

The Book of Bob

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Bob Maram

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Foreword by Sir Terry Waite

One morning on checking my email there was a note from my old friend Dr. Ineke Bosman. She enclosed the draft of a book written by her husband Bob Maram and asked if I might consider writing a foreword. At first sight it seemed a curious compilation of, book reviews, poetry and excerpts from a diary. I downloaded the attachment and began to read. It took only a few moments for me to realise that this was far from a random haphazard collection of writings. Here, the author was giving his reader a privileged access into the depths of his soul and immediately I warmed to him for his courage and truthfulness. I remembered the days when I had worked alongside his wife in Africa long before she knew Bob. I remembered her passion for truth and the depths of compassion she showed for those who found life difficult if not unbearable. She was restless. Always searching for a depth of experience that would lift her into a realm where the agony of existence was but a memory. Her restless spirit compelled her not to seek escape from this world but to continue to battle with disease and the outcast and work out her own salvation with all the passion and energy that vocation demanded. Now as I read on I could see that in Bob she had found a kindred spirit.

Here in these pages I could see a similar agonised soul attempting to make sense of his own life and in his partnership with Ineke finding a true companion for his journey.

I have long believed that good language, like good music has the capacity to breath harmony into the soul. The love of language shines through the pages of this volume and as one reads on one discovered that very harmony has gradually encompassed the soul of the writer as he enters the latter stages of life.

This is no book to be read as an electronic edition. It needs to be handled and placed so that at any given moment one might turn a page and in so doing share in the wisdom of this compassionate and intelligent man.

Terry Waite CBE

Editor's Note:

Bob Maram was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1931. After serving in the US Navy for four years he earned an MBA from Xavier University, Ohio. His professional life and interests have been diverse. Thus he was a banker by day while by night he performed as an actor in avant-garde theatre in Chicago. In 1997 he married the Dutch Ineke Bosman who worked as a tropical doctor in Ghana. He joined her while keeping his foothold in Chicago and spent time between Nkoranza in Ghana, The Hague in Holland and Chicago in The USA.

Bob wrote his first work, a play, while assisting Ineke with her home for mentally disabled children in Ghana. What followed were essays, memoirs, an occasional poem and of course his diary notes which were scribbled on loose pages and assembled and typed out (as far legible) by Bib Hughes who is a family friend and lives in Nkoranza as a farmer. Since 2010 Bob has been a permanent resident in The Netherlands but still spends the winter in Ghana where he is more productive in writing.

With the help of biographer Eileen Keasberry he wrote "Bob Remembers", personal memoirs about his life. At The Writer's Drawer he published many of his book reviews and articles.

Bob is an insatiable critical reader of history and the world of the modern American novel and film industry with a keen memory for detail. He has never yet known a moment of boredom. As a transgendered person in an age and culture where this was little understood he has become a master of charm, evasion and storytelling.

The writings of Bob are sometimes seductive, whimsical and gay and other times deeply serious but always knowledgeable and stemming from a passionate never drying source of the heart.

My hope and intention is that by reading this book you will gradually get to know the author by the contents he chooses to divulge and gradually the man himself, my man.

Bob is introduced by way of his book reviews as is his intention. Read on and you get to hear some edited personal memoirs. A poem or two make you smile, is this the same Bob? Yes he is. And so on. The work closes with excerpts from his diary entries, the "loose leaf journal notes". If you have come that far in your reading you will simply love the man.

Good, because that is what he is, loveable!

His work pitches out shadow against light, intellect against whim, gay against straight, personal against public, male against female. 'Against' not meaning 'in opposition to' but as forces that complete each other, dance together so to say.

I am proud to introduce you to his work at the occasion of his 84th birthday on the 17th July

Ineke Bosman. The Hague, 2015.

Foreword and Dedication

by Bob Maram

The book reviews, memoirs, essays, poems and excerpts from “Bob Remembers” were all written between June 2012 and June 2015.

My play Buddy and Babe was written in 2007.

The Loose Leaf Diary notes that Ineke has found and Bib kindly typed out are written earlier, around 2005.

I believe that my ability to produce this small body of work at this late stage in my life is due to many factors including my being transgendered and my Jewish muse who continues to encourage me. But mostly it is due to my being married to and in love with Ineke for over twenty years. She is an accomplished artist and poet who has given me the ability to express myself more freely. And it is to her that I gratefully dedicate this work.

I am somewhat uncomfortable and hesitant in writing about my transgendered self.

I, like most transgendered males, never made the decision to have a sex change operation even though I gave serious thought to having this life changing event.

Like most transgenders I have had my share of struggles in my quest to attain true self identification. For the past five years I have had specific psychological counselling and I have learned to gently touch that part of me but not to become a prisoner, a captive, to it or should I say her.

I am not sure how my life would have been if I had become a transsexual but I do know that the experiences, loves and friendships I have had as the Bob Maram I am now have been priceless and I am grateful.

