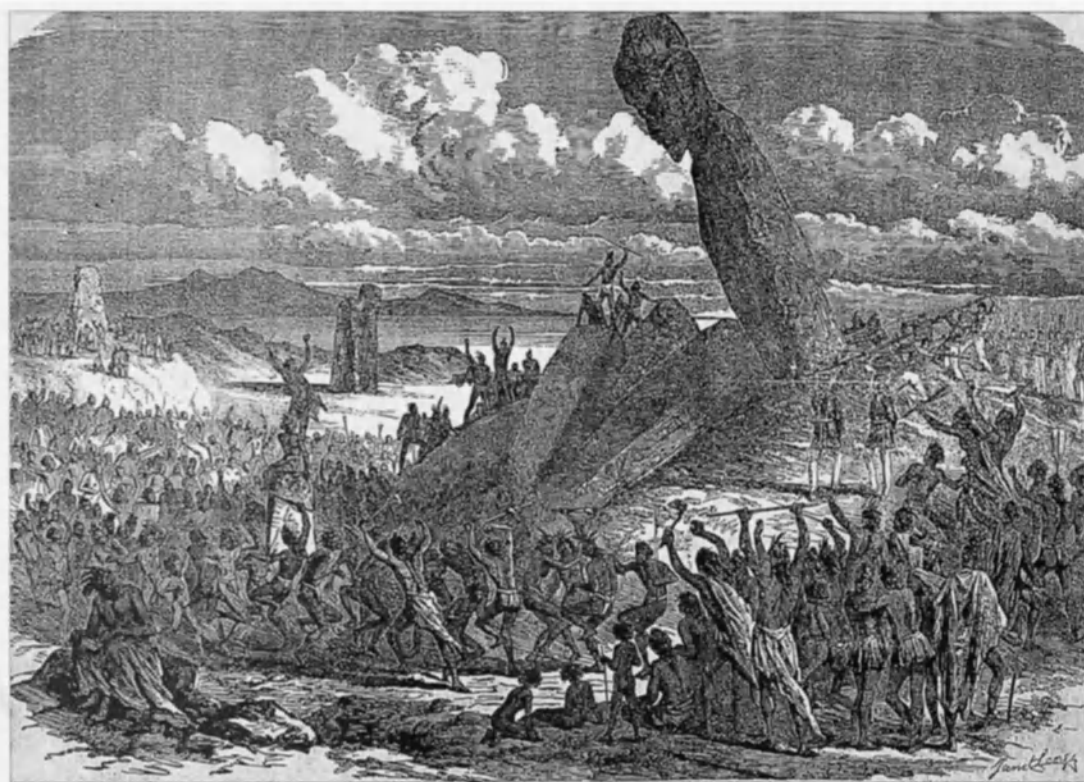
Easter Island had about 1,000 inhabitants when the French merchant ship *Tampico*, captained by Jean-Baptiste Dutrou-Bornier and carrying the missionary Father Gaspar Zumbom, anchored ▶



A rock painting depicting the Bird-Man, the focus of an Easter Island cult.

© Yves Gellier/Agence/Hoa Qui, Paris

In the 19th century Westerners demolished the last *moai* still standing upright. Right, sailors from the French frigate *Flore* surrounded by angry islanders in 1872.



© Bruno Barbier/Hémisphères Paris

► offshore in 1866. Two years later, Dutrou-Bornier settled on the island, marrying, or rather kidnapping, Koreto Kuapurunga, who claimed to be queen of the island, and joining forces with an Anglo-Tahitian called John Brander.

That same year, 1868, Fr Zumbohm decided to return to Valparaiso. Since he would pass through Tahiti, the Easter Islanders asked him to take a gift to its bishop, Mgr Tepano Jaussen, as a mark of respect. When the offering, a huge ball of plaited hair 100 metres long, was unravelled in front of the bishop, a wooden tablet bearing strange markings was found inside.

An elderly islander in the missionary party, Urupano Hinapote, explained that it was a *rongo-rongo*, one of the revered tablets which recorded the island's most ancient traditions but which nobody could decipher since the elders who knew the secrets of the script had died. The bishop wrote to the missionary who had stayed behind on the island, Fr Hypolyte Roussel, and asked him to send him as many of the tablets as he could find. Roussel sent him six, noting that the markings on them probably meant nothing, that the islanders did not know what they meant and that those who said they did were liars.

But the bishop was convinced the discovery was important and he eventually found, on a Tahitian plantation, an interpreter called Metoro Tau Aure. As soon as he gave him one of these tablets covered with geometric,

anthropomorphic and zoomorphic signs, he began a religious chant, apparently reading the signs from bottom to top and left to right, and turning the tablet upside down at the end of each line to read the next one. This is a variant of a form of writing known as "boustrophedon" (literally "turning like oxen in ploughing") and is similar to certain ancient Greek inscriptions where alternate lines are written in opposite directions. Unfortunately, the bishop's interpreter chanted the same thing whichever tablet he was given to "read."

### *Captain Dutrou-Bornier's stick*

When Ignacio Gana, captain of a Chilean corvette, the *O'Higgins*, landed at Easter Island in 1870, Dutrou-Bornier gave him a chieftain's stick covered with markings which experts consider the finest example of *rongo-rongo* in existence.

Gana gave the stick, along with two tablets with markings on them, to a scholar at the Santiago Natural History Museum, Rodolfo Philippi, explaining that the Easter Islanders had such reverence for the markings that they were obviously sacred to them.

Philippi at once sent plaster casts of the tablets to various experts around the world, notably an English scholar, Pack Harrison, who was mystified by what he took to be a kind of cartoon strip. Not one of the experts

consulted could find the key to the mysterious markings.

### *Thomson's attempts at translation*

William Thomson was the purser on the American ship *Mohican* which stopped at Easter Island in 1886. Three years later, the U.S. National Museum published his history of the island, the most detailed written until then.

Before reaching the island, the *Mohican* had stopped in Tahiti, where Thomson photographed the tablets in the bishop's possession. Once on Easter Island, he searched for an islander who could translate the inscriptions. He came across an old man, Ure Vaeike, who was very reluctant to help him but was eventually persuaded by money. The old man seemed to regard translating the markings as something dangerous for his soul.

As soon as he saw the photos of the tablets he began to chant quickly. But, just as with Metoro Tau Aure, he did not seem to be reading the text. He too recited the same things whichever one he was shown.

In the end, he confessed to Thomson that nobody on the island could read the mark-

ings but that they were definitely important, like a book written in a foreign language one did not understand. According to Thomson, Ure Vaeike's "poetic translation" of the markings was as follows:

"My daughter's canoe which has never been beaten by enemy tribes. My daughter's canoe has not been destroyed by the plot of Honiti. It's always victorious in all battles. Nothing could force my daughter to drink the poison from the obsidian cup. How can I console myself when powerful seas separate us? Oh my daughter! My daughter! The great liquid path stretches to the horizon. My daughter, oh my daughter. I shall swim through deep waters to find you, my daughter, oh my daughter!"

Experts now think some of the Easter Island markings are perhaps words, though they may not be full sentences or at all grammatical. They may just be notes to help the passing-down of oral traditions, especially genealogical records.

Maybe these mysterious inscriptions have the same message for us as the island itself. Perhaps they simply invite us to ponder on the fragility of all human endeavour. For the moment they remain poems dedicated to silence. ■

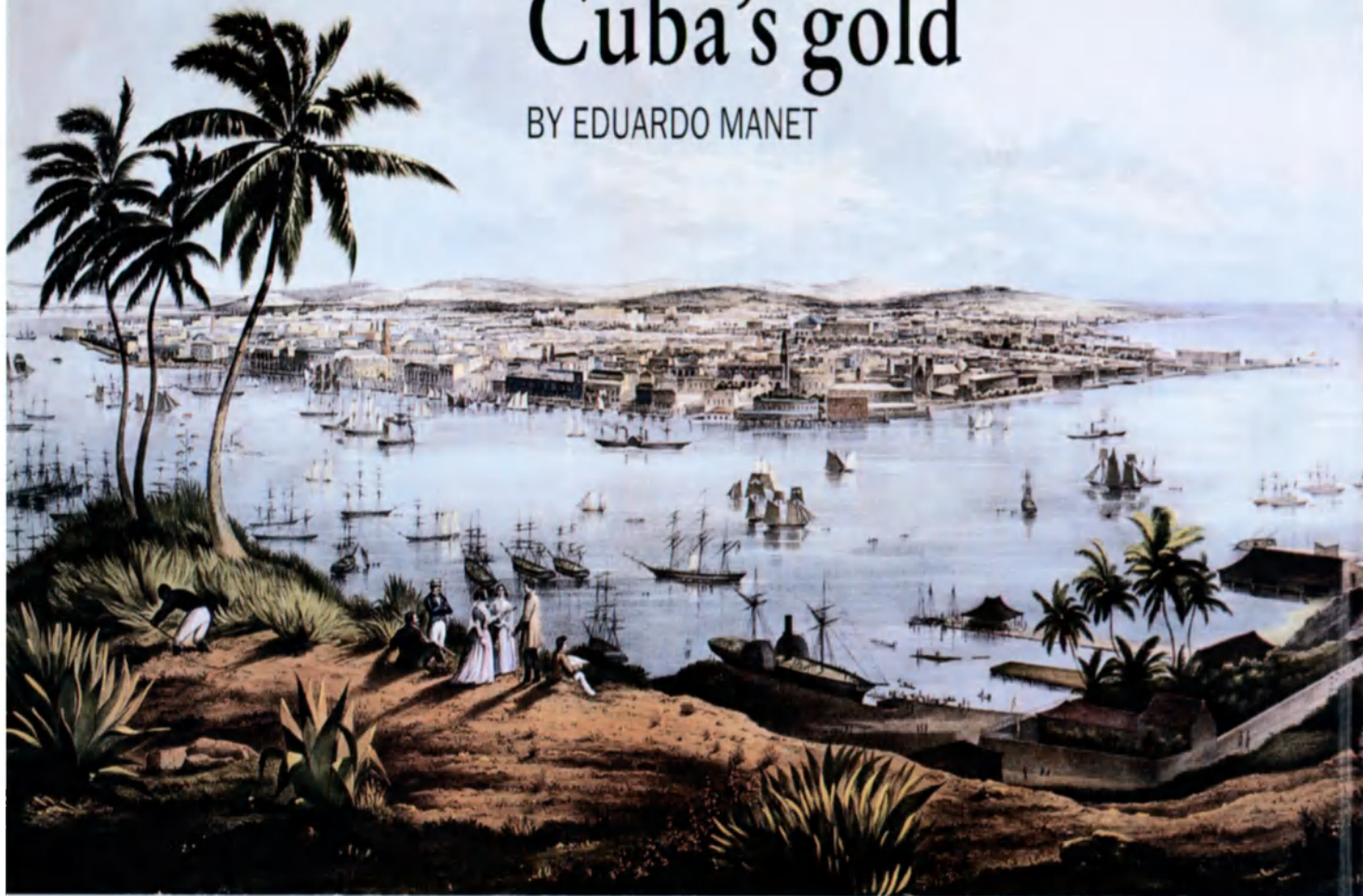
Giant heads carved out of soft volcanic tuff may represent important figures in the history of Easter Island.



