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Arthus de Vasconcellos Mehanna

**ROOTS AND ROUTES: BRAZIL AND  
ELSEWHERE IN THE POETRY  
OF RICARDO STERNBERG**

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Orientador: Prof. Dr. Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins

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THE POETRY OF RICARDO STERNBERG**

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Prof.<sup>a</sup>, Dr.<sup>a</sup> Viviane Maria Heberle  
Coordenador do Curso

**Banca Examinadora:**

---

Prof.<sup>a</sup>, Dr.<sup>a</sup> Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins, Orientadora  
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

---

Prof.<sup>a</sup>, Dr.<sup>a</sup> Magali Sperling Beck,  
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

---

Prof., Dr. Daniel Serravalle de Sá,  
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

---

Prof., Dr. Tacel Ramberto Coutinho Leal  
Universidade Estadual de Londrina



Para minha mãe, Anna,  
e minha irmã, Adriana.



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Lulled by the music  
of the busy and awake,  
asleep but at the helm,  
I redo Ricardo:

In the middle of the dream  
there is a forest;  
in the middle of the forest  
there is a clearing;  
in the middle of the clearing  
axe in hand I stand  
hewing timber for this craft.

(Sternberg *Map of Dreams*)



## RESUMO

No contexto multicultural canadense, muitos poetas discutem o tema do deslocamento, revisitando suas raízes. Este é o caso de Ricardo Sternberg, que deixou o Brasil quando tinha quinze anos e agora é poeta e professor de Literatura Brasileira e Portuguesa na Universidade de Toronto. Críticos levantam o rótulo de Sternberg como um escritor da diáspora. Contudo, o poeta recusa o rótulo e chama seu deslocamento de “dispersão forçada.” De acordo com as teorizações de William Safran sobre diáspora e os comentários de James Clifford sobre a teoria de Safran, o deslocamento de Sternberg pode ser categorizado como “quase-diaspora.” Sternberg revisita suas memórias de infância, recriando-as. Experiência pessoal, de acordo com Adrienne Rich, transmuta-se em poesia. Charles Simic escreve sobre a criação de registros de história coletiva através de fragmentos de experiências pessoais, e através da história de eventos “não-importantes.” A poesia de Sternberg sobre o Brasil retrata fragmentos da sociedade carioca dos anos 1950 e 1960, através de imagens do seu círculo familiar em Botafogo, dando evidências de aspectos sociopolíticos da época. O movimento do poeta para os E.U.A. e depois para o Canadá faz alusão ao seu interesse em rotas mais antigas, na recriação de narrativas de viagem em *Map of Dreams* que evocam o período das grandes descobertas, dialogando com a carta de Colombo para a Espanha, *Odyssey* de Homero, e *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, por Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Aqui discuto o contexto multicultural, levantando questões de diáspora e dispersão, analisando o ensaio “Roots and Writings.” *Map of Dreams* é analisado através das lentes da Literatura de Viagem. Os poemas sobre o Brasil são discutidos quanto a recriação das raízes de Sternberg, que contribui para relatos de história coletiva.

### **Palavras-chave:**

Deslocamento. Multiculturalismo. Canadá. Brasil. Diáspora. Dispersão. Literatura de Viagem. Poesia. Experiência Pessoal. História Coletiva.



## ABSTRACT

In the Canadian multicultural context, many poets discuss issues of displacement, revisiting their roots. This is the case of Ricardo Sternberg, who left Brazil when he was fifteen and is now a poet and professor of Brazilian and Portuguese Literature at the University of Toronto. Critics raise the label of Sternberg as a diasporic writer. However, the poet refuses the label and calls his dislocation “forced dispersal.” According to William Safran’s theorizations upon diaspora, and James Clifford’s comments on it, Sternberg’s dislocation can be categorized as “quasi-diaspora.” Sternberg’s roots are revisited in the recreation of his childhood memories in Brazil. Personal experience, according to Adrienne Rich, transmutes into poetry. Charles Simic writes of the creation of records of collective history through fragments of personal experience, through the history of “unimportant” events. Sternberg’s poetry about Brazil depicts fragments of society in Rio de Janeiro in the 1950s and 1960s through portraits of his family circle in Botafogo, giving testimony to the sociopolitical aspects of the time. The poet’s displacement to the U.S. and then to Canada alludes to his interest in early routes, in the recreation of travel narratives in *Map of Dreams* that evoke the time of the great discoveries, dialoguing with Columbus’ letters to Spain, Homer’s *Ulysses*, and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In this thesis I discuss the Canadian multicultural context, raising issues of diaspora and dispersal, analyzing the essay “Roots and Writings.” *Map of Dreams* is analyzed through the lenses of Travel Writing. In the poems about Brazil I discuss how Sternberg recreates his roots, contributing to records of collective history.

### **Keywords:**

Displacement. Multiculturalism. Canada. Brazil. Diaspora. Dispersal. Travel Writing. Poetry. Personal Experience. Collective History.



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## INTRODUCTION

It is true, we are but faint-hearted crusaders, even the walkers, nowadays, who undertake no persevering, never-ending enterprises. Our expeditions are but tours, and come round again at evening to the old hearth-side from which we set out. Half the walk is but retracing our steps. (Henry David Thoreau “Walking”)

*Hiraeth*, Welsh word for nostalgia, homesickness for a home one cannot return to. *Sehnsucht*, German word for yearning for a far, familiar land one may identify as a home. Both words do not have a literal translation in many languages. They illustrate the relation to one’s roots, a possible return to the place of remembrances, either through a journey from the roots into the new experiences abroad or through a journey from elsewhere back to one’s rooted memories. The present introduction’s epigraph speaks for the movement of looking back. Thoreau’s “Walking,” much analyzed through the lenses of travel writing, illustrates the concern with the need of walking, traveling, departing, and returning. Thoreau writes of retracing our steps, going back to the place where one has departed from, getting in touch with one’s roots, crusading through Nature, and through one’s old paths to new discoveries and expeditions. The epigraph from “Walking” opens this study for its connection with revisiting memories through histories of displacement which create a relevant distancing in order to rediscover routes and roots. Ricardo Sternberg’s poetry explores this recreation of memories in records of personal nature which intersect with a larger sphere, with records of collective history, dialoguing with myth and history, reinventing routes of travel writing.

Hence, the overall issue explored in this dissertation regards poetry and travel writing in a Canadian multicultural context. Specifically, the topic to be discussed is Sternberg’s poetry which, in its multicultural features, reveals relevant aspects of the Brazilian culture. Also, his positioning as a writer in the multicultural context of Canada will be considered in relation to critics’ and artists’ debates on the matter. Regarding Brazil, Sternberg’s memories from childhood depict the relation between personal experience and collective history in his poetry in a recreation of stories

from the perspective of displacement. In this sense, Sternberg's memories of childhood evoke socio-cultural aspects of Brazil in the 1950s and 1960s. Sternberg's poetry recreates not only memories from personal experience, but it also recreates old histories of displacement. The dialogue with great travel narratives in *Map of Dreams* combines myth and history in the adventures of a traveling persona. Besides addressing different cultures in this book, Sternberg also makes reference to Greek culture in *Bamboo Church*, which illustrates once more his interest in travel writing and dialogue with traveling cultures. In this sense, the multicultural implications will be discussed through the lenses of Travel Literature and its roots of colonial constructions of American societies.

The context of multiculturalism in Canada is the place from which Sternberg speaks as a professional and where he has been publishing his collections of poems. The first chapter of this study briefly explores such context. It discusses some developments of multiculturalism in Canada, illustrated by critical positionings. As an immigrant, Sternberg and other artists express their cultural differences, some raising voices which defy a hegemonic and coherent Canadian identity, others celebrating the multicultural implications of the country, and some not joining the debate. Diaspora comes into scene as a common link in histories of displacement expressed by multicultural writers in their artistic creations. Sternberg, however, refuses the label of a diasporic writer, explaining that his displacement was a result of a "forced dispersal." In the given context of multiculturalism and diaspora, Sternberg's positioning as a writer has very specific features, as will be further demonstrated.

In order to discuss the Brazilian context, Sternberg's background as a child in Rio will be taken into account. Sternberg left Brazil with his family when he was 15 years old, carrying memories that were later recreated in poetry. Thus the images brought from the author's childhood memories offer a poetic depiction of culture and society of the 1950s and 1960s Rio de Janeiro. Hence Sternberg's memories seem to serve as fuel to the development of his poetry. Such poems depicting the Brazilian context also illustrate the relation between the poet's personal history and collective history. That is, the depiction of Brazilian society and the recreation of great travel narratives portray such relation, interweaving the personal and the collective. The Brazilian context in Sternberg's poetry evokes the sense of displacement in his writings – bringing an insertion in a foreign

culture, and revisiting the homeland culture from a distant, though intimate, perspective. Such displacement is the lens through which the poet's memories are recreated, in a dialogic of personal and collective history.

The overall objective of the proposed research is to discuss Sternberg's poetry in the context of multiculturalism in Canada. The aforementioned history of multiculturalism is the setting in which Sternberg develops his writings about Brazil. In this sense, the poet, with a different cultural background, finds his ways into the English language to express relevant features of his home culture, and history. The specific objective of the proposed investigation is to analyze Sternberg's childhood memories recreated in his poems, carrying aspects of the Brazilian culture and society. Such aspects, written in the context of displacement, seem to illustrate the poet's embracement of his Brazilian identity. This study will also include discussion of Sternberg's long poem *Map of Dreams*, in its dialogic with travel writing and echoes of Brazil.

Based on such contexts, this study aims at analyzing (1) Sternberg's positioning in regard to the multicultural context in Canada and diasporic writing; (2) his recreation of routes in travel writing evoking myth and history; (3) his memories of Brazil giving access to relevant aspects of Brazilian history and culture.

The corpus for the proposed research includes poems from Sternberg's collections *Bamboo Church* (2003), *Map of Dreams* (1996), and *The Invention of Honey* (1990). Such collections were selected because they offer poems that refer to Sternberg's memories of Brazil and to travel writing. The poems to be analyzed, which present aspects of Brazilian culture are: "Thread and Needle," "Ana Louca," "Tia," "Paulito's Birds," "First Dance," "New Leaves," "The True Story of my Life," and "Onions." *Map of Dreams* will be discussed in its entirety through the lenses of travel writing.

*The Invention of Honey*, Sternberg's first collection, offers portraits of characters inspired by family, friends and neighbors in childhood memories which evoke a position of temporal and spatial displacement. Maria Lúcia Milléo Martins argues that the family rituals presented in Sternberg's poems mirror important aspects of Brazilian culture, and history, among which we find patriarchy, and Catholicism. Martins also mentions "the communion of the sensual and the sacred" in some of his poems, giving voice to a well-known Brazilian cultural trait (Memory 6).

Sternberg's second collection of poems, *Map of Dreams*, presents a multitude of voices reinventing maritime narratives, such as the Portuguese and Spanish travelers' chronicles of Great Discoveries and exploration. Travel in such collection offers a wide range of voices, and cultural crossings as the theme gathers myth and history. Displacement is explored on a larger scale, through a poetic narrative of moving and being moved by the desire of discovery. The book's polyphony allows the analysis of colonial discourses in past travel accounts in favor of domination and possession.

In Sternberg's latest collection of poems, *Bamboo Church*, the poet presents portraits of his childhood interwoven with the depiction of middle class society in the 1960s in Rio de Janeiro (Babstock, par. 1). Jacob Strautmänn's review describes the collection as inviting the reader to the poet's family table, and "[raising] a domestic quarrel with God as well" (par. 2). *Bamboo Church* is an extension of Sternberg's family life, initiated in *The Invention of Honey*, as a microcosm of Brazilian history and culture. Other reviews, such as W.J. Keith's and Bert Almon's, call attention to *Bamboo Church*'s "metaphysical wit." Sternberg's metaphysical wit refers to the celebration of "mind and body, sacred and profane, with an urbane and infectious enthusiasm that is highly endearing" (Keith, par. 1). Rosemary Sullivan's review on *Bamboo Church* approaches the issue of the relation of the sacred and the profane as a well-known Brazilian trait that permeates Sternberg's poems, as already observed by critics like Martins on *The Invention of Honey*. Other Brazilian cultural features are going to be presented along the analysis of *Bamboo Church*.

This study is organized in: introduction; I) first chapter, consisting of a discussion of multiculturalism in Canada, issues of diaspora and "dispersal," Sternberg's essay "Roots and Writings," and his positioning as a poet in the given context; II) second chapter, presenting a reading of Sternberg's *Map of Dreams* through the lenses of travel writing; III) the third chapter, encompassing analysis of poems referring to Brazil in *The Invention of Honey* and *Bamboo Church*; IV) final remarks, and V) the appendix, which consists of the poems analyzed in the Brazil chapter.

