

Marilyn May Lombardi: On "Questions of Travel"

? Quae negata, grata ? "what is denied is desired." And what is desired may be wrongfully "pocketed." This awareness spills over into most of the Brazilian poems, particularly "Questions of Travel," in which she asks, in the name of all displaced persons:

Should we have stayed at home and thought of here? Where should we be today?
Is it right to be watching strangers in a play in this strangest of theaters? ? Oh,
must we dream our dreams and have them, too? And have we room for one more
folded sunset, still quite warm?

The last query rebounds on both poet and reader, compelling the communal "we" to examine our urge to collect relics, "folded" moments pocketed in an effort to overcome our nagging sense of dispossession. Savoring this souvenir we call a poem, we as readers share the poet's misgivings about the genuineness of human sympathy. Staring at her words resting on the page like "some inexplicable old stonework, / inexplicable and impenetrable, / at any view, / instantly seen and always, always delightful" the reader (a tourist in the alien topography of the poet's mind" must ask herself whether she has room for one more image, for one more demand on her sympathy. Will our careful observation help any of us ? help the poet or her reader, or the world we ponder "blurr?dly and inconclusively"?

Unlike the flaneur, a traditional masculine figure, the poet of "Questions of Travel" cannot remain comfortably aloof from the madding crowd. As Lois Cucullu observes, the woman who dares to travel alone is in a far different position than the male adventurer. The female flaneuse, or pedestrian, Cucullu reminds us/ may be mistaken for a common streetwalker/ Even though Bishop's sexual preference alienated her from the marriage market, she nevertheless knew as a woman what it felt like to be on exhibition. For this reason, she might be expected to question the ethics of tourism with a greater urgency than her male counterparts.

From Marilyn May Lombardi, "?Travelling Through the Flesh?: A Poetics of Translation," Chapter 5 in *The Body and the Song: Elizabeth Bishop's Poetics* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), 154-155.

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