FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Another America Outra America
Barbara Kingsolver transl. Rebeca Cartes
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Barbara Kingsolver begins her introduction to the second edition of her only collection of poems, Another America, by declaring that she has “never yet been able to say out loud … I am a poet.” She attributes this, in part, to the not-uncommon sense that poems arrive by a kind of grace - that is, as moments of insight for which there is no rational accounting, no personal responsibility. However, it is also apparent that for Kingsolver, poetry is peripheral to her primary commitments: to child-rearing, to activism, and, as an author, to prose writing. As a result, her poetry often lacks the urgency and craftsmanship we associate with those artists for whom making poems is an uncompromised vocation. Nevertheless, when taken on these terms, Kingsolver’s poems remain worthy of the praise they received when issued initially in 1992. They serve a socio-political agenda with unusual dignity, rarely resorting to generalizations and never alienating the reader with belligerence. As was the case with the first edition, near literal Spanish translations by Rebeca Cartes (equal to, if not exceeding the English, musically) accompany each original poem, and re-inforce the sense that this is writing in the social service of cross-cultural communication. Although even the Library of Congress sees fit to cross-reference Kingsolver with “protest poetry” in its catalogue, at their best her poems present a vision of an underprivileged America redressed, and are, in that respect, songs of hope and longing as opposed to howls of protest and despair.

New to this edition are six poems, four of which offer a glimpse of what Kingsolver might produce were poetry to become for her more intimate, more central to her existence. The first stanzas of “Apotheosis” and “Ordinary Miracle” are particularly provocative in their quiet intensity: “There are days when I am envious of my hens:/ when I hunger for a purpose as perfect and sure/ as a single daily egg.” And: “I have mourned lost days/ when I accomplished nothing of importance./ But not lately.” These poems reflect what Kingsolver calls the “main preoccupation” of her recent life, the “safe-keeping of children.”

Twice in her introduction Kingsolver writes of poems, “They are everywhere, but easy to miss.” We are fortunate for the poems she’s noticed, for the attentiveness she manages.

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