© Frank Lehenet/Hémisphères, Paris

# Cuba's gold

BY EDUARDO MANET



© G. Dagli Ott, Paris/National Library, Madrid (Spain)

Once upon a time  
there was a  
beautiful island...

I like to imagine the first encounter between the Spaniards and the Indians of Cuba. The Spaniards disembark as conquistadors with drums and trumpets. Helmeted and booted, they carry halberds and muskets, and wield sabres and swords. The Cuban Indians savour earthly delights. They lie naked—or almost—in their hammocks and smoke the rolled-up tobacco leaves they are so fond of.

A monk who sailed with Christopher Columbus remarked on the splendour of Cuba's plant and animal life and its magnificent sunsets. In the glowing sky a festival of colours would modulate from blue to pink, then to orange, green and purple before melting into a deeper, denser blue just before nightfall.

But the Spaniards had other priorities than contemplating the beauty of sunsets. Discovering, conquering and colonizing the New World cost the Spanish crown dear. Columbus, who had left Europe to search for the fastest and most economical silk and spice route, was eventually relieved of his command. An army of battle-hardened soldiers and warlike adventurers began hunting throughout

the region for gold, fighting among themselves to the death and terrorizing, corrupting and enslaving the indigenous population.

The feverish search for El Dorado ("the land of gold"), a mythical land honeycombed with gold mines, fuelled legend and inspired perilous expeditions. Looking for gold, finding gold and sending galleons-full of it back to Spain grew into an obsession.

The Indian population of Cuba, the "pearl of the West Indies", was mobilized to strip the island of its gold, but the conquistadors were cruelly disappointed; they did not find a single nugget. Exhausted by forced labour and decimated by disease brought by the Europeans, the island's inhabitants were almost completely wiped out.

## *The triumph of sugar*

The colonists soon found consolation elsewhere. The island abounded in other forms of wealth. The sybaritic society of the Old World discovered that sugar of rare quality could be grown in Cuba. What could be more delicious after a copious meal than a sweet dessert, a cup of beautiful, anthracite-black

Engraving above shows Havana, capital of Cuba, as it was in 1851, a time when Cuba's sugar industry was expanding and its population was growing.

coffee along with a glass of Cuban rum and one of the cigars that would become world famous as Havanas?

This was the Cuban “gold” found by the first colonists. Not precious metal but tobacco, rum, coffee and especially sugar. And because the sugar cane on the island proved to be of such exceptional quality, there was no point in taking the trouble to develop other, less reliable crops. Growing sugar as a single crop was officially encouraged. Fields of sugar cane would soon stretch as far as the eye could see, and monoculture would turn into monomania.

With the rise of Cuban patriotism in the nineteenth century, voices were raised against the risk that a single crop might eventually strangle the country’s economy. But even after the Cuban people had achieved a hard-won independence, the cultivation of sugar cane as a single crop continued its triumphant march. A good many of the hectares of sugar-cane fields that had belonged to the Spanish or the Creoles were transferred to Cuban businessmen and American companies. The production rhythm imposed its law on the island’s economy. When the price of sugar rose, the Cubans profited; when it went down, the cane-cutters and the needy fell into dire poverty.

All Cuban patriots wanted to do something about this. In the schools it was taught that the country’s future lay in crop diversification, in an economic blend that would strike a balance between the different sources of wealth—tobacco, coffee, minerals and fruit.

It is hardly surprising then that after the revolution of 1958 the new leaders launched a massive programme of industrialization and diversification of the Cuban economy. Farming went from strength to strength as Cuba began a new chapter in its history that was designed to put an end to the dominance of sugar cane, a symbol of the past.

### Golden sands

But realism soon led the country’s leaders to change their minds. Cuban sugar became a force on the world market and brought in foreign currency. At the same time, Cuba broke off relations with the United States, and came to rely on sugar as a basis for trade with the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc countries. Tobacco, rum, coffee, fruit, zinc and nickel mines and fish were part of the island’s resources, but sugar cane, as always, dominated the economy. It was as much a part



Harvesting sugar cane in Vinales (Cuba).

© Stéphanie Frances/Hémisphères, Paris

of Cuban reality as the island’s beaches and palm trees, its Havanas, its torrential rains, its music and its climate.

Today the situation has changed considerably. Since the seismic shocks that transformed the world political scene in the 1980s with the implosion of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin wall, sugar has become one of the most unstable products on the international

A contemporary engraving of a Cuban sugar plantation in the late 17th century.



© G. Dagli Orti, Paris / National Library, Madrid (Spain)

► market. The well fed and health-conscious West has banished it from the table. Sugar substitutes and other sweeteners have taken over. The following comparison says it all: in 1914 Lidia Quatania, star of *Cabiria*, an Italian film that became an international hit, was the embodiment of female pulchritude. She and her voluptuous curves made the perfect advertising image for the sugar Cuba then sold in massive quantities. In 1997 one need only look at the fashion shows on Western television and the film-form silhouettes of the top models—today's dream creatures—to understand the uncertainties of the sugar market.

But to return to Christopher Columbus. The first tourist to set foot on Cuban soil, he exclaimed that the island was "the most beautiful land in the world". The library in Seville which houses the archives of the colonization of the Americas contains thousands of pages on the early days of colonization that corroborate this description and constitute a collection of tourist brochures before their time.

Cuba has kept its beautiful beaches and

palm trees intact. Why not profit from this bounty? All that had to be done was to set up a tourist development strategy, a hotel infrastructure and to adapt to today's joint-venture system. Tourism is the most hybrid of industries. Tourists from all over the world—Germans, Mexicans, Spanish, Swiss, Belgians, French, Italians and many other nationalities—now relax on Cuba's soft sands.

Let me conclude by describing an imaginary scene. A Cuban beach. A beautiful glowing sunset. A hammock is stretched between two coconut trees. Lounging in it is an Indian chief smoking tobacco leaves. Two beautiful Indian women are fanning him with palm leaves. Diego Velázquez, a Spanish conquistador, surrounded by cuirassed soldiers armed to the teeth, impatiently addresses the reclining chief. "We want gold!" he demands in a strong castilian accent.

"Gold?" queries the Chief gently, "but..." His hand sweeps nonchalantly, politely and elegantly towards the beach, the sea, the sky and the sun. "Gold, señor? You have it before you. This is our gold." ■

A floor show in a Havana nightclub.



### UNESCO'S ISLAND AGENDA

In 1990 UNESCO created a unit to act as a focal point within its Secretariat for those of its small Member States—mainly islands in the developing world—that do not have permanent delegations at UNESCO Headquarters. The unit's task is to ensure that these small states participate fully in UNESCO activities and that UNESCO is responsive to their needs.

The states (of which there are 28, plus 3 Associate Members) have been selected according to the following criteria, which were flexibly applied: a surface area less than 10,000 km<sup>2</sup>; a population of less than 1 million, and a per capita gross national product (GNP) of about \$2,000. The countries belong to the following regions: **Africa** (Cape Verde, Comoros, Lesotho, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles and Swaziland); **Asia/Pacific** (Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu); **Caribbean** (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname), plus the three Associate Members (Aruba, the British Virgin Islands and the Netherlands Antilles).

They face particularly acute environmental and development problems because of their ecologically fragile and vulnerable natural heritage, small size, geographical isolation, geological formation, scarcity of natural resources, and the natural hazards to which they are exposed (earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, cyclones, typhoons, floods, landslides and droughts). These problems are worsened by soil erosion, groundwater contamination, deforestation in upland areas, over-use of herbicides and the pollution of rivers and coastal waters.

Places of cultural and biological blending, these small countries have nurtured societies that are in many cases multiracial and multilingual and gifted with a remarkable capacity for adaptation. They are an original source of inspiration for the exploration of new paradigms and partnerships on local, regional and worldwide levels.

AMINA OSMAN ■

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In 1996 UNESCO launched an *Environment and Development in Coastal Regions and Small Islands (CSI)* initiative in order to help Member States achieve environmentally sound, socially equitable and culturally appropriate development of their coastal areas. These areas contain many of the world's richest ecosystems, and their resources make a sizeable contribution to world food security. About 60% of the world's population lives within 60 km of the sea. To co-ordinate planning and action on behalf of the sound development of coastal regions, the CSI supports an integrated approach drawing on the experience accumulated by UNESCO's natural science and social science sectors. Key themes include freshwater management, sustaining biological diversity, migration from inland areas to coastal urban centres, the social impacts of coastal erosion and sea-level rise. ■

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**Website: <http://www.unesco.org/csi>**

### INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE REEF

1997 has been declared the International Year of the Reef (IYOR). This worldwide campaign is designed to encourage the conservation and sustainable use of coral reefs and associated seagrass and mangrove ecosystems. ■

**For further information:**

**Website: <http://www.coral.org/IYOR>**

### THE INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC COUNCIL FOR ISLAND DEVELOPMENT (INSULA)

INSULA is an international non-governmental organization created in 1989 at the instigation of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere Programme (MAB) in order to bring together and mobilize the skills of national, regional and international authorities concerned with the sustainable development of islands and small island states. It encourages technical co-operation, especially in culture and in training personnel, in the exchange of information and experience through its publications and the organization of national and international conferences and seminars.

