

EDITORIAL

In the Red Room at the Nova Scotia Legislature hangs one of Sir Allan Ramsay's portraits of Queen Charlotte Sophia, who is sometimes known as Britain's first black Queen. In that portrait, the Queen appears, as George Elliott Clarke argues in this issue of *The Dalhousie Review*,

Perfectly "Mulatto," despite dissent
From naysayers who ignore her descent
From Margarita de Castro e Souza,
Offspring of Portugal's Alfonso III
And his gal pal, Madragana, who was
Either Moorish or Jewish (Sephardic),
But, by all accounts, gifted visibly
With pretty features pretty much "Negro."

Historians who share Clarke's belief that Charlotte Sophia was distantly related to a black branch of the Portugese royal family suggest that Ramsay's portraits of a curly-haired, dark-complected queen are more reliable than those of other artists, who downplayed her African features. Certainly, Ramsay was a well-known abolitionist, which may explain his inclination to represent his Queen as black. Either way, there is much to be celebrated in Clarke's entirely credible *and* decidedly provocative "Unfalsified History of Queen Charlotte Sophia," which is also a poem about perspective, if not bias. In this it shares something with Richard Norman's "Sparks Street," which tells the story of a Yousef Karsh photograph, and the process by which its living subject is "caught," held by the "spectral ice" of the flash, and transformed into "the first quick jag of past."

Clarke's poem also cohabits comfortably with Alex Pugsley's story "Death By Drowning," which is set in and around the Nova Scotia Legislature and features a narrator very much aware of the omissions and inconsistencies that colour any representation of a half-remembered life. But here is the rub: Pugsley's account of the death of the dashing, hawk-faced

Howland Poole Mair, fourteenth premier of Nova Scotia, is so compelling that I wanted to believe it to be “unfalsified.” And so, I set aside my potted knowledge of Nova Scotia politics and gave myself over to its seductive and deeply convincing portrayal of grungy but not un-glamorous mid-century Halifax, “its waterfronts haphazard with sea-craft” and its corridors peopled with illicit characters. Towards the end of his story, Pugsley’s narrator writes:

H.P. Mair was born at the end of the nineteenth century and mostly I have imagined his life in sepia tones, sometimes grey-scaled and indistinct, like the blackening Benday dots of a newspaper image, or dark-hued like a Steichen photograph, but, when picturing the events of his last day, I see the sequence in brash colours, like a film from the American New Wave. Colour 16mm shot on hundred-foot reels in a spring-wound Bolex, the image glinting with lens flares, a scene quickening as the motor sputters down, perforations of a reel-end flapping with random reds and yellows.

I loved this passage for its representation of history as technicolour confidence *and* as glaring perforations “flapping with random reds and yellows.” Certainly it speaks to Clarke’s poem, which is, after all, also about the hues of the historical record. However, it also brings to mind Jerry White’s lively short essay sketching the contours of contemporary cinematic debates about globalization and neo-colonialism in contemporary film with reference to Isabel Coixet’s *Nobody Wants the Night* and Hubert Sauper’s *We Come as Friends*. And that, certainly, is the delight of a journal such as this, where so many characters cluster and jostle like “blackening Benday dots” that come together in complicated, completed and fully-formed images.