



Vesna Goldsworthy. *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998. xiv + 254 pp. \$30.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-07312-6.



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British Literature and the Balkans

Vesna Goldsworthy's book is the most recent contribution to an interdisciplinary study of the Balkans. Goldsworthy uses her expertise as a professor of English literature and theater to explore the growth of a "definable Balkan identity" (p. ix) in works of British literature from the past one hundred years. She focuses primarily on works of British fiction from the late Victorian to the Edwardian period, because it was within this literature that many of today's widely used images of the Balkans were created and defined. Goldsworthy argues that these same images are presently transmitted by the British and American entertainment industries, influencing public opinion and perceptions of the Balkans. Her study is an attempt to explore what she calls, throughout the book, a "narrative," "textual," "literary," or "imaginative" colonization of the Balkans by the British, beginning in the nineteenth century. This "narrative" colonization took place in an area where the British did not engage in economic and territorial colonization. Yet it is this "literary" colonization, Goldsworthy argues, that profoundly shaped the way the Balkans are perceived throughout the world.

Goldsworthy suggests that an examination of British "imaginative" colonization of the Balkans is an important contribution to the study of "marginal and ambiguous areas of the world that have offered refuges to patterns of neo-colonial behaviour no longer acceptable elsewhere" (p. xi). This approach is an important part of her methodology. Not only does she examine what has been written about the Balkans in British literature, but she is careful to explore the implications of that writing as well.

In chapter one, "What should I do in Illyria?": English Literature in the Balkans," Goldsworthy sets up Britain as a great power in the nineteenth century that exercised "enormous political leverage" (p. 1) in the Balkans. Although Goldsworthy is trying to provide a contrast between British imperialism and this "imaginary" colonization of the Balkans, her statement that the British only influenced the Balkans politically appears to contradict her central theme. She suggests that Britain's true power over the Balkans was in its entertainment industry: literature, beginning in the nineteenth century, as well as film and television in the twentieth century. Therefore, she intends to explore how the most power-

ful nation in the world "exploited the resources of the Balkans to supply its literary and entertainment industries" (p. 2). Thus, she equates the detrimental effects of this type of colonization with those of traditional imperialism.

Goldsworthy breaks down "literary" colonization into processes she argues are similar to "real" colonization. In Stage One, adventurers and travel writers enter the region for the first time, sending back their impressions of it and "mapping" the area for further use. In Stage Two, writers descend upon the area for imaginative resources to exploit to "feed the ever hungry mother country" (p. 2). In this first chapter, Goldsworthy also gives some background to the various definitions of the Balkans, although not as comprehensively as Maria Todorova's similar examination of these definitions in her recent book, *Imagining the Balkans*.^[1] Goldsworthy is more interested in defining "Britishness" and "Balkan-ness" in relationship to each other than in defining the Balkans. Goldsworthy's study of British literature "inspired by the Balkans" portrays the Balkan Peninsula as an "orientalized space" which represented the "exotic" (p. 9); the "exotic" nature of the Balkans within this literature is due to the peninsula's remoteness from Britain. And in the context of this argument, Goldsworthy states that this "exotic" land was first "discovered" by Lord Byron.

Goldsworthy's second chapter, "Byron's Children: Literary Perceptions of the Balkans in the Nineteenth Century," focuses on the works of George Gordon, Lord Byron as the first example of British literature about the "exotic" Balkans. She begins her survey with Lord Byron, because he was the first to "textually" "map" out the Balkans, writing about an "Orient" that he actually experienced. Yet she understates Byron's literary accomplishments by associating him so completely with his "Romantic discovery" of the exotic "Orient" of the Balkans. She even goes so far as to suggest that Byron "is probably better known for his famous portrait in Balkan costume than for his increasingly unread verse" (p. 16). This aside, Goldsworthy's chapter sets up Byron as the first to reveal the literary attractions of the Balkans. Yet, as Todorova among others has shown, an eager European audience had discovered the Balkans long before him.

Goldsworthy frames this "imaginary" colonization within a period of European interest in the Balkan struggle against Ottoman rule. She melds the poetical works with the political interests in the Eastern Question, pointing out that fictional and political works about the

Balkans were both popular in Britain in the nineteenth century. British travel literature on the Balkans was popular as well, but this genre is frequently neglected in Goldsworthy's analysis of nineteenth century "colonial" literature.^[2] Goldsworthy discusses the works of Alfred Lord Tennyson, "Montenegro's Byron" (p. 34), and Algernon Charles, but only briefly lists the names of other authors whom she regards as Byron's other "children." She ends the chapter with the remark that Byron and his "children" had set up the atmosphere of a sinful Orient and a pure Occident for the next phase of colonization by authors such as Bram Stoker and Anthony Hope.

