

COURTNEY POLLETT

Maps/Legends

when I was an explorer
a hidden continent you were, spread out before me
I traversed your lowlands, studied your fables
pitched silken tents on your hidden rivers

I inhaled the spices of your ancient trade routes
drew maps describing in symbols all your wonders
puff-cheeked winds howling across trackless waters
sweeping plains, delicate archipelagoes
this the work of a true cartographical craftsman
coral and indigo dyes rendered from the rarest shellfish

once my position had become firmly established
I began to see myself as a missionary, charged with a message
bewildered by your heathen ways
I burned your fetishes, denounced your rituals
my body an instrument of holy progress
I wandered naked across your deserts

in the darkest hours I was tormented
by the mythological creatures of your savage legends
sat alone in my cell, hardly sleeping
illuminating hymnbooks with a goose quill pen

I don't travel much now of course
too many places filled with danger
blind alleys, unlit windows, whispers of revolution
too many lovers travelling under curses or illusions
too many drunken tourists with guidebooks and visas
searching for that imaginary shelter
the half-remembered place they've never been
that intriguing little hotel bar
where silkworms lie embalmed in mescal
and Salome dances backwards into the future
attracting veiled intentions
a dance in rhythm with the turn of centuries
the bloom and fade of empires
the slow, elegiac music of tectonic plates