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In *The Cactus Hunters,* Jared D. Margulies extensively analyzes the people involved in the illegal succulent trade. The impressive amount of work, especially travel, that has gone into the book quickly becomes evident, as Margulies narrates his visits to Brazil, Czechia, South Korea, and other places during his research. The apparent openness with which the collectors and traders, who often engage in illegal activities, spoke to Margulies surely speaks to his ability to connect personally to and build trust with the people involved. The bulk of *The Cactus Hunters* is concerned with a psychoanalysis of the cactus hunters, traders, and collectors. The unconscious desire of those involved in the cactus trade more than the actual trade or the cacti themselves is what drives Margulies.

Margulies argues that practices from both collectors and conservationists stem “from a shared psychic orientation, grounded in shared desires and anxieties about the living world” (p. 318). The two groups are then closer to one another than presumed. For example, the cactus hunters, Margulies states, show a desire to know, possess, preserve, and profit, and he explores this desire thoroughly, using especially Lacanian thought. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Margulies's psychoanalysis is his argument that “through cacti, collectors forged psychic connections between the literal ecologies of the Americas and the imagined ecologies they sought as a fantasy through cacti as a covetable species” (p. 132). In a way then, the cactus is a stand-in for the American West, for example. One historical cactus hunter who seems to particularly embody this attitude is Vojtěch Frič, a Czech botanist whose travels in southern Brazil in the early twentieth century Margulies recounts.

Occasionally, non-psychoanalytical scholarly analysis appears, though this analysis sometimes
feels slightly out of place and less thorough. For example, an identification of “colonial sentiments” regarding the cactus trade in Czechia, a country that has only been on the receiving end of colonization, reads rather forced and is treated hurriedly. An analysis of a Czech work of literature, The Good Soldier Švejk (1921-23), which deals with an anarchist and anti-authoritarian cunning soldier, as a character study for one of the collectors is introduced but subsequently quickly abandoned. The misspelling of an Indigenous scholar’s name in the subsequent chapter does help to not alleviate this cursory sense of the insertion of non-psychoanalytical parts of the scholarship.

For readers less interested or less familiar with psychoanalysis, the book offers peripheral context and information on the illegal cactus trade they may enjoy. The most interesting passages are often those analyzing the practices of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), the usefulness or uselessness of species as a biological categorization, and the recounting of conversations with individual cactus hunters. Margulies regularly manages to extract fascinating information about the cactus extraction and trade, as well as the desires and views from those involved in it. The differences between the preferences of the South Korean succulent customer compared with those from the Western customers and collectors are particularly interesting, for instance, as the former apparently does not care about the geographical origins of a particular plant, but only its aesthetic qualities, in sharp contrast with the latter. At one point, Margulies tells the reader how he became more familiar with D. Farinosa, a highly sought-after and often-poached species of succulent. He explains his time sitting with the plant on rocky coasts, writing descriptions, drawing sketches, and creating recordings, though he does not elaborate further on these activities, which may be of particular interest to the reader.

All in all, while the majority of The Cactus Hunters is concerned with psychoanalysis, Margulies enriches the narrative with some of the fascinating context surrounding the cactus trade.
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