Goldsworthy's third chapter, "The Balkans in Popular Fiction," reflects both the strengths and weakness of her book. Leaving the worlds of politics and poetry behind, she overextends herself by trying to include the bulk of popular fiction within this one organizational block. The particular insightfulness of her analysis lies in her illuminating treatment of the two most notable literary contributions to the "narrative" colonization of the Balkans—the imaginary world of Ruritania, created by Anthony Hope in his novel *The Prisoner of Zenda*, and of Transylvania created by Bram Stoker in *Dracula*. She elaborates on how, by the late nineteenth century, these newly liberated Balkan lands were recognized as an area of mystique for popular fiction. Goldsworthy argues that Hope's Ruritania, although initially described as a German principedom, became associated in the popular imagination with the Balkans due to the focus of the British popular press on the "goings-on among the Balkan dynasties" (p. 47). Other writers, she argues, were inspired by Hope's success with *The Prisoner of Zenda* and created historical romances that employed Balkan dynasties and politics as plot devices. Using Slavic sounding names from epic poetry and newspapers, fantastical descriptions of Balkan peasantry and landscapes, and British-like protagonists, these authors created a variety of Balkan worlds, which varied in their resemblance to historical facts.

Goldsworthy's discussion of Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula* and the Balkan Gothic is the most fascinating and convincing part of her book. She analyzes Stoker's work as an ingenious melding of a Victorian travel journal with a Gothic attraction to and fear of the exotic Balkans. Goldsworthy argues convincingly that Stoker's skill lay in his ability to describe Dracula's origins in an "exotic" and foreign Balkan land, "while preserving the essentially European identity of the Count" (p. 82). Goldsworthy offers a clear and persuasive analysis of how Stoker's work has been treated by literary scholars, while still making her own original contribution to the

study of *Dracula*. Unfortunately, Goldsworthy is only interested in the impact of the novel, yet it is likely that in the last half of the twentieth century, it may be Bela Lugosi's portrayal rather than Stoker's exotic descriptions that many people conjure up when thinking of "Dracula."

Goldsworthy finishes her chapter on popular fiction with a look at how the authors of spy and espionage novels used the Balkans as a setting. In works such as *The Thirty-nine Steps* and *White Eagles over Serbia*, the Balkans provided the desired sense of anxiety and mystery. Goldsworthy suggests that this representation of the Balkans as a threatening place that proved dangerous to any Westerner trapped there has been revived following the collapse of the communist regimes in the area.

In Chapter four, "War and Diplomacy in the New Ruritania: Comic Visions of the Balkans," Goldsworthy examines humorous portrayals of Balkan life in British literature. Works such as Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man* and H.H. Munro's stories use the Balkans as a setting for challenging romantic images of war. The primary focus of these works is not to give an accurate depiction of the Balkans, nor seemingly to analyze Balkan life, but rather to criticize Western European and British society. In this exotic land, Goldsworthy illustrates the ease with which "Britishness" could be sloughed off and the protagonist could become whoever he or she wanted to be. In some senses, then, the Balkans were not always seen in a negative light, but as a land of personal freedom and individuality for traveling Westerners. Yet many of these works have their characters go native "in order to safeguard the British way of life" (p. 136). And works such as Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy derived their caustic tone from actual experiences of the Balkans. These works, then, serve as a transition to Goldsworthy's next chapter, which deals with works of non-fiction.

Goldsworthy's fifth chapter, "Spectres of War," contrasts the fictional images created in her previous chapters with actual attempts to discover and to explain the real Balkans. To do this, she examines the "travel" experiences of Mary Edith Durham and Rebecca West, as well as the semi-autobiographical work of Olivia Manning. Interestingly enough, it was this kind of writing that was perceived as the most threatening to "Britishness." Goldsworthy mentions that as early as 1908 Durham, among others, was officially labeled by the Foreign Office as someone with whom it was inadvisable to correspond (p. 165). While the Balkans had served in popular fiction as a forum for better understanding "Britishness," these works of non-fiction were focused more on understand-

ing the nature of the Balkans. Manning's *Balkan Trilogy* sticks out awkwardly in this chapter, though, and might have been better used in Goldsworthy's previous discussion of fictionalized experiences in Chapter Four. This chapter adds an informative contrast to Goldsworthy's analysis of popular fiction, proving the success of adding other forms of literature, including the travel journal, to her study.