The theoretical and critical framework for the multicultural implications of Canada and its concepts will include writings by Linda Hutcheon, Smaro Kamboureli, Himani Bannerji, among others. This will serve as contextualization to discuss Sternberg's positioning as a poet. The discussion

of traveling cultures and diaspora will be based on James Clifford's concepts on the matter. Some considerations on early travel writing accounts will bring notions by Stephen Greenblatt, William H. Sherman, and Neil L. Whitehead. Charles Simic's writings on poetry and history will serve as reflection for the discussion of the Brazil poems.

In a multicultural context, many roots altogether, illustrated by citizens' different cultural backgrounds, speak for the multiplicity of artistic expressions. Such expressions are permeated by a diverse set of personal and collective journeys. This thesis brings the aforementioned contexts and analyses in order to develop consciousness upon the diversity encompassed by displacing one's culture into a new realm, then rediscovering one's own roots by clinging to a life of effervescent routes. "I redo Ricardo," writes Sternberg in *Map of Dreams*, quoted in this investigation's epigraph. When writing of redoing himself, Sternberg casts his persona into the unknown seafaring life. Distanced from the shoreline, the sea is a multicultural water world. Philosophical, political, and existential insights come to play when one faces uncanny events, and the solitude of being adrift, yearning for soil, earth to be rooted to once more. In the shocking waves of Multicultural Canada, Sternberg casts himself writing upon his roots – *hiraeth, sehnsucht* – the never-ending journey of memory through his poetry. Sail, Ricardo, for I also navigate, I too redo Ricardo, I too recreate your story from my own water world, I too recreate history from sails of the self.



## Chapter 1: Sternberg's Positioning in a Multicultural Canada

### 1.1 Multiculturalism in Canada

Since its First Nations, the history of Canada is essentially related to multiculturalism. According to Linda Hutcheon, “the multicultural history of Canada is not a recent one.” Canada is an old country “in both physical and cultural terms”; it begins with the history of the First Nations. That is, unlike what has been perpetuated in dominant narratives, the history of the country has not started with colonization and immigration (10). The critic also writes that any groups other than natives are originally immigrants in Canada and that all, including the First Nations, were and are multicultural. Smaro Kamboureli also states that “the land we now call Canada was already multicultural, and multilingual, before the arrival of the first Europeans,” supporting Hutcheon’s idea (11). Thus, discussing history from a perspective that does not support the colonizers’ constructions of the Canadian past helps developing consciousness regarding such history in order to “decolonize” it. That is, deconstructing history as it is perpetuated by hegemony creates discourse apart from, or against, the dominant one.

During the fifteenth century, colonization by the French and the British took place in Canada. In the eighteenth century New France ceased ruling and Great Britain began. In the twentieth century, the Great Immigration to Canada followed, encompassing a period of cultural tensions such as the Chinese Immigration and the imposition of the head tax<sup>1</sup>. The Canadian Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism founded in 1963 by the Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson aimed at analyzing and developing strategies to enhance both English and French cultures and societies in Canada. Official Bilingualism was one of the recommendations of the Royal Commission of Canada. However, such governmental binary concern would only exclude those cultures other than the hegemonic ones. In 1971, Pierre Trudeau finally implemented the official bilingualism in Canada. Followed by many activist movements against biculturalism, multiculturalism had its explicit political development in 1988, when it was legislated as “Act for the preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada” giving

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1 Fee imposed to each Chinese immigrant, after working for the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railroad.

birth to the multicultural stage of Canadian politics in history (Kamboureli 10). The “Canadian Multicultural Act” of Trudeau intended to embrace all cultures other than English and French.

However, the Canadian Multicultural Act still carries traces of the binary nature first proposed by the official bilingualism implemented in the early 1970’s. Its policies would include other cultures into the legal realm of the country but would also exclude many others, either by not mentioning or by segregating them. Critics and activists have different views upon multiculturalism in Canada. Artists also express differently their positioning in such context. Some acknowledge the beneficial developments of policies resultant from the Multiculturalism Act, others resist and criticize them, or yet do not manifest any perspective on the subject. On the one hand, the debate of multiculturalism in Canada counts on poets, critics and activists, such as Dionne Brand and Fred Wah, who resist the present socio-political context of Canada. On the other, there are the ones who present a celebratory voice. Linda Hutcheon, regardless of the problems in the Multiculturalism Act and its policies, has a positive perspective about the phenomenon of “transculturalism” or “interculturalism” in Canada, for it implies mobility, exchange, encounter or dialogue of cultures<sup>2</sup>.

Neil Bissoondath (36) argues that the Canadian Multicultural Act was too much of a politically opportunistic one that presents several failing proposals. Its 1971 policy, for example, did not mention the Aboriginal peoples and the 1988 Act directly excludes them. Bissoondath also mentions that the Act “seeks to seduce,” through repeating gentle and well-meaning generalizations. The critic’s ironic view of the Canadian Multicultural Act considers it as a “mantra of goodwill.” The critic also poses that the Act longs to contain, label, and fossilize those cultures. It does not take into consideration that such cultures have changed with their moving into North-America, and with their contact with different landscapes, and cultures. Joining the debate, Dionne Brand comments on how conquerors’ cultures like to see Black culture as petrified in time, with sorrow, “as sentiment rather than meaning or action” (117). Brand severely and ironically denounces the actions of a nation in regard to its people upon the pedestal of white superiority, politically and culturally, where racist practices are figured as “imperialist racial

2 See Hutcheon’s comments on this issue in “A Crypto-Ethnic Confession”, *The Anthology of Italian-Canadian Writing*, p. 320; “Critical Perspectives on Writing Ethnicity in Canada: Linda Hutcheon interviewed by Rosalía Baena, *Tricks with a Glass: Writing Ethnicity in Canada*, p. 287.



domination” (124). In her ironic critique, Brand asks whether people have never heard of cultural imperialism or “they’re into some serious denial.” The author also criticizes both conservative and liberal political parties in Canada, the latter led by Pierre Trudeau from 1968 to 1984, writing that “all boils down to the same thing [ . . . ] it’s classical white supremacy” (124). Brand suggests that white Canada was strangely immune to the intellectual debate until now, for she has grown up in a Black community that already fought cultural imperialism. Herein, Brand points out that cultural imperialism takes place in a common-sense ideology based on racism, designating formal culture stratified by “class, gender, sexuality, organised around maleness, class and heterossexual privilege.” The mentioned common-sense itself is constructed through society’s tools of “sense making,” such as newspapers and educational institutions (124). Brand defines cultural superiority as “a notion of intellectual and evolutionary superiority [ . . . ] that legitimates white dominance as the logical outcome of Nature” (125).

According to Smaro Kamboureli in the introduction to *Making a Difference: An Anthology of Canadian Multicultural Literature*, the “Canadian Multicultural Act” did not create a policy of integration favoring diversity. Such act categorizes cultures that are not part of hegemonic white Canada, English and French, and by not mentioning the First Nations, excludes them. In this sense, multiculturalism has not been well accepted by all Canadians, as states Kamboureli since its policies undermine the development of a cohesive Canadian identity that favors hegemony. Kamboureli calls the myth of a singular Canadian identity an “imaginary cohesiveness,” where “boundaries of difference must be repositioned” not taking into consideration “centre” or “margins” but “new and productive alignments.” The critic states that “the unity of Canadian identity is a cultural myth, a myth that can be sustained only by eclipsing the identities of others” (10). Himani Bannerji supports the same idea, arguing that the category of “visible minorities” was constructed as a social imaginary, just as the “nation” built from a “multicultural mosaic” is a product of a society based on conquest, wars and exclusion (4). The Canadian multicultural policies, then, promote containment, attempting to control minorities’ expressions, and supporting hegemony in Canada, which relates to the promotion of common-senses about culture. Bannerji concludes that these policies promote ethnocentrism, as well as Euro-centrism, preventing minorities’ integration in society.

In this Canadian multicultural context, writers with different backgrounds give voice to their cultures. These voices make use of tools and approaches that preserve and insert their histories and cultures within a Canadian setting, some of them resisting oppression and marginalization. Such multicultural production leads the reader to take in consideration social, political and cultural contexts that permeate the creation of Canadian literature. Hence, Kamboureli defends that revealing how the country has reached the present moment in history, reflecting the changing state of its culture, literature, as any other form of expression, measures the pulse of a nation (6).

Thus Sternberg's poetry, which makes use of images of displacement, interweaves his memories and personal experiences with the history of Brazil. Sternberg's positioning in the multicultural context of Canada reveals itself unique. In this polemic panorama, Sternberg does not participate in the multicultural debate: his poetry evokes histories of dislocation when recreating roots and routes through the recreation of memories of Brazil and elsewhere, and adventures in travel writing. For his Brazilian background and for the implications of displacement in his poetry, Sternberg is frequently labeled as a poet of the diaspora. The issue is approached in the next section, which brings theorists' and Sternberg's own view on the matter.

## 1.2 Diaspora or Dispersal?

Sternberg has an early history of displacement, having moved from Brazil to North-America at the age of fifteen. Refusing the label of a diasporic writer, Sternberg explains in his essay “Roots and Writings” that his displacement is rather a result of a “forced dispersal.” Critic James Clifford’s discussion of diaspora, traveling cultures, and travel writing contributes to the discussion of Sternberg’s positioning as a writer in Multicultural Canada. Clifford’s arguments raise reflections upon the complexity of cultures expressed through histories of displacement, such as questionings about diaspora, and one’s identity in the context of traveling cultures.

In Clifford’s prologue to “Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century,” the critic is surprised with Egyptian villagers who seem to live “complex histories of dwelling and traveling,” where they dwell-in-travel. Clifford’s efforts aim at tracing the histories of people on the move, going places. He is concerned with differences of people who articulate themselves through displacement. The critic suggests that historically thinking is a way to locate oneself in space and time, whereas a location is more of an itinerary rather than a static place, “a series of encounters and translations,” “paths, not a map” (11). Clifford characterizes his work as stepping into a wide range domain of diversity of the late twentieth century, linking “histories of travel and displacement” (18). In Sternberg’s *Map of Dreams*, by the end of the journey, the poet acknowledges a similar insight, where a static position is refused when the ship is adrift, suggesting that the movement represents the map of dreams, and not a specific location on it. Sternberg’s lines illustrate such discussion:

Or perhaps not. Not  
a pinpoint on a map

but the map itself.  
More than a map,

the drawing of it,  
this sailing forth. (Part V, poem 3, 7-12)

In this sense, Clifford's discussion of traveling cultures is relevant to emphasize the importance of diversity and movement. Clifford relates travel to "practices of crossing and interaction that troubled the localism of many common concepts about culture" (3). In Clifford's prologue, the critic questions whether human experiences through traveling can be seen as complex and pervasive aspects of their culture. That is, roots would not always precede routes. Travel would become "*constitutive* of cultural meaning" instead of a subsidiary expansion of it. He argues that any cultural centers, or regions, are sustained by contacts, people in movement (3).

Clifford discusses how tactical Western modernizations aim at controlling traffic across borders, attempting to fossilize cultures and maintain coherent insides and outsides. Clifford mentions how the contemporary world, torn apart by ethnic absolutism, inescapably claims for coherent identities (2-3). The policed intercultural frontiers, for instance, work "*against* historical forces of movement and contamination" (7). When trying to control borders, government turns out to contain cultural expressions to travel in more productive scales. The critic affirms that new paradigms are disseminated through historical contacts and processes of displacement, where new relations intersect. Such contacts disclose "hybrid cultures," which defy notions of margins and centers, towards a broader consciousness for realigning such concepts (7). In this sense, Clifford considers museums as symbols of global hegemony, as commodified culture, supporting the idea that fossilizing such cultures is a tactical move of control. Such control works for the constant and violent maintenance of the coherent identity of a country, or "imagined communities called 'nations.'" Thereby, the critic brings the idea of subversion of nationality as a practice of "nonabsolutist forms of citizenship" through articulations of "diaspora" (9). In this sense, the discussion about multiculturalism in Canada is relevant to illustrate how such tactical modernization of the legislation works for fossilizing cultures.

Clifford argues that structures such as race and culture, class and caste, gender and sexuality, environment and history are "difficult encounters and occasions for dialogue." They are non-static cross-cutting determinations, worldly travel spaces, not "homelands, chosen or forced" (12). That is, such structures are spaces of transit, traveling contacts in constant conversation, escaping the common-senses that support the cultural superiority mentioned

by Brand. Her critique on culture seen as petrified meets Clifford's argument regarding how mobility constitutes the aforementioned structures. Both critics seem to understand culture as a place fueled by movement, encounters, and dialogues. Denying such exchange, by petrifying them in time, ignoring their developments in different contexts, suggest that such fossilization of culture works in favor of containment.