A recently launched campaign entitled "Let's Adopt an Atoll" has begun to raise funds to help the 1,000-odd inhabitants of the Micronesian islet of Falalop start up or develop activities to compensate for the loss in the year 2000 of the financial aid they have been receiving since 1986 from the United States. ■

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**E-mail: insula@speedy.grolier.fr**

**Website: <http://www.insula.org>**

## TWENTY KEY ISSUES IN ISLAND DEVELOPMENT

1. *Sustainable development*: Islands are less able to absorb environmental effects than larger areas. Understanding and implementing strategies of sustainable development are major challenges for island communities.
2. *Diversity*: Islands vary considerably in size and population. The problems they confront derive in varying degrees from their smallness, a limited resource base and their susceptibility to storm damage and drought.
3. *Open, specialized economies*: Often dependent for foreign exchange on the export of one or two specialist crops, small islands may be obliged to import many consumer goods, including food.
4. *Private sector involvement*: The private sector has much to contribute to development policy. Transnational and local companies have a major responsibility with regard to waste management, toxic materials control and energy conservation.
5. *Distortions in island economies*: Social transfer payments can lead to distortions of the economy whose effects have not always been fully recognized.
6. *Transport*: Transport services between small islands and the outside world are often difficult to establish and costly.
7. *Demographic issues*: Small islands are subject to cycles of rapid demographic change that go far beyond those related to the balance between natural birth- and death-rates.
8. *Employment*: Small population size and migration mean that the fine balance between supply and demand of human resources is easily upset.
9. *Decision-making*: Integration of scientific concepts into managing island environments is often given low political priority.
10. *Natural resources*: Natural resources, on which sustainable development ultimately depends, are among the most vulnerable sectors of an island's assets.
11. *Forestry*: Conservation of forest cover is vital for small islands to protect their watersheds and guard against soil erosion.
12. *Land management*: Land-use problems on islands largely result from the conflict between change and development and traditional systems, resulting in the fragmentation of landholdings.
13. *Water*: Only the largest and wettest high islands have ample water resources, and even on some of these there are seasonal shortages.
14. *Energy*: Many islands depend almost totally on imported fossil fuels, although use of wood and charcoal continues. Solar energy is already important on some islands and biogas digesters are in use in a few areas.
15. *Conservation*: Small islands are often sites of rare but fragile ecosystems, many of which are in danger of disappearing through lack of conservation policies.
16. *Coastal and marine ecosystems*: Unregulated industrial and tourist development projects can cause permanent damage.
17. *Fisheries*: Island fisheries in the tropics and the Mediterranean are mainly small-scale and conducted on artisanal lines. Fishing for export is hampered by poor catching, storing and marketing capacities.
18. *Agriculture*: Island agricultural systems range from subsistence farming to the production of export cash crops. The fall in demand for sugarcane and copra has been a serious blow to certain island economies.
19. *Industry*: The smallness of islands is a severe constraint on industrial development. There is, however, some scope for value-adding semi-manufacture.
20. *Tourism and allied services*: tourism means heavy investment in infrastructure.

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# Heritage Sites



Australia: Fraser Island (1992),  
Lord Howe Island (1982)  
Canada: Anthony Island (1981)  
Chile: Rapa Nui National Park, Easter  
Island (1995)  
Ecuador: Galapagos Islands (1978)  
Indonesia: Komodo National Park  
(Komodo Islands) (1991)  
Japan: Yakushima (Yaku Island)  
(1993)  
Mozambique: Island of Mozambique  
(1991)  
United Kingdom: St. Kilda Island  
(1986); Henderson Island (1988);  
Gough Island Wildlife Reserve  
(1995)  
Senegal: Island of Gorée (1978)  
Seychelles: Aldabra Atoll (1982)  
Viet Nam: Ha Long Bay (1994)

Left, Komodo National Park  
(Indonesia). Below, Fraser Island  
(Australia), the world's largest sand  
island. Below left, Ha Long Bay, in the  
Gulf of Tonkin (Viet Nam).



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Paris Cedex 15, France.  
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## DISCOGRAPHY

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- Bali.** Folk music
- Bali.** Court music and Banjar music
- Corsica.** Religious music of oral tradition
- Cuba.** Folk music
- Greece.** Vocal monodies
- Greece.** Traditional music
- Hong Kong.** Instrumental music
- Indonesia.** Music from West Java
- Ireland.** Traditional music of today
- Japan.** Ainu songs
- Java.** Vocal art
- Java.** Sundanese folk music
- Sicily.** Music for Holy Week
- Solomon Islands.** Fataleka and Baegu music from Malaita



Unesco/Gil Jacques, Montreal

COMMENTARY

# Federico Mayor

## UNESCO AT WORK:

peace, development  
and democracy

Through its work in education, science, culture and communication, UNESCO seeks to free the individual. It combats poverty, exclusion and violence, promotes tolerance and multicultural dialogue and helps to protect human diversity.

Convinced that it is only through freeing the individual that the political participation essential for democratic coexistence can develop, UNESCO defends human rights and the “personal sovereignty” of each and every one. Democratic values give strength and cohesion to the unlimited diversity of the human species and promote its unity. UNESCO does not represent a particular civilization but all countries without exception: it represents humanity as a whole.

Its mission is to build peace in people’s minds by contributing to human development within a framework of justice and freedom, for the right to peace is a premise on which all other human rights are based. With this in mind, UNESCO encourages all citizens to learn about and respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These rights are neither given nor received; they are put into practice on a day-to-day basis. They are indivisible. Exercise of and respect for human rights underpin the three great principles that inspired the founders of the United Nations system: peace, justice and freedom. While states and other entities or institutions cannot grant these rights they must ensure that they are respected.

UNESCO maintains contact with all peoples and all sections of society in order to encourage the general mobilization that is needed to bring about the transition from the law of the strong to the law of reason, from a culture of war based on coercion and power to a culture of peace based on dialogue and persuasion.

Discouraging war and strengthening peace are two sides of the same coin. Democracies do not have to be vulnerable. Citizens must feel that they are protected by the rule of law and take pride in its enforcement. For these reasons we need a new concept of security and of the role of the armed forces. Astronomical sums are today earmarked by states to protect their territory from potential international enemies. Civil society is left completely exposed, and watches with dismay the establishment of regimes which fill daily life with terror and suffering, while intensive and profitable trading in weapons of mass destruction continues all over the world.

### A shared responsibility

The seeds of non-violence, tolerance and solidarity must be sown very early. This is the only way in which peace can become cultural, i.e. inherent in the organization of life in society. We must plant the seeds today if they are to bear fruit tomorrow. This germination will take place in the schools. This is why education is the key to the different future that we desire for our children.

Education frees individuals and empowers them to shape their future, to accept or reject according to their own judgement, to act always "by their own lights". The prime beneficiaries of this education are, of course, the excluded, but lifelong education is of concern to all, rich and poor, scholars and the wider public, heads of government and ordinary citizens. For living together in a spirit of good understanding is a collective and shared responsibility.

This is UNESCO's field of action. It promotes the transfer of knowledge and the access of all to the communications media, without which reforming ideas do not circulate. Freedom of expression is a prerequisite of justice. And laws are only just if all citizens have the right to express their views.

This is why UNESCO is constantly reminding governments that education is a fundamental right for all and as such must be accorded political and budgetary priority by states. A country's development depends on improving the level of education of its people. There is a direct link between reorganizing budgetary prior-

ities in this way and the achievement of sustainable socio-economic development. Subsidies and loans from outside sources can make a valuable contribution for a time, but external aid can never replace a nation's political commitment to the education of all its citizens as a matter of top priority.

### The conscience of humanity

Education is a priority mission for UNESCO, but not its only task. These tasks are many, and all are linked to the promotion of the ideal of peace set forth in the Preamble to its Constitution.

UNESCO works to safeguard the heritage—natural, cultural (tangible and intangible), genetic and ethical—and fosters creativity in an endeavour to build the cultural heritage of the future. Through far-reaching programmes on the environment (Man and the Biosphere, oceanography, hydrology and geology) and in the social sciences (MOST), UNESCO encourages scientific rigour in research and fosters the establishment of exchange networks for reflection and training capable of providing rapid and sound solutions to many of the questions facing humanity. The World Science Conference to be held in 1999 will present a retrospective of the major scientific achievements of the century.

The Universal Declaration on the Human Genome, based on the excellent work carried out over the past five years by the International Bioethics Committee, is the first ethical and legal framework of worldwide scope on a subject that is profoundly scientific and human, as well as being a major standard-setting contribution made to humanity by UNESCO.

It must never be forgotten, however, that at the end of the day it is up to nations to put all these ideals into practice by incorporating guidelines into their laws and striving to reach the goals that they, with others, have set at international conferences. In accordance with its mandate UNESCO is required to denounce any situations or actions that are contrary to the standards and ethical values so clearly laid down in its Constitution. For UNESCO is also a conscience of humanity. ■

*The treasure of the***CERRO RICO**

by Pascale Absi



The Royal Mint (Casa Real de Moneda), below, was completely rebuilt between 1759 and 1773 by Salvador Villa and Luis Cabello. It is one of the finest examples of Potosí's colonial architecture.

Indigenous miners who work the ore-rich mountain of Potosí (Bolivia) believe it to be the incarnation of Pachamama, an Andean god. The city has featured on the World Heritage List since 1987.

The history of the Bolivian city of Potosí began in 1545 when the Spanish began mining silver deposits in a mountain which became known as the Cerro Rico. Within a few years a rich settlement studded with opulent baroque churches, theatres and the mansions of the colonial bourgeoisie had grown up at the foot of this 4,000-metre-high peak, and soon Potosí had a bigger population than that of London, Paris or Amsterdam. Fabulous fiestas were organized by the wealthy mine-owners. It is said that a silver bridge stretching from Potosí to Madrid could have

been built with the ore extracted from the mountain by the Indians during the colonial period.

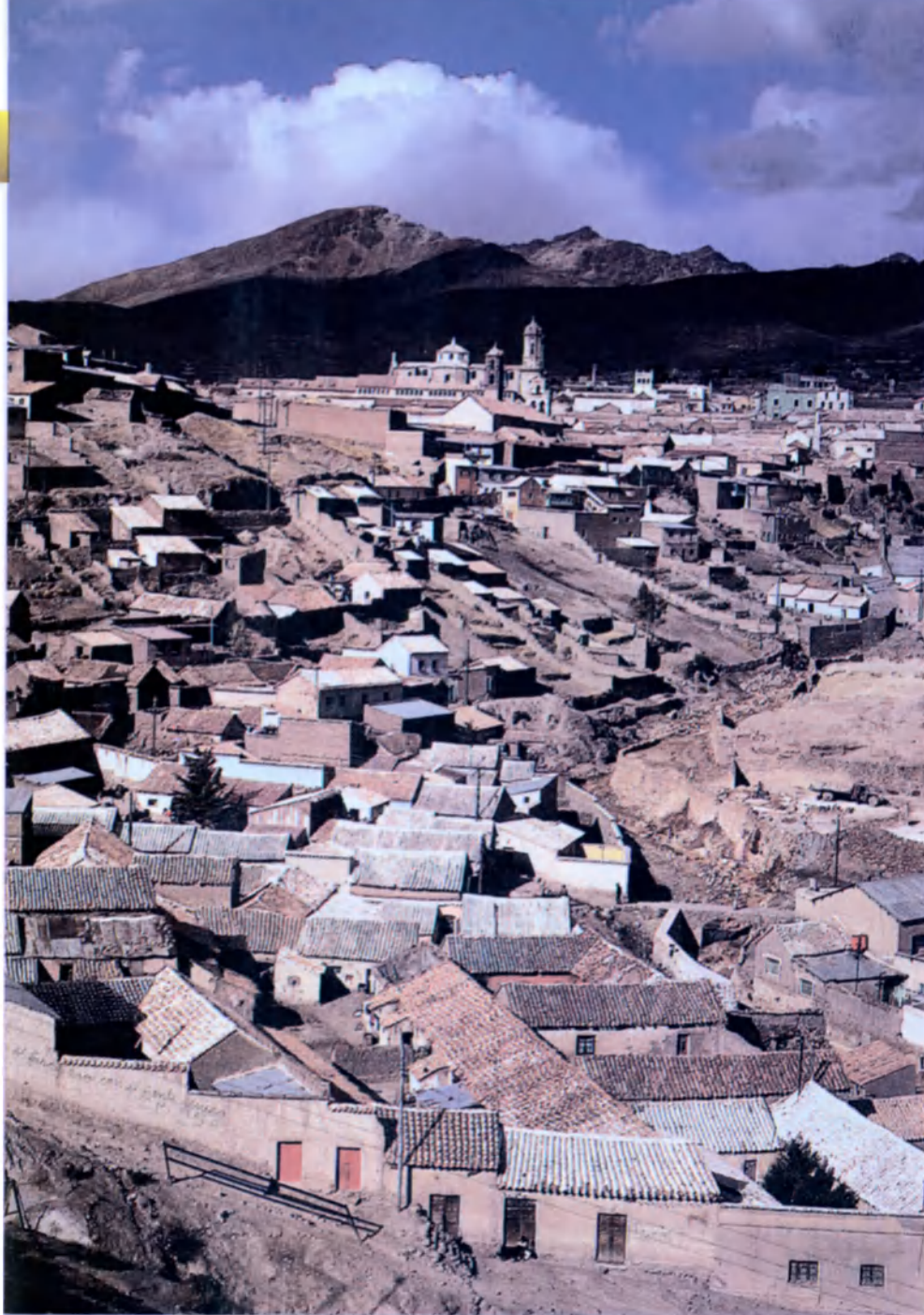
But first and foremost Potosí was a mining camp whose fortunes were closely linked to its veins of ore and to the vicissitudes of international markets. After a period of great wealth, decline set in, and in the mid-1980s plummeting prices brought an end to the tin cycle that had begun at the turn of the century. The state-run mines closed, and Potosí was plunged deep in crisis.

