

Gwyneth Barber- Wood

THE VERANDAH (For WVB)



There is a place, distant in memory,
though nearer now than my own breath:
the time, a spring morning, the place, a verandah
where an unrepentant reveler, facing the unknown,
found at last the altar on which to lay her dreams.

The day was lyrical as the sea of heads on that street
in Port-au-Prince, near the Iron Market, and a boy whose eyes
never once met mine as he led me through a labyrinth
where pride watched from the sockets of sorrow.
I remember the pungent, musk-like odour of the wooden
sculptures, the baskets for all seasons: 'Buy this one
to keep your silver and gold trinkets, ma'mselle.'
'Look the paintings here!' *'Jolie comme vous, princesse!'*
A tap-tap, rainbowed, bursting at the seams, leaned left.

And as you gave it all a cursory glance,
I stood the ground of unknowing, focusing
on a distant range of hills, unyielding, unknowable,
the air tremulous as naivete,
and you, bespectacled, indifferent, behind your screen-
you who would one day define the horizon –
a gambler exchanging a cup of promise for a feast.

One day I wrote a tribute to you
and called it "The Veranda" – not by any means
original, but then what is? Today, each time I roll

words half way up that hill,
I think of bamboo bent by the wind, and do not falter
as I write this, in your honour,
of the world I found on your verandah.