

From the Editor's Desk



Once again, Paul West's work graces our pages. In this issue, you will find excerpts from his recent memoir, *My Father's War*. West is now just past the age of his father when his father died. Despite all those years to consider it, and despite the writing of over forty books, Paul West still faces what we all do: the mystery that is a father. The language with which he confronts that mystery is, of course, *Westian*—a verbal sorcery that separates him from all of his writing contemporaries. Nothing West has ever written, no matter its subject or length, can be labeled “slight.” In *My Father's War*, West brings to life a blinded and shell-shocked survivor of The Great War. As he says of his father with fond irony: “Three years in France is bound to do something to you, whoever you are.”

He had volunteered at fifteen, faking his age, eighteen and a half on his return from France, nineteen and a half on his leaving hospital. People he did not know would come to look at him as if he were wrapped in a flag, as if he were a garden, exclaiming quietly at the smallness of his hands versus the largeness of his ears, the leaden introversion of his wound, the tidiness of the knot in his blood-red tie. (The dead man whose body had shielded my father from the worst of the shell-blast had been named Blood, a coincidence my father often mused over, half-discerning in the muddled farrago of fate a just hand apportioning destinies and names.)

A few months back, Paul suffered a severe stroke and the effects of aphasia, a language disorder resulting from damage to portions of the brain that are responsible for language—the sort of kismet you might find affecting a brilliant lyricist in a Paul West novel. But like his most resourceful, resilient *mutilés de guerre* (Rat Man, Stauffenberg, his own father), Paul is not only fighting against his fate, he is, predictably, penning a book about the experience. Be on guard for

The Shadow Factory. Meantime, in this issue of **WLA**, we are pleased to feature “My Father at War.” See if you don’t agree with the assessment of the editors of *The Salon.com Readers Guide to Contemporary Authors* whose entry on West solidifies the case that “for beautiful sentences fed on brainpower, there is no contemporary writer who can match him.” Be well, Mr. West.

– Donald Anderson, 2006