Recounting Cultural Encounters

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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This book is dedicated to our parents, Živko, Ljubomir, Vojka and Kora.

Marija and Aleksandra,
March 1, 2009

INTRODUCTION

Four years in a row, the Faculty of Philosophy in Nikšić has hosted international conferences on English language, literature, and methodology. Each September Nikšić becomes a lively place in which scholars from various academic centres assemble to discuss the main issues of their concern. *Recounting Cultural Encounters* is a result of their work in September 2007, and, therefore, in addition to its theoretical significance, the title of this collection is also a symbolical reminder of these profoundly friendly and collegial academic encounters.

Contributions reprinted in this book highlight some of the wide ranging ways in which the issues of culture and identity can be approached in a literary text, while focusing on the ways in which cultural encounters have been changing both the world and its reflection in literature. The beginning of the twenty first century is an appropriate time to repay careful attention to these issues. Understanding how our perception of the Other changes with the concept of the world we inhabit, we want to emphasize the rising importance of fostering cultural pluralism and global understanding.

Having based their research on widespread readings in academia, such as deconstruction, post-colonialism, post-modernism, new historicism, and narratology, the authors of these papers proceed by addressing the metaphor of travel as one of the strongest metaphors for the evolution of mankind, especially if considered under the light of the historically and politically imposed opposition between the progressive western and the static eastern or African societies. However, as the end of the imperialist era brought about poignant awareness of cultural relativism, as well as deconstruction of the great narrative of progress, facing the Other as an unconceptualized entity became a major moral concern of a modern traveller. It is pronounced that this concern should be textually testified to dramatize the human inability to avoid verbal appropriation of the other. The final question we seek to answer is whether the era of advanced technology and globalisation, along with a post-modern ironical attitude to hyper realities and textual transparencies, has rendered the sphere of the text the only available point of concern of contemporary literature and thought in general.

The first group of papers look into the Western approach to the Balkans, focusing for the largest part on the Anglo-American view of Montenegrin geographical, cultural, and social space. Peter Preston, from the University of Nottingham, begins his paper "Imagining Montenegro: From Tennyson to James Bond" quoting Alfred Lord Tennyson's sonnet "Montenegro." "O smallest among peoples! … Great Tsernagora!" wrote Lord Tennyson in 1877 at the height of national resistance against the Turks. Similar sense of Montenegro's enormous gallantry in contrast to its physical smallness persisted in British writing about the country throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. This paper discusses both famous and less well-known writers, including Rebecca West, Joyce Cary, and Jan and Cora Gordon, and concludes with the appearance of a "Montenegro of the mind" in *Casino Royale*, the most recent James Bond film.

Biljana Đorić-Francuski focuses on a more particular moment in the relation between Montenegro and the great powers. In her paper "Montenegro as the Scene of Some Strange War Images in Joyce Cary's *Memoir of the Bobotes*" she analyzes the reputed British novelist Joyce Cary's unusual response to the First Balkan War. Although it is generally thought that Cary treats the subject of war and those involved in it with contempt, some parts of his narrative show that he really considers his participation in the war to be a unique adventure, which he enjoys so much that it has been compared with a holiday and an excursion. Although it is true that the war serves only as a background for some of his personal feelings and thoughts, this does not mean that Carry was insensitive or in denial, since he volunteered to serve in a British Red Cross unit. Đorić-Francuski clarifies a few factors that prompted the young man to take part in the war and then depict it through the use of various unusual images, above all those devoted to describing food, drinks and the preparation of meals. Despite the presence of youthful, even boyish, indolence in his stance, a spirit of guileless and naive adolescent idealism, as well as a certain romantic enthusiasm for the cause of the Montenegrins pervade Cary's book, infusing it with allure, genuineness, openness and spontaneity.

In her paper "A Stay in Montenegro—An American Impression," Bojka Đukanović looks at the Montenegrin experience of Mr. Henry Rushton Fairclough, a distinguished American scholar, who was a USA commissioner to the Balkans, and played a significant part in the relief and Red Cross work during World War I. One of the most interesting books depicting the desperate situation in which the Montenegrins found themselves in the aftermath of the War is his autobiography *Warming Both Hands*, which included his experiences under the American Red Cross in Switzerland and Montenegro. As Montenegro, even at the beginning of the

twentieth century, was still a not well-known corner of the Balkans, he dedicated pages and pages of his biography to describing this tiny Balkan country, in order to bring it closer to his countrymen. His account of the country and his experience during his stay there appears as fascinating to the modern reader as Montenegro of those past times might have appeared to the author.

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"'A soul that remembers can never be lost': Tragic Cultural Encounters in Albahari's *Götz and Meyer*" by Vesna Lopičić assumes that the concept of cultural encounters is nowadays primarily read in a positive context. The connotations of creative exchange and constructive interactions are usually considered inevitable. However, contemporary history offers a significant number of examples that prove opposite trends. The relations of Israel and Palestine, India and Pakistan, USA and Iraq, are indeed close but not to the benefit of either party. Lopičić's work examines the literary depiction of the tragic encounters from our recent history in David Albahari's novel *Götz and Meyer*. The Jewish population in Belgrade, on one side, and the German soldiers ordered to drive the truck to the gas chamber, on the other, represent two conflicting cultures meeting during the Second World War. David Albahari's intention is to emphasize the moral significance of the memory of this tragic episode, which had lasting personal and cultural consequences.

