



The World and the Bo Tree

Helen Bevington

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“Each time I leave home I seem to go in search of something—call it a bo tree, or Shangri-La, or paradise—which is only another name for peace itself and these days decidedly a fool’s errand.”

So writes Helen Bevington in *The World and the Bo Tree*, a book that describes her travels taken amid the turbulence of the 1980s. The “world” of the title is the one everybody knows, a fairly troubled, even threatening place to inhabit these days. The bo tree, which has flourished for centuries in India and Asia, is itself a meaningful symbol of peace, since under it the Buddha sat when he gained enlightenment and sought thereafter to share it with the world.

The book fashions a delightful fabric, a weave of exotic journeys and chaotic recent history. While we travel with Bevington to and from various destinations in Europe, Asia, South America, Africa, China, and elsewhere, we are conscious of the look of the world at home in striking contrast to the serenity occasionally glimpsed in distant places. At home she reminds us of such global disturbances as the demise of the Equal Rights Amendment, the Chernobyl nuclear disaster, the explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger*, and the possible destruction of the planet. Abroad, on some quest of their own, we may encounter such fascinating passersby as Mark Twain in Bangkok, Lord Byron in Italy, Goethe in Sicily, Marco Polo in China, Isak Dinesen in Africa, and Gladstone in the Blue Grotto of Capri.

Against the backdrop of the world, Bevington discovers moments of peace in unexpected and unlikely places—visible, she says, in Tibet or on the road to Mandalay, in the look of the midnight sun, or in the silence of Africa. Fleeting and elusive though these moments are, they are real and in themselves strangely enlightening.

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