

**Andrew Hammond. *British Literature and the Balkans: Themes and Contexts*, Studia Imagologica 16, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010. Pp. 321.**

A sequel to Andrew Hammond's earlier book, *The Debated Lands: British and American Representations of the Balkans* (2007), this volume develops further his analysis of a comprehensive range of publications on the Balkans during the last 150 years. Hammond explains the term 'imagology' (as developed by French and German academics in the 1950s), as 'a strand of comparative cultural study which views the assigned features of a nation or ethnicity... as a product of a representational practice'(5). This takes into account the changing nature of national mythmaking and intertextual analysis of national images. As with his earlier work, Hammond follows the thread of change (basically in three phases) in British outlook over time, noting how ethnic discord recorded at one time, can later be seen as harmonious multiculturalism; likewise material backwardness is later seen as pastoral simplicity and 'barbarism' as 'noble savagery'. He relates these changes in attitudes to the transformations in social conditions in Britain in the three periods.

One chapter is devoted to the changing form of, as well as perceptions of, Eastern Europe—relating directly to historical events: the ending of Ottoman supremacy and the takeover of Austro-Hungary, the effects of the two World Wars, and maybe greatest of all, the erecting and then dismantling of the Iron Curtain; he surveys changing attitudes of both travellers and writers to all these events, and discusses a range of myths that have built up, and a 'border psychosis' (28).

The focus of 19th century writers, in the period of decline of the Ottoman Empire, is to record the region's degeneracy, savagery, immorality and chaos which characterises the Balkans; for example, the writer, A. W. Kingslake who describes this descent from imperial culture in its last throes, Hammond comments that the deplorable stereotypes of that era, still remain today. He devotes the best part of a chapter challenging the acclaimed views of the Balkan writer, Maria Todorova, criticising her lack of analysis of the political interests governing representation in the 19th Century. This is despite, as he notes, her work being so grounded in analysis based on Edward Said's work, the writer who has brought about the greatest challenge to the vilification of the Islamic world (47 and 62).

A chapter on 'Savage Europe' draws together much of the literature that Hammond covered in his earlier book, as well as further recent publications also surveying the period when writers reported on the primitive state of the Balkans, emphasizing a 'binarism between

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the imperial self and colonial other'. He specially focuses on the development of exaggeration concerning myths, taking as an extreme example, that of Dracula and how it has framed whole nations' perceptions of Romania. This was preceded, Hammond explains, by the creation of Dracula by the English writer Bram Stoker. There follows a fascinating analysis of this development, and how it led to the consolidation of the strand of Gothicism that had built up throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, giving way, in the inter-war period, to much more sympathetic interest in the region, in praise of peasant life.

Analysing the effects of the political context in which writers on the Balkans wrote, Hammond reflects on the fact that following the defeat of communism, there was a lack of solidarity towards the East among western European populations. He finds rather that it seemed to initiate a profound crisis of identity in the West, while those in Eastern Europe find the new Schengen division returns the Balkans to their inferior position during Cold War times, but often with high level Western advisors' influencing their governments and with possibilities for new profitable markets for the West. Many writers of the 1990s and since are found to be repeating the denigratory clichés of the nineteenth century reported on by military and government advisors who also found earlier marketing opportunities. Present-day exploitation is on a larger scale, where Westerners have the financial backing to be able to buy up the best land, forcing former subsistence farmers into further destitution.

In recent years, those championing humanitarian aid as a solution to internal conflicts, may be seen simply as a new version of earlier efforts of colonization by those who 'offered a triumphant vindication of foreign rule when faced with earlier ethnic strife'.

Amongst the wide variety of British writers on Balkan countries are those exiled to one of them through either choice or circumstance. Such writers should gain a much deeper understanding of that society, but their portrayal of it, and especially of their own place in it, can be very distorted as Hammond illustrates, with several examples. He lists five categories of practices and beliefs enabling the self-preservation of such writers: attachment to other expatriates and co-nationals, adherence to a personal routine, devotion to labour, attainment of personal authority and an assurance of moral supremacy. When reading most exiled writers' accounts it is easy to find at least one or more of these points to be highly relevant.

Many of the same women are included in a book co-edited by myself with John B. Allcock, on women travel writers on the Balkans, *Black Lambs and Grey Falcons: Women Travellers in the Balkans* (Berghahn, Oxford and New York, 2000). But it is intriguing to engage with Hammond's rather different perspective on them. His chapter on 'Women and

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War', for example, analyses the motives of many of the British nurses and women doctors who set up and worked in field hospitals in Serbia and Bosnia during the First World War. He concludes by commenting that Rebecca West's Serbophilia can be traced back to the earlier women travel writers, and that this attitude remained a common feature even into the Cold War period.

Any book on British writers in the Balkans must include Byron and the influence his writing had on generations of readers. However, Byron's portrayals, like many to follow, provided a romantic and exotic perspective. Later writers were influenced by the growing interest in psychology, and more recent writers, Hammond argues, have exchanged the model of imperial adventurer for that of more sensitive free-thinking 'scholar-gypsy'. Beyond Victorian motifs of engaging with godlessness and depravity, there is greater interest in historical research. The Cold War is seen as producing an efficient totalitarianism, yet there is an amused contempt for the deficiencies of development: the lack of modernization, offered a new kind of challenge for daring Western travellers to face—a new mystery to uncover—and even enjoy. With the end of the Cold War, Hammond notes that balkanist fiction turned to cynicism, culturalist racism and animosity, focusing also on shortages of goods and services.

Widening his field of literature considerably from his earlier book, Hammond considers all categories of writing on the subject of the Balkans, whereas his earlier one focused more specifically on travel writing. Here he looks also at fictional, political, historical and military writing, and finds some interesting parallels among them. It was probably less the increase in travel that popularized material on the Balkans in the 19th century, than the fact that publishing became more economical just as literacy increased. Hammond claims that these issues influenced perceptions of the Balkans which switched from that of barbaric peasants to that of monarchical grandeur.

The final chapter, analyses the Humanitarian Intervention of recent years. It also informs the reader of many publications, (not exactly literature in the sense used for the rest of the book, but nonetheless useful).

Hammond is hugely fluent, using ample illustration from an immense bibliography of published work covering about 25 pages. This alone provides a comprehensive reference resource. Numerous and detailed footnotes in each chapter allow the reader to follow up on many tangential issues.

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