The following couple of papers examine the power of language over identity. Biljana Čubrović's paper, "Twisting Cultural Stereotypes: Identifying Nations Linguistically," explores the cultural stereotypes of the British and Serbs as presented in Vesna Goldsworthy's *Chernobyl Strawberries* (2005). Goldsworthy's interest in the cultural diversity of the

two nations springs from both her language background and her rich life experience in Britain as her newly acquired country that allows her to describe this country as competently as she describes Serbia. Observing an individual as the locus of cultural and linguistic contact, Čubrović's analysis of the cultural beliefs and values as presented in the book is offered in the context of contact linguistics. Considering Eva Hoffman's autobiographical novel *Lost in Translation*, Nadeža Stojković, in her paper "To Translate or not to Translate: to Enrich or to Impoverish Identity," observes the ways in which Hoffman employs the theme of an individual facing a sudden change in her linguistic surrounding due to her emigration, presenting language as a medium of personal and collective identity. Being a representation of a real, not fictional, experience, this novel exemplifies how adopting two languages, which existing side by side complement each other, enriches one's identity in a creative way.

The following series of papers are concerned with American soil and culture. They examine how American travellers perceived the other in the course of their history and how this perception has not only reflected their cultural being but has also determined it as well. In her paper "Transformations vs. *Transformation*," Saša Simović discusses the ways in which Hawthorne's romance contrasts two civilizations: the Eternal City of Rome, its tradition, experience, and Catholicism as opposing America's youth, prosperity, ambition, and Protestantism. However, it is in the poignant context of the ruins of the City of Imperators that the protagonists of the novel are presented as the very offspring of New England. On the opposite side of them, Italian nobles, sylvan creatures, mysterious artists and lovers, introduce the posterity to the old civilization of Europe and often to its dark past, which leads to various types of transformations masterfully presented in both the characterization and setting of the romance.

Mirjana Daničić presents her research, "The New Cultural Politics: Encounters between Race and Gender—Blackness and Feminism—in Toni Morrison's Novels." As the starting point Daničić takes Toni Morrison's words: "As a black and a woman, I have had access to a range of emotions and perceptions that were unavailable to people who were neither". The cultural capital of people of colour has been long disregarded and, given the existing racial polarization in American literature, it still relies on the subcultural. With her constructive explorations of the past and the present of Black women, Toni Morrison has united the two "marginal" groups in her literary works and decisively pushed the postmodern intellectuals towards new cultural politics of difference, both racial and sexual. The paper analyzes and illustrates Morrison's ways of

expressing the black and the feminine as something that has a key role in the reconstruction of the personal identity of her heroines.

The third part of the collection pays attention to the complex relationship between the British and Indians. It opens with "The Cultural Perspective of Indian Society as Revealed in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*" by Soumen Mukherjee from the Faculty of Business Communication in Delhi. Mukherjee's paper points to a sea change in the social, political, religious, economic and scientific fields, which India is undergoing at the moment and which are aptly captured and highlighted by Roy's novel. Mukherjee explains how in recent years Indian novelists in English have made a mark in the world literary scenario scene? by their bewitching narration and have awakened an interest in the riches of Indian culture and civilization. Roy's world acclaimed maiden novel, which won her the coveted Booker prize in 1997, proves to be a mirror wherein the reflection of the Indian culture and society can be perceived. The novel presents the cultural background of the important characters, the intimate relationship between culture and life, the tension and interaction in the process of the mingling of characters belonging to different cultures, and thereby trying to apprehend the various aspects of Indian culture in comparison to the West and its overall impact on the reconstruction of a modern society. The novel has had tremendous impact because it touches upon the basic human needs of love and compassion and does it through its female protagonist Ammu, a typical middle-class Indian woman, who transcends all cultural, linguistic and social barriers in her search for self identity. A research on the cultural stratification and cultural metamorphosis of the Indian society, this paper is also an interpretation of tolerance that life could contain brought out in the setting, the characters, the plot, and the interactions in the novel.

Aleksandra Jovanović's paper, "The Quest for the Center in Rushdie's Novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet,*" explores why and how the characters of Rushdie's novel travel on a mythical task to find the meaning of existence. Jovanović examines Vina Apsara's quests for meaning through the labyrinth of world cultural and historical events. The "ground beneath her feet" is constantly moving, because the centre is always "where she is not," as Salman Rushdie says in this novel. She journeys in search of the lost meaning and the centre "which still holds." At the same time, her love Ormus Cama searches for his identity locked in his dead twin whose notion contains the secret of the Other. Global cultural centres, New York and London, offer the scene for their adventure because of their resemblance with the wasteland, where the centre is buried under the layers of meaning of modern pop culture, the entertainment industry and

art. Jovanović shows how by deconstructing the bulk of modern culture and world history, Rushdie tries to uncover what lies beneath, as he builds the new edifice of sense which is retrieved through the universal and, at the same time, unique love of Ormus Cama and Vina Apsara. The idea of the decentered meaning makes the quest for the (lost) centre the structuring principle of the Rushdie's novel.

Marija Knežević deals with Julian Barnes's novel *Arthur and George* (2006). The title of her paper "The Strange Meeting of Arthur and George..." is inspired by Wilfred Owen's poem "Strange Meeting" in which escaping from a battlefield of a strange war, which for the poet is a war between soldiers and politicians, the poet meets his true soul-mate among the enemy's dead soldiers in Hell. The reversal of meaning at the end of the poem, when the latter introduces himself as "the enemy you killed, my friend" witnesses, just as *Arthur & George* does, a culture of utter arbitrariness and becomes an offspring of the culture in which encounters take place or don't take place dependent on the angle of seeing. In this novel, somebody has received threatening letters and suffered wrongful arrest, false imprisonment, and defamation primarily on a racial basis, while, despite all the good will, no truth can be proved in the world in which all the superior instances are rendered fictive. However, presenting a new humanist appeal, the novel suggests that the meanings we apply to the event may not matter, but suffering is what matters, as well as our in/ability to redeem the pain. Stating this, the novel exploits several traditional genre narratives making thus specific literary analysis of the narrativity of life and searching within the rich literary heritage for the clue and the basis of a humanistic discourse that could be applied to the disillusioned twenty-first century's mind.

