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# Review: Postcolonial Travel Writing: Critical Explorations

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saviour of Jews (wherever they might be) that was highlighted in conveying the parachutists' narrative to Diaspora Jews and the world at large (65).

These conflicting needs at the national and international level can also be seen internally, among the families of the parachutists. Baumel-Schwartz teases out the ambivalence felt by the families of the other parachutists who didn't return, in response to the transcendence of Szenes (99). While many felt that the others were forgotten, Rafi Reiss's daughter, who never knew her father, said that she connected to him through Szenes's "Eli Eli."

*Perfect Heroes* is an updated English rendition of Baumel-Schwartz's Hebrew study *Giborim le-mofet* and I suspect this to be the reason for the only noticeable flaw of the book. Periodically, references to Israeli political culture are mentioned but not explained. This suggests the reader ought to be intimately familiar with iconic tropes, figures, and the complicated political landscape during Israel's short history. The provision of a glossary (217) still fails to elucidate the text's nuances, such as the differences between the left-wing political parties Mapai and Mapam (93). Or, for example, the reference to Trumpeldor (69), which requires familiarity with the advertisement and an understanding of the irony in the slogan "I was Trumpeldor's right-hand man"—his left arm was damaged and amputated above the elbow. But these are very minor issues in a text that is well researched, well presented, and clearly aimed at a scholarly audience.

Far more noticeable are the numerous occasions upon which Baumel-Schwartz provides the reader with general historical information that is rarely presented, such as references to rationing in the 1950s; "fear for the fate of the Israeli pound" which "provoked mass hysteria" and led to a prohibition on the trading in gold; as well as the impact of major epidemics contracted by thousands, including encephalitis and polio, "of which more than 10 per cent died" (86). These nods to the historical context of the action at the center of this text play an important role in situating events and providing color for the changing responses of Israeli collective memory.

Rachel S. Harris

Justin D. Edwards and Rune Graulund, eds. *Postcolonial Travel Writing: Critical Explorations*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. 208 pp. ISBN 978-0230241190, £50/\$80.00.

This thoughtful, provocative, and theoretically sophisticated collection of essays examines the complex relationships between contemporary travel writing and the genres of biography, history, and fiction. The editors and eight other contributors are trained in literary analysis and/or cultural studies,

which informs their largely shared approach of highlighting their analyses of the authorial voice as informed by the actual biography of each prominent travel writer whom they consider. The volume overall seeks to explore the nature, variety, limits, and potential meanings of travel writing during the last half century and thereby to reframe the concept “postcolonial.” While not all the contributors concur precisely about the nature of travel writing or the positionality of individual authors, the volume’s essays implicitly speak to each other through shared themes.

Following the powerful influences of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978) and Mary Louise Pratt’s *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York: Routledge, 1992; revised 2008), many postcolonial theorists have critiqued travel writers, especially Euro-American male authors, as inexorably complicit in orientalism, colonialism, racism, and sexism. A major project of this volume is to build upon and then transcend these canonical works by Said and Pratt. Paul Smethurst reflects other contributors in criticizing Said for oversimplifying the production of colonial texts and “always [assuming] the irresistible strength of colonialism transforming all in its path” (169). Similarly, Claire Lindsay reexamines Pratt, her critics, and Pratt’s own original sources, as well as distinctly different European writers of the same period, to “advance a more subtle and appropriate method” (18).

The contributors almost all seek to recuperate the “postcolonial” approach. They recognize there have been “an increasing number of studies questioning the validity of ‘the postcolonial’ in a world recognized as global” (54). But the contributors, in diverse ways, regard globalization not as hollowing out or obviating postcoloniality. However, the contributors eschew considering “countertravelers,” non-white people who went from colonies to metropolises during the colonial period. Rather they have selected “reframers” (3) who by their works and lives “subvert” (4) the colonial (and hence the conventional postcolonial) narrative. The contributors thus envision and seek to advance a reconceptualized postcoloniality as informing the lives and works of many travel writers during our current postmodern age when Europeans are settling and assimilating in former colonies, when people from former colonies are settling and assimilating in the former metropolises, and when virtually all boundaries are questioned and blurred. Indeed, Smethurst deploys the term “*postcolonial*” (165, italics in original) to represent the intertwining in people’s lives of experiences from before full colonialism to the present.

The contributors to this volume deliberately complicate Said’s and Pratt’s Eurocentric models and recast postcoloniality through their own selection of travel writers and their works. For example, Richard Phillips shows how travel writer James Morris may have started as a typical masculinist, pro-imperialist,

white Englishman in his early travel works but later entered “some equivocal territory” (99) by settling in Wales and changing his gender and identity to Jan Morris. Other contributors have also chosen the works of non-European and/or non-white authors to problematize the models of Said and Pratt, including Bidhan Roy analyzing V. S. Naipaul; Rune Graulund analyzing Pico Iyer; María Lourdes López Roperó analyzing Caryl Phillips; Justin D. Edwards analyzing Denis and Charlotte Williams; and Anne Schroder and Zoran Pečić each analyzing in complementary ways Jamaica Kincaid.

The shared literary criticism and cultural studies methodology of all the contributors also comes through. Travel narratives for them are neither “‘real’ or ‘authentic’ . . . travel is an ongoing activity with no terminal point, no objective way of assessing it in terms of ‘better’ or ‘worse’” (10). Most contributors have selected travel writers who, the contributors say, intentionally create works where “the structure of the text positions it between fact and fiction” (119). Schroder terms the travel writer not “the author” but rather “the narrating agency” (124). Further, the explicit self-location and orientation of the travel writer, the contributors claim, should be overridden by the literary critic. For example, Smethurst asserts distinguished author William Dalrymple “is more attuned to theory than he might realize” (157), and “perhaps contrary to [his] intention . . . sometimes shows affiliation with postcolonial theory, while, at the same time, opposing Said” (168). Symptomatic of this, Dalrymple is erroneously identified by the editors as a “novelist” (vi), but he rightly identifies himself as “a historian, a biographer, a critic and a journalist, as well as a travel writer” (176). Thus, as the concluding chapter, which is a joint interview by Tabish Khair of Dalrymple and Pankaj Misra, illustrates, the authors of travel narratives do not always envision or define themselves and their works in the same ways that the essays in this volume represent them.

Despite the diversity of the lives and voices of the travel writers analyzed in this volume, this selection is neither representative of much of today’s travel writing nor fully subversive of Said’s and Pratt’s model. Leaving aside Morris, six of the eight featured travel writers are elite males. All nine wrote in English and have their greatest readership in Britain and North America but largely wrote about the non-West. Further, all the contributors were themselves trained and currently work in the Euro-American academy (except Smethurst who teaches English literature in the University of Hong Kong). Overall, this challenging volume will be most engaging for scholars of culture studies, postcoloniality, and contemporary travel literature.

*Michael H. Fisher*