The sixth and final chapter, "Reclaiming Balkan Erewhons," summarizes Goldsworthy's argument by providing more insight into how the entertainment industry has used these images of the Balkans. She states that many of these books served as resources for contemporary "journalists and commentators who, lacking the time to research their subjects thoroughly, are ever eager for readable—and quotable—accounts of life and death in the Balkans" (p. 203). This final chapter propels her argument to the 1990s, yet her analysis of works seems to end much earlier than that. This present-mindedness leads her to use the evidence of her previous chapters to explain why Europe balks at involvement in the Balkans today. She insists that examining popular fiction gives insight into perceptions of the West and its definitions of "Europeanness." Yet she has looked only at British perceptions and depictions, which, she argues, have a far-reaching impact in Europe because of the success of an English-based entertainment industry. One wonders, though, whether the literature or films of other European countries have also helped shape contemporary views of the Balkans. Were the Balkans "imaginatively" colonized only by British popular writers, or is this, as Todorova points out, only one "national" approach to presenting the Balkans?

Goldsworthy's emphasis on the similarities between this "imaginative" colonization and British imperialism is unclear at times. She confusingly places Lord Byron within the "mapping" stage of colonization when perhaps she should have looked to travel writers' depictions of the Balkans. Larry Wolff's work on the "Philosophic Geography" of Eastern Europe might have provided a solid base on which to base her analysis, as his book *Imagining Eastern Europe* focuses on a similar phase of discovery as Goldsworthy's first step in "imaginative" colonization.[3]

Both Goldsworthy's stated thesis and the cover of her book are somewhat misleading; she is really not interested in film and television, as the image of Lawrence Olivier on the book jacket and her references to the "entertainment industry" would imply. Although she does make some references to Bela Lugosi's unforgettable por-

trayal of Count Dracula and Francis Ford Coppola's stunning film version, she neglects other important works of the twentieth century, such as Murnau's "Nosferatu," that may have had just as large an impact as Stoker's original novel. Her argument is that these memorable film portrayals are really just a continuation of the images created in the "literary" colonization of the Balkans. Unfortunately, because she does not completely explore the role of film and television in the process of colonization, she also is unable to adequately examine the process of "imaginative" colonization of the Balkans in the twentieth century.

Goldsworthy's book is weakened by certain organizational problems. Her analysis follows no strict chronological or thematic path. She takes on too much in Chapter Three, and is not always successful in integrating the historical context and settings with her discussion of the novels. And while her thesis is clearly stated, she often loses focus as she gets caught up in the details of these novels. Her argument would have been made more compelling by an examination of the authors and the audience of the works she describes. She should have identified more clearly which books were widely read and which were not. Furthermore, she fails to analyze the implications of a novel's popular success or failure and the impact it had upon the British public mind. Only in a few isolated examples, such as a reference to the appeal of Gladstone's pamphlets (p. 207), does Goldsworthy pay attention to those who read these books and presumably participated in this "imaginative" colonization. In addition, she should have explained more clearly how "Britishness" was defined throughout this process. A fleshing out of this definition would have nicely complemented her ideological preferences for the concept of "orientalism."^[4]

These criticisms aside, Goldsworthy provides some interesting insights into how the Balkans came to be viewed so negatively. British novels are just one part of that larger picture, but Goldsworthy's thorough work on this topic will no doubt provoke more questions and interest in the subject. When viewed in combination with works by Maria Todorova and Larry Wolff, Goldsworthy's *Inventing Ruritania* provides an interesting and in-

formative look into Western European perceptions of Eastern Europe.

Notes

[1]. Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Todorova examines the usage and meaning of "Balkan" as a concept of both outsiders and insiders. Todorova's chronology of the emergence of the idea "Balkan" in her first chapter is perhaps a more solid introduction to "imagology" than Goldsworthy's. The two books were only published two years apart, so it is probable that Goldsworthy was unable to make use of Todorova's work in *Inventing Ruritania*. For an excellent review of *Imagining the Balkans*, see Gale Stokes' review for HABSBERG in September 1997: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path-1749878161715>.

[2]. Barbara Jelavich, "The British Traveller in the Balkans: The Abuses of Ottoman Administration in the Slavonic Provinces," *Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 33 (1955), pp. 396-413.

[3]. Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994). Goldsworthy does not cite this important book in her bibliography. For H-Net reviews of Wolff's book, see Susan Parman's "Review of Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*," H-SAE, June 1996: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=1724846635492> and Thomas J. Hegarty, HABSBERG, July 1995: <http://www.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?path=14604867249910>.

[4]. Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

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