In the last part of the book, the papers regard the postmodern issues of clashes and interaction between popular and high culture, old and new texts, traditional novel and metafiction, authorship and readership. In his paper "Sympathy for the Devil: Gurus and Shamans in Nineteen-sixties Music and Literature," Victor Kennedy examines the appeal of the gurus and shamans in the songs of the sixties and shows how encounters with these characters came to resemble fictional encounters with the devil. That popular music and literature of the nineteen sixties was full of gurus and shamans is evident already in the examples of Bob Dylan's "Mr Tambourine Man," Donovan's "Hurdy Gurdy Man," Carlos Castaneda's Don Juan, Jim Morrison's "Lizard King," and Pete Townshend's "Tommy". They all resemble fictional versions of real-life gurus Timothy Leary and the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, who were both highly influential not only among writers and musicians, but in the culture at large.

Castaneda and Morrison themselves took on the status of cult figures, as did science fiction writer L. Ron Hubbard. In the early sixties, these attempts at counter-cultural spiritual development were seen as positive and enlightening, but as songwriters such as Ray Thomas ("Legend of a Mind") and filmmakers Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper (*Easy Rider*) predicted, such utopian dreams held a dark side, later revealed in the cults surrounding anti-gurus such as Jim Jones, Charles Manson, and David Koresh.

This book closes with "Intertextuality and the Construction of Authorship in J. M. Coetzee's Nobel Lecture *He and his man*," a paper by Olga Glebova from the Jan Dlugosz Academy in Czestochowa. Glebova discusses J. M. Coetzee's acceptance speech for the 2003 Nobel Prize in literature which has become one of the most original Nobel lectures undermining all traditional conventions of inaugural speeches. Delivered in the form of a short story entitled "He and his man" Coetzee's text defies easy interpretation and offers a profound meditation on the metaphysics of writing and a radical questioning of the authorial role. Similarly to the novel *Foe* (1987), "He and his man" is inspired by Daniel Defoe and is constructed as a complex allegory based on allusions to *Robinson Crusoe, A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain, The Journal of the Plague Year* as well as to some facts from the English writer's biography. The paper explores Coetzee's use of the postmodernist narrative device of metalepsis to deconstruct the traditional oppositions "author-character," "fiction-reality." The paper also traces the metaphors provided by Coetzee to conceptualise his notions of author and authorship. Coetzee's story, characterized by narrative indeterminacy and intertextuality, can be read as a self-referential commentary on Coetzee's own work (which has drawn extensively not only on Defoe but on other writers as well, for example, Dostoevsky in *The Master of Petersburg* 1994). On the other hand, it can be seen as an allegory on the creative process in general understood as collaboration and appropriation of previous texts.

For its argumentation strongly founded in recent literary studies and humanities in general, its interdisciplinary nature and its focus on the actual global problems of abrupt cultural change and exchange, its heightened understanding of the necessity of coexistence of differences in a changing world, its spirit of tolerance, and its international spirit in general, we assume this collection will not only attract academic literary scholars but will also appeal to the general reading public.

Editors, Podgorica, January 2009.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM ILLYRIA TO JAMES BOND: MONTENEGRO IN BRITISH WRITING, 1601-2006

PETER PRESTON

At the core of this essay lie discussions of four texts. One, Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (1941), is extremely well-known to those interested in the history of British responses to Yugoslavia, although the discussion here concentrates on West's treatment of Montenegro. Tennyson's magisterial sonnet "Montenegro," written and published in 1877, is also familiar, and is fascinating for the way in which the poet creates from a few known facts a Montenegro of his imagination. Joyce Cary's *Memoir of the Bobotes*, written soon after his return from service in the Balkan War of 1912-13 but not published until three years after his death, is important not only for its witness to events in the prelude to the First World War, but also because its author went on to be a well-known and much admired novelist. The fourth text, *Two Vagabonds in Serbia and Montenegro* by Jan and Cora Gordon, first published in 1916, is very little known but offers a rumbustious and probably rather fanciful account of the authors' exploits in the region during the First World War.

In many respects, however, it is difficult to separate the perception of Montenegro from the ways in which British observers have perceived the Balkan Peninsula as a whole. This subject has received extensive treatment from such authors as Vesna Goldsworthy, Maria Todorova and David Norris, all of whom helpfully bring post-colonial and other theoretical perspectives to the study of how the Balkans have been represented in both imaginative and factual texts.[1] Although this essay concentrates on the specific ways in which Montenegro has been perceived, it is important,

[1] Full details of these books are given in the Bibliography.

as a context for its argument, to reiterate some points concerning literary Balkanism.

