

Vesna Goldsworthy. *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of the Imagination*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1998. Pp. xiv, 267. US \$30.00.

Ruritania, the name of a fictional German principality on the margins of Europe, in Anthony Hope's novel *Prisoner of Zenda*, became, Vesna Goldsworthy suggests, "one of the most widely used symbols of the archetypal Balkan land" (46). In her penetrating study of British literary fictions of the Balkans, Ruritania features as a trope of the colonizing and patronizing construction of Balkan "otherness." While Goldsworthy's book shows that the construction of Balkan "otherness" as treacherous and enchanting, otherness which mixes mysticism and anxiety with violence and romance, characterizes nineteenth- and twentieth-century British writings of the Balkans, this cultural imaginary, however, has a long history. One might trace it back to the Renaissance myth of Illyria, that is, of a largely unexplored and mysterious hinterland beyond the eastern coast of the Adriatic. Among the countries of the eastern Mediterranean, like Greece, Albania, and Wallachia (now in Romania), Illyria too features in the Renaissance popular fiction as a land of marvels where England displaces some of its anxieties. Ruritania is an uneasy country in which Europe and the Orient uncomfortably mix. Imagined as a fantasy land on the eastern fringes of the civilized Europe, Ruritania embodies "symbolic distinctions" (7) between the European West and the Balkan East. What Goldsworthy's superbly researched and highly original book demonstrates is that British treatment of the Balkans appears to have been a sort of longing to slough off the peninsula in order to construct the Empire as more civilized and less aggressive and arrogant.

Inventing Ruritania brims with persuasive evidence supporting Goldsworthy's cogent argument about how the Balkans were imagined, misrepresented, and misshaped in the nineteenth- and twentieth-century British literature and culture. That process of cultural appropriation involved infantilization, exoticization, and eroticization of the Balkans, representing it as farcical, disgusting, impenetrable, and backward. The book is mostly about Romania, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Albania, with Bulgaria and Croatia featuring only marginally, and with a splendid chapter on the Byronic myth of Greece. Goldsworthy's impressive archival research results in arguments full of force, enabling her to venture into directions where few British and Balkan scholars who have written on the subject went. She is at home with contemporary critical theories, and she is a sensitive literary analyst, sharp in her conclusions. Goldsworthy examines imaginative and travel literature, interviews, newspaper articles, writers' correspondence and diaries, historic and political documents, television, film scripts, and operettas. Within this contextual richness, she examines a large number of texts by literary figures ranging from Byron to Bram Stoker, to Graham Greene, to Rebecca West and Olivia

Manning. While at no point in Goldsworthy's book does theory speak louder than literature, the book is well informed by postcolonial theory, feminism, psychoanalysis, and cultural anthropology.

What further impresses about this beautifully written and heavily researched book is that it consistently makes connections between earlier and contemporary constructions of the Balkans. This is reflected in the West's patronizing attitudes towards Albania, and in the pronouncements about Balkan Yugoslavia by some European political figures during the Balkan war of the 1990s. Correspondencies between literature and contemporary politics in Goldsworthy's book are provocative, suggestive, and sparkling with knowledge of both British and Balkan history and culture, making *Inventing Ruritania* a bold example of an engaged literary criticism. Goldsworthy often relegates these contemporary constructions to footnotes, raising the content of her footnotes almost to an implicit secondary argument that runs along with the main thesis. In doing so, she also suggests the extent to which British (and Western European) imaginary construction of the Balkans still prevails. This imaginary construction is part of "a new orientalizing move" (204), which renders the Balkans as non-European. Goldsworthy's is the most creative use of footnotes I have come across in an academic book recently.

Ambivalent attitudes towards the Balkans can be related to the ambivalent etymology and geography of the Balkans, which Goldsworthy discusses at the beginning of her book. Neither the name (what country gets to be considered Balkan) nor the peninsula's inner and outer boundaries (especially the boundaries) have ever been stable. Goldsworthy identifies the crucial problem of British interest in the Balkans, by observing that "why the Balkans should have attracted so many British writers, given Britain's relatively slight involvement with the area, stays unanswered" (10). One might speculate, however, that because they were considered uncivilized and hence subordinate to Britain, and of no great geopolitical importance (as Goldsworthy suggests) yet close to Britain, the Balkans appeared to have been exotic and undocumented enough to be inviting to literary imagination to colonize it. In the case of the only big European colony of British imagination, literature stepped in where politics left an almost blank page.