Today it is the capital of the poorest department in the Bolivian Andes. Of its 120,000 or so inhabitants, more than 7,000 miners—men, women and children—organized in co-operatives still work night and day deep within the mountain. Mining methods have barely changed since colonial times, and because of the combined effect of accidents, silicosis, poor diet and lack of medical care, the average life expectancy of workers is no more than fifty.

**GIVE THAT YOU MAY RECEIVE**

One August day in 1996 more than a hundred women from Potosí's mining co-operatives decided to occupy the summit of Cerro Rico to protest against their working conditions and the policy of privatizing ore deposits for the benefit





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The mining city of Potosí. In background, the baroque cathedral designed by Manuel de Sanahuja. It was not completed until 1838.

of multinational companies. Their action also had a cultural aim: to protect the Cerro Rico from the intrusion of the modern technologies used by the big companies that would threaten its geological stability. One side of the summit had already caved in, partly destroying the mountain's characteristic conical shape.

The city's entire population rallied behind the mining women, whose struggle is far more than a mere defence of Potosí as a historic symbol. For everyone, miners and farmers alike, the Cerro Rico is the incarnation of Pachamama, an Andean divinity associated with the earth's fertility.

The mine workers, who belong to the region's indigenous, Quechua-speaking communities, still have plots of land in the places from which they came. They often return to the countryside to do farm work, attend festivals, or assume some kind of political office. Townsfolk and miners they may be, but they are not cut off from the rural world. The mining culture has been built around a conception of the world rooted in rural life: you must give in order to receive; people are not the rulers of the world, but must negotiate continually with the forces of nature in order to gain access to its wealth. The Potosí miners

believe that the Spirit of the mountain is the real owner of the mineral deposits that people are allowed to mine (but only in exchange for offerings).

#### THE GODS OF THE MOUNTAIN

The present equilibrium between the workers and their mountain is the culmination of a long process of taming the vital forces of the Cerro, which was intact in 1545 when the Spanish discovered the existence of fabulous deposits of silver within it. The Cerro Rico is a sacred mountain on whose summit stands a place of worship. The miners say that it has exacted a toll of human lives in exchange for being exploited. The earliest sacrifice was made by the Indians who came to Potosí to do compulsory service for the Spanish crown and died in their thousands in the bowels of the mountain. It is their blood, so it is said, that gives the mountain its singular red colour. Nowadays, sated at long last, the Cerro Rico lets people live in exchange for more modest offerings.

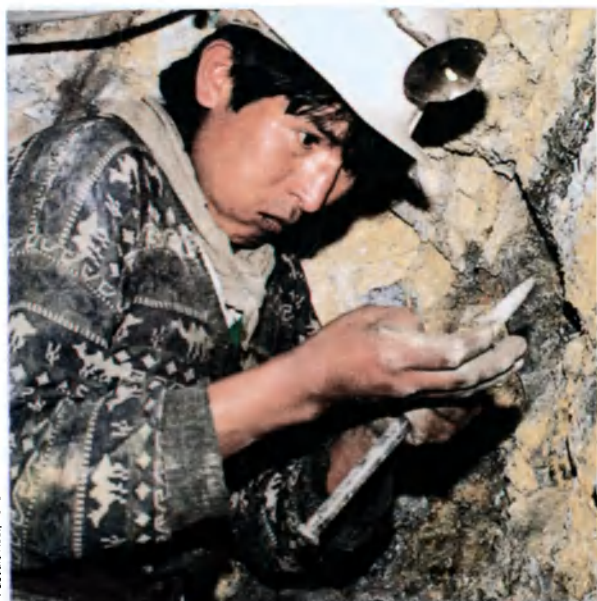
The Europeans appropriated the souls of the indigenous population as well as the riches of South America. The Spanish soon replaced the divinity of the mountain by the Madonna de la Candelaria (Our Lady of Candlemas). They built chapels along the mountain roads, and placed a cross on the summit. Pagan elements that could not be assimilated by the Catholic missionaries (ancestor worship, for example) were considered to be devil-worship and condemned.

Today the miners divide their loyalties between two divinities, Pachamama and Tío. Pachamama is associated with the mountain and is personified at the entrance to each mine by an effigy of the Virgin Mary, whose protection the miners solicit. She is also the wife of Tío, the god of mine shafts and the lord of mining and mineral deposits. ▶

► Represented by mud statuettes placed here and there along the mine galleries, Tío has inherited horns, hooves, forked tail and the nickname *diablo* from the European image of the devil. Yet the moral idea of the devil and the Manichean division into good and evil propounded by the Catholic Church have never been totally integrated into Andean concepts of the vital forces of Nature. The devil of the mine punishes workers who fail to make offerings to him not because he is evil but because he is hungry. He is held responsible for most of the mortal accidents due to roof-falls or suffocation—on these occasions he is said to have eaten his victims. Propitiatory rites therefore consist largely of feeding the mine divinities in order to solicit their wealth and win protection from their gargantuan appetites. Every Friday miners gather around one of Tío's statuettes, pour a spot of alcohol at his feet, lay a few coca leaves on his outstretched hands and place a lighted cigarette between his lips. During the dry season, the miners improve his rations by sacrificing llamas.

Tío is a strangely anthropomorphic figure, sitting amongst the men as if he were one of their number and being included in

A miner examines a shard of ore he has just hacked from the shaft wall.



© Pascale Abbi, Paris

their conversations. He is a workmate, almost a friend. He can even be heard of an evening in the silence of the abandoned mine, emptying a wheelbarrow or hacking away at the rock. Some miners tell how, when they arrive at their posts in the morning, they find their work already partly done.

Sometimes dressed as a miner, with helmet, lamp and cloven hooves, jewels, blond hair and out-sized sex, Tío has been known to appear to a miner working alone in the galleries and guide him to a particularly rich seam or suggest they make some kind of pact. In return for greater wealth, he will ask the miner for exceptional offerings, such as his soul or a human sacrifice.

#### A WORKMATE AND A GOD

The capture of a miner's soul through a pact with Tío is only the extreme manifestation of the influence of diabolical forces on human beings. According to Potosí miners, going down the mine turns you into something of a devil yourself. When they first start work, the men of the Cerro fall victim to an initiatory disease corresponding to the temporary seizure of their soul by Tío. This event, regarded as a baptism, marks their entrance into the circle of devils, an essential qualification for work underground and a guarantee of the quality of their output.

There is a tenuous dividing line between the devil who becomes a miner and the miner who becomes a devil. In the mine their roles are interchangeable; the man becomes Pachamama's lover. Mining is described as a fertile sexual relationship: the miners talk about lifting the skirts and using their crowbar to deflower the woman-mountain whom they fertilize with their offerings and deliver each day of her minerals.

The same energy circulates between the miners and the spirits



of the mountain. They say in the Cerro that men give life to the mine with their breath, just as the mine gives life to men. Just as mines cave in when they are no longer exploited, miners fall ill and die when they no longer go to work.

One August morning in 1996 the women members of the cooperatives came to defend this fragile balance which is threatened by large-scale mining of the Cerro Rico. In the evening of the fourth day of their occupation, as they were preparing to pour a libation to Pachamama from a bottle of spirits they had brought with them to fight the bitter cold, one of them told me, "You know, all these machines will spell the end of the Cerro. It might even collapse, and that would make Pachamama very angry. . . ."



© Eric Fregé, Paris

**The Cerro Rico.** In Potosí it is said that the mountain owes its reddish colour to the blood of the thousands of miners who have perished working deep within it.

## THE SPANISH KING'S SILVER

The great days of Potosí were in the early 17th century when it was the biggest mining and industrial complex in South America. Twenty-two successive *lagunas* or reservoirs equipped with locks fed water to an artificial watercourse (*La Rivera*) which powered 140 *Ingenios* or mills where the silver ore was ground, mixed with mercury and melted into bars in fireclay kilns known as *huayras* or *guayras* before being stamped with the official mark of the Spanish Royal Mint. This was known as the *patio* mining technique.

Potosí had a population of 160,000 at that time. Each year some 13,000 Indians, bound under the *mita* system of forced labour, came to the city with their families, about 60,000 people in all. Drawn from all over the high Andean plateau, these peoples of diverse ethnic origins played a big hand in shaping the city as it is today. The indigenous people's district is still divided into 17 parishes, an echo of the 17 Andean provinces subjected to the *mita*.

Even today, five of the 22 reservoirs still provide about 80,000

people with water. The entire chain of production has been preserved intact—mines to dams, aqueducts, refineries and kilns. Many other traces of Potosí's past glory and prosperity have also survived. There are some 22 parish or monastic churches, some dating from the 16th century, numerous mansions in the Spanish town centre. Above all, there is the Royal Mint, which was rebuilt between 1759 and 1773. About 2,000 colonial buildings have been identified, the oldest being the Casa Vicaria (1615). The blend of baroque and local (Mestizo) architectural styles that began to appear in the second half of the 17th century can be seen in the churches of La Compañía (1700-1707), Santa Teresa (1685), San Lorenzo (1728-1744) and San Martín.

In 1630 a fracture in an embankment wall caused a lot of damage in the indigenous district. Rebuilding work went on into the 18th century. Mining activity continued until Bolivian independence in 1825, after which its decline, which had already begun—production methods had remained unchanged for a century and a half—became steeper. ■

# Climate change: the great debate

BY FRANCE BEQUETTE

Some people see the Third Conference of the States Parties to the Framework Convention on Climate Change, which is being held in Kyoto (Japan) this month, as the last chance to fight global warming by taking urgent mandatory steps. Others see it as a chance to argue with the pessimistic predictions of most scientists.

One might ask why, just for safety's sake, every country doesn't immediately agree to curb greenhouse gas emissions. The answer is that the necessary steps would be unpopular, would lose votes and cost a great deal. Governments handle energy and transport matters with kid gloves.

## IS IT GETTING WARMER OR NOT?

In the past, people either adjusted to the climate or migrated. These days, humanity seems capable of influencing climate itself. According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) we have altered, and are continuing to alter, the balance of gases in the atmosphere. This is especially true of the

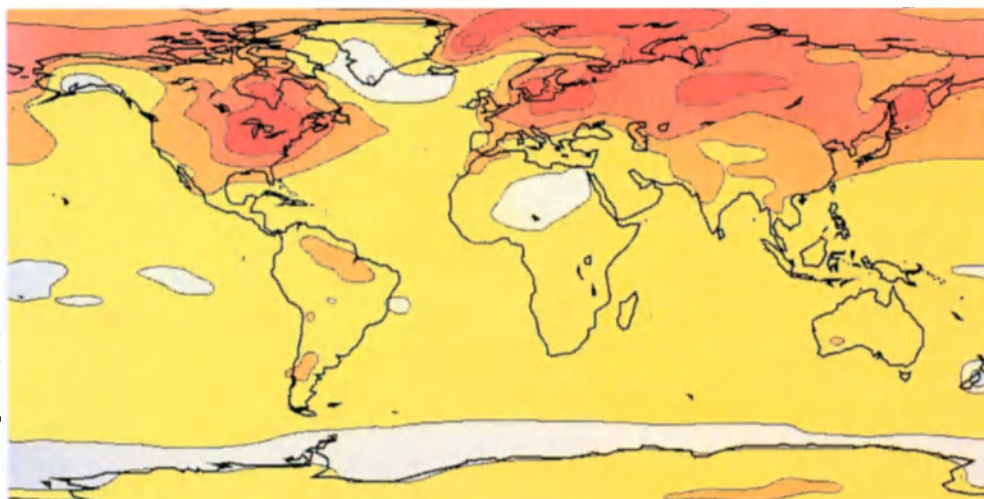
greenhouse gases—carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), methane (CH<sub>4</sub>) and nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O)—as well as water vapour, which is the largest contributor to the natural greenhouse effect, but whose presence in the atmosphere is not directly affected by human activity.

These gases make up only 0.1% of the earth's atmosphere, which is 78% nitrogen and 21% oxygen. Without the greenhouse effect caused by the presence of an envelope of these gases, the earth would be 30°C colder than it is. Since the beginning of the industrial era, we have produced enormous quantities of CO<sub>2</sub> by burning fossil fuels, and by cutting down forests we have reduced the planet's natural capacity to absorb it. Stock breeding and agriculture produce mostly methane and nitrous oxide. If gas emissions continue to grow at the present rate, the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere will have doubled between 1750 and the beginning of the 21st century, and will perhaps even triple between now and the year 2100.

Painter Erik Victor's fanciful depiction of Cologne (Germany) and its cathedral in the year 2050, after the polar ice caps have melted because of global warming.



A computer-generated world map (1993) showing rise in surface air temperatures if carbon dioxide emissions double. The model predicts dramatic warming of northern hemisphere winters. Temperature increases are colour-coded from pale yellow (0-2°C) to red (8-12°C).



© UK Meteorological Office/SPL/Cosmos, Paris

Admittedly the situation is worrying, but some aspects of it are still a matter of debate. Respected scientists at the University of Virginia and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) argue that if the earth has got warmer over the past 20 years, the atmosphere has cooled because of aerosols (ash from volcanic eruptions or combustion, for example), and that logically, the more industrialized northern hemisphere should be warming more than the southern, whereas the opposite is happening. They also say that modelling of the earth's climate does not take into account the clouds which can cool the lower reaches of the atmosphere.

But the facts are stubborn. The planet has become between 0.3°C and 0.6°C warmer in the past century, the hottest for 600 years. In the same period, the sea level has risen by between 10 and 25 centimetres.

Facing the doubters is a formidable adversary: the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which was set up in 1988 jointly by WMO and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and involves 2,000 scientists around the world. The Group was mandated to assess the state of existing knowledge about climate change; the environmental and socio-economic





© Erik Viktor/SPL/Cosmos, Paris

world's fifth major polluter (5.6%), does not intend to reduce emissions by more than 5%. But it is in the United States that the situation seemed to be most inflexible when the U.S. Senate unanimously passed a resolution on 25 July stating it would not ratify any climate agreement that did not require the participation of the developing world.

Since then things have changed and President Bill Clinton announced at a press conference on 22 October 1997 that he will propose at Kyoto to reduce U.S. greenhouse gas emissions to the 1990 level between 2008 and 2012, and to reduce them even further in the following five years. A \$5-billion budget will be earmarked for the development of clean technologies and industrialists will have nine months to prepare pollution reduction plans. President Clinton also reaffirmed the need for participation by developing countries. He noted that a tonne of carbon emitted in Argentina has the same effect as a tonne of carbon emitted in the United States. In principle developing countries would only have to accept targets beyond 2010.

The U.S. Information Agency's Jim Fuller has said that his country will present a draft treaty on world climate change to the Kyoto conference. "The commitment to reach legally binding targets and timetables has sparked controversy in the United States," he writes. "Environmentalists and scientists who support curbs on greenhouse gases say they are crucial to preventing future disaster. But some scientists and industry representatives dispute the

accuracy of future warming predictions and oppose limits on energy consumption they say will cause irreparable harm to the U.S. economy." He went on to say that "Most studies suggest that reducing greenhouse gas emissions 20% below 1990 levels by the year 2010 . . . would reduce the gross domestic product of the United States by 1% to 2% and cost nearly \$100,000 million per year."

### WE'RE ALL IN THE SAME BOAT

But why, it may be asked, should poor countries limit their emissions when the rich countries of the North are mainly responsible for global warming?

Robert Wolcott, of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), believes it is not a question of past but future responsibility. "Emissions of developing countries are and will be increasing at a far more rapid rate as they move through what you could think of almost as a corridor of technologies," he notes. "They will be adopting technologies that are more or less currently in place or have recently been in place in the developed world." This is why the EPA advocates "a climate technology transfer program in which we will join with our developed-world partners to supply the most advanced and appropriate technology to emergent economies to facilitate their sustained growth economically, but in the least greenhouse-gas intensive fashion."

The EPA is also considering a greenhouse gas emissions trading system. This would involve fixing an

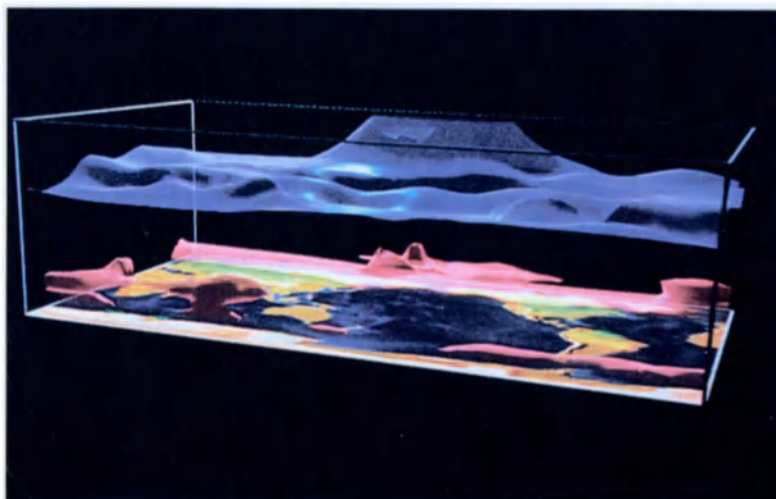
impacts of such change; and possible response strategies. Its First Assessment report, published in 1990, provided the scientific and technical basis for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, whose ratification procedure was opened at the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. By May 1997, 166 countries had ratified the Convention.

### GOOD AND BAD PERFORMERS

Some countries have fulfilled their commitments and taken steps to limit CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Early in 1997 the World Wide Fund For Nature (WWF) published a list of good and bad performers. Germany, for example, is set to meet its commitments to cut its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (800 million tonnes a year) by the year 2000. The Germans are expected to push at Kyoto for further emission reductions by 2005.

New Zealand, however, which produces less than 300 million tonnes annually, has no plans to reduce its emissions and does not accept the need to act urgently. Russia, with more than 800 million tonnes (10.2% of world CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 1996), has the same attitude. Next comes China (13.5%), then Europe (19.6%), and finally the leading polluter, the United States (25%). Japan, the

A 3-dimensional model of temperature and soil-moisture differences assuming twice the 1993 levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide. Blue band at top indicates stratospheric levels where the air has cooled by more than 2°C, while the lower red band indicates a rise of more than 5°C in low-level air. In green: increased soil-moisture levels; in yellow, decreased soil-moisture levels.



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## ENERGY RETURNS TO MOZAMBIQUE

After 12 years of silence, the Cabora Bassa hydroelectric dam in north-western Mozambique is humming again. Built on the Zambezi River in the early 1970s, Africa's biggest power plant came under constant attack during a decade of civil war. Lines were cut, pylons blown up and service pathways mined. The return of peace meant that repairs could begin in 1995. From the end of 1997, it should be producing 2,000 megawatts a year for neighbouring South Africa. About 200 MW of that will be fed back through the South African grid to supply Mozambique's capital, Maputo, which is close to the South African border. Mozambique will no longer have to buy power from its big neighbour but just pay a transit fee, which will save about \$10 million a year. ■

## WORLD FRESHWATER RESOURCES

The United Nations system and the World Bank have published a joint *Comprehensive Assessment of the Freshwater Resources of the World*. The 33-page brochure, including maps and explanatory diagrams, provides a situation report combined with specific suggestions and a strategy for fair distribution and efficient use of water. The document is available from Unesco's International Hydrological Programme. ■

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e-mail: thp@unesco.org  
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<http://www.pangea.org/orgs/unesco>

## MINERAL EXPLORERS TURN TO AFRICA

Until recently the trend for international mining companies has been to explore in Latin America, but with backing from the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA), a World Bank affiliate, investors are now turning to Africa, with its abundance of gold, precious stones and almost every imaginable mineral. The MIGA encourages foreign investment in developing countries by providing them with guarantees against political and non-com-

▶ annual worldwide maximum emission level. Then a maximum level would be worked out for each country, taking into account various factors, and ensuring that all the individual country levels, when added up, did not exceed the fixed worldwide level. Each country would then grant greenhouse gas emission allowances to companies within the limit assigned to it. The trading mechanism would work in the following way: a country or a company emitting less greenhouse gases than its authorized total would be entitled to sell to another country or

**The effects on Ponderosa Pine seedlings of an atmosphere containing twice as much carbon dioxide than today's level are being tested in this special, bubble-like laboratory.**

company a "pollution allowance" corresponding to the gap between its real and authorized emission rate.