The issues begin, of course, with the very word "Balkan". Its original use in English as a name for the region's principal mountain chain was based on a misunderstanding of a kind that is very common when travellers, traders or colonisers, mistake the word *for* something as the name *of* something. Balkan means mountain and to speak of the "Balkan Mountains" is to call them, tautologically, the "Mountain Mountains". By extension, "Balkan" came to be used by the 1880s not only to refer to the peninsula that lies to the east of the Adriatic, but also to the states on that peninsula. At about the same time, the word also acquired associations concerning difficulties that were almost impossible to resolve: the Eastern Question of the 1870s became the Balkan crisis and the Balkan problem, which required solutions originating outside the Balkans. The geopolitics of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries ensured that the Western or Great Powers were very alert to the political affiliations of the Balkan states and to their strategic importance in containing the perceived threat posed by the Russian Empire. It was vital for Western Europe to exert a strong influence in the region in order to keep Russia at bay—but given the power of the Ottoman Empire and the competing Slavophilism of many in the Balkans the balance was a delicate one.

The most significant outcome of this power play between East and West was what soon became known as "Balkanization"—the division of the region into a number of small units, usually hostile to one another—a policy calculated to keep the area in an almost perpetual state of conflict and upheaval. There is probably no part of the world where both individual states and groups of states have seen their name and standing change so frequently in so short a time and it is quite hard to remember where Montenegro or any of her neighbours stood at a particular moment during the years from, say, 1876 to 1946. Unsurprisingly, this led to uncertainty, resentment, hostility and warfare as states clamoured for the return of land that they believed was culturally, ethnically and historically theirs.

In 1924 the American magazine *Scribner's* wrote of Belgrade that "[p]atches of glaring 'Westernism' merely emphasize [its] fundamental 'Balkanism'" (*OED* 903). Here, "Balkanism" emerges as a term to denote a quality that is not European, nor emphatically non-European. The Balkan's existence on this borderline is a major determinant of its perception in Western culture. Its location places it somewhere between the civilisation of Italy to the west and Greece to the south. Greece used to be seen as part of the Balkans, but its privileged position within Western culture as the source of philosophy, drama, poetry and art somehow

separated it from its northern neighbours. Hellenism and the legacy of Rome and the Renaissance from Italy were seen as central factors in the creation of Europeanism, but the Balkans were perceived as playing no part in these cultural developments: there was no Gothic movement, no Renaissance, no neo-Classical revival, no artist, writer or musician whose name was known or influence felt outside the Balkans. In terms of culture in the narrow sense used by Matthew Arnold, the Balkans were a blank, a void.

The origins of many of these perceptions of Montenegro and its people can be found in the responses of the earliest English visitors to the country. In her excellent article "Njegoš and England," Bojka Đukanović discusses the history of English contact with Montenegro from the early nineteenth century to the reign of Vladika Peter II Petrović Njegoš, from 1830-1851.[2] From the wide range of fascinating quotations drawn from the writings of many travellers and other observers who wrote about Montenegro two key points emerge. There is admiration for the bravery, boldness and daring of the Montenegrins in their courageous defence of their country against the Turks over a period of five hundred years. At the same time, however, courage and defiance can easily become defined in terms of other, less desirable qualities: the Montenegrins are also seen as fierce, blood-thirsty, lawless, barbarous, illiterate and uncivilized. Praise for their determination and their skilful use of the country's mountainous terrain in their guerrilla war against the Turks is always qualified by a sense that they breach the rules of civilized warfare, and that practices such as the taking and display of their enemies' heads place them in a realm that, for all their love of freedom and independence, lags behind Western conceptions of conduct. There is a sense that the Montenegrins have come to enjoy warfare and the qualities it demands for their own sake, and that their lust for vengeance and plundering therefore devalues the causes for which they have fought. Many commentators are inclined to forgive this extreme fierceness because their enemies, the Ottoman Turks, are not only seen as cruel and merciless but are also the ancient enemies of Christianity. Nonetheless, balancing or qualifying judgements are present in almost every commentator from this period.

Njegoš himself, conscious of his country's reputation and anxious to encourage contact with Western Europe, was always welcoming to visitors, who were in return impressed by his hospitality and his striking personal qualities. He was an awe-inspiring figure, six feet seven inches tall, with long black hair and a full beard; but observers noted that his

[2] For place and personal names I have employed the transliterations in current use. Obsolete forms used in quotations are retained.

strength was combined with gentleness, with a kindly face and a pleasant smile and small, delicate hands. Elizabeth Roberts sums up the impression that he made on his visitors: "agreeable in manner and dressed in national costume, he was the epitome of the romantic Balkan hero, at once poet and chieftain."[3] Visitors noted and approved of his soldierly qualities, his excellent marksmanship and his courage in leading his people in their struggle against the Turks. In this respect he shared many of the characteristics perceived in the Montenegrins as a whole; but what the visitors record with special emphasis are those aspects of his personality that separated him from his people. He was fluent in French, an excellent conversationalist, learned, with a love of literature and a poet himself. He had travelled in and was knowledgeable about Europe; he had established schools and promoted the printing of books; he was personally charming and especially courteous and gracious in the company of women—indeed he had many of the characteristics of the cosmopolitan European gentleman.

