

New Men, Old Europe: Being a Man in Balkan Travel Writing*

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Much modern Western travel writing presents Eastern Europe and especially the Balkans as a sort of museum of masculinity: an area where men, whether revolutionaries, politicians or workers, are depicted as behaving in ways that are seen as almost exaggeratedly masculine according to the standards of the traveller. Physical toughness and violence, sexual conquest and the subordination of women, guns, strong drink and moustaches feature heavily. This is a region where men are men – and sometimes so are the women, whether ