

*Get on Top*, David Homel's fourth novel (1999) following his *Sonya & Jack*, *Rat Palms* and *Electrical Storms*, is the first one translated into Serbian. The translation by Slobodan Drenovac conveys well the strange atmosphere of the novel itself, in which the author daringly envisions a Biblical scene – the coming of the Messiah. In his more than original rendering, the Messiah appears in rural coastal America embodied in an exceptionally sensual young American beauty. Her stunning blond hair and golden skin are in contrast with the black of her deep mourning, which is still a small surprise in comparison to her incredible moral laxity. The novel opens with her leaving her hometown, the site of a few incestuous relationships, on a bus heading for the Salvation Coast. When she gets off at the forlorn deserted settlement of Retreat, the reader gets the false impression that the girl is searching for redemption. This misconception is reinforced by the Biblical echoes of both the toponemes used in the novel and the chapter names (Choosing a Miracle, We Buy Snakes, Fooling the Creator, The Midway Blessing, The Praise Singers). Yet nothing could be further from the truth since our gorgeous Sabitha Hunter(!) is not hoping for salvation but vengeance. She is a female anti-hero with an indomitable free will, chaotically breaking all sexual taboos until she meets a Jewish peddler, Nathan Gazzara (!), who imposes a pattern on her erotic exploits. Sabitha is to become a Messiah in order to save mankind by teaching people not to observe social order and thus realize the peddler's life-long desire: to change the world. Nathan, quite in line with his name, has taken a personal vow - "I refuse to live in an age of no miracles" - so when Sabitha crosses his path he decides she is his miracle and sets up a plan to advertise her to other men who will defile social laws with her. Which is exactly what happens: with an apparently magic hairband made of rattlesnake skin, secreting beads of mysterious olive-like oil from her forehead, Sabitha as the queen of snakes re-enacts the archetypal scene of man's temptation. Along with Nathan, who perverts Biblical parables in order to reverse their messages, Sabitha gathers a huge congregation of wild followers intent on breaking all traditional rules. At this point the novel takes an incredible turn: the old peddler and his extraordinary apprentice become lovers, miracles occur much too often, a whole township joins "a lascivious imitation of baptism", having group sex in a local hot spring, freaks multiply, Sabitha falls in love with a Crab Man, murders are committed to please the new Queen, who descends ever deeper into her own darkness, and violence becomes the norm. One cannot help but wonder how the author will resolve this hellish situation and close Pandora's box. The only solution is naturally love, again coming from an incompatible lover, who helps Sabitha escape her enraged followers after Nathan's disappearance.

*Get on Top* closes with a scene depicting the close embrace of the Messiah and her saviour, and raises a number of moral issues. David Homel has delved deep into human nature and unearthed eternal questions of faith, conventions, love, the relation between the sexes, ethical choices, victimization, freedom. The option favoured by the author is no doubt personal salvation through love. The *carpe diem* attitude to life is strongly stressed in the novel by Nathan Gazzara, whose variation on this Romantic concept runs "If not now, when? If not here, then where? If not us, who should it be?" This invitation to seize the day is repeated on the last page by the narrator - "Why not

here? Why not now? Why not us?" - somewhat backgrounding the implied criticism of the futility of the American cultural concept and the discontent with the value system of the whole Western civilization.

The translation is exceptionally effective in its rendering of witty statements like: "The most vicious attacks from non-believers are preferable to having to choose between Corn Flakes and Rice Krispies the morning after a miracle" (128) or "Messiahs are like potato chips or cockroaches: when you have one, you can't have just one" (130). Slobodan Drenovać, a Serbian translator and journalist living in Croatia, pleasantly surprises the reader with his choice of translation equivalents. His work will hopefully acquaint admirers of Canadian literature in Serbia with David Homel and contribute to the efforts of Geopoetica to publish international best-sellers. This renowned Belgrade publisher takes pride in listing Julian Barnes, Salman Rushdie, Paul Auster and other great authors in its catalogue.

