

FOREWORD

With *Around Uluru*, Nicolas Kurtovitch continues his walking and his writing in a desert / book, going for a third time to a place where men have walked from time immemorial and who walk with him today.

This is not about a walk in a desert, but in a World Heritage-registered sacred ground, ancient, where legends continue to live, as do the men who were born there.

These are the places which particularly affect Nicolas Kurtovitch, where, at the end of a walk of initiation, the souls of ancestors breathe for those who know how to listen, to hear. The book becomes a path of searching and revelation. Walking / writing as the (only?) possible path of communication with the people, this is what the man and the author offers us.

To do this, a cleansing has to be undertaken, in order to present oneself naked to the world. The reality is painful, it can be discouraging, frightening. It's easy to understand the temptation to give in when faced with suffering. You have to steel yourself not to. The writer knows that at the end of the path (the cross), salvation (words) will be there and that he will become closer to these people whom he loves so much.

He knows everyone who has walked in the desert, from Moses to Théodore Monod (whom he quotes on the way); he understands the danger.

He « *opts for the minimal* »

Veritable mystic, his faith makes miracles happen.

The walk hypnotises, transporting one to the liberating borders of delirium and mirage, traversing time and reaching to the very origin of man.

The reader (being led and carried by the author) can therefore meld and merge into the earth, become as one with its elements and the spirits who live within. Writing enables us to share the experience.

Enlightenment is followed by a very real communion, which, using their words and the text which has been created, places man in the centre of the world, enabling him to compare himself to God.

The earth becomes the original womb. This “*undeniably feminine presence at Uluru*” doesn’t stave off the fact that death is “*never far away*” and that “*in the end our bones will mix with the dust*”.

For Nicolas Kurtovitch, words are the steps which craft sentences; sentences are the steps which craft text. This is writing which is inseparable from life, from man’s walk towards awareness, that of his own, of the other and of the world.

The walker/writer is then able to encounter the Rainbow Serpent.

The man returns back to his daily life and to reality, « totally drained, the walk completed », as indeed it is for the writer, with his text completed. But in his wake is a poem which will from now on always bear the legend as well as the memory (that of the aborigines, that of the author, of the reader).

Moving from life into art and vice versa: this is the author's hallmark. The walk/writing is cathartic: the man is cleansed.

This is the « *something* » which happens « *travelling along a path towards the centre* » which the book proposes, while also inviting each of us to “make the journey”. You will have by now realized that *Autour Uluru* is neither a diary nor a travel book; it's a tale of discovery, a vast poem which will take you to the heart of origins.

There's also a very strong allegory when writing: let the words seek themselves / find themselves / find themselves again / become more than the writer and reach the Other.

Nicolas Kurtovitch's photos aren't simply just photos, they are renditions: they accompany the walk/writing and are all clues/invitations offered to the reader.

This book builds on the journey sought / borrowed, adding to Nicolas Kurtovitch's already substantial body of work and confirming him as one of New Caledonia's great voices.

Jean-Claude Bourdais

Nicolas Kurtovitch, a man on the move

In many of his works, Nicolas Kurtovitch often links writing and walking. Strongly anchored to the areas and places about which he speaks, he writes as he walks, he walks as he writes. Writing on the move enables it to rise ever upwards. “*Writing poems/ is like being on the path / of a white mountain*” The journey of a man who one day decided to go and seek an understanding of his environment, to discover himself and others: « *I try to find tracks there of the men who follow an invisible trail* ». The very movement which made evolution possible. We've known since Plato's time that walking facilitates thought. An walk of initiation serves to call forth words, to open the senses, to listen : « *One step, another step / silence comes first /... only listen more attentively / finally hear the beating of his heart* ».

Walk to listen, listen to hear, hear to know, know to understand, understand to love. To do this, you have to be in the best possible condition to receive, to let it penetrate, to open oneself: Be of the world. Entering naked into the world.

« *Nothing to do except go naked into the new country* »92

Naked : proof of goodwill, of a need and wish to be cleansed. A mark of respect, like removing shoes before entering a mosque, or, as is often the case in New Caledonia, before entering into someone's home.

Naked : choosing to have contact with the earth, the mother rock, grass, thorns, stones, feeling the chill, the icy cold, the warmth, the burning heat, the wind which carries scents

Naked : being tested and accepting the suffering

« *The sun and the black sand / agree between themselves to burn me / barefoot* »

« *Some red ants / between the toes / the pace increases* »

« *During his walk the wind stings his face / the stones rip the soles / and the sand in the wind reduces his clothes to tatters* »

Nicolas Kurtovitch is a man of trails, or paths, who looks everywhere for the tracks of others, in order to find his own. He follows the footsteps of a man who follows the footsteps of a man who follows the footsteps of a man who... the best method to get back to the origins.