In the first chapter of "Traveling Cultures," Clifford suggests that culture can be rethought in terms of travel as a field of dwelling and displacement, where interference and interaction construct "*historicities*." The critic attempts in such suggestion to denaturalize the concept of "culture" approached in its organic characteristic "seen as rooted body that grows, lives, dies, and so on" (25). Also, such denaturalization agrees with Brand's aforementioned critique to common-senses imposed by "sense making tools." Clifford argues that there is a myth of the traveler "who has the security and privilege to move about in relatively unconstrained ways" (34). Such myth meets the category of a common-sense generalization. The critic affirms that travelers' movements are actuated by "strong cultural, political, and economic compulsions" where one can be economically privileged or oppressed; each traveler with its specific concerns and coercions.

Sternberg's comment in "Roots and Writings" about the issue of "dispersal" illustrate Clifford's notion of such compulsions. Sternberg writes that there was dispersal due to professors' low salaries in Brazil, which motivated his family migration to North-America. In this sense, it was a sort of "forced dispersal" (Sternberg Roots 1). Sternberg's comment on professors' low salaries depicts a persistent sociopolitical aspect in Brazil still causing dispersals in search of better economic conditions abroad. Sternberg explains his reluctance to the term diaspora. He writes that "Brazilian immigration is, in historical terms, a fairly recent phenomenon" and that, though he and his family would meet Brazilians once in a while, they "never participated in a Brazilian community simply because there was none" (Sternberg Roots 1). Sternberg also states that he has "rarely written poetry in Portuguese," and concludes: "I would feel slightly fraudulent passing off as a writer of the Brazilian diaspora" (Roots 1).

James Clifford and Robin Cohen propose a discussion on diaspora sharing some ideas on the matter. In the discussion that follows the first chapter of Clifford's *Routes*, the critic answers Stuart Hall's question

arguing about how memory works in favor of continuity, through a sort of “collective memory” (45). Clifford affirms that a sense of integrity is maintained by a constructive memory, as an essential element for such maintenance (44). Accordingly, Robin Cohen states that diaspora is built from a collective memory of the homeland which is cultivated by a considerable number of members sharing a common ancestral home:

A diasporic consciousness has, moreover, to be mobilized (that is, socially constructed). A significant number of social actors need to accept their collective self-definition as a transnational community, organize to spread this perception and persuade others to participate in actions designed to cement their diasporic character and status. (13)

In chapter 10 of *Routes*, Clifford discusses diaspora by analyzing its implications in several contexts and specific situations. The critic approaches diaspora in the late twentieth century as diverse, non-exclusivist experiences of transnational identity formations. Clifford mentions how diaspora connects dispersed people through several communities yearning for a return to their homelands. Clifford argues that modern technologies of communication and labor migration make such connection possible for dispersed populations distant from their home country as “diasporic forms of longing, memory, and (dis)identification.” Clifford discusses William Safran’s six features of diaspora, two of which are relevant for this study, as collective experiences of “expatriate minority communities” who: (1) cultivate memories, perspectives, or imagination about their home country; (2) believe that their original country is a place of prospective homecoming (246-7). Sternberg’s experiences of displacement have, in this sense, connection to both features of diaspora mentioned: first, cultivating his childhood memories through their poetic recreation; and second, through such recreation, a metaphorical homecoming.

In the context of the six features Safran proposes, Clifford suggests that histories of displacement fit a category of “quasi-diasporas,” as they present, not all, but some of the features discussed. Such experiences of dislocation outrun the usual definitions of diaspora, recognizing groups as more or less diasporic as they relate to two or more

of the six features (249). According to Safran's model, Sternberg's history of displacement is quasi-diasporic for presenting two of its six features: (1) cultivating memory, and (2) returning to the homeland through the poetic recreation of such memories.

Clifford differentiates diaspora from travel. The former comprehend "dwelling, maintaining communities, having collective homes away from home" (Clifford 251). This is the idea that, for Sternberg, in "Roots and Writings," identifies a diasporic writer, label which he refuses for he did not have the opportunity to live among Brazilian communities in North-America by the time he moved there with his family. Still on this respect, Clifford writes:

Diaspora discourse articulates roots *and* routes to construct what Gilroy (1987) describes as alternate public spheres, forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference. (251)

An alternate public sphere seems to function as a sort of cultural bubble inside a given urban space. That is, immigrants, for instance, practice their homeland culture, create consciousness about their difference among the hegemonic culture of the foreign land they now inhabit. Clifford also argues that diaspora cannot be defined precisely, allowing a wider range of perspectives that oppose the so called coherent common-senses on the matter, opening spaces for adaptive approaches and reactions to "dwelling-in-displacement" (254).

In the multicultural context of Canada, Sternberg's poetry portrays relevant traits of Brazilian history and culture, traveling back to his days as a child in Rio de Janeiro. Besides roots, routes and travel writing are also explored in the long poem *Map of Dreams*, and in poetic records of other visited lands.





### 1.3 Roots and Writings

The essay “Roots and Writings,” still unpublished, offers important details on Sternberg’s life as a child in Brazil, the issue of displacement, his contacts with other foreigners, as well as information on his own early experiences in traveling from his home country to North America. The essay also reveals how the poet developed his interest in literature and writing.

Sternberg was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1948, where he lived until he was 15 years old, when his father received an offer for working permanently at Berkley, U.S. In this context Sternberg experienced the lack of a Brazilian community in the new foreign country that kept him from participating in a diasporic community. The poet has still managed to get in contact with his Brazilian identity, as an analysis of his poems about Brazil will illustrate later in this study.

Sternberg affirms that the Brazilian migration to North America is historically a very recent event, so there were not Brazilian communities in the United States back in the 1960s to put into practice the essential activities of a regular diasporic community. In this sense, Sternberg found in his memories a Brazilian character which took him to his current professional field as professor of Brazilian literature, and to his writings about Brazil.

Thus Sternberg articulates his Brazilian roots through his poetry as well as through his history of displacement. In “Roots and Writings,” the poet gives details about Botafogo, the neighborhood he has lived in Rio de Janeiro, the name of Streets and people he used to meet: his grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and neighbors. Also, he discusses his history of displacement, position of a “quasi-diaspora,” according to Clifford’s and Safran’s notions of diaspora, is disclosed through Sternberg family’s forced dispersal and practices in the new land, motivated by better economic opportunities.

Sternberg’s family history of moving and traveling seems to have influenced the poet’s own practices of displacement, either in his personal travels or in his recreation of travel narratives in *Map of Dreams*. His grandfather from Germany and his grandmother from Ireland met in a ship to the States when going to visit relatives in New York. Sternberg’s Brazilian family on his mother’s side was the one with whom the poet had everyday contact. His experiences with such relatives in Rio are the ones recreated in his poems about his childhood memories. He remembers how usual it was to meet a relative in the streets of Botafogo every time he went out. Sternberg describes Botafogo as it was back then and how it is

painted in his poems “a village with its small cast of characters.” Today, on the other hand, the poet knows how Botafogo has lost the village features to become “a little hell hole of traffic” where Voluntários da Pátria St. is one of the noisiest streets in Rio (3).

Sternberg’s memories of his house on Real Grandeza described in “Roots and Writings” tell about how his parents’ social activities influenced his early contact with foreigners, politics and literature. People from any part of the world would make visits to his father: “Englishmen! Japanese Geographers! Amazonian Indians!” When it came to politics, Sternberg would listen to such names which did not mean much for him at the time, but that made history: “Lacerda, Getulio, Lott, Janio, Jango, Fidel.” As well as being in contact with the new changes in Brazilian society, there was time in the poet’s house for art and literature, which also influenced his later passion for both. In parties, there were poetry readings, and Sternberg recalls names as João Villaret, Jorge de Lima, Eustórgio Wanderley, Fernando Pessoa and Machado de Assis (6). Sternberg’s first memory outside Rio de Janeiro comes to a house near Petropolis, in this passage of “Roots and Writings” the poet remembers meeting Lota Macedo Soares, who was building a famous house, named Samambaia, and also meeting the American poet Elizabeth Bishop. Sternberg affirms having a stronger impression from Lota’s “forcefulness” rather than Bishop, whom he remembers well from that time, although he spent more time with the poet later when he lived in Cambridge (7).

In addition to the poet’s description of places he has been, memories from summers in Cabo Frio brings up the same image Botafogo represented: first, a small village back then, offering time out with nature and other children from the local area. Later, described as nowadays noisy touristic place. Besides that, the only settings described in the poet’s childhood memories permeated are the ones indoors, such as the households at Visconde da Silva St (7-8). Sternberg recalls always being interested in reading and writing, although he does not remember reading much of poetry as a child. However, he recalls children’s traditional songs, such as Villa Lobo’s “Nesta Rua” (10). The poet starts his interest in poetry along with the learning of English, beginning to write poetry in Berkley High School and later writing with some more discipline at the University of California Riverside. Back then, there was little presence of Brazilian material in his writings. After adolescence, his Brazilianess reasserted itself along with his graduate work and his following career in Brazilian Literature in a sort of “regressive adaptation” as Sternberg calls it (11).

The unfurling of Sternberg's memories as poetry in a foreign soil speak for the expression of his personal experiences of displacement, from Brazil to North-America, and for his contribution to collective history through his poems depicting Rio's society. The poet carries Brazilian culture to a Canadian context, expressing it through the recreation of his memories. This confirms Clifford's notion of travelling cultures which are displaced and travel across the world. Thus Sternberg's positioning is the one of a traveler who, besides revisiting Brazil in his memories from the 1960s and 1970's, evokes the period of the great discoveries in the travel narrative of *Map of Dreams*.

In *Map of Dreams*' introductory hymn, Sternberg writes of the lack of words winter brings, relating idleness to the cold season, opposed to the idea of movement and heat of traveling hours and abundance of words in tropical routes:

Winter held me  
with frayed bandages,  
a poverty of words,  
*its anchor of ice.*

*Now this dreamt departure  
to El Dorado, the Indies,  
the island of Hy-Breasil. (Intro 5-11)*

The first stanza brings winter in Ireland, Éamon's homeland before his "dreamt departure." The anchor of ice relates to the sense of imprisonment in the land, and poverty of words in Ireland. The image of winter brought in this first hymn can be easily associated to the Canadian winter, landscape in which Sternberg has developed his writings. When raising the anchor Éamon departs, embarking in the adventure of travel and artistic creation.



**Chapter 2: Travel Writing: “Now this dreamt departure /  
to El Dorado, the Indies, / the island of Hy-Breasil”**

The displacement enables us to recover the wonder that is latent in our own practices, a wonder that has become flattened by familiarity and yoked depressingly to the ordinary, half-visible regulation of class and status in which museums, movies, paperback books, and schools all play a part. This is the utopian moment of travel: when you realize that what seems most unattainably marvelous, most desirable, is what you almost already have, what you could have – if you could only strip away the banality and corruption of the everyday – at home. (Greenblatt 25)

In the epigraph, Greenblatt writes of displacement as a recovering aspect from everyday life’s banality. In this sense, the critic mentions how the “half-visible regulation of class and status” of society maintains individuals trapped into a maze of common-senses (25). Such social regulations cast individuals towards an urge of modern society for an unreachable spiritual, material or emotional satisfaction. Thus displacement seems to be the key for achieving the needed distancing from social “corruption” in order to claim for “the utopian moment of travel.” The epigraph illustrates the feeling the persona, Éamon, has in *Map of Dreams*. The boy lives on the coast of Ireland, in a countryside farm life, which evokes the idea of being submersed in the ordinary everyday routine of work. Éamon’s starvation for traveling starts to flourish, as he daydreams about the enchanted island of Hy-Breasil in part one of Sternberg’s narrative, second poem:

As a boy on the coast of Ireland  
he would often see it, or thought he did,  
-so deep his thirst for that elsewhere-  
the island, floating, half hidden  
in the salt spray haze of dawn. (1-5)



## 2.1 Travel Writing: Early Routes

Since the beginning of European expansion through traveling and colonization, such as the first journeys to the Indies, travel accounts were written, either in report form as in letters or chronicles, or in epic form as in Camões' *Os Lusíadas*, and Homer's *Odyssey*. Both forms present adventurous explorers who travel in search for mercantile opportunities, new lands to be colonized and explored, or simply trying to find a way home. Such written accounts of travel introduce much of the political interests of European countries, characterizing their representations of the New World in favor of imperial concerns. The use of a fantastic realm in such written records of travels and discoveries is used as rhetorical strategy in order to achieve the colonizers' interests. The fantastic would also be used to explain much of the uncanny events that the encounters with difference triggered. Sternberg makes reference to Columbus, in part two, twelfth poem, who wrote "*Bien que el cuerpo ande acá, / el corazón esta ali de continuo*"<sup>3</sup> (1-2) in a letter to the Banco di San Giorgio in Genoa in 1502 (Maps 61). Here, the sense of nostalgia is clearly speaking for the desire travelers have of coming back home, to their beloved ones, when their bodies are at sea, but their hearts are set in their homeland.

