RESENHA REVIEW

Marcus Vinicius Freitas. *No verso dessa canoa: poemas, 1993-2005.* Ilha da Vitória: Flor&Cultura, 2005. 125p.

In the interest of full disclosure, let me say right off that I served as Marcus Vinicius de Freitas' advisor on his dissertation, *Charles Frederick Hartt: Um Naturalista no Império de Pedro II*, defended in 2000 and later published by the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais. Notably, this dissertation was also the basis for *Hartt: Expedições pelo Brasil Imperial*, an illustrated, bilingual book, published by Metalivros in 2001, that was a finalist for the Prêmio Jabuti. But is not of Marcus the student of Hartt's scientific and cultural achievement in Brazil that I write here but of the poet who has gathered his poems in *No Verso Dessa Canoa: poemas, 1993-2005.*

If "Ter a obra feita por outrem, e trabalhar só em aperfeiçoá-la... Assim, talvez, foi feita a *Ilíada*," as the imagined author of Fernando Pessoa's *Livro do Desassossego* says, this happy process is somewhat approximated when the poet revisits himself to put together a selection or collection of his work. With varying degrees of awareness and consideration, he negotiates with one or many selves, deciding, perhaps, to replace words or touch up phrases and lines, smooth out the meter before (or after) ordering his poems in sequence for his readers. Such matters he will sometimes take up in a preface or afterword. What he must not do, of course, is explain his poems or argue for them. "If a poem does not paint itself on the mind, all the prose in the world will

not justify it," warned an annoyed reviewer a century ago. Neither apologizing for his poems or trying to explain them, Marcus does something worthwhile: he offers the rationale for his volume as a whole, focusing on the way he now takes himself as the author of this body of poetry, by explaining the technical and thematic directions his poetry has taken over time, the avenues and byways he has traveled, and why this selective volume has taken this particular shape. Moreover, he locates his work in the recent and current history of Brazilian poetry: decades of "concretismo, poema-piada, hai-kaísmo (que redundou em arcaísmo), marginalismo de fachada, brincadeirinhas inteligentíssimas com signos e imagens." He acknowledges a strong fidelity to "a tradição da melhor poesia brasileira – a que combina a técnica de Drummond, a economia sublime de Bandeira, o rigor de Cabral e a imagética de Murilo Mendes," and, above all perhaps, to the traditions of Portuguese poetry, so fecund at the outset "com Camões e com os poetas medievais galego-portuguese." (In specific poems, for instance, we see literary connections, explicitly in Marcus' poem "Na beira do rio Providence," which lovingly parodies Camões by way of Pessoa, and familiarly in the wicked and delicious "Sonetos eróticos," poems dedicated to the memory of those earlier bad-boys of ribald poetry, Afonso Eanes de Cotón, Gregório de Matos, Bocage and Bernardo Guimarães.) In short, Marcus's prologue presents a poet's apologia, along with a succinct and personal account of the state of Brazilian poetry as he sees it

No Verso Dessa Canoa is divided into four sections: "Rondilhas roubadas," "Sonetos eróticos," "Barca da dúvida," and "Canto do tordo." Formally they range from lyric to sonnet, from narrative to (mini) epic. "Rondilhas roubadas" runs to fourteen poems, numbered so as to suggest a sequence that the reader is intended to feel but not to labor to define. "Barca da dúvida," on the other hand, is a closely woven sequence

of twelve numbered episodes, retelling with great economy the Old Testament story of Noah and his Ark. Down through the ages many others have retold stories from Scripture, of course, but not many of those, I would venture, has been told more efficiently. For Marcus the original Noah story may have been mediated by the singer-songwriter Jeff Black's retelling of it. Homage is paid to Black through an epigraph comprised of lines from the song "Noah's Ark": "if I ever get to heaven / I'll admit I doubted some / I'll tell them everything that happened / and ask them why it took so long / and if they find my tools and timber / that I used to build her strong / I hope the fools that do remember / how on a sea of hope and faith / we drifted home." Black's Noah wants some credit for doing what he was compelled to do. Not unlike him is Marcus's Noah, who expresses his doubts and raises questions of meaning and purpose. Like Robert Frost's interest in hired men and wall menders, Marcus's lies in how Noah takes himself. He is dutiful if fearful, willing but skeptical, compliant and complaining, believing yet needing to be shown. "Barca da dúvida" does not to tell us everything about Noah that Scripture does, choosing, rather, to work out the thoughts and emotions natural to someone trying to fulfill the task he is called upon to perform when he questions the wisdom, not to say the purpose, of the divine order. Well into the poem (Episode X) Noah continues to puzzle over his situation: "O velho sentia medo. / Não do vento ou do alarido / nem da chuva / ou dos gemidos que sua gente gania. / Tinha medo, sim, do véu que se suspendia / para além do sem-sentido, / deixando entrever o que esteve sempre contido / em sua mente e em seu ouvido: / a voz que não era voz, / o rouco latido feroz / que se fazia de mouco / pois falava e não ouvia; / a inominável chirimia / que pouco a pouco se tornava seu algoz." It is a high and noble task to look for the modern self in Noah as well as the Noah in the reflective beings

that we in the twenty-first century would be. This is the kind of work that was done in the expanse of the epics of earlier centuries. It is remarkable that a contemporary poet has been able to compress Noah's story to its essentials while expatiating on the nature of its anti-hero's conscientious awareness.

In conclusion, let me say a word about the section titled "Canto do tordo." Heralded by an epigraph – lines from Frost's "The Road Not Taken": "I shall be telling this with a sigh / Somewhere ages and ages hence" – these poems are rich in local names and regional detail. The Providence and Blackstone rivers, journeys through Warren, Bristol and Newport, a motel stay in White River Junction, sorties to cranberry bogs, Walden Pond and Wallum Lake are seen anew. With keen ear and an eye fresh to the breath and pace of a new country, the Brazilian Marcus has responded with strong poems that speak "New Englandly."

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