These qualities, for many of those who met him, made it all the more extraordinary that such a ruler should emerge in a country like Montenegro. To be the romantic Balkan hero, that essentially Byronic combination of artist and man of action, was not necessarily an ideal or comfortable situation. Romantic barbarism may be very alluring, but for a man engaged in modern state-building, there are many disadvantages. One of his visitors, Charles Lamb,[4] sums this up very forcefully:

> No social distinctions are yet known among them, and the most perfect equality prevails—even the sons address their father by his Christian name. The only exception is in the person of the Vladika—his lot is on the whole not an enviable one. The only educated mind among the many—the only polished gentleman among simple peasants; he is indeed an isolated being. Handsome and in the prime of life, yet there must be none to cheer his lot or lighten his solitude, nor any to whom he would love to transmit his mountain throne.[5]

There is, then, a personal and political price to be paid for the Vladika's sophistication and liberalism, in the form of isolation and uncertainty about the succession. It is quite clear, however, that Lamb and other contemporary commentators regarded Njegoš as an isolated phenomenon,

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[3] Bojka Đukanović, "Njegoš and England," *Enciclopedia Njegoš*, translated by Marija Knežević (Beograd—Podgorica: Pitura—Foundation Njegoš, 2006), 188.
[4] This is *not* the Charles Lamb (1775-1834) who was the author of *Essays of Elia* (1823).
[5] Charles Lamb, "A Ramble in Montenegro," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 57/351. January 1845), 50.

an exceptional personality whose achievements, however significant and impressive, would not necessarily be translated into the transformation of Montenegrin society or its attainment of European standards of civilization.

The response to Njegoš is paradigmatic of the two principal ways in which nineteenth-century commentators dealt with the Balkans: romanticisation or demonisation. Byron of course was the great romanticiser, largely because of his use in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1812-18) of his experiences in Albania in 1809-10. For Byron, the exotic was extremely alluring, and at a time when he was disillusioned with England, he was powerfully drawn to the simpler or more primitive way of life he found among the mountains of Albania, and fascinated by the absence of those conventions that had so frustrated and angered him back home. But what fascinated Byron was a source of fear and anxiety to others, and where he gladly embraced a culture that was so distinctively non-European in its social codes and sexual mores, less dazzled commentators worried about that same difference between the Balkans and Europe. The Balkans simultaneously belonged to Europe and yet embodied various kinds of alarming difference and otherness. Here could be found a potential Europeanism of the purest kind, represented by Greece, the very cradle of Western civilised values, but a Europeanism that had been spoiled or turned by its long contact with and domination by the Ottoman Empire. Nor, as I have already suggested, was this situation entirely straightforward, because although in moral and religious terms, the English were anti-Turkish and anti-Islam, in political terms their official stance was pro-Turk and anti-Russian. Nonetheless, it was Gladstone's conversation with Tennyson about the courage of the Montenegrins in defying the Turks in March 1877 that led to the composition of a sonnet about Montenegro by England's most celebrated living poet.

*

They rose to where their Sovran eagle sails,
They kept their faith, their freedom, on the height,
Chaste, frugal, savage, armed by day and night
Against the Turk; whose inroad nowhere scales
Their headlong passes, but his footstep fails,
And red with blood the Crescent reels from fright
Before their dauntless hundreds, in prone flight
By thousands down the crags and through the vales.
O smallest among peoples! Rough rock-throne
Of Freedom! Warriors beating back the swarm
Of Turkish Islam for five hundred years,

> Great Tsernagora! Never since thine own
> Black ridges drew the cloud and brake the storm
> Has breathed a race of mightier mountaineers.[6]

With words like "eagle," "scales," "headlong," "crags," "rock-throne," "ridges," and "mountaineers", the sonnet is packed with images of height, while the stoniness of many of these words lends them additional associations of obduracy and firmness. It also associates height with freedom, a trope that Tennyson also employs in a poem written in 1833 and published in 1842, which begins "Of old sat Freedom on the heights."[7] This is developed into the poem's overall sense of elevation, of the Montenegrins occupying the heights both literally and metaphorically, physically and morally. Tennyson also emphasises the relative size of the opposing armies: the Montenegrins, "smallest among peoples," are numbered in hundreds, while the Turkish "swarm" (conveying a submerged image of venomous insects) runs to thousands. The numerical inferiority of the Montenegrins is set against their heights of courage: they are "dauntless warriors," people of "Great Tsernagora," "mightier mountaineers," who have defended their country over the enormous time span of five hundred years. Against this is set the comparative weakness of their opponent, whose "footstep fails," who "reels from fright" and is to be seen "in prone flight," a vulnerability emphasised by the rhyming words "fright"/"flight" and the emphatic alliteration on the letter "f". The Montenegrins are "[c]haste, frugal, savage" and although the last word hints at the notion of a lack of "civilisation" in the European sense, Tennyson's placing of these qualities at the beginning of the line and the metrical emphasis they carry suggests that they are rough but admirable virtues in the context of their defiance of the Turk. Furthermore, the alliterative link of "faith," "freedom" and "frugal" balances the judgement of the Turks in "fail," "fright" and "flight." The rhythm and metre of the poem are steady and dignified, and Tennyson, who according to his son Hallam placed Montenegro "first among his sonnets," is intervening in a tradition of sonnet-writing, also to be found in the work of John Milton

[6] Alferd Lord Tennyson, "Montenegro," *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, 1969), 1240. The sonnet was first published in the prestigious periodical the *Nineteenth Century*, May 1877 and was accompanied by an article about Montenegro by Gladstone.
[7] *Ibid*., 617-618.

