

James Burnes
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Review

Neil Safier's *Spies, Dyes, and Leaves: Agro-Intermediaries, Luso-Brazilian Couriers, and the Worlds They Sowed* illuminates the tale of Hipolito José da Costa's work in America as a courier/spy for the Portuguese crown. At first, it seems the article is only concerned with revealing the true nature of da Costa's actions, and there are no indications early on that this is not the case. Once into the body of the work, Safier begins to compare instructions that da Costa received from his benefactors. One, an official set pertaining to what he should ascertain with regards to political and socio-economic topics and the other a more narrow set of questions to ask about the natural history of the areas he is to visit.

The overarching goal of da Costa's mission is to discover as much as he can about the Mexican cochineal—an insect used to create a fine crimson dye. Safier follows da Costa's writings to understand the course he took when attempting to get into Spanish territory via the newly independent United States of America. Many of these accounts, when placed against popular natural histories written about the cochineal are nearly identical, including official correspondence as well as da Costa's own journal. Safier raises the question regarding whether or not da Costa ever really left Philadelphia on his two-year sojourn.

It is hard to determine Safier's position on this specific question other than to say he believes that it is possible that da Costa did not travel. As it turns out, the fact of da Costa's travel is not specifically the issue for Safier, but at this point the reader

is still not quite sure what the Safier's point is. That point could be the conflicting instructions between crown and natural history book publishers/translators, or it could be that Portuguese spies were less than trustworthy. The latter of which could throw into question every Portuguese travelogue written.

Only after da Costa writes more on the cochineal proper might Safier's thesis be found. Throughout the text da Costa attempts to gain permission to travel straight from America to Brazil without returning to Lisbon as well as attempting to begin a trans-national cooperation between Brazil and the American whalers. This seems related to the cochineal only inasmuch as da Costa was reporting on each and both could thrust Portugal economically ahead of Spain.

Only in the final paragraphs of Safier's work can the reader actually grasp the author's argument. He describes some misunderstanding with the metamorphosis of the cochineal that led to some naturalist interpreting the different stages of the cochineal life cycle as the male and female of the species. Through this lens, Safier postulates that most "go-betweens" have the same ability to begin as one thing and emerge from their mission as quite another. The fact that da Costa requested extra funds from Portugal for travels he may have never even made only adds to the interpretative difficulties that face the historians of science.

Recommendation: Revise and resubmit: Present the working thesis at the beginning of the work. Framing da Costa within the cochineal analogy early on would greatly strengthen his use of the understanding of the insects as a microcosm of understanding the "go-betweens." The idea of transnational whaling venture could be explored further if it indeed strengthens the examples between da Costa's official instructions versus his unofficial guide to becoming a naturalist. Otherwise, it clouds the issue at hand and takes the reader's focus away from an already crowded historical stage.