Antonia Smith

*The Turk Who Loved Apples: And Other Tales of Losing My Way around the World.*

Matt Gross. New York: Da Capo Press, 2013. p/bk 280 pp. ISBN 970306821158. Price $18.50.

*The Turk Who Loved Apples* is a personal narrative written by the former Frugal Traveler writer for the *New York Times*, Matt Gross. In his chapters, Gross takes us through some of his adventures in Vietnam, Kyrgyzstan, Taiwan, and Turkey, among other countries. Each story is an attempt by the author to come to terms with the physical, mental, and emotional challenges of being a traveler, turning a profit from traveling as a writer, and finally the ethical burdens that many Western, specifically, American travelers, impose upon themselves when visiting developing nations. While amusing at times and helpful with moneysaving tips, Gross's book is largely a failure as a travel guide. The book succeeds, however, in inadvertently revealing some aspects of American exceptionalism, and the real or imagined divide that prevents many Americans from understanding the rest of the world.

Gross seems eager to set the record straight about his personal history, experiences, and motivations that were often criticized by readers of his articles in the *Times.* While a majority of this book is self-indulgent histrionics, Gross encapsulates for us the present condition of the intellectual class of American travelers—the travelers who desperately seeks experiential knowledge in order to become more cosmopolitan selves, the travelers who bestows upon themselves more importance than will ever be given, and the travelers who are unable to escape their own self-awareness in a thoroughly modern world.

Unfortunately, Gross doesn't provide much insight into the places he visits, which are many, but rather, insight into the realities of being a concerned traveler. No doubt many travelers have, and will continue to have, similar feelings about their impact on the environment, for example, or giving money to the poor and wondering whether it helps or hurts local economies, and the search for "authentic" experience. It is Gross's background of privilege that becomes the monster on his back that slows him down, not the weight of his pack. Gross struggles so with his own notions of American class that they frequently cloud his experiences with

people he meets, and prevents him from bridging cultural and linguistic barriers.

One concern about Gross's approach to frugal travel is the lack of effort to equate "frugality" with "simplicity." At no time does Gross attempt to strip down to the essentials of understanding a place or a people or a history; instead, frugality seems to mean the curation of the same experience that a wealthy traveler would have, but at a cheaper price. The goals of the frugal traveler seem to be the same as the wealthy traveler. Gross cannot for the life of him get away from himself, and this is incredibly annoying.

Perhaps most striking is his lack of concern for other human beings. Gross professes to lose track of the people he meets in his travels only to remember them by the characters he creates through his writing. Gross is utterly too concerned with is own intrusive role as the "traveler" or the "author" to process genuine interaction. There can be no interest in the substance of his stories, because there is no substance, only attempts at style and exploration. His nod to Barth and Nabokov by addressing his "dear reader" is ridiculous. He seems to liken himself to Ambrose, the character in Barth's short story, "Lost in the Funhouse," which only succeeds in exposing his reliance on superficiality and on fiction.

*The Turk Who Loved Apples* is intended for educated, conscientious travelers seeking consolation for their fear of the unknown and encouragement in overcoming cultural barriers. Overall, Gross is entertaining enough, but the insecurities he reveals in his writing are perhaps more telling of an American condition.

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