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**Jocelyn Bonnerave**

**New Indians**

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**Foreign Rights Manager:** Martine Heissat  
mheissat@seuil.com

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**Translation:** Alison Anderson  
alisona@mindspring.com



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**BIOGRAPHY** Jocelyn Bonnerave was born in 1977 in the Marne. He studied literature and social sciences, anthropology in particular. He often associates his musical and literary activities in performance. *Nouveaux Indiens* is his first novel.



*Nouveaux Indiens* takes the form of an investigation that changes topics along the way. Against the background of an American presidential election campaign, a French anthropologist arrives in the United States to study the lives of a few musicians and is forced to put aside his scientific reserve when he uncovers the turpitudes of a strange bunch of people: young artists, confirmed intellectuals, a surgeon, and a homeless woman who wears lovely amber beads around her neck. Other characters encountered include a cellist with magical powers, and an old Buddhist who is also an irrepressible foodie. Has the New World really changed all that much since the time of the Renaissance savages?

## Homeless

There is something much lighter about the campus than the city. The central walkway, wide and straight as a street, branches off in a thousand sudden places, paths diverge and shrubbery conceals what is behind the curves. You can walk across the lawns as much as you like.

Many Nobel prize winners come from UC Berkeley, and many homeless people settle in the city. The central campus is a park of several hundred acres where, in the shadows of the trees, you glimpse various figures licking their wounds. The sun in California is known for its mildness, but the surprisingly varied list of health recommendations in the *Lonely Planet* guide includes a warning to avoid prolonged exposure without sunscreen, even specifying the appropriate factors for various brands of sunscreen and body lotion. The homeless go without sunscreen. They live in the midst of innumerable gray squirrels which, when on the ground, advance by wiggling between tail and body, tracing S's across the green carpet of lawn. Some of the homeless people collect things: newspapers, jewelry, rubber dolls.

You see hardly any obese people on campus. The students eat well, on the whole, and the homeless don't eat much. In town you see fat people everywhere. Near the university music building, I come upon a woman with a charming smile, wrapped in a faded blue comforter, leaning against a flower tub which has her name written on it, it's *her* flower tub, and has been for nearly seven years. She managed to find some silk thread and little amber stones to make herself a necklace. She threads the beads with fingers as agile as they are dirty, because amber, in winter, protects your throat and your bronchial tubes. You have to plan: until Christmas, she sings every night at the San Francisco Opera, she says, I am Carmen for a million spectators, she looks me straight

in the eye as she strikes up the toreador's aria, *Prends gaaaaaaaaaaaaarde à toi!*, in French in the text, and in my head it goes back and forth from French to English *qui n'a jamais connu de loi* because in the meantime, after a magnificent summer, she has turned red as a lobster, which she'll never eat any ever ever *bye bye* bacon omelette, *homeless* American style new Redskins, no more need to steal their space they lost it all on their own, Campus illegal camping, Bohemian life style no more tepee boo boo on the mouth under dirty blankets, bad times for anthropologists.

Jocelyn Bonnerave  

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**New Indians**

Right, getting annoyed now. I breathe normally. On I go.

The first day or two, in my hotel room, I have jet lag. My strolls around campus are the only outings my illogical sleep patterns will allow. I have really sharp headaches, too, and sometimes it all gets mixed up, in fits and starts. It's like in the song: *que hora son?* What time are they? My appetite is affected by the problem too: when America is waking up, it's already lunchtime for my still-European stomach. I wolf something down when I wake up, then fall asleep again. It won't last, but for the time being, it's giving me a hard time, thinking it through carefully, stating it clearly. Must be patient.

When I'm not asleep but don't feel like going for a walk, I read Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer*, or I look for a roommate on *Craigslist*. Just one serious appointment so far, on Alcatraz Avenue. Charming address. The advertiser seizes the problem by the horns: yes, the island of Alcatraz is visible on the horizon, you can totally see it from the end of the avenue, the most famous prison in the world. But it's been closed for years, and in any case number 510 is a haven of peace, just look at these photos of the garden. Comes a point where you shouldn't get bogged down with symbols.

*Craigslist* is a community website and it's very practical for finding a place to live or a bike or a camera or a whore who's way too young and who'll offer you a *quick one* in the neighborhood, amateur photos to prove it.

E-mails from family and friends aren't enough to fill my solitude. The only person I know here is Frank Firth, and I only saw him once, last summer in Paris. When the solitude weighs too heavily, and, in addition, everything starts to get mixed up, I start repeating things to myself. I'm not a bum, I'm not a Nobel prize winner either, I'm a researcher in anthropology; I'm only passing through Berkeley, three months, for the books. It's mainly in adjacent Oakland that I have things to do. I'm here to observe Frank Firth, the musician, who's teaching his students at Mills College how to really play together when they're playing music.