(1608-74) and William Wordsworth (1770-1850), to mark public events and call attention to the plight of oppressed and tyrannised peoples.[8]

*

> I had a certain romantic enthusiasm for the cause of the Montenegrins; in short I was young and eager for any sort of adventure. I saw most of the fighting and was among the first three across the bridge at Scutari, at the surrender of the Turks in 1913. For this campaign I had a little gold medal from the Montenegrin government which I prize very much, that it was earned in what was, for a boy of my age, very much an adventure.[9]

When Joyce Cary travelled to Montenegro in October 1912, he was a young man of twenty-four, recently graduated from Oxford University, idealistic but restless and casting around for an opportunity to act on his idealism and further his ultimate ambition to be a writer. He thought that it was vital for someone who hoped one day to write novels to experience war and believed that the Balkan conflict would be his last opportunity to do so, since like many other people at the time he was convinced that there would be no more large-scale European wars. The combination of Cary's desire for experience and adventure is very evident in the style and structure of Memoir of the Bobotes, the book that Cary wrote, probably soon after his return to Britain in May 1913, about his Montenegrin experiences. Idealism is less evident in the Memoir, however, because the keenly observant and unflinchingly honest future writer in Cary transformed into prose what he saw and heard in Montenegro.

He arrived in Montenegro with the hope of joining the Montenegrin Red Cross at Antivari (Bar), and when that proved too difficult he briefly considered enlisting in the Montenegrin army. But while he was in Antivari he was caught up in a series of events, which included being arrested as a possible saboteur, when he was near an army ammunition dump that suddenly exploded.[10] In the event he showed great courage and presence of mind and as a result was able to join the British Red Cross,

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[8] See, for instance, Milton's 'On the late Massacher in *Piemont*' (1655; Milton 436) and Wordsworth's 'On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic (1802-03; Wordsworth 268).

[9] Joyce Cary, *Memoir of the Bobotes*, Introduction by Walter Allen (London: Michael Joseph, 1964), 8. All the in-text references to this text are taken from this edition.

[10] My thanks are due to Dr. Bojka Đukanovič of the University of Montenegro who in September 2007 took me on a tour of the ruins of Antivari, including the site of the blockhouse that exploded and the prison where Cary was briefly incarcerated.

with which he served on the strategically vital Scutari front until the Turkish surrender.

Such experiences certainly brought Cary to the heart of the war and he reports on some horrific sights; but for all its powerful verbal and visual representations of the consequences of war, *Memoir* is not in the strict sense a war book, and Cary's interest is in rendering what it feels like to be involved in a war as a non-combatant. As he says, in the faux-apologetic last sentence of the book: "if this proves a disappointing book it must be because there is too much eating, and too little incident in it—too much like life, which is perhaps disappointing for the same reason" (164). For a time, Cary acted as chef for his Red Cross unit, so food inevitably figures quite prominently in the narrative; as he remarks earlier "[a]nyone will tell you that a war is not made up of just fighting, but just exactly of stew, and if you are lucky, eggs" (108). But Cary is not just interested in food for its own sake—he also wishes to make a point about the everyday realities of life and the role they play in the larger narratives of history:

> These seem to be paltry matters for a historical work, but they are after all the most important parts of history, and generally forgotten. No one would have bothered to make history at all but for appetite or, at the lowest, hunger.
>
> Take out the meals of a week of your life, and see what is left of you as a historical character on Saturday evening. (51)

Such macrocosmic reflections are uncommon in *Memoir*, because Cary is more concerned with life on a section of a front in a single war, and much less concerned with writing about War with a capital "W". In tone, as Walter Allen points out, the book is very pre-First World War (9). In its descriptions of boredom between actions it anticipates some accounts of trench warfare on the battlefields of Flanders and France, but in other respects it is very different from that of writers like Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon and Edmund Blunden. It contains no outrage about the iniquities of warfare or any particular identification with a righteous cause, even though Cary's sympathies were clearly with the Montenegrins. Cary's letters home from the front are described by his biographer Malcolm Foster as "cool, factual, objective, simple"[11] and these qualities are carried over into the prose of *Memoir;* indeed one might say that the greater the danger and horror he describes the cooler and more evenly paced his prose becomes, as in this short passage from his account of the explosion at Antivari:

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[11] Malcom Foster, *Joyce Cary. A Biography* (London: Michael Joseph, 1969), 80.

> We were taking cover for the last time, to get breath for the last rush, when Williams said suddenly:
>
> "Look at that, Joe!" and pointed down.
>
> Joe Baverstock and I looked, and noticed something like a piece of withered branch with the bark on. I picked it up and saw that it was a man's arm, the fingers blown away at the palm.
>
> "I expect that's the lad that did it," was Joe's comment; I handed the arm to our guide, who put it in his belt. (30)

The detachment, the mordant brevity of the spoken exchange and the refusal to make any comment about the experience, is characteristic of the book as a whole and does not indicate lack of concern on Cary's part, but a desire to observe events as closely as possible and render them in clear, accurate and unadorned prose.

Three more brief points need to be made about Cary's representation of the Montenegrins at war. The first is that Cary displays little sympathy for those Montenegrins who have emigrated to America in search of prosperity and a better life and have returned to fight in the war, but who now complain about the poverty of the country, the difficulties of its terrain and the ignorance of its people. He reflects that "[p]robably the very rocks and cliffs that kept them hungry, and have kept them independent and self-respecting for so many centuries, give them also the good health, good air, and plenty of exercise, that make them happy" (57). Second, he frequently remarks on the beauty of the country, particularly when looking down from its heights on "a minute and distant world that seemed as far from us as Atlantis" (18). Finally, he pays tribute to the Montenegrin soldiers, whose courage and sense of honour are so evident; but he complicates that opinion with statements which very neatly turn the tables on European ideas of the superiority of their way of life to those of the Balkan countries:

> This was already the time of the Armistice, which was respected far too well by the Montenegrins for their own good.
>
> For the first time they were fighting by the rules of European warfare, and they are not enough civilized to know that these rules are never kept. (52)

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A text that appears to have eluded most previous commentators on British perceptions of the Balkans is Jan and Cora Gordon's *The Luck of Thirteen*, first published with that title in 1916. When it was republished as a Penguin paperback in 1939 it was retitled *Two Vagabonds in Serbia and*

Montenegro, to make it uniform with the authors' series of travel books published in the intervening twenty years. The book is an account of twelve months, January to December 1915, that the Gordons spent working for the Red Cross in Serbia, which included an eventful and sometimes perilous excursion into Montenegro to bring much needed stores and hospital supplies into the country.

