

The poet who travels

The poet who travels is always writing from overseas. She sends postcards in different languages, usually interpreted as riddles.

The poet who travels always moves off when people are just getting to know her. That's the way she is! But people have throw-away memories and needs. By the time she returns she has become conspicuously hidden.

This kind of poet is generally charged with restlessness as if travel were a vice. People say she's always selling the house she lives in. But she knows she visits venues poets normally ignore, and enjoys views that poets don't normally find. Surely that must be beneficial!

A motile poet isn't always a good traveller. She can be sea or air sick, collect diarrhoea and disease. And sometimes the pain and anxiety aren't worth the distance. Even a writer who likes to strike out, sometimes wishes that she'd stayed at home.

A migrant poet travels at first but then sticks to one place, and sometimes finds permanent status. But a wandering poet carries her miles to excess and stains her good name. She is always eyed with salty suspicion because she creates in a pick and mix way. Her landscapes are disconcerting hybrids: trees in the desert, ice in the Congo, discs in the sea.

A walkabout poet is never one of us. So much for community values! She is a nuisance to editors and institutions because she is a permanent cross-read. When the anthology comes out this poet is usually acknowledged as an after-thought, somewhere on the back page. Even new writing fans fear the unsettled.

So our poet is always in trouble but that doesn't worry her, because she has a mobile phone, likes change, and realised a long time ago that travelling meant always being thought of as deceased.

People who stay at home know their native tongue backwards. But the poet who travels throws language away, and learns to enjoy being a poet-en-passant.