You will not find many explicit references to my transgenderism in my book but I do know that that part of me has had a strong influence in all my writing and in all of my productive life.

Bob Maram

Book Reviews by Bob Maram:

-**Because It Is Bitter, and Because It Is My Heart**, by Joyce Carol Oates (1990) (15)

-**Bernard Malamud. A Writer's Life**, by Phillip Davis (Oxford University Press, 2007) (19)

-**Bernstein Meets Broadway. Collaborative Art in a Time of War**, by Carol J. Oja (Oxford University Press, 2014) (22)

-**Black Mischief**, by Evelyn Waugh (1932) (27)

-**Canada**, by Richard Ford (2012) (31)

-**Dissident Gardens**, by Jonathan Lethem (2013) (33)

-**Exile and the Kingdom**, a collection of six short stories, by Albert Camus (originally, *L'Exil et le royaume*, 1957) (36)

-**J.D. Salinger. A Life**, by Kenneth Slawenski (2011) (37)

-**Life & Times of Michael K**, by J.M. Coetzee (1983) (41)

-**Ravelstein**, by Saul Bellow (2000) (43)

-**Roth Unbound. A Writer and His Books**, by Claudia Roth Pierpoint (2013) (46)

- Socrates: A Man for Our Times**, by Paul Johnson (in various formats, 2011) (51)

- The Collected Stories**, by Isaac Bathshevis Singer (1982) (54)

- The Elephant Vanishes**, by Haruki Murakami (1993) (58)

- The Last Tycoon**, by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1977) (62)

- The Neon Wilderness**, by Nelson Algren (1st edition 1947) (66)

- The Road**, by Cormac McCarthy (2006) (68)

- The Secret History of Vladimir Nabokov**, by Andrea Pitzer (Pegasus, 2013) (73)

- The Spinoza Problem: A Novel**, by Irvin D. Yalom (76)

- What We Talk About When We Talk About Anne Frank**, eight short stories by Nathan Englander (2012) (80)

Because It Is Bitter, and Because It Is My Heart by Joyce Carol Oates (1990)

The essays and book reviews of Joyce Carol Oates have provided me with intellectual and emotional nourishment for many years. Her essay on Annie Leibovitz, "A Photographer Lives," concerns the photo artist's last days with her dying lover, the famous writer Susan Sontag. While I had negative feelings about her photographs of the dying Sontag, which I believe border on exhibitionism and the grotesque, I was positively moved by Oates' sensitive handling of the visual farewell given by the lover to her departing beloved. Oates' reviews of Shirley Jackson's "We Have Always Lived in a Castle" and "The Fiction of Flannery O'Connor" do, I believe, poetic justice to these great and often misunderstood writers. But I had never before read a novel by Joyce Carol Oates. Admittedly, I was a bit apprehensive because I was aware that excellent book reviewers do not necessarily have the talent to become first-class novelists. A friend of mine once said that book reviewers were usually less than excellent writers but were good enough writers to write about writers who are truly excellent. (Since he knew I was a book reviewer I now wonder how much of a friend he really was.)

But my fears were soon allayed when I read the novel *Because It Is Bitter, and Because It Is My Heart*. While the title is certainly puzzling it is also appropriate since the book is bittersweet. It is a marvelous story that takes place in the early 1950s through the mid-1960s at a time of high racial tension. A handsome young black male high school basketball star named Jinx Fairchild protects a younger white girl who he hardly knows, named

Iris Courtney. In doing so, he kills a mean-mouthed white racist. Jinx is never suspected of having anything to do with the crime and both he and Iris are in a sense bound together because of this tragedy. Jinx initially tries unsuccessfully to forget the event and get on with his plans to obtain a college athletic scholarship. The last thing he wants is to get further involved with the white girl. He tries but can't tell his mother about what happened. He is having nightmares which haunt him even during the day. The black-white conflict is made worse by his less than virtuous gambling older brother who tries to coax him to play a little slower on the basketball court so that he can win some bets.

“What you care about them white muthas? You think they care about you? You think they give a shit about you? All you is, boy, is a performin’ monkey for them, same as I was, and if you don’t perform, you on your ass... and they turn their attention to the next monkey. You think they give a shit about you? Truth is, asshole, they don’t even know you; never heard of you.”

Iris, meanwhile, is constantly thinking about her “black beauty” who, in saving her had to kill the evil white assailant. But she has additional problems with her once beautiful mother Persia, who has now become a pitiful alcoholic who works as a cocktail waitress at an unsavory bar. When Iris tries to help her Persia shouts:

“How dare you! Have you nothing better to do with your time then spying on me? After all I’ve sacrificed for you, you little bitch.”

At times Persia can still be loving to her daughter and tells her that all she ever wanted was never to be lonely and that God had made her a promise that she would never be lonely again after she gave birth to her sweet