The Gordons were in the great tradition of English eccentricity. Both came from solidly middle-class families, Jan the son of a clergyman and Cora—known in the book as Jo—the daughter of a doctor. Jan, after a false start as a mining engineer, trained as an artist in London, while Jo resisted her father's attempts to steer her towards a nursing career and studied art at the prestigious Slade School in London. They were both gifted musicians: Jo had studied violin and piano at the Manchester Conservatory, while Jan was proficient on the banjo; and in later life they earned part of their income from performing folk music on a variety of plucked and bowed instruments. By 1906 they were both in Paris, painting and moving in artistic circles. They married in 1909 and returned to England at the outbreak of war. Jan was unfit for active service, so he and Jo volunteered to work for the Red Cross and were sent to Serbia with a unit from the Royal Free Hospital in London.

On their return to England in December 1915, by what seems to have been a combination of cheek and charm, they persuaded a London publisher to commission a book. *Two Vagabonds* must be the only book in the world whose structure attempts to imitate the design of a hat. As they were leaving the publisher's office, he asked Jo where she had got her hat. The Gordons explained that

> it was made of a white Albanian saucer-like fez which we had bought in Plevlie, that the handkerchief twisted round it was from the Bazar at Scutari, both held together by the large silver brooch which Nikolai Pavlovitch, ex-brigand and comitaj, had helped us to buy at [Peč].[12]

The publisher asked that they should "write [the book] as much like that hat as possible" (11). The resulting volume, with alternate chapters drafted by one and then checked by the other, was completed in two weeks, and like Jo's hat, it consists of a variety of elements, which give it a haphazard, slightly bizarre yet very attractive quality.

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[12] Jan and Cora Gordon, *Two Vagabonds in Serbia and Montenegro* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1939), 11. All the in-text references to this text are taken from this edition.

Although the book was revised for the 1939 Penguin edition, because readers of the first edition said that its arrangement was puzzling, the later text, even after more than one reading, remains infuriatingly elliptical and frustratingly lacking in contextual information. There are few chronological markers and no attempt to give everything a full or equitable treatment: the first five months of their service in Serbia are disposed of in a dozen pages, while their much shorter sojourn in Montenegro occupies over a hundred pages. The legend on the book's only map reads "Route Map of the Authors' Wanderings" and together with their use of the self-description "vagabonds" catches something of the nature of the book: there is a strong sense of a couple of ramblers enjoying the freedom of the road. The map has no key, no helpful direction arrows, and omits several places where significant events occurred. In this sense the book is an anticipation of their later travel books, in which they refuse to conform to the conventions of travel writing or their readers' expectations of the genre. Like E. M. Forster, D. H. Lawrence, Robert Byron, Aldous Huxley, Graham Greene and Evelyn Waugh, they were early practitioners of a new style of idiosyncratic and impressionistic travel writing that emerged in the inter-war years, offering a response to place rather than a guide to places.

Yet *Two Vagabonds* is also a war book, but a war book that largely views the conflict from the wings or from behind the lines. The Gordons saw the consequences of battle, rather than the fighting itself. They observe wounded soldiers, a civilian population deprived of proper medical care, a peasantry trying to survive in times of acute shortages, and towards the end of the book, a retreating army. There is one scene set at the front when Jo fires a machine gun at the enemy and they witness a Montenegrin artillery unit, much to its surprise and delight, inadvertently scoring a direct hit on a building containing enemy officers. This sense of direct conflict comes as something of a surprise, for most of the violence in the book is between husbands and wives, as episodes in blood feuds or as a consequence of drunkenness, as when Jan deals with a Montenegrin soldier abusing a Turkish peasant by throwing him into a stream.

Given their interest in people's ordinary lives, it is not surprising that the Gordons have little to say about the war in a larger sense. Nor do they dwell on the historical dimensions of issues like Montenegrin independence. On one occasion they refer to Montenegro as "the black mountain where the last of the old Serbian aristocracy defied the Turk" (49) and there is also a passing reference to the epochal battle of Kosovo. A speech about Montenegrin territorial claims is put, without authorial comment, in the mouth of an irredentist Sirdar. There is a reference to Montenegro as a country which has over a long period resisted Turkish

conquest, and how much the nature of the terrain always aided the Montenegrins and prevented the Turks from occupying the whole country. But the point is not dwelt upon: the relationship between the nature of the terrain and Montenegrin independence is not explored in the philosophical manner to be found later in Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*.

The Gordons are much more interested in a number of other features of Montenegrin culture. They remark on "the grateful temperament of the Montenegrins," (51) their unwillingness to admit to hunger because it is a sign of weakness (67), and their odd habit, encountered at several inns and cafes, of denying that rooms and food are available (115). They admire the energy, courage and cheerfulness of a group of women carrying supplies to sons, brothers and husbands at the front. They comment on the Montenegrins' dignity of demeanour and appreciate their non-cosmopolitan innocence. In Danilovgrad they miss the "picturesque Turkish houses […] full of unexpected corners and mysterious balconies" (76) seen in Albania. Montenegrin houses are "small and simple, four walls and a roof, like the drawing of a three-year-old child, except that there were no chimneys. Broad streets lined with the houses would have been depressing had they not been painted in bright colours" (76-77). There are bad roads, smelly, bug-ridden bedrooms and disgusting food, but although the Gordons do all they can to sleep comfortably and eat adequately, they accept many of their problems as the inevitable consequences of the war, and they certainly make no criticism of the Montenegrins for the state of affairs.