In the first chapter of *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, William H. Sherman gives a context of the first accounts of travel narratives. Sherman discusses how documenting journeys were important in overseas travels, for such documents would help following travelers to "fill in the gaps of geographical knowledge" (17). The critic also mentions mapping as an important tool of travel accounts, not only for guidance but also for pointing which commodities the found land could offer. Such records, the only ones on the great discoveries and explorations around the globe, are clues of European travelers' perspectives about the new lands and contacts with natives. These perspectives helped building the European imaginary about the found lands, reaffirming traditional values of the Old World through writing. It illustrates the colonial gaze that still influences political and sociocultural matters in the Americas.

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3 "Though the body is here, / the heart is permanently there" (Sternberg Map 61).

Sherman discusses early travel writings from the sixteenth century, such as Columbus' letter to Spain after arriving in the Americas. The critic considers such writings in "report" form, associated with the chronological narration of the movements of travelers in their journeys and events, along geographical and ethnographical annotations. Such narratives would describe what occurred and what could have happened during the quest. In this context, lying would be a common practice in such writings, opening doors for the fantastic to emerge in such documents. The impossibility of finding new events to report would lead to their invention, and creation. In this sense, "eyewitness testimony, second-hand information, and outright invention" are permeated in early travel writings of the sixteenth century, blurring the boundaries of describing between truth and fiction in such reports (31). Sherman discusses Thomas More's *Utopia*, published in the early sixteenth century. In a context where "actual and imaginative voyages were used to criticize foreign habits, domestic conditions, and even travel itself," such *Utopia* satirizes economy and politics in Renaissance Europe (32-3). In this sense, maritime exploration in search for new mercantile opportunities and trade was object of satire, criticizing the economic configuration of the transition from feudalism to capitalism in Europe.

In the introduction to *Marvelous Possessions*, Stephen Greenblatt discusses discourses of travel in the Middle Ages (fifth to fifteenth-century) and also in the sixteenth-century, when the great discoveries and exploration of the Americas began. Greenblatt approaches the issue of travel writing as a registration of the unexpected, travelers who imagined they were in control of their routes and finally arrived to places they never knew existed. Such unexpectedness and excitement serves as basis for curiosity upon the new findings, where the unfamiliar evokes a surprising "discontinuous wonder" in the "encounter with difference" (Greenblatt 2-3). Encountering natives, their cultural practices and values incited estrangement from the European explorers that found in this moment an opportunity for using the rhetoric of the marvelous. That is, writing of fantastic wonders in favor of heightening their positions to heroic personae. Again, the impossibility of understanding natives' culture leads the explorers to create a fantastic discourse on their observations.



Greenblatt argues that Columbus, in his letter to Spain about his discoveries, responds to the encounter with the New World with wonder – a main feature of European first reaction to the Americas “in the presence of radical difference.” Columbus thus makes use of wonder to explain the profanation of the holy European beliefs. That is, pagan rites of the natives were attributed to the presence of demonic manifestations. Images of these rites are attached to practices of anthropophagy, such as reports about the Tupinambá tribes denote (14-5). The critic characterizes wonder as a primary inward response, a reaction which cannot be renounced for it is “absolutely exigent, a primary or radical passion” (17).

Greenblatt suggests that wonder is a reaction occurring in the brain, rather than in the heart. The critic cites the view of Descartes, sixteenth-century philosopher, who affirms wonder to cause a “drastic alteration in the spirits of the brain” to hold attention to the substance of wonder (19). The critic argues that Descartes writes of wonder as the first of passions, which precedes and escapes morality. Similarly to Whitehead’s argument that wonder serves as a profanation of the holy and of European moral values. In this sense, such first encounter, as Descartes terms it, creates a sense of estrangement, which puzzles the travelers: to take refuge of such wonderful experiences or to take hold of them (20). Would the brain stand for the strategic use of the marvelous discourse in favor of domination? Would such refuge or holding on to those experiences be a means of appropriating it through its conviction? Greenblatt, contextualizing from Aristotle to the seventeenth-century, argues that such terms:

[. . .] made wonder an almost inevitable component of the discourse of discovery, for by definition wonder is an instinctive recognition of difference [. . .] The expression of wonder stands for all that cannot be understood [. . .] (20)

In the last pages of the introduction, Greenblatt approaches the issue of possessions upon marvelous elements. The critic writes that after the first instinctive reaction of astonishment toward a certain object, it can be then experienced without brain alteration. Afterwards, the object of wonder can be categorized, and thus possessed, as the discourse of colonial conquest attempts in the New World. Representation, not only of

the new land, is hence permeated by the marvelous in late Middle Ages and Renaissance (fourteenth to seventeenth-century). Such representations in those centuries function as rhetoric strategy of either possession or discard upon the represented uncanny element (22). Greenblatt argues that in such period philosophy pursues to overcome the wonder which art longs to exalt. Although they are opposites on such discourse, they share assumptions, metaphors, procedures, and perspectives (23). In this sense, the anxiety of possessing is mined by moments of wonder in first encounters with difference, often attributed to a mystical element such as the presence of the devil or other fantastic creatures.

In chapter three of *Marvelous Possessions*, Greenblatt argues that Columbus makes a revision of the use of the marvelous, in an attempt for redemption, and then for appropriation when “colonizing the marvelous” (24-5). In this sense, Greenblatt reasons that Columbus creates the discourse of wonder as a “calculated rhetorical strategy,” causing a temporary amnesia about his deeds (73). The critic discusses that wonder produces (self) estrangement before the new multiplicity of possibilities in the found land, and also a sense of dispossession where nature seems possibly hostile to religious, and thus, to royal authorities. Greenblatt suggests that although such evocation of wonder claims for dispossession, it contradicts Columbus’ intentions in the New World. The idea of the marvelous creates a sense to authorize the possession of the place and its goods. Greenblatt also mentions that journeys to the Indies are intertwined with marvels, which seems to influence Columbus’ representations of wonder (74). Columbus makes use of wonderful elements, connecting his writing to those of the classical travel narratives. Such strategy attempts to summon the feature of a heroic enterprise, as Odysseus’ narrative denotes. Thus the historical acts of appropriation of lands by colonizers illustrate the dispossession of natives from their own territory.

Greenblatt also describes how the marvelous functions in Columbus’ writings as a converser, or mediator between the material (objects, situations) and the intangible (emotions, fears, desires). That is, such discourse of the marvelous for Columbus is a means of exceeding the discourse of the material world and of his perception of the customary (75). Greenblatt affirms that Columbus, amidst his rites of possession upon the new land, makes use of the marvelous to suffice the inner emptiness of such rites (80). Then, the critic brings the discussion of wonder in art,

mentioning critics and philosophers such as Minturno, Lodovico Castelvetro, Plato, and Aristotle. Greenblatt emphasizes their understandings of the use of the marvelous in art arguing how they associate wonder with pleasure, the summit of poetry, the response to beauty. Francesco Patrizi considers “marveling as a special faculty of the mind” mediating “the capacity to think and the capacity to feel” (79). Articulations of the marvelous blends artists’ rational and irrational responses to the world, revealing philosophical insights towards humanity when either refusing reality or creating it through a critic or manipulative gaze.

Accordingly, in the seventh chapter of *The Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*, Neil L. Whitehead discusses the marvels of the Amazonian rain forest, contextualizing how the fantastic is approached by early travel writings. Whitehead mentions Columbus as a provider of mysteries in his letter to Spain. In an attempt to catalogue and describe the new land in geographical and ethnographical terms, “the marvelous, the novel, and the extreme” are given space (122-3). Whitehead discusses Gaspar de Carvajal’s sixteenth century writings on the Amazon’s wonders. The critic mentions such wonders linked to the promise of the walled city of El Dorado and its golden empire. Such concern about El Dorado is much present in English travel writing on the Amazon in this period (125).

In the seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century, travel writing accounts are concerned with their authenticity. They focus on more specific examinations of either cultural systems, or on their encounters with local fauna and flora. In this sense, such encounters, along the encounters with natives, denote an atmosphere of wilderness and vast possibilities. Such environment, evoking the infinity of prospects, moves from the initial hope to the final expectation of finding “the elusive river highways of the continent, or even the great and golden city of El Dorado itself” (Whitehead 128). In this sense, such range of possibilities reflects on the academic production of anthropologists on the frustrated “or chimerical paradise of ecological potential” (Whitehead 132-3). Whitehead comments on Lévi-Strauss’ *Triste Tropiques*, published in 1955. The critic discusses how the travels into the interior of Brazil, such as into the Amazon, allude to a sort of time traveling. Once encountering “remnants of the colonial conquest,” the traveler is offered an ultimate possibility of getting in touch with such point in time (134).

Thus the documentation of journeys and the mapping activities of the explorers seem to function as rhetoric strategies in favor of imperial concerns and its political interests. The discussion of such documentation is relevant for this study concerning its approach on the creation and recreation of truth and fiction in travel reports. That is, the imaginary seems to be manipulated through uncanny images of the discoveries aiming at the possession and appropriation of conquest. Also, the so called authenticity in written accounts of travel speaks for the need of the explorers to convince royalty and citizens that their quests are not in vain, thus seducing their readers with their discourse. Explorer's search for fame and success as discoverers in these quests also seem to influence their reports. Besides evoking the values observed in classical travel accounts, Sternberg also subverts them. The following analysis will demonstrate this.

## 2.2 Map of Dreams

In *The Invention of Honey*, Sternberg makes reference to the Dutch Renaissance scholar, humanist, social critic, theologian and Catholic priest Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus, also known as Erasmus of Rotterdam. Erasmus is known for being an iconic traveler in favor of his studies and lectures; he is considered one of the greatest examples of traveling in association to academic knowledge. He has traveled Paris, England, Italy, Belgium, among others. Nowadays, scholarships in Europe carry his name and his publications are still read around the globe. In “Erasmus in the Kitchen” Sternberg reflects on travel and choice while brewing his tea. He wonders whether Erasmus “for once considers / the steps taken / that brought him [. . .] to where he is” (4-8). The poet questions the persona’s awareness in the face of a decision, an existential questioning. He returns to “the blind hour / of some choice,” blaming “the men [he] was then / [. . .] the poor devil / knew of no choice” (20-23). The poem ends in a kind of nostalgia for travel as the persona is back to the moment where roads diverge (47).

Erasmus is mentioned again in the same collection in “Erasmus Challenged by Spring.” Although there is no explicit reference to traveling, the final lines suggest the seduction of the world: “surely it is to rebuke us / that the world flares again / when winter within us / settles as the only season” (19-22). Historically, it refers to the period of Renaissance when Erasmus and Luther urged for a reform to the church that challenged its hegemony in Europe. Erasmus and Luther accused the Catholic church of corruption grounded in humanist critics’ texts. The reference to Erasmus anticipates the issue of travel in Sternberg’s first publication, *The Invention of Honey*, signaling the time of the great navigations and its narratives, and the revisiting to the period in *Map of Dreams*.

In *Map of Dreams*, Sternberg writes a poetic narration of a travel account evoking the great seafaring explorations and discoveries made by Spain and Portugal. The persona in the book travels from Ireland to “France / Spain and on to Portugal” to embark in a voyage that will lead him to such adventures similar to the great travel quests for new lands. The poet’s narrative blurs the line between the actual experiences at sea and the fantasized happenings. Travel in such collection offers a wide range of voices, and cultural crossings as the theme gathers

myth and history (Martins “Departure” 130). Myths such as the one of “Hy-Breasil,” the enchanted island; “the book / with its registry of monsters,” which refers to mythology created in seafaring expeditions (Sternberg *Map*, Par II, poem 3, 1-2).

According to Carmine Starnino’s review of *Map of Dreams*, it evokes an unpredictable plot written through fable and myth. Its surprising overturns “refashions” seafaring narratives (Starnino par. 4). The critic points out that Sternberg’s voice, in a spontaneous tone, allows the poet to “heighten the sense of myth-making” without the exceeding emotional tensions most travel narratives present (Starnino par. 5). Hence, myths present in *Map of Dreams* depict relevant aspects of history in a fantastic realm, such as in the passage:

Giuseppi from Palermo [who] knew  
the secrets of the Babylonians,  
algebraic incantations  
[. . .] the symbolic order of colours,

[. . .] More appropriate for a sailor,  
his knowledge embraced

the surnames of the winds  
that guided good Gonzago.  
(Part II, poem 7,1-3, 5, 13-16)

Myths and histories of sailors often describe their canticles, prayers, and superstitious knowledge at sea. Starnino’s review also indicates such elements in *Map of Dreams*’ “meditative quality,” correlating it to prayer, and to a spiritual overflow, where its rhythm “carries the power of a hymn” (par. 7). In the poem, Sternberg mentions prayers and clamours, such as Giuseppi’s knowledge on “prayer for safe anchorage” (21), and when Éamon prays for the blessing of “the life force / teeming in these waters / [. . .] the fish / in their prodigious multiplicity / [. . .] all things bevalved” (Part II, poem 10, 1-2, 6-7, 19).

