

Jane Satterfield. *Daughters of Empire: A Memoir of a Year in Britain and Beyond*. Toronto: Demeter Press, 2009. 125 pp. ISBN: 978-155014-503-8. \$24.95.

Read by Jessica Schagerl

Satterfield's *Daughters of Empire* resembles Elizabeth Gilbert's phenomenally bestselling *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia*, a memoir likewise premised on one woman's search for herself after the breakdown of her rocky and unsustainable (first) marriage. There is one significant difference: Satterfield finds herself pregnant before she can leave her husband. Indeed, part of the predictable charm of the book is the unfolding of a particular late twentieth century narrative: a woman realizes that "I couldn't nurture a child unless I also nurtured myself" (16) and, then, ultimately concludes, often with the help of a new lover, that it is possible to "learn to train my gaze through a different lens" (117).

My favourite parts of *Daughters of Empire*, though, do not deal with the struggles of balancing professional aspirations, a creative temperament, and a child; I live this. In fact, I wrote part of this review with my toddler beside me. As methodically as is possible for a boy of his age, he was practicing his letters. I stopped taking notes at one point in order to watch him concentrate. I felt no guilt about this pause in my work; I figured Satterfield would understand more than most that sometimes the lived experience of motherhood takes precedence over the pile of tasks, both creative and remunerative, that need doing, always need doing. A good portion of her memoir is devoted to these very negotiations.

At her best, Satterfield writes with an often wry awareness of the intricacies that surround intimacies. I found myself rereading the passages that combined the memories of multigenerational maternal relationships with her reflections on 'home.' She recalls growing up with an English mother in the U.S., and writes her own memories of being pregnant while living in England with her husband. Throughout, she reflects on her key literary foremothers, chiefly the Brontes, Sylvia Plath, and Angela Carter. There is a subtle shift in her awareness of England as 'home' over the course of the memoir. I was pleased when she acknowledged a healthy dose of privileged choice in the matter of both her understanding of exile and return, and possibilities for self-creation (98).