

A JOURNEY THROUGH WORDS.  
DISCOVERING BADIKIAN-GARTLER'S TRAVEL POETRY  
AND LITERATURE. A SORT OF INTERVIEW

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Born in Buenos Aires, and a long time Chicago resident, Beatriz Badikian-Gartler is the author of some evocative travel texts such as «Mapmaking: The Poet as Travel Writer» (1998), «Discovering the Land Left Behind» (1999), and «Sisters of the Road: American Women Travel Writers» (2002) where she behaves as a journalist who writes with a powerful voice, a colorful imagination and a good eye for her people in Argentina and their context. In creativity and competitiveness, Badikian Gartler is always developing. Beyond her travel writing collection, she has written non-fiction essays, film reviews, memoirs, and other scholarly publications. Known in Chicago as a poet and now as an emerging novelist she is, in fact, a world traveler or a poet who travels with words to discover new worlds. *Mapmaker Revisited* (1999) is a collection of travel poems with some interesting autobiographical approaches to the author and contemplative pictures of Spain, Italy, Mexico, and Argentina. A long distance traveler depends on individual requirements, a detailed route description, maps and a lot of imagination to make the literary journey—that kinds of journey that a real travel writer can initiate—a suggested «escape» point off the route also shown at the end of the route.

SJH: Beatriz, we know you have specialized in 20<sup>th</sup> century American Literature, African-American literature, Latino literature, Film Theory and Travel literature. How do you combine your university teaching activity with your creative writing?  
BBG: I have been a writer since adolescence. I have always written. It is part and parcel of what I am. Teaching is what I do. I love to teach. I have no problem combining both activities. Furthermore, each one influences and affects the other. I learn from my students and they, in turn, learn from me.

SJH: «elements for an autobiographical poem» (1992), «We are what we dream» (1993) and «The writer at her work» (1996) owe their origin to dreams and self-experience. What part does autobiography play in your poetry and how do you face dreams when you want to write about yourself?

BBG: Poetry is often autobiographical, more so than novels or short stories. I am often inspired to write a certain poem by something I see or hear or dream or experience. Almost always a poem starts from me and goes out to the world

transformed. Dreams are just one part of myself. I think dreams offer us curious and surrealistic images that we can use in poetry successfully. They are intrinsically interesting and original.

SJH: Which one of the two literary territories —fiction and non-fiction— provide you more satisfaction and delight?

BBG: I love both territories. Fiction allows me to play and invent and pretend. Non-fiction allows me to tell stories I have heard or lived, to offer testimony of realities, mine and that of others. They are different and as such, good for different purposes.

SJH: In *Mapmaker Revisited* (1999) Sandra Cisneros writes that, for a woman like you, the country is the whole world. Do you agree with this statement of Cisneros's at face value? Are you a woman with a soul of a painter, journalist, novelist, reviewer, traveler...having a good will for all and a strong, a very strong regard, for landscapes, folk motifs and people when you are abroad?

BBG: Absolutely. I am as a matter of fact a painter and a reviewer and a traveler and a novelist and all those other things. When I travel I watch and listen for the small details that make a difference. My country is the whole world.

SJH: The maps show the path and its immediate surroundings, with places of interest marked in red. All maps are oriented north but are shown at different scales. What are your specific points of interest, «red references», and literary orientation in your travel writing and poetry?

BBG: If you are referring to the cover of the poetry book —the points of reference on those maps are key places in my life. I designed the cover with the help of my friend, the photographer Diana Solis. As an artist I love collages and have produced several hundreds of them.

SJH: A good pair of boots is vital for happy long distance walking, although in warm weather, if the ground is dry and you are not carrying much weight, a pair of trainers with a thick sole and a good grip may prove more comfortable. Are rapid changes of temperature a part of the incredible success of *Mapmaking Revisited* in 1999?

BBG: I think that the success of the poems in the collection is due in part to their eclectic nature and, at the same time, their focus. In other words, the poems center around an individual and yet they travel all over the world, literally and metaphorically.

SJH: I agree that a mapmaker may be only a reference to a cartographer. Maps are made of words, images, lines of exile, travel, love and longing, loss and celebration...but what about your travel poetry? Is it an allegorical painting only based on your own experience?

BBG: I write poems about places I've been to but, instead of describing the place in a traditional form, I like to approach it obliquely, through an experience or a minute detail or a person who is part of that place. In a sense, they are allegories.



SJH: At the most basic level, is travel mobility and transportation a meaningful claim in your fiction and short story writing? How does travel affect your work of fiction?

BBG: My new novel *Old Gloves - A 20<sup>th</sup> Century Saga* is based on the stories of my family going back to my grandparents who had to flee Turkey and move to Greece. Later my parents who immigrated to Argentina and so on. Travel—whether forced or not—is part of my writing. It is what it is all about. The recently published novel *Old Gloves...* also reflects the mobility of peoples. It is about two families who must keep moving, fleeing, and starting over again in new landscapes with new languages to learn and new customs.