Sternberg describes in *Map of Dreams* a dreamt travel that attempts to find “El Dorado, the Indies, / the island of Hy-Breasil” (Epigraph, 10-11). The reference to such places clearly evokes the great navigations in search for new routes to the Indies, as well as to the city of El Dorado,

obsession of a great deal of travelers in the Americas. Such references illustrate Whitehead's suggestions about the presence of the promise of El Dorado in travel writing. Sternberg's notes on the island of Hy-Breasil tell that it is an enchanted island off Ireland's coast, also named O'Brasil. The poet mentions his use and free adaptation of Roderic O'Flaherty's 1684 description of the place. Also, Sternberg acknowledges a recreation of one of Morough O'Ley's visit to Hy-Breasil<sup>4</sup> (Sternberg Map 61). In regard to the use of wonderful elements in travel narratives, discussed by Greenblatt and Whitehead, Sternberg's account also illustrates such feature. In this case, such elements permeate the journey, the paths, not the wonders of a new found land, as classical travel accounts often present.

The sense of wonder is created in Sternberg's narrative through the destruction of charts and maps aboard; when the ship is considered lost. After destroying such maps, the sailors and the captain can count only on one book that gives them directions. The book is the *Map of Dreams* itself. Such directions, then, lead the ship into fantastic experiences:

What was left us then was the book  
with its registry of monsters

(some imagined, some briefly seen),  
its list of proverbs, the map of dreams.  
(Part II, poem 3, 1-4)

The book registers sirens, dark centaurus, as well as “an Amazon astride a reined dolphin” (20). This evokes the previously mentioned idea of Sternberg's epigraph to his travel narrative—“True, the seen; / the unseen, truer still” (*Vera quae visa; Quae non, veriora*)—blurring the boundaries between reality, the so called truth, and dream. Maria Lúcia M. Martins discusses Alexis Cohen, who argues that there is a denial of the idea of sight as the most privileged and trustworthy relation of men towards the outside world, thus evoking a Medieval idea of embracing other senses of the body. Such denial of “the seen” as “the truth” is then

4 Roderic O'Flaherty (1629-1717/18) was an Irish historian who collected manuscripts of his country, interested in the antiquities about Ireland, renowned by his intellectual activities at the time.

Morough O'Ley was a descendant of the O'Flaherty Family. He is said to have participated in one of the visits to the island.

reproduced as a “postmodern disbelief in too much reliance” (“Departure” 131). In her critique to *Map of Dreams*, Cohen writes that Sternberg’s central figures in *Map of Dreams* “symbolize a pre-Enlightenment world-view where the human body was the instrument with which people measured their engagement to the world” (3). Cohen’s review meets the idea of the denial of rationality to give space to bodily experience which measures reality in the Medieval World:

[The captain] could himself be  
henceforth the measure

of our ship’s progress,  
direction and speed. (Part II, poem 1, 11-14)

Thus Cohen writes that “The captain and Gonzago therefore stand as figures that embody both a Medieval and oneiric structure of reality where the self is intrinsically connected both to the external environment and one’s experience of it” (6).

Maps are previous guides to be followed by travelers, as suggests Sherman about the making of maps and reports on travel accounts (17). The epigraph of *Map of Dreams* “*Vera quae visa; / Quae non, veriora*” (Map 10) illustrates references to maps used in the great expeditions to sea, for it was taken from a note on a map by William Baffin, explorer of the seventeenth-century, according to Sternberg’s travel narrative (Map 61). Ironically, maps in the period of the great discoveries were drawn based on precarious geographical knowledge, they were maps made out of great imaginary assumptions, or, maps of dreams. Also, it is ironic how Sternberg deconstructs the notion of maps as documents to be guided by in the passage “Not / a pinpoint on a map / but the map itself. / More than that map, / the drawing of it, / this sailing forth” (Part IV, poem 3, 7-12).

In the review for *Map of Dreams*, critic Alexis Cohen writes that “Sternberg depicts human rationality, embodied in the image of the map, as it intersects with the human imagination, connoted with its respective association with the concept of the dream” (1). Thus the map in Sternberg’s collection becomes the journey itself for there is no geographical certainty, which opens space for the drawing of a new map, myth-making, and its registry in the fantastic book of monsters, inducing sailors



to experience the encounter with wonderful elements. Such experiences reveal an engagement to the tradition of the creation and encounter with those fantastic elements in opposition to the desire of mapping: dreams, imagination and wonder versus rationality.

The first fantastic elements that appears in Sternberg's narrative are the sirens, as the sailors pray to hear from them and find their right path again, wailing "Sail by power of dreams / [. . .] by ignoring maps" (Part II, poem 2, 10-11). Afterwards, the sailors actually meet the mermaids, who "begged to be brought aboard" and hear once more the tale of Fergus, drowned by such creatures of the sea (Part II, poem 5, 11, 15-17). Martins mentions the irony of the presence of the mermaids, the only female characters appearing in the experience:

Here again history signals and makes us think of the scarcity of women as subjects, agents in the history of travel writing. As Clifford observes, "'Good travel' (heroic, educational, scientific, adventurous, ennobling) is something men (should) do" (31), and of course write about. This is so in *Map of Dreams*; the whole crew is male. But Sternberg finds an original way to problematize this by bringing mermaids aboard. (Martins "Departure" 134)

The critic argues that they appear labeled as monsters that do not threaten the sailors. That is, female characters only appear under the appeal of sensuality, wealth, and possession in travel quests (Departure 133-4). The female characters, mermaids, depicted as unthreatening monsters, raise the polemics of their passivity, and their representation as a valuable object, that is, their objectification. Hence women are not actors of history in travel accounts, they perform gender according to the norms and patterns of the European society in the sixteenth-century, they are subjected to patriarchal constrains.

In this sense, when the navigators claim to sail by power of dreams, with no maps, they are opening space for the fantastic experiences to come, evoking the sirens and other wonderful elements as well as challenging them. Being lost in the ocean, Gonzago, the pilot, could not smell his way to virgin islands anymore, for he has lost his ability to devilish creatures:

“Small deamons he claimed / came to visit him at night” (Part II, poem 6, 13-4). In addition, another episode illustrates the use of wonder for explaining unexpected events. The ship encounters a winged serpent, that is sent away with a curse by Giuseppe, a very experienced sailor who knew how to identify “the monsters as they rose.” The navigators believe they have landed, but Giuseppe affirms it is “the leviathan who surfaced / and bellowed at the prow” (Part II, poem 7, 31-2). The experienced sailor believes that they are on the back of a beast, not on a piece of land.

Whether it was real and firm land  
kept hidden by special ordinance

or else some illusion of clouds  
brooding on the surface of the sea

or even the craft of evil spirits.  
(Part II, poem 8, 1-4)

Thereby, the navigators’ uncertainty regarding the nature of their marvelous experiences, and their doubt about having “seen or unseen” such events are attributed to either dreams, or illusions for being underfed at sea. Also, the navigators, specially the captain, have an inclination towards drinking rum. Such elements, as well as the map of dreams, seem to give the sailors certain abilities, as being able to “envision / the end of the world / in a shower of stars.” The captain, rum drunk, foresees a great storm by reading the “holy book,” the map of dreams (Part III, poem 1, 3-8). However, the navigators discredit the captain’s precognition, for they all “had seen dark rings / round the sun” and could tell by themselves misfortune is approaching (Part III, poem 2, 1-2).

When the crew receives signs of being close to the shore, but does not manage to reach it, they state that if it were not for the trail of leaves, they could swear “we had all but dreamt it” (Part IV, poem 1, 36). In this regard, Alexis Cohen’s idea that in *Map of Dreams* the “concepts of time and space are porous and the boundaries of human imagination are unclear,” (1) agrees to the idea of the incapability of the sailors to tell if they were either dreaming or actually experiencing the fact that they were close to firm land. Cohen also writes that “the crew is unable to make sense of their experiences and consequently fail to categorize them as real or imagined” (7).

After failing to locate the new land, the sailors turn to Juan Garcia who, unlike the captain and Gonzago, does not sail based on his bodily experience, but works with instruments that would take the ship back home. Cohen writes that Sternberg questions the other sailors' navigational methods, once Juan Garcia presents the key to the closure of the expedition (8). In a way back to the rational, awakening from the dreamt adventure, Juan Garcia succeeds in taking them all back to their land:

versed in the art  
of the astrolabe

turned his instrument  
towards the sea

and brought us home  
by drift of starfish. (Part IV, poem 4, 7-12)

The sense of nostalgia for the homeland evokes Columbus' voice by the end of the journey in *Map of Dreams*. As the journey approaches the end and disrupts from the wonderful elements, nostalgia takes place. That is, the persona moves away from the fantastic events, as coming back from a dream, desiring firm land. The nostalgia Éamon and his fellow sailors experience is expressed in the lines: "*I fear I'll not set foot / on that green shore*" (Part IV, poem 1, 22-3). The journey ends with the sailors back home, through Juan Garcia's instrument, and navigational knowledge, reflecting on the never found land and their belief of its existence:

The Indies? No,  
we never found them

but none of us  
has ceased to believe. (Part V, poem 4, 13-6)

Éamon is then transported through time travel into one of Sternberg's childhood memories of his family history. Sternberg recalls his great-grandfather under his mango tree, at the end of the journey, evoking his Brazilian background: "Across the arch of centuries, / the man in his hammock / -my great-grandfather- / constructing his empire / under the

mango trees” (Part V, poem 5, 1-5). Sternberg’s image of his great-grandfather in his hammock brings to mind Thoreau’s words about the nature of the saunterer, the walker, often seen by critics as a sort of traveler. He writes that “He who sits still in a house all the time may be the greatest vagrant of all” (Thoreau 72). Hence, Sternberg’s ancestral is depicted as the man who sits in the house all day, building his empire, daydreaming of uncountable imaginary expeditions.

Sternberg’s travel narrative displaces the persona from his countryside routine, “in a field as broad as the sea” (Part I, poem 1, 23), dreaming of travelling to new lands. Such image of the field referred as being vast as the sea suggests the persona’s desire for exploration in order to go beyond his domains. In *The Invention of Honey*, “Exigencies of the Poem” also refers to a field that expands itself as the sea, a green prairie “that goes on forever [. . .] the breeze moving / the grass into green waves (Part Three, 7, 40-1). In *Bamboo Church*, “Duplexity” also makes reference to the desire of discovering multiplicity of travel. The persona’s heart has a “forked design” (5) and in the face of the diversion of two roads “its choice is not to choose / but to travel both” (7-8). Here Sternberg conveys that traveling encompasses a compulsory movement of going different places at once. In this regard, traveling leads to roads that diverge in a cultural and sociopolitical sense. Such diversion of two roads implies a binary choice, which seems to induce its compulsory nature. Sternberg seems to criticize the existence of such binaries, for they nullify the possibility of a multiple, different choice.

Nostalgia is hence taken further when Sternberg revisits his memories of Brazil, in a time travel through his Brazilian childhood, in routes through his roots, as the poem “Double Root” from *The Invention of Honey* illustrates:

Two feet  
and out of two feet grow  
two legs and  
of two legs a man is made  
confused by his double root. (Part Three, 1-5)

Sternberg’s double root – Brazilian and Canadian – seem to dialogue through the metaphor of dreamed paths. In his work, the poet revisits both sides of his roots, much based on his hybrid identity of also standing in between, as the sailors in *Map of Dreams* stand when lost at sea, between their home and the wonderful unknown.

### Chapter 3: Brazil

Il Miglior Fabbro,  
I am humbled, indeed  
almost paralysed  
by Your ingenuity,  
Your craftsmanship

[. . .] I planted seeds  
brought back from Brazil  
last summer. According  
to Your designs, they begin  
to display some green.  
I did not know the seeds  
would be raised in the air [. . .]

the closed fist of a seed  
unfurls a green banner  
among the cacti on a sill  
above my snowbound yard [. . .]