Goldsworthy locates the origins of the British construction of the Balkans in the romanticization of the Oriental Balkans. Examining Byron's poetry inspired by Greece and Tennyson's sonnet about Montenegro, Goldsworthy shows that that construction was the result of a complex interaction of different political and intellectual currents of nineteenth-century Britain, which included classicist pan-hellenism and "oriental exoticism" (40) of the late 1700s. For the British, the Balkans were a complex intellectual construct first, then a Romantic

retreat into the lands of lemons and olives, and of pronounced patriotic sentiments.

The Balkans also inspired popular romances and the gothic fiction of the nineteenth century, enabling the genres of the "Balkan Romance" and the "Balkan Gothic" (73). The Ruritania of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century popular literature is a fictional kingdom suitable for spies, murderers, decadent aristocracy, and unleashed passions. Writing about the Balkans in popular literature, Goldsworthy examines, for example, the fictions of Anthony Hope and Sydney C. Grier (pseudonym for Hilda Gregg), Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and Agatha Christie's murder mysteries. Goldsworthy also makes acute arguments about popular movies inspired by the Balkans, examining, for example, Laurence Olivier's 1957 movie "The Prince and the Show Girl," featuring Marilyn Monroe and Laurence Olivier, inspired by an erotic dalliance of the Serbian King Milan Obrenovic. Transylvanian mysteries are inflated in *Dracula*, providing a background for the effeminized count's perversion, and suggesting, Goldsworthy argues, the conflation of European otherness with "threatening sexuality" as a sign of the *fin-de-siècle* decadence. Goldsworthy's research leads her to some new discoveries of intersections of the exotic and erotic.

Among E. M. Forster's manuscripts, she discovered an unpublished short story, "What Does It Matter? A Morality," set in the fictional land of Pottibakians, in which homoerotic love between the country's president, Dr. Bonifaz Schpiltz and Mirko Bolnovitz, an 18-year peasant and a gendarme in Pottibakia, is freely explored. The story is "an allegorical plea for sexual tolerance" (127), manifested in several characters' signing a "manifesto urging sexual toleration" (127). Homoeroticism is also the subject of Forster's play "The Heart of Bosnia," which takes place in an imaginary British Consulate. The Balkans become a space within which homoerotic desire can safely be imagined, away from the pressures of homophobia in England, and a site where illicit desire subverts the British political establishment and the country's image, embodied in the President-sodomite and in the Consulate as a site of erotic pleasure. This chapter demonstrates the effective application of queer theory to these texts.

British diplomats, travellers, and officers often frequented the Balkans, and Goldsworthy explores how Yugoslavia features prominently in the Ruritanian stories of Charles Lever, David Footman, and Lawrence Durrell, and in Evelyn Waugh's war diaries and his trilogy *The Sword of Honour*. While diplomat-writers, like Durrell and Waugh, describe Yugoslavia in grim colours, and represent as farce Yugoslav diplomacy under the communist regime in the Second World War, British women writers are overwhelmed by the peninsula as a whole. Goldsworthy examines Edith Durham's writing on Albania, Rebecca West's novel on Yugoslavia, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, and Olivia

Manning's *The Balkan Trilogy*. She makes illuminating claims about how British women's enthusiasm and sympathy for Balkans' small countries helped those women to achieve a sort of gender equality (or just a fantasy of it?). She provocatively asserts that "In all its apparent backwardness and poverty, the Balkan world offered British women a chance of real equality with men. British women enjoyed a sort of 'honorary male status' in the Balkans" (200). But this suggests the extent to which Ruritanian fictions reveal more about Britain than about the Balkans. In the spring of 1998, *Inventing Ruritania* attracted significant attention in England. This admirable book should be indispensable reading for anyone interested in literature about the Balkans, and it has much to tell to those writer-adventurers who continue to reshape the Balkan myth.

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