## People's Park

I liked Jean de Léry's book, I found it used on the French shelf at Moe's, during a walk which took me over to Telegraph Avenue, just beyond the campus. Four centuries ago, Jean de Léry set off on his own for the Americas, into Indian territory.

Appointment at 2:00 p.m. at Alcatraz Avenue. Very calm, I read the opening pages of the *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil* on a bench in People's Park. Then I glance at the gilded plaque that explains the history of the place, then I sit back down, and there everything gets mixed up. In the 1960s, the "people's park" was at the heart of the protest movement: public gatherings, demonstrations, sit-ins, circles of naked women. Today, campaign posters for the presidential election hang on the fences. Today, I am sitting alone, with a difficult book, the people in the park are homeless people kicked off the UC campus, there are women lying down on lawns with holes in the grass that show its melanoma, they are badly dressed but not totally naked so that's good news. Beer, beards, lobster red Cancer skin (no wait, it's Capricorn that goes through Brazil), Henry Miller walking through Paris on the surface of the planet the way Jean de Léry did much lower and much earlier, Indians without land homeless Redskins are an absurdity, land not property but the infinite possibility of ... of taking walks? People of the park! Who will be your man? Bush means *buisson* in my language and Kerry means nothing at all and if you're going to tilt at windmills, the wheat has to grow somewhere, doesn't it, Miller is *meunier* in my language and if the mills are giants *Henri Meunier* is their heart, and it beats in my language.

## Gardening

### INSTRUCTIONS FOR LIVING AT 510 ALCATRAZ AVENUE

1. This space is your space. Make yourself comfortable in your own private space, but don't forget to create a sense of community for everyone.
2. You will have noticed that you must pay to use the dryer. Be sure to have change BEFORE Sunday morning. The machine takes coins of 10, 20, 30, etc. and I collect the change once a month.
3. Interior decoration: everything is allowed provided you all agree and the space is made completely neutral again once you leave the premises. You can bang nails into the wall during the day, I'm not here and my mother is deaf.
4. Clean the shower regularly, the walls get moldy very quickly. Please use cleaning products like *Green Tide*, *EcoHousehold*, etc. Our earth is a little bit like the garden behind the house. Soap is no good for the soul.

5. English is a little bit like French. *Soap*, *savon*, *soupe*, *soul*, *moule*, *mold*, etc.

6. Housekeeping is like gardening, it's a bit like the big bang: my soap has repercussions, it's responsible toward the cosmos, you pollute your garden you pollute your planet, *no jet lag* from Original Sin, this space: your space, big bang, big soap opera, etc.

7. Etc.

8. In my head, it all gets mixed up, but it shouldn't when I'm signing a lease agreement, I'm writing my name.

9. Etc., your rent is deliberately low. In exchange, I ask you to do two hours of gardening a week. That helps to create a strong feeling of community, and it makes things easier on my back. I hope that you will take away from your stay at 510 Alcatraz Avenue the following:

10. Gardening is very good for the soul,

11. Chatting is soap for Sam,

12. Au gratin is vizir *good for* soup,

13. *Jardiner c'est très bon pour l'âme.*

Signed:

The owner: Cinnamone Weyle

The tenant: A. the anthropologist

## Meeting

Sweating, out of breath, a vile taste of vomit in my mouth, I find the place for the meeting, and in the lobby there are photocopies tacked up all over the walls: *We miss you Mary* that I don't understand, in fact I don't understand *a thing* except that there are these people in a circle who are getting ready to play some music, and there's Frank in the middle of the circle. I tap him on the shoulder, he turns around and says, Ah, hey there, what's up?

It's scandalous. He is not going to get away with this.

"Uh, not much, same old shit, what about you?"

What a dork! I am pissed, it's enough to make you eat your tongue! That's not at all what he's supposed to say. Scream! Scream at him! Otherwise they'll never know! What's up? I'll tell you where to put your what's up, I will! I come halfway around the world to see this gentleman, vomiting in the plane, that's how much I like flying (and that flight attendant bitch telling me to breathe normally), I cross an entire ocean and two really pointy mountain ranges, when I get here

it's Bugs Bunny who meets me, 5 foot 5, his paunch sticking out, munching on his carrot with his stiff British upper lip?

What's up? Obviously, he doesn't give a shit, Frank Firth, eleven hours in a plane, that's peanuts, he's a cosmopolitan gentleman, he's used to long flights for his sold-out concerts, London, Moscow, Tokyo, Zagreb, so Paris-Berkeley for him, you understand, is a joke! He's at home in an Airbus, Frank Firth, he's an air-pocket dweller! A glitch-free career, all by plane, gliding along: guitarist, English rock n'roll at twenty, New York free music at thirty, serious composer at forty-five, and always a great teacher ... As for jet lag, he's immune to it, what can I say? Basically, that's why he interests me ...

"Did you have a good trip?"