Perhaps we too can surge  
sprout green wings though  
I mean this metaphorically.  
(Indeed what I ask for  
Is feet rooted to the ground).  
Perhaps we will learn in time  
To trust the script, in time  
To abide by Your metaphors.  
(Sternberg *Invention of Honey*)

The connections of Sternberg's relationship with his home country and his following development as writer led the poet to reflect on the impact of his Brazilian identity on his poetry, as he explains in *Roots and Writings*. In his essay, Sternberg quotes Machado de Assis to exemplify how an "intimate connection" is the feature which characterizes his Brazilian roots in his writings: "What can be demanded of a

writer is a certain intimate connection that makes him a man of his time and of his country even when dealing with subject matter remote in time and in space<sup>5</sup>” (2). This passage confirms the importance of poetic records motivated by the poet’s experiences, yet detached in time and space, revealing the connection between the personal and the collective. Sternberg’s ties to his Brazilian and Canadian roots expressed in his poems speak for the connection mentioned by de Assis, as it creates a unique record of perceptions upon sociocultural aspects of his time.

In the first stanza of “New Leaves,” the poet introduces a reflection on the craft of writing, making reference to the poem “The Waste Land” by T.S. Eliot, dedicated to Ezra Pound as “Il Miglior Fabbro,” or, the best craftsman. The poet shows some surprise to see the planted seeds from Brazil growing in an odd environment for them, and taking such a form that amazed him. In this stanza, the poet presents the reader with the seeds, sprouting away from their original land. This image may be read as an allusion to his memories which grow and blossom into poetry form outside its place of origin. The “green banner” can be read as a reference to the Brazilian flag unfurling in the odd North-American environment, among snow. As well as the seeds have developed, the poet’s memories from Brazil are also implied in the metaphor of the “green banner.” In the last stanza of “New Leaves,” Sternberg asks for a solid ground to be rooted to like the seeds in Canada growing green and strong. One can relate this to the issue of belonging somewhere and the experience of displacement. The “green wings” indicate that the leaves grow up in the air, though rooted to the ground, that is, the roots are the basis for the “new leaves” to grow strong, like the poet’s memories finding their way into poetry. In this sense, his seeds having sprouted in a foreign soil indicate how traveling cultures work in the realm of memory and poetry. That is, Sternberg explored in his poems written in English, mostly for a foreign audience, memories loaded with Brazilian culture.

In “Notes on Poetry and History,” written in 1984, critic and poet Charles Simic writes about the difference of history written by historians, and history written by poets, contrasting their focus and approach to a given

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5 “O que se deve exigir de um escritor, antes de tudo é certo sentimento íntimo, que o torne homem do seu tempo e do seu país, ainda que trate de assuntos remotos no tempo e no espaço.” Machado de Assis, “Instinto de Nacionalidade,” translated by Sternberg.

historical period: “If history, as it comes through the historian, retains, analyzes, and connects significant events, in contrast, what poets insist on is the history of ‘unimportant’ events” (Simic 126). The idea of “unimportant” events refers to fragments of personal experiences, and not records of monumental history. These experiences speak for fragmented historical records as relevant registers for they are interwoven with collective experiences. Thus, Sternberg’s recreation of memories from Brazil illustrates a fragmented testimony to his time as a child in Rio de Janeiro, through the depiction of relatives and the neighborhood of Botafogo. Simic ends his essay stating that “One must, in spite of everything, give faithful testimony of our predicament so that a true history of our age might be written” (128). That is, collective history is built from records of details, fragments, of one’s testimony to a given historical period or event.

In this respect, in “The Genesis of ‘Yom Kippur’ 1984,” Adrienne Rich comments on Muriel Rukeyser’s line “Breathe in experience, breathe out poetry.” Rich discusses that a poem is not a slice of the poet’s life, even though it is created from intense experiences of it. That is, there is something else between an experience and a poem, there is “a sense of transmutation” (253). In this sense, Sternberg illustrates such movement as he recaptures old memories and transmutes them into poetry, connecting experience to art, and the personal to the collective.

The poem “New Leaves,” epigraph for this chapter, evokes Rich’s idea of transmutation of experience into poetry, as the seeds and memories sprout in a foreign landscape unfurling the green banner, a voice which carries Sternberg’s Brazilian history and experience. The “unimportant events” described in Sternberg’s poems, such as family rituals, and portraits of women, illustrate much of the 1960s society in Rio. That is, although such events may have more importance to those within the family than to the rest of Brazilian citizens, they help construct records of collective history that represent such period of Brazilian history through images of personal experience. Such sociopolitical representations speak not only for Sternberg’s experience but for many middle-class families of the 1960s in Botafogo and other places in Brazil.

In *The Invention of Honey*, the poem “Peddler” describes a scene where a peddler knocks at Sternberg’s family home. It is another poem that can be representative of Sternberg’s poetry about Brazil. The poem

describes a scene where the peddler, a traveling character, presents characteristics and products which suggest displacement. The first evidence refers to the peddler's foreign accent:

He appeared each spring  
to clap at our gate,  
the man of foreign accent,  
hauling a heavy suitcase. (Part Three, 1-4)

Such remark indicates the poet's acknowledgment of his estrangement to the character's difference. The peddler offers his products from places around the globe, exposing items from his journeys to Paris (10) and Peru (17). Sternberg writes that the peddler's suitcase "had no bottom / or none that I ever saw [. . .] [containing] the best / the world had to offer" (26-7, 31). These lines suggest the persona's awareness to a multiplicity of goods from different cultures that a traveler could acquire, goods which allude to cultural artifacts (cultures) carried in the suitcase. The poem resonates Sternberg's observations on traveling cultures. That is, the peddler's suitcase can be read as a metaphor for Sternberg's writings, which carry evidence of journeys through cultures, as *Map of Dreams*, and also journeys through childhood memories that speaks for the poet's cultural background in Brazil – the collective and personal experiences in dialogue.



### 3.1 The Sacred and the Profane

For Rosemary Sullivan, *Bamboo Church* presents “a celebration of the sacred and sensual things of this earth.”<sup>6</sup> The poems about Brazilian culture illustrate images which concentrate the celebration of sacred and profane aspects in association with Brazil. The sacred aspects addressed by Sternberg relate to Catholic norms juxtaposed with their profanation. Sternberg writes of characters from his childhood memories that portray the celebration of religious traditions, as well as their deconstruction. Brazilian culture offers a wide variety of religious combinations, which mirror the blending of superstition with religious rites. Such combination is an important trait of Brazilian culture for it reveals not only Sternberg’s roots but also roots that mark society in the 1950s and 1960s Rio de Janeiro.

Like Sullivan, W.J. Keith notes that *Bamboo Church* presents the sacred and the profane duality: “these poems celebrate mind and body, sacred and profane, with an urbane and infectious enthusiasm that is highly endearing” (par. 1). Martins endorses this view recognizing the union of the sacred and the sensual as “perhaps one of the most characteristic Brazilian traits, inheritance of primitive nakedness clothed with Christianity” (ABECAN, par. 6). This idea evokes the history of pagan traditions, inherited from the native Brazilians who had their cultures invaded, for colonizers insisted in substituting natives’ practices for their own. The title of Sternberg’s book, *Bamboo Church*, can be associated with the idea proposed by Martins: a church – clearly, a European cultural institution – made out of bamboo, which evokes the primitive condition of Brazilian natives’ nakedness before colonizers complex outfits. Also, the idea of a bamboo church suggests a fragile edification for a church. In this sense, “bamboo” seems to clothe “church.” That is, ironically here it is the native element that clothes the church, a profane metaphor that disrupts religious European behavior.

In the poem “The True Story of my Life,” Sternberg uses a tale to represent traditional European education and culture of a patriarchal family. This is illustrated by traditional dances used to initiate the son in social life: “So what I learned and polished / were the saraband, the minuet, / the gavotte, pavane and quadrille” (Part One, 35-7). Ironically, in spite of learning classical ballroom dancing with a Viennese teacher,

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6 Quoted in Martins, “Departure,” 6.

he would also learn “Personal Magnetism” with a one-eyed gypsy. The irony lies in the celebration of classical art, juxtaposed with eroticism, sensuality, and meditative practices:

His lessons were to provide me  
with what my father called  
Personal Magnetism.  
I was made to meditate forever  
on the cryptic remark  
with which he would leave me:  
*self-maintenance is the smallest  
duty of the human species.* (54-61)

Education and social status were connected; the father’s wishes concerning his children’s lives exposed the learners to the preparation through different cultural practices. The poem reveals that the boy is forced to adjust according to the royal tradition of the Princess he is promised to. The history of Brazilian colonization is then evoked by the poem – natives were forced into the colonizer’s tradition:

I was apprenticed  
to seven masters  
who, through a painful  
pedagogical process  
much in vogue in those days

though later discredited,  
instructed me in the arts  
of etiquette, fencing,  
ballroom dancing, history,  
archery, rhetoric and erotics. (11-20)

The disclosure of the poem affirms the disagreement of the son to his father’s plans, escaping with another woman and sending a note to the princess “*Je regrette.*” Brazil can be found in this story in what it reveals about a patriarchal family, imitating European standards. Then, comes the second subversion of “sacred” traditional values, the son having his

own ideas about his future refuses his obligation to marry the princess, refusing a holy marriage. The subversions Sternberg applies to traditional values illustrate irony as a key feature of the poem that can be read since its title, the true story of his life drawn by a subversive fairy tale. The last stanza reiterates the irony when the noble son says:

I robbed my father's coffers,  
 eloped with the middle daughter  
 of the pastry cook. (103-5)

In the poem "Tia," Sternberg pays homage to a dead relative, as the first lines about her "sleep" suggest. The secluded and very religious aunt transgresses her limitation in daydreaming:

Once, under the mango tree  
 that shadowed the entire house  
 she began to fall but reached  
 for a trailing vine,  
 regained her balance  
 and from behind thick glasses  
 smiled at me: Tarzan,  
 she said, and shuffled away. (Part Two, 15-22)

The combination of the sacred and the profane is given in the gesture where Tarzan bows in front of the altar to St. Francis, Tia's patron, "the wolf curled at his feet." Such combination refers to Tia's religious devotion and the erotics of Tarzan, illustrating Sullivan's idea of the celebration of sensual and sacred things of the earth. Transgression is present when Tia is daydreaming, breaking the physical confinement of everyday life through the imaginary. Tarzan illustrates a profane image, for he represents a cinematographic sexual symbol in the 1950s and 1960s, symbol that endures until now. Thus, Tarzan and St. Francis are celebrated by Tia, the first as an erotic symbol, and the latter as a Catholic Saint (30).

In the poem "Paulito's Birds," Sternberg describes his uncle's collection of birds. In the first stanza the reader is introduced to the *bamboo church* Paulito used for the mating of the birds. The ironic

confluence of the sacred and the profane in this passage is in the description of Paulito as an atheist, who keeps a church for birds to procreate. The sexual implication in this act creates a subversive use of a holy sanctuary, the sacred image ironically profaned:

In dozens of plain cages  
 each with its mirror and bell  
 my great uncle raised birds  
 but the steepled bamboo church  
 with a nest in its hollow pulpit  
 he, the fierce atheist,  
 kept for the maiting pair. (1-7)

The poem makes use of Christian vocabulary: Paulito practices a “ceremonious, almost sacramental” in feeding the birds (12-3). The use of the words “ceremonious” and “sacramental” evoke Catholic rites within churches. In the last stanza of “Paulitos Birds,” Sternberg calls his great-uncle a “wizard, magus, *bruxo*” (Bamboo 5). This reference indicates that Paulito performs practices which are representative of paganism. Also, it is relevant to reflect on Sternberg’s use of the Portuguese word “*bruxo*,” instead of using an English word. Such code-switching suggest a rhetoric strategy in favor of estrangement, placing Paulito as an outcast of mysterious practices who cannot be labeled as a simple “wizard” but that evokes Brazilian cultural traits encompassed in the use of the word in Portuguese.

### 3.2 Portraits of Women

How womankind, who are confined to the house still more than men, stand it I do not know; but I have ground to suspect that most of them do not *stand* it at all. (Henry David Thoreau “Walking”)

Social constructions on gender issues can be perceived throughout the history of art. Such aspect reflects on art how society builds its stereotypes regarding behavior and social roles interwoven with gender. People thus behave, or perform, according to the pattern related to their gender roles in society. Sternberg offers portraits of women that both defy and conform to the norm imposed by social rules arising from Catholic and European traditions. In the introduction of *Bodies That Matter*, Judith Butler discusses:

The category of “sex” is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a “regulatory ideal.” In this sense, then, “sex” not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce—demarcate, circulate, differentiate—the bodies it controls. Thus, “sex” is a regulatory idea whose materialization is compelled, and this materialization takes place (or fails to take place) through certain highly regulated practices. In other words, “sex” is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. (1)

By citing Foucault, Butler defends that regulatory ideals are performed according to one’s sex, controlling bodies. Hence, there is a compulsory performance of gender role intrinsically connected to one’s sex. In that matter, Sternberg’s depictions of women both conform to and subvert patriarchal roles, either by being in accordance to holy marriage, being a housewife, or relating them to sensuality, such as in “First Dance,” and in “Tia,” when dreaming of Tarzan. These are social constructs about gender, the materialization of their sexes in conformity

with the gender roles attributed to women. In that sense, Sternberg's representations of women coming from his childhood memories suggest a celebration of the sacred conformity of marriage and traditional values, as well as a celebration of sensuality in women.