We quickly realize that for him, the walk is a beginning, serving as a « pre-text ».

Writing becomes the trace of an insuppressible, existential quest, travelling along the road where many have gone before; brothers in walking or writing, they accompany him, they live with him and he pays tribute to them along the route: « *Romans, Arabs, Crusaders, Conquerors, Colonizers, Mongols, nomadic hunters, Redskin Indians, Pacific peoples, Explorers or sportspeople ...* », « *Rising out of my memory / the names of Santiago / Penalba / Compostelle and Calatrava* ».

Alongside these ghosts, the walk/writing is, first of all, Humility.

« *To be walking, pure and simply / Among the grass without names* »

It is Unpredictable:

« *His feet don't need him / They know what they have to do* », « *I don't control anything as such. I am ready to listen and I am guided by what I pick up. I'm somewhat like a dog, ready to go after every smell.* »

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Above all, it is Solitude. «*And so man walks alone* », he repeats like a litany several times in the *Poem of Solitude and Exile (Poème de la solitude et de l'exil)*, a leitmotif, the sentence/penalty and fundamental condition of man.

« *In the first place / the man alone, irretrievably alone / walks / without always knowing why or where he's heading / delighting in the simple movement / the gestures, simple and obvious which hold / all their secrets* ».

Alone while always being accompanied: the poet becomes inhabited. In his asceticism and in being tested, he is « *alone in this journey* » to « *think about the answers* ». Truly crossing the desert, abandoned, roaming, filled with Love for the world, he is « *he who walks with the other / Who looks at him / Who loves him with a pure love / Without limit / Translucent and joyous* ».

The walk / writing asks questions, « *What is the mirage which hides itself so / behind the veil / of a walk in many directions* », returning back to the origins thanks to the magic of an incantation thrown out to the land: « *Tell me, earth / ... / teach me / to recognize my soul / along uncertain paths / ... / show me / ... / the origin of breath* ».

The regained body becomes « the channel of the area » : « *I feel lifted by my feet / stomach heart mouth / up to the mountains / the ancient life that I recognise* »

The walk / writing has completed its role: with the end of the journey comes the freedom which alone gives meaning to existence. Walking / writing: a possible path to break free and go beyond its limits, returning to the sources of this ancient quest, being reborn. To pass from shadow into light, from animal to Man, enabling him at last to become « *a total presence, complete in the world* ».

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This is why Nicolas Kurtovitch commits himself to his poetry: « *I consider poetry as a means of awareness, not as a means of financial gain ... It's the means to know myself, to know the world ... and to go towards the other ... poetry is the path that I personally borrow in order to progress in life ... Poetry is the means of being in harmony with the universe*»

But the poet knows that the walk always ends at the departure point, that there always remain things that have not been said, the body exhausted, having to start again ... No : continue. Nicolas Kurtovitch knows that « *to arrive at the end of the road is to find there the beginning* » , that the dream is perpetually threatened. And so begins another work, made up of another recurring theme in Nicolas Kurtovitch's work: vigilance.

Stay awake, don't trip up: « *It's the moment which counts: if you're not vigilant, you lose your way* »

The walk/writing isn't « *peaceful countryside*» or a « *restful, spiritual atmosphere with no tomorrow*». It unblocks and continues on by protection and permanent struggle so that the dream may be glimpsed and then reached. Only vigilance ensures that the dream doesn't become a mirage.

The poet, inhabited, is also determined. « *We tirelessly retread the same path / until arrogance is driven out / until the arbitrary is unmasked ...*». « *Vigilance is to be attentive to oneself, be attentive to what, surrounding one, meets what I believe in and to speak out if necessary ...* » « *It's not about going down already-trodden paths of years gone by, but rather a path which is completely new and different, that we create for ourselves, a path for the 21st century: My wish is for this chosen path to be one of vigilance. Vigilance towards oneself, first and foremost, and before any other vigilance, in not giving in to either guilty conscience or arrogance, which lies in wait for those who are in possession of some kind of power.*

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It's the whole which gives force and coherence to this work on the move.
Nicolas Kurtovitch, together with several other writers such as Déwé Gorodé and Pierre Gope, are some of the voices who have chosen to take arduous paths in literature, involving vigilant attention, in a country which is seeking its identity and that of the Other; proof (and tests) of hope.

Jean-Claude Bourdais

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