

## mRb

SPRING 2008 MONTREAL REVIEW OF BOOKS

## fiction

conveys: "The sand runs out and the wave soon will carry everything away; all we can do is love."

This is a prose work that has been billed, inexplicably, as a novel. It might be more helpful to approach it as one would a poem or even a piece of inspirational or devotional writing: as something to keep by your bed to soothe your mind on troubled nights, a reminder that we are all in this together.

**I**n *The Postman's Round*, a young mailman named Bilodo develops a fascination with Japanese-style poetry, an interest he initially keeps secret from his blue-collar colleagues, who might not approve of poetry of any kind, especially if they knew that Bilodo's exposure to the form had involved a violation of post office policy, not to mention federal law. For years, Bilodo has been steaming open mail intended for Gaston Grandpré, a writer and intellectual who lives along his route in the made-up Montreal working class district of Saint-Janvier-des-Âmes. These letters contain short poems written by a beautiful woman named Ségolène, who teaches school in far-off Guadeloupe. She and Grandpré are engaged in an ongoing poetic exchange. Are

they romantically linked?

At the beginning Bilodo is unfamiliar with even the most popular of Japanese poetry forms: the haiku. Out of a growing love for the mysterious Ségolène, he learns enough about the form to begin experimenting with it himself, so that he can send her his poems in the place of Grandpré's. His newfound knowledge is shared with us in elegant, easy-to-digest doses, giving

us the information we need to appreciate the book's trick ending, which plays on one aspect in particular of the Japanese tradition. Our own learning process here makes Bilodo's transformation from a total poetry naïf to a near expert seem that much more credible. If we can do it, so can he.

In 2006, the French-language

original of this smart and funny novella won Montreal screenwriter Denis Thériault the Japan-Canada Literary Award, a lucrative but little-known prize. Hopefully, Liedewy Hawke's thoughtful translation into English will bring this perfect little story to greater acclaim. **mtb**

By Anne Chudobiak, Montreal writer.

