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Literary Collections

Where the Tigers Were: Travels Through Literary Landscapes
Don Meredith
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"Very well then—he would travel. Not all that far, not quite to where the tigers were." This quote from Thomas Mann's Death in Venice might describe Meredith, except that he has traveled far indeed—from the United States to Wales, the Middle East, India, Africa, and finally to Lamu Island, Kenya.

The author recalls his search in select places for something of significance to a famous local writer. What results is a mix of exotic flavors redolent of places from Venice to Vietnam. His purpose is to write a book that unravels cultures, peoples, and countries for the reader. He says,

> *This is one traveler's way of unearthing something personal and abiding about a place as he plunges in….*

Including a sketch of each writer's life and a history of the locale, he relates his experiences in the Cairo of Pulitzer Prize Winner Naguib Mahfouz, the Italy of Giorgio Bassani, Karen Blixen's Africa, and other faraway lands. The brief biographies are enlightening, such as when Meredith reveals that Giorgio Bassani (1916-2000) became absorbed in the treatment of the Jews in 1938 when Mussolini instituted racial law. This theme runs throughout Bassani's writings.

He also acquaints readers with the distinctive life of author Maria Thomas (a.k.a. Roberta Warrick). She came to Ethiopia as a Peace Corps volunteer in 1971 bringing along her four-year-old son and her husband. In her writing she creates portraits of an African-born American doctor and an African patient. Meredith's language is full of imagery, as when he wants to see, "… this corner of Wales [that] Dylan Thomas had spun into a universe."

It would have been helpful to include the actual location about which he writes. For instance, it is not certain which country he is referencing when he talks of remote places (to the

Western reader) such as Dar es Salaam. Yet one savor's Meredith's descriptions. When dawn comes to Dar es Salaam, it is "…like pale smoke from across the Indian Ocean, bringing with it smells of smoldering garbage…."

Meredith can write with poignancy and revelation. Such is the case when he searches for and finally catches up with Mahfouz, who is sitting on a balcony restaurant—all Meredith feels he can do is stand on the street below, hold up Mahfouz's book, and applaud. In response, the shy author salaams deeply from above.

Winner of the 1999 George Garret Fiction Prize and twice a winner of the National Endowment for the Arts Fiction Fellowship, Meredith has written novels, short stories, essays, and travel articles.

This well-researched book is part travel guide and part literary criticism. A woven tapestry of twelve authors, places, and experiences, it may serve as both an interesting resource to world travelers and literary students.