

## Compte rendu

---

### Ouvrage recensé :

*The Scent of Eucalyptus: A Missionary Childhood in Ethiopia*. By Daniel Coleman. (Fredericton, Goose Lane Editions, 2003. Pp. 254, ISBN 0864923740)

par Janette Elvey

*Ethnologies*, vol. 31, n° 1, 2009, p. 274-276.

Pour citer ce compte rendu, utiliser l'adresse suivante :

URI: <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/038513ar>

DOI: 10.7202/038513ar

Note : les règles d'écriture des références bibliographiques peuvent varier selon les différents domaines du savoir.

---

Ce document est protégé par la loi sur le droit d'auteur. L'utilisation des services d'Érudit (y compris la reproduction) est assujettie à sa politique d'utilisation que vous pouvez consulter à l'URI <https://apropos.erudit.org/fr/usagers/politique-dutilisation/>

---

Érudit est un consortium interuniversitaire sans but lucratif composé de l'Université de Montréal, l'Université Laval et l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Il a pour mission la promotion et la valorisation de la recherche. Érudit offre des services d'édition numérique de documents scientifiques depuis 1998.

Pour communiquer avec les responsables d'Érudit : [info@erudit.org](mailto:info@erudit.org)

devotion, to their vocation. Money is irrelevant; for each woman flyer, all that matters is the thrill of pulling back on the joystick, lifting off the runway and having control of her metal bird as she soars into the skies.

These collective biographies show that women pilots have worked and flourished in one of the most unforgiving climates on the planet. As such, the volume fills a void in resources on women's careers. The book should be an inspiration to future young women pilots and, in particular, it might help them fight for gender-free skies. Finally, we would echo Fratzke's wish that the photos and accounts of these women find their rightful place in the Alaska Aviation Heritage Museum.

Geoff Rayner-Canham  
Marelene Rayner-Canham  
Sir Wilfred Grenfell College  
Memorial University  
Corner Brook

---

The Scent of Eucalyptus: A Missionary Childhood in Ethiopia. By Daniel Coleman. (Fredericton, Goose Lane Editions, 2003. Pp. 254, ISBN 0864923740)

Like the eponymous tree in *The Scent of Eucalyptus*, Daniel Coleman's life in Ethiopia as a son of Canadian missionaries was that of a naturalized transplant. The fragrant eucalyptus tree played an ambiguous role in Ethiopia. Although it provided a sorely needed source of firewood when it was first introduced from Australia in the nineteenth century, the eucalyptus soon overstayed its welcome after it sapped nutrients out of the soil and native flora were unable to survive. Missionaries had come to that part of Africa in 1928 welcomed by the government of the time, and soon became part of the infrastructure by building medical and educational facilities. Yet they were among the first to be labelled as the enemy and subsequently ousted at times of political upheaval, arguably when they were most needed. This memoir captures the conflicting issues surrounding the relationship between missionary families and the country that they call home.

Daniel Coleman tells his story through a string of insightful stories that are loosely chronological within thematic chapters. This technique allows the readers to learn about the reality of his life in Ethiopia just as the young Daniel is experiencing them. In "A Curriculum in Clothes" he describes how he interpreted the distinction between *ferenjie* [foreigner] and Ethiopian as little more than a difference in clothing. When his bright new yellow vest gets splattered with mud while playing with his wooden wagon, he felt immensely unhappy because the clothes that set him apart got so dirty. The adult Coleman writes that while his young friends had clothes the colour of which "blended with the soil in a way mine never had and never would" (48).

Various realizations emerge from the succeeding chapters. In the chapter entitled "Not My Home," Coleman discusses his gradual understanding that although he had known no other home, he was actually a foreigner in Ethiopia. The difference between how the Canadian and Ethiopian cultures coexist with domestic and farm animals comes to light in "Ferenjie Nature." King Haile Selassie's fascination with animals is also discussed in contrast to the average citizen. Lions were kept in a menagerie near the palace — a living, breathing, powerful reminder of the nation's symbol. In his private realm, however, the King kept a Chihuahua as a pet, one of the few Ethiopians who could satisfy a whim to keep an animal for pure enjoyment.

In each of these chapters the reader gets the sense that the young Daniel learned a valuable and universal life lesson. The topics covered in "Thick Skin" are comparatively more delicate and may bridge the gap between Ethiopia and Canada in the memories of many who may have seen it on television. Through a number of stories Coleman shows his reality of life in Ethiopia during political upheaval and widespread famine. His experiences were frightening yet he understood that they were mild in comparison to what the typical Ethiopian citizens themselves had to endure. The teenage Coleman learned that the missionaries responsible for assisting with the famine had to play a political game in order to get even small amounts of food to those in need. The nation's young adults, including friends of the Coleman family, faced an unfair predicament, having to choose between two forms of national service, both of which led to an uncertain and probably dangerous future. These descriptions of injustice are vivid and gripping.

In the mid-1970s there was political unrest and widespread famine and through a number of stories, Coleman relates how life for missionary

families underwent a dramatic change. After the King was deposed, the new government enforced a policy of atheism, and the new converts to Christianity were persecuted. Coleman tells the story of a childhood friend whose tuberculosis was treated at a missionary hospital and became part of the Coleman household. He later converted to Christianity and upon refusing to renounce his faith, he was jailed for six years.

Coleman moved to Canada for his final year of high school. Life was increasingly complicated in Ethiopia for missionary families as they became dangerous to their Ethiopian friends for their religious and therefore subversive beliefs. When Coleman arrived in Canada, he did not discuss his African childhood, preferring instead to claim that he came from his father's hometown in Ontario. He lived a life of divided realities while in Canada and only returned to Africa shortly before his parents retired.

There are excellent photographs scattered throughout and that enhance Coleman's narrative. Ethiopian words are interspersed through his writing and some are defined, most notably those close to the beginning. However there are numerous occasions when the reader is left to guess at meanings, extrapolating only from context. Perhaps this was done to keep the reader off balance and guessing, just as some of Coleman's experiences may have done to him.

In his youth, Daniel Coleman assumed he would follow in his parents' footsteps on the path through Bible College and then on to a missionary posting in a distant land, however his vocational aspirations took him elsewhere. Studying Canadian immigrant literature he completed a PhD. and he now holds a Canada Research Chair in English at McMaster University. Although an academic, Coleman has written this book for a wider audience. He successfully brings to light the complexity of the role of missionaries, something often portrayed with critical and unbalanced views. This work is not post-colonial literature in the conventional sense, but a chronicle of the formative years of his life as a child of religious missionaries in Ethiopia, superbly told.

*Janette Elvey*  
*Memorial University of Newfoundland*

---