Nor do they seem to have come to the country with any of the conventional prejudices and assumptions to be found in many earlier accounts of life in Serbia or Montenegro. There is no significant mention of the supposed warlike nature of the Montenegrins or their tall, fierce, warriors. The only speech along these lines comes from a Montenegrin who accuses the Albanians of being interested in nothing but killing (118). The single reference to Montenegrin height is in a comic context, when some soldiers talk about the inadequacy of French uniforms, designed for an army with an average height of five feet two inches and supplied to the six footers in Montenegro's army. The royal family, whose photos decorate so many houses, pops up in expected and banal places: a young and rather down-at-heel princess on a ferry, and in an inn a weary soldier-prince in need of a shave. The Gordons note with amusement that Strauss's *The Merry Widow* is banned in Podgorica because it contains a supposed portrait of Prince Danilov, but they make no comment as to whether they believe, as did so many popular novelists, that Balkan politics belonged in the world of light operetta and Ruritanian romance.

Overall, however, the Gordons liked Montenegro. They found Podgorica, or "Pod" as they call it, "sleepy [and] inhospitable" (110). Cetinje they describe as a "polychromatic little village of little square houses, cheerfully dreary;" they note that the monastery is the town's only building of architectural interest, and that since the prince-bishops reigned from there "it must have many a queer tale to tell" (79). Characteristically, however, they do not tell any of these tales. There is nothing about the characters of the prince-bishops, no mention of Njegoš or the Montenegrin Vespers.[13] On the other hand, they are very conscious of the country's natural beauties, which they describe with the eyes of trained painters:

> On the higher peaks of the mountains there was already a fresh powdering of snow. In the valleys the clouds had almost cleared away, leaving a film of moisture that made shadows of pure ultramarine beneath the trees. Your modern commercial grinder [of paints] can't sell you this colour […] Pure lapis lazuli. (109)

They certainly seem to leave this "hospitable little country" (131) with regret, and compare it with Serbia, to the latter's detriment:

> Coming back to Serbia from Montenegro was like slipping from a warm into a cool bath. One is reminded that the lords of Serbia withdrew to Montenegro, leaving the peasants behind, for every peasant in the black mountain is a noble and carries a noble's dignity; while Karageorge was a pig farmer. There is a warmth in Montenegro—save only Pod. The Montenegrin peasant is like a great child, looking at the varied world with thirteenth century unspoiled eye; centuries of Turkish oppression have been hard on the Serb. (134)

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Rebecca West wrote *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* in a different context from that of either Cary's or the Gordons' book. She visited Montenegro

[13] The Montenegrin Vespers are said to have taken place on Christmas Eve 1702, when on the orders of the clan chiefs and led by the five Martinović brothers, there was a massacre of Christians who had converted to Islam and refused to recant. There is no contemporary description of the event, which does not appear in the historical record until the nineteenth century, and although there is a strong folk tradition about the Vespers, transmitted in popular ballads, some Balkan historians doubt that it ever took place. Its place in Montenegrin culture was, however, assured in 1847 when Njegoš, the poet-prince, published *The Mountain Wreath*, his epic poem dramatising the story of the Vespers.

in peacetime and was usually able to move around the country with comparative freedom. She was also at a different stage in her literary career when she visited Yugoslavia in 1936, 1937 and 1938. Cary and the Gordons were young authors who had still to establish their literary reputation as authors; whereas West was a well-established writer in her mid-forties who had published several novels and undertaken a good deal of literary journalism. She had been a political activist, prominent in the suffragette movement, was associated with radical writers and thinkers. As the "Prologue" to the book indicates, she brought to Yugoslavia knowledge of the country's history as well as an understanding of its current political situation.

West's journey through Yugoslavia as recounted in the book is an entirely literary construct, since she combines, conflates and synthesises impressions gathered from all three of her visits. Although it reads like a chronological continuum it is a narrative whose apparently uninterrupted journey is entirely illusory. Furthermore, the journey that gives the book its narrative drive is only one determinant of its shape and structure. West introduces passages of historical and political comment that thicken the texture of the narrative and strengthen its context. This is especially important because by the time the book was published in 1941, the war had begun, and its first English readers had already lived through the Blitz, the Battle of Britain and the fall of France and Dunkirk. Until the end of 1941, when America entered the war after the attack on Pearl Harbour, Britain faced Nazi Germany almost alone. In these circumstances, the historical dimensions of *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*, with their accounts of five hundred years of resistance against the Turks, must have seemed very apposite. Although between 1936 and 1938, when West was actually in Yugoslavia, it was apparent that a large-scale conflict was imminent, by 1941 her journeys had acquired an extra retrospective significance.

West's "Bibliographical Note" makes it clear that she was aware of the tradition of European writing about the Balkans and that she disapproved of much of it. Her background reading was extensive, comprising histories of Christianity and the Roman and Byzantine empires, as well as nineteenth-century travellers' accounts and recent works of history and analysis. She remarks on "the peculiar character of the literature which deals with the Balkans," much of which is either "propaganda bought and paid for by the great powers" or "a sour controversy between birds of two different feathers […] content to beat their wings in the empyrean of