In "The True Story of my Life" the poet constructs the image of a princess with some subtleties which, according to tradition, are not proper for such a social position, disclosing at first a fragile girl and then giving her attributes of a sensual and adventurous woman, from a tropical place. On the one hand, the character's royal position evokes monarchy. On the other, her behavior escapes the one of a regular European princess. Sensuality, at any rate, can mean as well a connection to stereotypical views of Brazil's sensual exuberance. The female transgression is combined with her sexual appeal; instead of fitting the domestic role the princess ironically domesticates the alligator. The fact that she dwells in a tropical place also speaks for her unusual bold attitude. Thus the setting of her kingdom also defies ideas of a common-sense princess. Such notions can be inferred by the lines mentioning the princess and her writings on "her alligator pet snapping a hummingbird:"

a pale, frightened girl at first  
and later, the sneering beauty  
astride her stallion.

[. . .] recounting the exploits  
Of her favourite pet: *Today*,  
She would write of the alligator [. . .] (Part One,  
78-80, 82-4)

In "Tia," the image described is of a woman who lived in the house and for the house, never having married, she was left aside, on the margin, as the following lines demonstrate: "Her role / had been to always play / second to married sisters" (Part Two, 9-11). The only moment that Tia plays a major role is when staging with Tarzan in her dreams. Such portrayal represents Tia in a marginal position in regard to her family and society, suggesting the image of a spinster. Although Tia conforms to a

patriarchal gender role, she subverts it in her daydreaming with Tarzan. Tia's fantasy can also refer to the previous discussion on Butler, since the character transgresses, through daydream, the "regulatory norms" of her own religiosity and of the patriarchal constraints that repress sexuality by thinking of Tarzan, a sex symbol.

In "Ana Louca," Sternberg depicts an outcast, representative of a well-known character in the Brazilian society. Ana Louca walks through the streets, as a crazy eccentric person, talking to herself in public, as described in the lines, in an image of an exposed Madonna, another profanation of a holy image:

Antic-prone and crazy  
breast-feeding her dolls  
through the streets  
or on Sundays marooned  
by herself in a pew,  
she offered her litany  
of curses and profanities  
to no one in particular. (Part Three, 1-8)

In comparison to Ana Louca, who escapes social norms when wandering the streets and is left aside from society, Tia conforms to social roles, such as the one of a religious person, but is on the margin of her family circle when wandering in imagination, daydreaming of Tarzan.

Sternberg also creates curious traits of Brazil in the image of women in "First Dance." This time the poet describes Aunt Dolores: "When music revved her hips / she moved and still would move / long after the exhausted boys" as a woman who is an "inveterate dancer" (6-8, 13). Martins cites Carmen Oliveira, who believes that this is the most Brazilian poem in *Bamboo Church*, pointing the similarity of Aunt Dolores with the woman who Chico Buarque de Holanda says to have a "typhoon in the hips" (*um tufão nos quadris*) in the lyrics of the song "Bye Bye, Brasil." Martins writes: "Sternberg confirms that, having written the line "music revved her hips," soon recognized its filiation. Correspondences not only apply to the dancing sensuality attributed to Brazilian women but allegorically to a country essentially musical." (ABECAN, par. 8)

The third stanza of “First Dance” depicts Aunt Dolores’ habitual and natural musicality:

Her snapping fingers then the beat,  
melody, her deep-throated hum.

Inveterate dancer,  
what dance didn’t you know?  
The Boogie-Woogie, Calypso,  
Castle Walk, the Lindy Hop,

Fox-trot, Samba and Tango,  
the Polka, Waltz and, drunk,  
a mean Hully-Gully, a raw  
down and dirty Rock & Roll. (11-20)

Particularly, a family woman, Aunt Dolores, is both musical and sensual. The connection between music and sensuality is also represented by the union of Aunt Dolores and her husband, “the only man I saw/do justice to her style” when they meet on the dance floor: “A tiny god, enthroned / in the haze of his Gauloise, / he held her mesmerized” (28-30). These lines illustrate the sensual atmosphere in which they meet to dance, in the haze of the tiny god’s cigarettes (*Gauloise*), in a sensual ritual led by music and dance moves. Then, the uncle is characterized as “defiant, belligerent,” adjectives related to youth energy demonstrating the connection between music and sensuality in the daring and vigorous posture of the uncle, despite his twenty years of marriage (38). Musicality as part of a poem’s form and rhythm also applies here: in this sense, “First Dance” performs in its rhythm the dance of its content.

Thus Sternberg’s portraits of women both conform to and subvert patriarchal models for gender roles: Ana Louca, an outcast; the princess in “The True Story of My Life,” under the codes of nobility, but with an alligator as a pet; “Tia,” in her religious devotion, versus her sensual fantasies; and Aunt Dolores from “First Dance,” conciliating her twenty years of marriage with her dance sensuality. These characters illustrate the celebration of the sensual and of the sacred, blending both in depictions of Brazilian society and family.



The poem “Thread and Needle” brings yet another portrait of woman, this time an easygoing family person, who persists on her sewing skills even being “purblind with cataracts at sixty-five” (Sternberg Invention 17). This image is further analyzed in the next section specifying rituals inside the house and family intimacy.



### 3.3 “Sanctuaries of Boredom” – family rituals

In Sternberg’s poems there is often the presence of his memories within the households where he spent time as a child in Botafogo, such places were stages for scenes of family intimacy and rituals evoking Brazilian society at the time. “Thread and Needle” takes the reader into this atmosphere of family intimacy, as in the second stanza the poet’s aunt says: “child, thread this for me.” In the third stanza, the poet draws the image where Sinhá gives life to her altar – her home – among her prayers and needles.

[...] If I moved my head a certain way  
Sinhá was inside the aquarium  
lost among the ferns  
sewing and muttering prayers  
oblivious to bright fish  
threading in and out of her hair.

Silver needle, golden thimble  
I will sew your bride a dress

Sanctuary of boredom, that house  
was a world, a system complete,  
self-sufficient as the aquarium. (Part One, 10-20)

Such lines make a comparison between Sinhá’s house and the aquarium, where she is part of the vicious circle of both, the metaphor suggesting the “sanctuary of boredom”—the house and the aquarium as this complete system of dullness. The angle in which the poet depicts the aunt and the fish threading her hair is emblematic of her aquarium life. In the last stanza, Sternberg provides a change of angle, showing the poet as a participant of the aquarium life. The repetition of the request in the last two lines reaffirms that Sinhazinha relies on him, closing the circularity of the “sanctuary of boredom.” In this sense, water functions as a dimension for philosophical insights. Sinhazinha, lost inside the aquarium, indicates an automatic movement, as the one of sewing and asking for the child to thread for her again and again. Such image illustrates an echoing memory which is accessed through the philosophical dimension of the aquarium that evokes the image of Sinhá.

[...] I no longer remember.  
 [...] Sinhá, suspecting  
 a demon in those gears,  
 turned her eyes toward one  
 lost inside the aquarium  
 and asks, again and again:  
 child, thread this for me. (24, 28-33)

The poem “Tia” mentions the traditional Brazilian catholic devotion to Saints and their images: “Her patron was St. Francis: / A bird to each shoulder, / the wolf curled at his feet” (Part Two, 30-2). St. Francis is known to tell the birds that they should be thankful for the freedom given to them by the Lord, such freedom that Tia did not seem to experience inside the house. As in the poem “Thread and Needle,” this Tia was part of a “sanctuary of boredom” as well. *Boredom* is a constantly approached topic in Sternberg’s poems, used to depict the pace of life of his relatives and how they dealt with it. In “Tia,” the poet mentions certain strategies to ease boredom: as Paulito’s handling with the birds, and Tia’s religious rites. Such behavior metonymically exemplifies the life-style of the patriarchal Brazilian society at the time, as the following lines suggest:

[...] I understand  
 Those were rituals  
 Enacted since before I was born,  
 mean to alleviate boredom,  
 understood, I think, as such. (38-42)

The poem “Ana Louca” is the only poem depicting a “sanctuary of boredom” outdoors, the city itself was her household. The idea of boredom can be associated to the town, as in Carlos Drummond de Andrade’s poem “Cidadezinha Qualquer.” Drummond’s poem depicts a small town with an almost lethargic pace of life, where the poet repeats the word *devagar* (slowly) several times to characterize the movements of the place. This idea of life as slow and repetitive is illustrated in Ana Louca’s ritual of coming to the door for food: “Thursdays she would come / demanding that which habit / had made hers by right: / the warmed leftovers / she wolfed down,

standing / against the green backdoor.” In the last stanza, Sternberg finishes the poem with the image of Ana Louca going to sleep, representing thus a social scene of abandonment, disclosing then her fragility when lying down among her dolls and unusual objects: “[. . .] she slept by the docs / [...] / asleep and for once, quiet,/a grizzled girl” (18, 20-21). In small towns in the 1960s, outcasts like Ana Louca were usual beggars, social aspect that can still be noticed nowadays.

In “First Dance,” Sternberg gives information about the time the scene has happened to depict a moment in 1956, which would repeat itself: “At some wedding or another / (I must have been eight)” (41-2). The poem depicts how music and dance in family rituals, as weddings, were also part of the strategies to overcome boredom. That is, leisure functions as a breach in their routines.

In “Onions,” Sternberg portrays his grandmother cooking and telling him popular knowledge about life:

The opacity of onions  
is deceiving.

The onion is a crystal ball  
that makes you cry  
for future sorrows.

I was told this  
by my grandmother  
tired of the daily drama  
by the sink.

She would tell him such saying and give him the impression that she was tired of the family dramas. Such image indicates that the drama of crying for chopping onions also relates to daily dramas of the households, concerning “sorrows” of life in family and society. Also, such poem suggests a ritual in the household, first the one related to house chores, as cooking, and then the ritual of an older relative teaching the young ones about life and popular knowledge. The scene also seems to speak for the intimacy between grandmother and grandson, where the former shares knowledge and feelings with Sternberg. Also relevant is

the fact that the female character is the one cooking, exemplifying the patriarchal construction of gender and her performance of a housewife. That is, according to patriarchy, women are the ones responsible for taking care of the family and meals.

Sternberg's poems that bring his childhood recreate his memories in Rio de Janeiro in the late 1960s. The memories are brought back into scene through poetry, after a particular transmutation from roots into writings. Thus a historical record is construed through images from Botafogo back in the 1960s, portraying family and social matters that create records of personal history. The "unimportant events," as Simic writes, are also records of collective history. The previous analysis of Sternberg's poems gives evidence to this association with portraits of his family rituals that are permeated with Brazilian culture and history. The recreation of such memories joins present and past transmuting experience into poetry.

## FINAL REMARKS

Memory and history play an essential role in this study, they are the ones through which the discussion begins. Regarding history, a brief account of the Canadian Multicultural phenomenon served to contextualize Sternberg's positioning as a poet. The Canadian land before colonization is recognized in the history of the native people as already plural. After the arrival of the colonizers, multiculturalism has only expanded, for the country has received many immigrants and diasporic communities, in greater number in the twentieth and twentieth-first-centuries. Currently, multiculturalism is a polemic issue in Canada, with critics that oppose the Multiculturalism Act and its political implications and resist the labeling and categorization of their cultures. On the other hand, there are more optimistic views on the encounter of cultures.

Sternberg's positioning in the multicultural context of Canada, as discussed in Chapter I, is unique for the poet does not participate in the political debate about multiculturalism. The poet nonetheless contributes to the plurality of the context with his poetic voice, which brings Brazilianness into Canadian landscape. Sternberg refuses the label of a diasporic writer, saying that his displacement was result of a forced dispersal, motivated by his family search for better life conditions abroad. In this matter, Sternberg history of displacement permeates his writings about Brazil, both in the poetic recreation of his past, and in the discussion of his Brazilian identity in "Roots and Writings."

Sternberg's discussion on diaspora and dispersal in the essay "Roots and Writings" evokes the issue of memory. In Simic's essay, the discussion on the use of personal experience that describes the history of "unimportant events" illustrates the creation of records of collective history through fragmented events. That is, the depiction of a personal experience can contain historical information about a specific event, or period in time. Sternberg's poetry brings fragments of memories from his childhood in Brazil, giving evidence for characteristics and practices of society in Rio de Janeiro in the 1950s and 1960s. It is relevant to recall Rich's words on the matter, who agrees with Simic when writing about poetry as a result of experience. The critic and poet writes that there is a sense of transmutation between experience and poetry. Something occurs in the middle of the recreation of a memory, or experience until it is written in poetic form, refusing the idea of a poem as the slice of a poet's life.

