Brogan's biography certainly helps us understand Tocqueville's personal life as well as the political and historical events enveloping Tocqueville, but Brogran's grasp of Tocqueville's ideas does not match his grasp of history.

–Roger Boesche

A SELF-INVALIDATING CRITIQUE

Debbie Lisle: *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. Pp. 314. $91.00)

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Despite the title, this book falls far short of addressing the global politics of travel writing. It analyzes travel writing—defined as fictionalized accounts that are classified as nonfiction, thus excluding novels on one side and guidebooks on the other—of English-language authors, mostly popular ones such as Bill Bryson, Paul Theroux, Pico Iyer, and Robert Kaplan.

The book argues that travel writing is a political process because it transmits and perpetuates particular views about the world, which indirectly—and sometimes, as Robert Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts*, directly—influences political discourse and decision making. Specifically, popular English-language travel writing is a reactionary genre that perpetuates what Lisle calls a "colonial vision," one that projects the superiority of "Western" cultural and moral values and entrenches the division of the world into familiar, safe and unfamiliar, unsafe places. Even those writers (such as Iyer) who overtly reject such a viewpoint and instead embrace a "cosmopolitan vision" are, according to Lisle, complicit in this Orientalist project because their cosmopolitanism judges others by Western (Enlightenment) values that privilege individual choice and creativity, is only accessible to a small elite, and ignores the plight of the downtrodden who can never hope to become "global souls." Finally, would-be revolutionaries who go to live with guerrillas are condemned for pursuing a "romantic vision" and "working out [their] personal problems at the expense of the locals" (156).

One of the problems with this standard, relativist critique is that those who engage in it commit the same mistake as those whom they criticize: they confuse the Anglophone West with the world. Lisle's "choice of reading material ... implies a specific readership that, like Theroux, is conversant with the Anglo-American literary canon" (52). She holds this against Theroux ("he has only ever read one Turkish novel"), but not, apparently, against herself. Indeed, she ignores such highly influential travel writers as Romain Rolland, Calvino, Enzensberger, and Magris, though she includes Amitav Ghosh. (Nor does she mention, say, Russian or Chinese writers, but that makes more sense since, presumably, they are exempt from the requirement to atone for colonialism.) Yet instead of acknowledging her choice to

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focus on Anglophone authors, Lisle puzzlingly claims that "travel writers *are* primarily Western and in the Anglo-American literary establishment" (43, my italics), thus ignoring a range of other traditions.

A more fundamental problem with the book is that it pursues two mutually exclusive agendas: the structural Marxist one (hybridity is a bourgeois delusion that diverts attention from class exploitation) and the cultural relativist one (those who do not belong to "a culture" have no right to talk about it). Necessarily, this makes Lisle's argument inconsistent. She feels that travel writing is such a compromised genre that it has no place in "our supposedly 'enlightened' age" (2). She revels in revealing the "colonial vision" at the core of each travelogue and, having unearthed it, moves on without examining their differing degrees of veracity or impact: Pico Iyer gets roughly as much rap as Robert Kaplan. Kaplan, rightly, stands accused of tendentiously selecting decontextualized bits of information in *The Ends of the Earth*, creating a doomsday vision of Africa; Bruce Chatwin, also rightly, of romanticizing Aboriginal patriarchy in *The Songlines* by ignoring severe social problems, particularly those of women and children. But Lisle does not stop to analyze the assumptions behind these different kinds of views or to consider that, though both may have arisen from lack of attention to context, they have opposing political impacts: she is content to gloss both as colonial. Her deployment of "colonialism" as a catch-all in no need of further analysis makes her critique superficial and even arbitrary. Writing that the Aborigines encountered by Chatwin "are still living a 'false consciousness' under the combined rule of colonialism and patriarchy" (129, fn137), she does not seem to notice that she is echoing Kaplan's view of Africans suffering from a "culture of poverty." Writers with "postcolonial" (black or female) bodies, like Gary Younge or Josie Dew, are expected to display more curiosity and empathy—apparently because they should be in the same cultural box as the oppressed—but are ultimately found wanting as they fall short of acknowledging the symbolic violence they perpetrate by *being* travel writers ("[W]hat *right* do I have to pass judgement on these foreigners?" [108, italics in original]). The text's strident tone, which recalls the "culture wars" of early 1990s America, does not help; sometimes it unwittingly turns into its own parody: "De Botton ... is only interested in what the Western canon of philosophers, artists and writers—mostly dead, white males, can tell him about travel. It is clear that De [*sic*] Botton is not interested in ... Foucault and Derrida" (275). At other times, such as when she accuses Bill Bryson of evading his responsibility by not writing about Auschwitz (106), Lisle's "colonial vision" appears to be a gloss not just for the roots of North/South inequality but really for *all* historical injustice.

Lisle wants travel writers to redeem the genre by engaging in a meta-conversation about the effects of their texts, asking "questions such as 'who is telling this history?'" (232); "*why* they are there in the first place. What purpose does a travelogue have? Whose agenda is it serving? What good will it do?" (269). She points to the "critical turn" in anthropology in the

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1980s as a model to follow. No doubt, anthropology's engagement with its own past complicity with colonialism has made it more reflexive (though it also deprived it of its courage to offer recommendations to politicians). As a result, its understanding of globalization is now far from Lisle's own view of a homogenizing process of "American cultural imperialism" (205). Lisle delivers her final attack against Alain de Botton for being "interested in how the 'universal' experience of travel binds us all together" and failing "to see that not everyone—and certainly not the tourist workers in Barbados—can afford to travel" (275). I am no fan of de Botton, but I did spend a weekend in Venice with two tourist workers from Barbados.

Just as the "less savoury" elements of Humboldt's South American voyage do not detract from his scientific achievements, so, too, the new inequalities that globalization creates cannot obscure the opportunities for a shared sense of humanity that it opens up. Iyer may be oblivious to the cultural and material realities that prevent most people around the world from turning into "global souls," but Lisle is blind to the liberating effects mobility can have for poor people and to the "really existing hybridity." Theroux may be uninterested in the effects of the global imbalance of power on the livelihood of people in Africa, but Lisle ignores local imbalances of power. A travel writing that is contextual and reflexive would notice both. It would show that while not every African farmer or Nepali Sherpa possesses, in Thomas Eriksen's words, "the vocabulary and conceptual framework of a Bhabha, a Todorov, or a Bauman," they do deal with outside information, goods, and ideas in creative ways as they struggle to overcome various inequalities. Such writing would not show "other places" as exotic props to underpin Western normality, but it would also avoid reducing travel, a complex social experience for everyone involved, to a dry projection of global exploitation.

–NYÍRI Páil

MUSCULAR CHRISTIANITY

William J. Baker: *Playing with God: Religion and Modern Sport* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2007. Pp. xii, 324. $29.95.)

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Many readers will find much of interest in William J. Baker's *Playing with God: Religion and Modern Sport*; however, those who enjoy it most will be those who use the word "modern" to describe things that happened a rather long time ago. The cover jacket is adorned with a glossy color photograph of a football team at prayer. The introduction opens with mentions of 1950s high school football, Deion Sanders, and ESPN and ends by describing a recent "Faith Night" at a minor league baseball park. This slick packaging encourages an inference that the word "modern" in the subtitle refers to

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