Wolcott recognizes though that these ideas are causing concern in some countries which view them "as a form of carbon colonialism . . . and feel that this puts them under the influence of, and even control of, investors from the developed world."

## ALL OR NOTHING

A preparatory meeting for the Kyoto conference was held in Bonn (Germany), the headquarters of the UN Convention on Climatic Change, in August 1997. The Convention's Executive Secretary, Michael Zammit Cutajar, has admitted the conference was a failure. "We are all worried about the slow progress at the Bonn meeting," he said. "There's only a short time now to build up the necessary political will to produce a solid agreement at Kyoto."

Such lack of political will, which was also evident at the June 1997 Earth Summit in New York, is disturbing and bodes ill for the Kyoto conference. The oil and coal industries, as well as the most unenlightened industrialists, fear for their profits, since they might well be heavily taxed.

On the other hand, Kyoto will be a special opportunity to promote clean energy sources which, when developed, could at last be generally affordable. ■

## SOURCES

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✓ *Understanding Climate Change: A Beginner's Guide to the UN Framework Convention*, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). (Fax: [(41) 22] 797 34 64, e-mail: <iuc@unep.ch>, Internet: <<http://www.unep.ch>>)

✓ *IPCC Second Assessment: Climate Change 1995*, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

✓ *An Introduction to Simple Climate Models used in the IPCC Second Assessment Report (Technical Paper II)*, WMO, UNEP.

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✓ *Explaining Climate Change*, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). (Fax: [(41) 22] 364 42 38; e-mail: <climate.campaign@wwfus.org>)

mercial risks. The mineral deposits are in remote areas, and their extraction creates jobs and helps to alleviate poverty. African ministers attending a MIGA-sponsored symposium stressed the need to involve local communities and safeguard the environment. This is going to be an uphill job since mining usually causes considerable pollution.

### THE ELEPHANTS OF ALGIERS

At Algiers' Ben Aknoun Zoo, two baby elephants were born four months apart in the winter of 1996-97, one of an Asian, the other of an African mother. This happy event was particularly remarkable because African elephants are not known to breed in captivity. The 304-hectare park has 814 animals and the 12 elephants there drink 300 litres of water and eat 300 kg of fodder per day. The zoo is short of money, however, and its future is in doubt.

### MEDICINAL PLANTS COULD FACE EXTINCTION

A recent World Bank report warns about a probable over-harvesting of medicinal plants in the developing world, where some 4 billion people depend heavily on natural medicines for their daily health. Global trade in medicinal plants now exceeds \$1 trillion. They are harvested without any kind of regulation and do not benefit from research support, unlike other cash crops. "Unless you watch how you cultivate and harvest your medicinal plants," says John Lambert, one of the report's authors, "you're not going to have them much longer."



© Stéphane Franceschi/Hémisphères Paris

### KENYA BECOMES WORLD'S LEADING TEA EXPORTER

World tea production reached a record 2,691,000 tonnes in 1996. Export earnings from tea increased food security in producing countries and for farming families. According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), in 1994-95 tea represented 55% of agricultural export earnings in Sri Lanka and 33% in Kenya. Kenya became the world's leading tea exporter in 1996, with 244,200 tonnes, with Sri Lanka a close second with 244,000 tonnes. The leading importer was the United Kingdom (148,500 tonnes).

### CONTAMINATED CHILDREN

For 30 years, small-scale smelters around the Bolivian town of El Alto have spewed out toxic waste and fumes containing lead, arsenic, zinc and chromium. Soil and air analysis has

shown abnormally high concentrations of lead and arsenic, which are extremely harmful to the nervous system. A recent study showed younger children were most vulnerable, with more lead detected in their blood and more arsenic in their urine. Health officials hope the study will lead to a regional programme to monitor the environment around the smelters.

### A CAR OR A HOUSE? YOU CHOOSE

The Scottish city of Edinburgh has come up with an imaginative scheme to make life pleasanter. An old railway goods yard near the city centre is to be replaced by about 100 homes surrounded by a landscaped garden. But if you want one of the homes, you're not allowed to be a car-owner. Free heating will come from steam generated by nearby factories, and energy for lighting will be drawn from rooftop solar panels. Waste water will be recycled for use in cleaning and bathrooms

will use rainwater. As for those cars, you can hire one from a council-run "pool."

### KENYA'S ENERGY-SAVING COOKERS

Three billion people in the world cook their food on simple wood fires in metal containers. The loss of energy is enormous. A solution has been found in Kenya in the form of the *jiko*, a cheap oven shaped like an hour-glass. The charcoal goes in the bottom part, and the top part, which is for the food, has a ceramic lining. The first rough models have been redesigned and craftworkers are now turning out some 20,000 *jikos* a month. Over a million are in use throughout the country.

### IVORY TRADE RESUMES

After a seven-year worldwide ban on ivory trading, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe were authorized to resume trading (with a single country, Japan), at this summer's meeting of States Parties to the International Convention on Trade in Threatened Fauna and Flora Species, held in Harare (Zimbabwe). The reason for the decision is to use up the 3 countries' ivory stocks, estimated at more than 50 tonnes, according to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF). With this in view, elephants will be transferred from Appendix I to Appendix II of the Convention. But sales will be closely monitored and measures taken to prevent a resurgence of elephant poaching in countries not covered by the decision. It is agreed that proceeds from sales will go towards nature conservation.



© Marco/Ask Images, Paris



© Beatrice Petit, Brussels (Belgium)

# Isabelle Leymarie talks to Steve Turre

**American trombonist and composer Steve Turre combines respect for tradition with openness to all types of music.**

■ How did you first get interested in jazz?

**Steve Turre:** Coming from a musically gifted family—especially my mother, who is a pianist and flamenco dancer—I always knew I'd be a musician. It's my vocation in life. At home we listened to all kinds of music—jazz, boogie-woogie, classical, Latino, blues, gospel, rock, whatever. In my parents' day—they met at a Count Basie dance—you danced to jazz. But it's become less rhythmic now, which explains why it's lost some of its public. Latino music on the other hand has a great beat and has a considerable following today. I love a good beat. Everything in nature is rhythmical. Music without a beat lacks vitality.

When I was about nine or ten, I began playing the trombone in the school band. Two or three years later I joined a band where my older brother played the sax. In 1972 I went on a European tour with Ray Charles (my younger brother, Pete, is now his drummer). The following year I took part in a jam-session at the Keystone Corner in San Francisco, and Art Blakey asked me to play with his band.

■ You are sometimes called a *Chicano* musician. Are you happy with that label?

**S. T.:** Absolutely not. The word "Chicano" mainly applies to Los Angeles where it means people of Mexican descent who usually belong to the underprivileged social classes. Whereas I grew up in the Bay Area near San Francisco (northern California). I have Mexican roots, but I am American, and like any American, I'm a blend of various nationalities. I don't want to be restricted by my roots or get locked into clichés for the rest of my life. I want to be myself with my individuality intact.

■ Some Latin American jazz musicians often complain that the critics respect them more when they play "pure" jazz rather than Latin Jazz, music which is, however, just as interesting and hard to play. Have you run into any such prejudices in your career?

**S. T.:** Yes. The problem often comes from record companies or promoters. Some labels, for example, make a distinction between white jazz and black jazz. If you



© Steve Turre/Musiques de nuit, Bordeaux

have a Latin American background and you run a band, they tend to consider you exclusively as a player of Latin jazz. And even though I love Latin rhythms, I'm a jazz musician, and I stand by my jazz records. I don't like having labels stuck on me. I'm interested in all sorts of music.

■ Besides your work as a trombonist, for the past few years you've become especially well known for playing conches and seashells, from which you coax haunting sounds. Your seashell solos with Dizzy Gillespie's United Nations Orchestra were one of the highlights of his concerts. How did you discover these unorthodox instruments?

**S. T.:** Rahsaan Roland Kirk had a seashell he let me play. I loved to blow into it. Conches and seashells were the predecessors of brass instruments, but it was only in 1978 while on tour in Mexico with the Woody Shaw sextet that I had my eyes opened to seashells. I'd never been to Mexico. We were going to perform in several towns, and my mother gave me the phone number of some of her relatives. I invited them to the concert, and that evening, Woody decided to play a piece in which we used seashells. The audience loved it, and after the concert my family asked me if I knew that the Aztecs used to blow into seashells. I didn't in fact. Next I went to Mexico City's Anthropological Museum and saw some wonderful seashells, and then to Teotihuacán, where I found bas-reliefs showing men blowing into seashells or conches. Up till then I didn't feel confident enough to use them. But after that I felt something click inside and began play-

ing without worrying about what people might think.

■ Aztec priests used sacred conches. In the Caribbean the Maroons—escaped slaves—and Haitian country folk also used conches to communicate. Conches are both a sacred symbol and a symbol of freedom. Do you do anything to the conches and seashells before playing them?

**S. T.:** Yes. I taught myself by trial and error. I file and trim them. I've got them in all sizes and compose according to the ones I've got at hand. Small seashells produce high notes; big ones produce lower notes. For the past five or six years I've also been collecting animal horns, which are still used in certain forms of traditional African music. Fitted with a special mouthpiece, they produce interesting sounds and rhythms. I've created something new with my seashells, but I use them for the different tonal colours they give. They fill out my instrumental palette. The "Shell Choir", my set of seashells, are part of my musical luggage just like other experiments. But I'm a trombonist most of all. The trombone is my main instrument, and I can change timbre and colours by using all sorts of mutes.

■ Do you get as much pleasure from composing as you do from playing?

**S. T.:** If you lead a band, it's to play your own music. I've already played the whole traditional repertoire of jazz for the trombone, and I want to do something different. At school I studied harmonics and basic musical theory, but I mostly learned to compose from the great arrangers and by watching how music is made. I had the opportunity to compose the score for a film, *Anna Oz*, directed by a young French filmmaker, Eric Rochant. You can hear my seashells in it with a few additions. I'd like to do more films, but I prefer playing. I've found a way of expressing myself and a style I feel comfortable with, and I get enormous satisfaction from it. ■

Discography:  
Steve Turre, Verve 314 537 L33-2 (1997)

# Funding a new home for Egypt's ancient treasures

by Samir Gharib

Cairo Museum possesses what is regarded as the world's richest collection of Egyptian antiquities, comprising some 176,000 items. Only 40,000 of them are on display, however. The rest are stacked in the museum's basement areas.