In “Roots and Writings,” Sternberg mentions how his family has an early history of dislocation. The poet mentions the history of his ancestors coming to Brazil, and then meeting each other in travels around the world. Also, his parents would receive guests from many parts of the globe, among artists and critics. Sternberg’s history of displacement can be read as a motif for his interest in exploring travel narratives from the time of the great navigations. The second chapter of this study analyses his recreation of routes in travel writing evoking myth and history. *Map of Dreams* has connections with canonical travel adventures, such as Homer’s *Ulysses*, and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and narratives of actual journeys as Columbus’s. In Sternberg’s long poem about Éamon’s travel expedition in search of an enchanted land, the poet recreates and subverts canonical models of travel writing.

The third chapter on Sternberg’s poems about his childhood demonstrates how his memories of Brazil give access to relevant aspects of Brazilian history and culture in the 1960s: the celebration of the sacred and the sensual; the conformity and subversion of patriarchal norms in portraits of women; the way “sanctuaries of boredom” permeate life within his family households as a microcosm for the slow pace of small towns (“vida besta,” as in Drummond’s poem “Cidadezinha Qualquer”).

Further investigations in poetry and other genres in relation to issues of displacement are relevant. The present thesis supports that researchers develop deeper reflection on the issue of the transmutation of experience into poetry, analyzing what lies between them, the entr’actes, as posed by Rich. The relevance of the exploration about “unimportant” events, suggested by Simic, also finds itself present. Hence more studies on the issue of personal inventory giving access to collective history are suggested. Travel writing, diaspora, and dispersal also reveal themselves as fields of study to be further developed. Theories as Safran’s, Cohen’s and Clifford’s help creating consciousness about diversity triggered by the displacement of people around the globe.

Last, the proposed research should contribute to the area of Literatures in the English Language at PPGI, more specifically to studies on poetry. It is relevant to mention that this study is the first MA thesis developed in Brazil about Ricardo Sternberg’s poetry. Also, there is no MA thesis or PhD dissertation developed in Canada about Sternberg’s poetry. Multiculturalism in Canada, however, has been discussed in Edegar França Junior’s MA thesis at



PPGI, entitled “The Multifaced Janus: Multiculturalism in the Poetry of Cyril Dabydeen.” Similarly to the proposed research, such thesis relates to multicultural aspects of Canadian history, and poetry. Also at PPGI, travel writing has been discussed in Camila Alvares Pasquetti’s MA thesis, “A Reading of Thoreau’s ‘Walking’ as a Travel Narrative.”

To conclude this study, words from the Mexican poet Octavio Paz illustrate the type of poetry Sternberg writes. Paz considers poetry as an invitation to return to the homeland, as a historical expression of races and classes. Paz writes that “it is not historical science but biography that could offer the key to the comprehension of the poem [...] History and biography can give the tone of a period or a life.” This passage resembles the biographical tone in Sternberg’s poems that offers images of the Brazilian society. Finally, Paz makes a direct connection to the use of time within a context, applied here in Sternberg’s return to his childhood memories. “Poetry is nothing but time, rhythm eternally creator [...] Poetry is history, language and society.”<sup>7</sup>

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7 My translation.



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## APPENDIX

### I. The True Story of My Life

At the age of three  
I was promised in marriage  
to a neighbouring princess  
and took to heart  
my father's interests.

As prescribed by her religion  
I immediately underwent  
strange rites of purification,  
submitting myself to an awkward diet  
of eggs laid under a waxing moon.

I was apprenticed  
to seven masters  
who, through a painful  
pedagogical process  
much in vogue in those days

though later discredited,  
instructed me in the arts  
of etiquette, fencing,  
ballroom dancing, history,  
archery, rhetoric and erotics.

She arrived from Vienna,  
my dancing teacher;  
a woman who despite  
her advanced age and weight  
glided gracefully into my life.

Beaming at me  
from behind thick glasses  
the Viennese was thorough  
and ours was a tour  
of what the world's feet  
had been doing across the ages.

She was, however, prejudiced  
 against all modern movements:  
 the grotesque stomp of savages.  
 So what I learned and polished  
 were the saraband, the minuet,  
 the gavotte, pavane and quadrille.

But most difficult,  
 demanding the greatest grace,  
 the courtship dance:  
 a complicated series of gestures,  
 a slow, erotic posturing,  
 and finally the chaste embrace  
 of bride and groom.

One master enchanted me.  
 He was a one-eyed gypsy  
 who ingratiated himself  
 into my father's household  
 by magically removing  
 the unseemly wart  
 that blemished my sister's  
 happiness, my father's  
 designs on another kingdom.

His lessons were to provide me  
 with what my father called  
 Personal Magnetism.  
 I was made to meditate forever  
 on the cryptic remark  
 with which he would leave me:  
 self-maintenance is the smallest  
 duty of the human species.

With another master  
 I spent long hours  
 untangling the snarled  
 lineage of the girl;  
 but the incestuous lines  
 crossed so often,  
 their imagination for names



was so limited,  
that I grew confused, lost appetite  
and though severely punished  
gave up that line of study  
satisfied that she was indeed  
the issue of man and woman.

The princess herself  
I never saw, though photographs  
were sent daily from the palace:  
a pale, frightened girl at first  
and later, the sneering beauty  
astride her stallion.  
She would send me perfumed notes  
recounting the exploits  
of her favourite pet: Today,  
she would write of the alligator  
he sapped a hummingbird  
clean out of the air.

My twentieth year  
was entirely devoted  
to the study of a groom's  
manner on the wedding night.

Instructed in the secrets  
of zippers, buttons, clasps and snaps  
my hands acquired the instinct  
of searching always for flesh:

of unbuttoning, unzipping,  
unclasping, unfastening,  
bypassing at any rate  
cloth that stood in the way.

At the age of twenty-one  
I sent the princess  
three red roses and a note that read:  
Je regrette;  
I robbed my father's coffers,  
eloped with the middle daughter  
of the pastry cook.



## II. Tia

Of this one I now speak  
but soft and low  
for I do not wish  
to disturb her sleep.

Were my words to reach her  
on that other shore  
she would embarrassed  
to hold even this small  
a stage. Her role  
had been to always to play  
second to married sisters.

A fragile thing, she was  
myopic, rheumatic, prone  
to spells of dizziness.  
Once, under the mango tree  
that shadowed the entire house  
she began to fall but reached  
for a trailing vine,  
regained her balance  
and from behind thick glasses  
smiled at me: Tarzan,  
she said, and shuffled away.

A believer in icons  
and in appeasing heaven  
with prayer and promise,  
she kept the household altar  
outside her bedroom door:  
A large niche painted blue,  
speckled with golden stars.

Her patron was St. Francis  
A bird to each shoulder,  
the wolf curled at his feet.

Paulo, her brother-in-law,  
a feisty bantam, an atheist,  
in arguments would threaten  
to make out of that niche,  
a cage for his macaw.

In retrospect, I understand  
those were rituals  
enactes since before I was born,  
mean to alleviate boredom,  
understood, I think, as such.

As when, soaked in cheap cologne,  
Tia drifted through the house  
on a cloud of rose or jasmine:

upstairs rushed her sisters  
then down some minutes later,  
a moist hanky to her nose  
to sit frozen in a sulk.

But these were exceptions.  
Shuttered against the heat,  
the house droned and they slept.

### III. Paulito's Birds

In dozens of plain cages  
 each with its mirror and bell  
 my great uncle raised birds  
 but the steepled bamboo church  
 with a nest in its hollow pulpit  
 he, the fierce atheist,  
 kept for the mating pair.

At his whim, admonished  
 not to speak, I followed,  
 acolyte with a burlap bag  
 from which he doled out  
 ceremonious, almost sacramental,  
 feed to the fluttering tribe.

Half his thumb was gone:  
 a loss he would ascribe  
 --in a sequence meant to mirror  
 my own small failings--  
 first, to sucking his thumb,  
 next, to teasing the parrot  
 and later, to being careless  
 around the carpentry tools.

Perhaps it was his demeanour  
 --dry stick of a man-- or the way  
 the door to the birds was locked  
 and he alone held the key;

perhaps it was that stump of a thumb  
 grudgingly displayed when we sat  
 at the table and the stubborn  
 afternoon refused to move,

that brings him back today  
 as wizard, magus, bruxo,  
 who, against ransom not received,  
 holds locked in this spell  
 of feathers and birdseed,  
 the children of his kingdom.



#### IV. Ana Louca

Antic prone and crazy  
breast-feeding her dolls  
through the streets  
or on Sundays marooned  
by herself in a pew,  
she offered her litany  
of curses and profanities  
to no one in particular.

Thursdays she would come  
demanding that which habit  
had made hers by right:  
the warmed leftovers  
she wolfed down, standing  
against the green backdoor.  
Finished, she rattled thanks  
from the gates and was gone.

A packing crate her bedroom,  
she slept by the docks.  
Amid rags and broken dolls,  
asleep and for once, quiet,  
a grizzled girl  
lulled by the ocean's rhythm  
as if cradled in its blue arm.





## V. First Dance

Such a wealth of buttocks  
would have slowed the walk  
of anyone (praise be to God!)  
it proved mere ballast

to the strut of Aunt Dolores.  
When music revved her hips  
she moved and still would move  
long after the exhausted boys

had surrendered the floor, and more,  
even with the band gone silent.  
Her snapping fingers then the beat,  
melody, her deep-throated hum.

Inveterate dancer,  
what dance didn't you know?  
The Boogie-Woogie, Calypso,  
Castle Walk, the Lindy Hop,

Fox-trot, Samba and Tango,  
the Polka, Waltz and, drunk,  
a mean Hully-Gully, a raw  
down and dirty Rock & Roll.

Half her size, my uncle  
was the only man I saw  
do justice to her style.  
Once – and only once -

on any given night  
he would drop his cards  
to sidle towards her on the floor.  
A tiny god, enthroned

in the haze of his Gauoise,  
he held her mesmerized.  
His moves pared now  
into a sizzling stance:

a suggestive sway of the hips,  
a licentious thrust of the belly,  
the head thrown back, towards heaven,  
a rooster, set to let loose

the fierce light of a brand new day.  
He stood defiant, belligerent,  
though their blissful marriage  
was twenty years old.

At some wedding or another  
(I must have been eight)  
she called me to the floor  
and at my hesitation  
sashayed, picked me up  
and held me close. When since  
have I so been whirled  
or returned to that space

a body learn to inhabit  
in the lull between two beats?  
Locked within her arms  
I was danced.

## VI. Thread and Needle

Stern, starched, mustachiod, my great-uncle spent the days policing the stone in his garden, the mangoes in his trees. He spoke to me of the emperor. Sinhazinha, my aunt, the seamstress, purblind with cataracts at sixty-five, would hand me the needle and ask: child, thread this for me.

If I moved my head a certain way Sinhá was inside the aquarium lost among the ferns, sewing and muttering prayers oblivious to bright fish threading in and out of her hair.

Silver needle, golden thimble I will sew your bride a dress.

Sanctuary of boredom, that house was a world, a system complete, self-sufficient as the aquarium.

So who was it that interfered introducing into the house a device that could thread needles?

I no longer remember. But soon after I touched it the contraption would not work or would not work as well and Sinhá, suspecting a demon in those gears, turned her eyes towards one lost inside the aquarium and asks, again and again: child, thread this for me.



## VII. New Leaves

Il Miglior Fabbro,  
I am humbled, indeed  
almost paralysed  
by Your ingenuity,  
Your craftsmanship.

Elephant, tapir,  
crocodile, mongoose,  
ant, lizard, fly...  
I have omitted much  
but need not continue  
as my point is made:  
lightning strikes You  
time and again.

Your every hit a home run?

Man is sometimes  
less than wonderful.  
Perhaps you hesitated  
as we forever seem to.  
But I may be wrong  
and we may yet surprise  
ourselves. Two weeks ago

I planted seeds  
brought back from Brazil  
last summer. According  
to Your designs, they begin  
the display some green.

I did not know the seeds  
would be raised in the air  
by the push of the sprouts  
then serve as a sheath  
for the curled, new leaf.  
I have no words  
to express my amazement  
at Your economy of means.

Brought from the tropics  
then in obedience  
to a sweet injunction,  
the closed fist of a seed  
unfurls a green banner  
among the cacti on a sill  
above my snowbound yard.

Perhaps we too can surge,  
sprout green wings though  
I mean this metaphorically.  
(Indeed what I ask for  
is feet rooted to the ground).  
Perhaps we will learn in time  
to trust the script, in time  
to abide by Your metaphors.