And now he's worried! Okay then, quick quick, he's got twenty people around him with their bows lifted their lungs inflated amplifiers turned up to the max average age twenty-two, ready to let'er rip. So all the small talk, it's really just to be polite.

I answer, yeah yeah, nice trip, really nice—I can still see the stain splattered above the Atlantic: my barf. An anthropologist is not supposed to dislike traveling. Hiking boots, socks rolled down just below the knee, thin band of flesh then off-white Bermuda shorts up to the waist, very bulky binoculars hung over a fishing vest with compass pocket, Aspivenin pump pocket, map pocket, pen knife pocket with saw-blade, spoon-blade, scissor-blade, knife-blade of course, and finally the pith helmet with huge motorcycle goggles on a rubber strap, don't try to tell me otherwise, for you that's what an anthropologist is: an explorer. A lover of faraway places, fond of the unknown. Well not for me, and you can believe me, I'm not a one-off. That Tarzan stuff, it's all done, old chap! Anthropologists are library rats who do sometimes leave the library with fear in their guts because there's no book written yet about the people they're interested in, and that book, even if it means fevers and voodoo, well, someone's got to write it. So Frank Firth makes me break out in a cold sweat, but he interests me.

"Okay, hi everybody, before we begin, I wanted to tell you, today we're welcoming a young scientist, I'll let him introduce himself."

I tell them my name is A. the anthropologist, and everybody laughs. I think, good job I left in plenty of time. I didn't think this kind of thing happened anymore in developed countries. Picture this: the BART train that takes me from Alcatraz Avenue to the connecting train in West Oakland was hassle-free. BART is like the RER in Paris, in a way. As I am keeping an appointment I made

months ago, six thousand miles from here, I leave for Mills College well in advance (two hours: if I'm early there's always a café where I can wait with a good book; I know from experience: I'm always early). Well, two hours was almost not enough, because I hadn't allowed for Timo Lopez.

“My name is A. the anthropologist. In the old days anthropologists studied villages where savages lived but nowadays that no longer exists (I put on my best accent to inform them of this). So, now we fall back on eccentrics, artists, you see (I pronounce it *aahtists*, everyone laughs), so my savage is Frank on the campus of Mills College.”

And Frank makes faces like a savage and everyone laughs.

*Lonely Planet* warns you that Oakland is known to be dangerous. Timo Lopez, after holding up a bank in the center, is still too poor to use any other means of transportation, so he gets on *my* BART train that had so far been hassle-free. He hijacks it, he's got a really big gun. The driver warns us: we must be brave. We stop between two stations—tears, terror, helicopters in the sky—you can hear the rotors now and again. He asks for a ransom. That's already a lot of emotion, but the best is still to come. What's up? Well the cops are pretty efficient in this country. Timo Lopez takes aim at a little girl, but very quickly he also gets a big red dot on his forehead. It looks like a third eye, but it's actually the laser sight of a sharpshooter who'll be paid by the State if he has to take the shot. That's the story they told me afterward, because he wasn't in my car. He gets out with his hands in the air, without the kid. It's all good. Now I can see him live, next to the tracks. He's young, small, lean but sturdy, apparently he's surrendered to the two cops in riot gear who pin his arms behind his back, fairly gently. Now he's walking along past the BART to a squad car, they're filming on all sides, you can see the revolving lights on thirty or more unmarked police cars more and more clearly as night falls. Headline news on TV tonight, tomorrow a paragraph in the national press, and then that's it. But California cops' vests don't go down to their forearms. So? So, very distinctly, I see Timo Lopez suddenly lunge forward, planting his teeth in the wrist of the cop on the left, apparently piercing his blue jacket with no problem, then he raises his head again with a bit of flesh in this teeth, while the other guy is writhing on the ground. The cop on the right loses his temper, manages to subdue the cannibal, screaming of sirens, fuck I feel jet lagged, rotors in the sky and blue emergency lights whirring like rotors, an ocean, two mountain ranges, a forest in a dangerous city, fifty-seven degrees at night, it's spinning, all mixed up, anything else and I'll barf, and fifteen people with me just in the car I'm in. It's all over. Timo Lopez has been overpowered in less than an hour and forty-five minutes, I go through the psychological support cell, jump in a taxi, and rush off to tap on Frank Firth's shoulder, and casually he asks me what can possibly be up. The cannibal and Bugs Bunny. Thanks for the welcome.

I don't say tell them any of that. I breathe normally. Frank is one of the last savages in a world where they no longer exist of course, but he's just the chief, right, so in fact it all depends on *you*, so thank you for pretending I'm not here, and then they let 'er rip.

There will be music, other cannibals, other ways to use flesh, two more elections, more music. There will be an investigation, and then another investigation.

For the moment I don't know any of that, yet.

For the moment, it's just starting, and for good: who is the young woman on the poster, "*We miss you Mary*"?