The museum has never been enlarged since it was built at the beginning of the century. Some renovation and modernization work has been carried out, particularly on the electrical installations and the surveillance and alarm systems, and a new room for the royal mummies is now open to the public, after being closed for many years for reasons connected with Islamic law. The main achievement in recent years has probably been the recording of over 135,000 items on CD-ROM—but these are merely drops in the ocean.

On average, a new archaeological site is discovered every month in Egypt. As there are no regional museums, the rooms and corridors of the Cairo Museum are bursting at the seams with more and more artefacts, and it is impossible to observe scientific standards of display. The basement areas are so crammed that it is almost impossible to get into them. Valuable objects are piling up and mouldering down there, doomed to slow degeneration. Security problems and management difficulties further aggravate the situation, while the museum's location on Al Tahrir Square, one of the world's most congested thoroughfares, means that it is threatened by pollution and by vibration from the underground railway that passes beneath it.

The only solution would be to build a spa-



An exhibition hall of the Cairo Museum. In centre, a statue of Ramses II.

© Grandadam/Hoa Qui Paris

acious new museum, in compliance with modern scientific standards, on a protected site. This would make Egypt the world centre for the study of Egyptian civilizations, would greatly increase tourist revenue, contribute to the development of research and enable management of all the country's museums and sites to be centralized. For archaeology, it would contribute to the development of reliable conservation methods, education and the media would also benefit and, last but not least, it would help in the creation of new jobs and the training of specialists.

In 1992, a plot of land of 117 *feddans* (about ►

- ▶ (68 hectares) near Giza and the Saqqara site was allotted to the new museum by presidential decree, but in its five-year budget adopted at the same time the government set aside only 75 million Egyptian pounds (about \$20 million) for the project, a sum incommensurate with the total construction cost, then estimated at \$700 million.

The Italian government made available two billion lire to finance a feasibility study. An Italo-Egyptian commission of experts was set up and began work in January 1993. Its conclusions were made public three years later: the building of the new museum should proceed in tandem with the restructuring of the present museum; the collections should be divided between the two

The upraised arms on this statue adorning the tomb of the Pharaoh Awibr'hor symbolize the ruler's *ka*, the energy principle that inhabits gods and humans.



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museums, and the new one should also house a large specialized library, restoration laboratories, a data bank, an information agency, rooms for young visitors, separate rooms for permanent and temporary exhibitions, an auditorium, a publications bureau, photographic laboratories, and so forth.

No decision has as yet been taken about the distribution of the collections. Various proposals are being studied, the main aim being to avoid duplication.

But the real problem is a financial one. The Egyptian government is not in a position to make available the two billion pounds needed to carry out the project, and the present scale of its foreign debt is such that it cannot contract any new loans. On the other hand the governments of the rich countries, all of which have their own problems, are unable to help with the project's financing.

There is no doubt, however, that the project is economically viable. The museum has every chance of becoming a major attraction for the world's Egyptologists and providing a windfall for national and international tourism. It will very likely double the number of tourists visiting Egypt, which now stands at one and a half million a year. Successfully managed, it should thus be able to draw three million visitors, representing a revenue of \$30 million from admission fees alone, not counting other sources of income, which should double this sum again. The museum could therefore cover its construction costs in less than a dozen years.

Egyptian banks alone could put together the capital needed for the building of the museum and then entrust its management to an international company. The Egyptian government could take the initiative in setting up a company in which it would itself be a small stakeholder and put shares on sale on the Egyptian and international markets. Such a solution, which is in line with the government's present privatization policy, would furthermore enable it to control the movement of objects of artistic worth: neither private enterprises nor individuals would be able to take any such object out of the country without the agreement of the authorities. The Egyptian law-enforcement agency responsible for the protection of the heritage would obviously be in charge of security for the new museum, as it is for the present one.

If the public sector does not have the resources to finance the project, let the private sector step in! ■

## Between utopia and reality



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■ Your life as an adult and as a poet began with what you later called “a triple badge of rebellion”—proud negritude, impassioned surrealism, and the idea of revolution. Today only the surrealism part seems to have survived.

**R.D.:** It’s a long story. When André Breton came to Haiti at the end of 1945, his visit coincided with an exhibition of the Cuban painter Wifredo Lam’s paintings and a series of lectures given by the Martinique poet Aimé Césaire. This really fired the imagination of us young Haitian artists and writers. At that time we knew nothing about what was happening in the surrealist movement in France. For young people combatting President Elie Lescot’s dreadful dictatorship, surrealism was the lifeblood of revolt. Contact with Breton had a contagious effect on us. After his first lecture in a Port-au-Prince cinema, we brought out a special issue of our new magazine *La Ruche* as a tribute to him. We went to prison for our pains and the magazine was banned.

What Breton discovered in Haiti, and made us discover too, was that surrealism wasn’t just an aesthetic doctrine but something that could be part of a people’s way of looking at the world; that there was a kind of grassroots surrealism. This restored our self-confidence. We saw that this sense of wonder we had secretly been a bit ashamed of and associated with a kind of underdevelopment was actually our weapon. Breton told us that in France “we launched surrealism as a movement based on intellectual foundations, you in Haiti learned all about it in the cradle.” In other words, surrealism was something inherent in the Caribbean. Voodoo, a product of Franco-African syncretism, is an example of reli-

A Franco-Haitian poet, essayist and award-winning novelist looks back on his nomadic life, speaks out against totalitarian ideologies and reaffirms his attachment to public spiritedness based on planet-wide solidarity and mutual respect.

Interview by  
Jasmina Šopova

gious surrealism. The behaviour of the voodoo gods is supremely surrealist.

■ So surrealism for you is much more than a literary movement.

**R.D.:** Much more. Many European writers, starting with the German Romantics and even before that, had a surrealist approach. I’m sure if you looked closely at Egyptian, Japanese or Chinese culture, you’d find surrealist elements there too. For me, surrealism is a way of injecting the supernatural into everyday life. You find it everywhere. But some people, like Haitians or Brazilians, display it more boldly than others.

■ How do you explain the emergence of the Duvaliers in a society imbued with a sense of the magical?

**R.D.:** The magical has even marked Haitian politics. Our history has thrown up dictators who practised a kind of tragic perversion of magic. This is how the “tonton macoute”—which is a folk concept, an incarnation of evil, a kind of Nazi, a Haitian SS-man—came to exist. Haitian folklore is a tug-of-war between good and evil. The elder Duvalier, “Papa Doc,” used the forces of black magic to plunge the country into a totalitarian surrealism.

But there’s more to it than this demoniacal aspect. From the December morning in 1492 when Christopher Columbus discovered Haiti and was transfixed by what he saw, the historic, baroque tale of Haiti cannot be separated from American wondrous realism. A sense of the wondrous (South American magic realism) has become part and parcel of Haitians’ view of the world and the sustenance of their third of the ▶

► island of Hispaniola, where the best and the worst rub shoulders like the dearest of friends, when they are not locked in terrible combat.

■ **You have celebrated the communist utopia in your poems.**

**R.D.:** The Marxist utopia, with all its lies and repressive nightmares, took over my work and my life as a poet until the moment I broke with Stalinism. After living in places which had a huge “strategic” importance in the turmoil of our century—Moscow, Prague, Beijing, Hanoi and Havana—I realized that what was meant by “socialist revolution” in those places was not the opposite of the Haitian terror regime, but another form of the same perversion. Instead of promoting the heritage of the rights of man and the citizen, “the revolution” defiled the autonomy of women and men and carried out, at their expense, the most amazing hijack of ideals and dreams in all human history.

■ **What has become of the “revolutionary ideal” which drew you from Haiti to Europe and then on to Cuba?**

**R.D.:** I ardently believed in revolution. For me it became a kind of natural state, like breathing, walking or swimming. And it nearly destroyed my integrity as a citizen and a writer. The ideal of revolution seriously impoverished my personal store of poetry and tenderness which, when I was twenty, made me think of my future work as a state of wonder and oneness with the world. It made my literary career that of a writer who performed psychological and intellectual somersaults and sudden existential about-turns—a kind of carnival of uncertainties and inconsistencies, adrift in the furious currents of the century’s passions and ideals. The treasure islands invented by the utopias and mythologies of revolution went up in smoke with the great dreams of our youth—uniting the idea of transforming the world (Karl Marx) with that of changing life (Arthur Rimbaud).

■ **The word “utopia” as used by Marxists has a pejorative meaning for you. But doesn’t the world need utopias?**

**R.D.:** Octavio Paz has defined utopias as “the dreams of reason.” We’re just emerging from a terrible nightmare of reason. The nineteenth century, a critical age if ever there was one, gave birth to the idea of a revolutionary utopia. But the totally legitimate dream of earlier philosophers did not turn into the major transformation of human lives they had hoped for, nor into unprecedented progress for humankind. The generous aspirations of critical thought imposed on us, under the bogus label of “real socialism,”

an absolutism the like of which we had never seen before.

In saying this I do not wish to denigrate the idea of utopia as such. Old age reminds me these days that I don’t have much time left and that I must hasten to express things I’ve kept to myself all my life. And hopefully express them with grace and maturity. So, in a way, I’m summing up my life’s nomadic journey. And all self-criticism leads one to utopia. But hardened observer that I am, I deeply distrust a historical concept that this century’s revolutions have debased. In place of the notion of *realpolitik*, which is at the root of most of the woes of people and societies and which still flourishes to an extraordinary degree in government, I offer the notion of *realutopia*.

■ **Could you explain what you mean by *realutopia*?**

**R.D.:** It’s an aesthetic concept which enables me to unite the various parts of my Franco-Haitian creole-ness as a writer. Doctors and physiologists call synergy the links between several elements which combine in a single function and a common effect. The idea of *realutopia* leads me to a kind of aesthetic and literary synergy which points in a single direction the multitude of experiences that I owe to magical reality, to negritude, to sun-kissed eroticism and to the creole fantasizing of Haitians, which is the surrealism of the humbled and the hurt.

■ **So you haven’t entirely turned your back on negritude?**

**R.D.:** I’ve always mistrusted the idea of negritude because I did not think it was possible to constitute an anthropology which is the exact opposite of the one which devalued us and downgraded us as “Blacks”. You can’t just transfer to a Black context what is said and done in terms of Whites. Aimé Césaire referred to this phenomenon as turning Gobineau upside down. I realized we had to create our own aesthetic and ideology without falling into “anti-racist racism.” That’s why I said goodbye to negritude at the same time as I dropped Marxism. I’ve only stuck with surrealism, which is still one of my working tools. I use both ends of the tool—the scholarly and the popular. But I mistrust surrealism too. Breton leaned towards the occult, trying to link surrealism with certain cabalistic and Talmudic traditions—a shadowy area in the history of thought but no less interesting for that—which are the equivalent of looking for the philosopher’s stone. I don’t go along with that at all.

I’ve rejected the ideals of my youth and today I work with the tragic experiences which in my case they led to.



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In place of the notion of *realpolitik*, which is at the root of most of the woes of people and societies—and which still flourishes to an extraordinary degree in government—I offer the notion of *realutopia*.



■ **How do you see the world these days?**

**R.D.:** The idea of revolution has been buried and history marches on, with its media-fed procession of horrors and marvels. The myth of a great consummation of the body and the mind died of natural causes in a big Soviet-style bed. The corpse is still warm and already the spark of totalitarianism has reappeared in the shape of religious fundamentalism. All kinds of ethno-nationalist savagery, supposedly under the banner of a campaign to renew faithless societies, are building monuments to obscurantism, terrorism and new handiwork by the state. On the borders of the West, the idea of a fundamentalist utopia has taken the place of a revolutionary one.

■ **How can literature inspire people to embark on the adventure of a new renaissance?**

**R.D.:** The answer to that is shaped by a context of fundamentalist horrors, inter-ethnic massacres and racist and nationalist violence. It's one of a planet completely ruled by market forces.

Thanks to the rational instruments of the rule of law and democracy, the institution of the market has survived all attacks on it. But most people now think the democracy of the market—its basis and the way it works—needs to be overhauled. Or else life in society is going to become a great planet-wide casino. So it's in the interests of the victorious marketplace to do something about the chaotic and aggressive conditions in which the globalization of human affairs is taking place.

Bold steps should be taken to make good use of the world's heritage of democratic experi-

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ence, the rich store of rules of citizenship and the art of living together which is to be found in Western civil societies, the most developed and experienced in terms of law, liberties, justice and solidarity. We should be able to turn the current haphazard process of globalization into an unprecedented humanization of relations between individuals and nation-states. The international civil society which is growing up amid disorder and uncertainty needs the oxygen of world-wide public-spiritedness and the idea of solidarity that will be conducive to fair distribution of the values and principles which are now the shared property of the global village.

■ **Who could promote this global public-spiritedness?**

**R.D.:** I see the bold imagination of poets and writers at the forefront of the values shared by the world's cultures. Our works, each with its own strictly aesthetic identity, should help scientists and politicians to revamp our old ideas about good and evil, to revive a sense of the sacred which is being lost and to devise a more balanced relationship between North and South, and East and West. This would be in a new world order where the necessary rules of commerce, tempered by a new sense of meaning and new ideals, could express a fresh balance between nature and history. To advance further without risking disaster, the spirit of the market should now be endowed with certain ethical features, such as meaning, laws of citizenship and an art of living together based on mutual respect and sympathy between the world's peoples and societies. ■

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### CORRECTION

Page 27 of our October 1997 issue ("Natural Disasters, Be Prepared!") contains an error. The phrase "Most of the 100,000 people who died in the 1991 Bangladesh cyclone. . . ." should begin: "Most of the 200,000 people who died. . . ."

## JANUARY ■ MICROFINANCE

Interview with Johan Galtung (N. Batic). Reaching the unreached (S. Rahman). A new weapon in the war on poverty (J. Garson). Three golden rules (M. Otero). Where credit is due... (R. P. Christen). A bank for the poor (M. Yunus). Microfinance in Indonesia (M. S. Robinson). Latin America: ACCION speaks louder than words (M. Otero). Enterprise in Africa (K. Mutua). Village banking: a report from 5 countries (R. Scofield). Three microcredit schemes in Europe (M. Nowak). Commentary: Education, seedbed of the future (F. Mayor). Greenwatch: People and plants (F. Bequette). Heritage: Colonia del Sacramento (E. Bailby). Listening: Interview with David Sanchez (I. Leymarie).

## FEBRUARY ■ RADIO, A FUTURE FOR SOUND

Interview with Alain de Libera (R. Sabbaghi). On the crest of the waves (H. Bourges). The first half century, 1895-1945 (B. Blin). The second half century, 1945-1995 (G. Price). A public service (K. Ebbesen). From short wave to satellite (R. Gallon and D. Seligsohn). By the people, for the people (C. A. Arnaldo). Villages find their voice (W. Jayaweera and L. Tabing). All power to the microphone! (A. Oganessian). Commentary: Energy for all (F. Mayor). Heritage: Mr. Jefferson's dream house (F. Leary). Greenwatch: Earthwatching satellites (F. Bequette).

## MARCH ■ PLURAL CITIES

Interview with Predrag Matvejevic and Vidosav Stevanovic (J. Sopova). Tangier: myths and memories (T. Ben Jelloun). New York blues (J. Charyn). Bombay: one and many (L. R. Jagga). Marseilles: port of call and recall (E. Temime). La Paz: a tale of two cities (L. Pacheco). Vancouver, or the spirit of place (H. Ditmars). The spirit of diversity (A. Barrak). Commentary: Science and society (1) (F. Mayor). Heritage: Notre-Dame d'Amiens (C. Romane). Greenwatch: Large dams (F. Bequette). Reflections: The world is a sanctuary (H. Skolimowski). Listening: Rediscovering Lili Boulanger (I. Leymarie).

## APRIL ■ THE BODY AND THE SELF

Interview with Mario Luzi (M. Rosi). Face values (D. Le Breton). An invisible river (S. Nagatomo). The body and the book (D. Biale). A language of its own (M. B. Priso). From selfhood to salvation (R. Maitra). The garden of delights (A. Meddeb). Commentary: Science and society (2) (F. Mayor). Heritage: Te Wahi-pounamu, New Zealand's pristine wilderness (A.-M. Johnson). Greenwatch: Gardens: a cultural flowering (F. Bequette). Listening: Interview with Rido Bayonne (I. Leymarie).

## MAY ■ LANDSCAPE WITH FIGURES

Interview with Aimé Césaire (A. T. Melsan). Reading the landscape (Y. Bergeret). Thresholds of divinity (M. Ninomiya). Sicilian flights (J.-F. Patricola). Colourful language (G. Piña-Contreras). Say it with flowers (Y. E. Ioannou). What's in a name? (L. Mizón). Fact file: The world network of biosphere reserves. Commentary: Science and Society (3) (F. Mayor). Heritage: The Island of Mozambique (P. Lagès). Greenwatch: Gardens of the Far East (F. Bequette). Listening: Ethiopia's azmari minstrels (I. Leymarie). Anniversary: Aleko Konstantinov (1863-1897) (G. Danaïlov).

## JUNE ■ HOW IDEAS TRAVEL

On the road (F.-B. Huyghe). Manuscripts on the move (G. Messadié). Best-sellers and gossip-mongers in 18th-century France (R. Darn-ton). 'Words have no legs, yet they walk' (Y. Tata Cissé). The mixed signals of globalization (S. Guemriche). Cyberspace: a planetary network of people and ideas (J. C. Nyíri). The test of time (L. Merzeau). Fact file: Safeguarding the documentary heritage; Routes of dialogue. Commentary: From ideal to action (F. Mayor). Greenwatch: Save our soils! (F. Bequette). Heritage: Palmyra, faces that belong to eternity (M. Zibawi). Ancient and modern Egypt come face to face (S. Gharib). Interview with Viviane Forrester (E. Reichmann).

## JULY-AUGUST ■ PORTRAITS OF WOMEN IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S LITERATURE AND UNESCO'S SECRET.

Japan: Breaking the stereotype (A. Sueyoshi). East Africa: Silent partners (E. Ledi Barongo). Former USSR: From ideology to love (J. Prosalkova). North America: Mothers and daughters (E. Liebs). UNESCO's secret, an LBRZ and ZKRR adventure (Alteau and C. Doxuan). Declaration: The human right to peace (F. Mayor). Sarajevo's battered soul (P. d'Erm). Albania's threatened heritage (Y. Aliçka). Greenwatch: Forests: a breathing space for the planet (F. Bequette). Heritage: the divine faces of Teotihuacán (C. Romane). UNESCO in action: adult education for tomorrow (C. McIntosh). Reflections: letters from Asia (D. Sinor). Interview with Mstislav Rostropovich (I. Leymarie).

## SEPTEMBER ■ THE STATE OF THE WORLD HERITAGE

What is the world heritage? (Dossier). The World Heritage Convention, 25 years on (B. von Droste). Vive la différence! (C. Fabrizio). An idea whose time has come (P. Nora). Cultural landscapes (D. Lowenthal). Past and present: a creative dialogue (J. Rigaud). The Mod-

ern Movement (M. Kuipers). In youthful hands (I. Kvisteroy). Words and deeds (G. Zouain). The North-South gap (L. Rajk). A vigilant eye (M. Björnstad). Sacred mountains (E. Bernbaum). A canal in southern France (F. Bordry). Three highland villages in Japan (H. Saito and N. Inaba). Commentary: The heritage, memory of the future (F. Mayor). Greenwatch: A waste-free farm (F. Bequette). Interview with Youssef Chahine (M. Fargeon).

## OCTOBER ■ NATURAL DISASTERS, BE PREPARED!

Safety first! (B. Rouhban). A decade for international action (F. Press). Nature on the rampage (W. W. Hays). Making cities safer (M. Erdik). The do's and don'ts of risk reduction (B. Carby). Sounding the alarm (F. Ferrucci). Women in the front line (D. Guha-Sapir). Insurance: halting an ominous trend (G. Berz). Commentary: Water and civilization (F. Mayor). Greenwatch: New Caledonia: threats to biodiversity (F. Bequette). Heritage: Taxila, the cradle of Gandhara art (L. Gourret). Reflections: Spreading the word (O. Vallet). Interview with Manuel Elkin Patarroyo (F. Romero).

## NOVEMBER ■ THEATRE'S CHANGING SCENE

Theatre for tomorrow (R. Schechner). Rules made to be broken (J.-P. Guingané). An art in search of its roots (R. Maitra). Shingeki's restless century (O. Yoshio). A common home (A. Smeliansky). The birth of modern Arab theatre (G. Maleh). The theatre of the oppressed (A. Boal). Fact file: The International Theatre Institute. Commentary: Science education and sustainable development (F. Mayor). Greenwatch: Seaweed at your service (F. Bequette). Heritage: Ironbridge Gorge (N. Cossons). Interview with Andrée Chedid (M. Leca).

## DECEMBER ■ ISLANDS A WORLD APART

Islands of the imagination (R. Baudry). Iceland's hidden fire (T. Vilhjálmsson). The Pacific: the coming of the ancestors (A. Guerreiro). Solstice islands (E. Maunick). The trials of Ulysses (J. Lacarrière). What, my brother, is an island? (L. Bhattacharya). Easter Island's last secret (L. Mizón). Cuba's gold (E. Manet). Commentary: Peace, development and democracy: UNESCO at work (F. Mayor). Heritage: The treasure of the Cerro Rico (P. Absi). Greenwatch: Climate change (F. Bequette). Reflections: A new home for Egypt's ancient treasures (S. Gharib). Listening: Interview with Steve Turre (I. Leymarie). Interview with René Depestre (J. Sopova).

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▼  
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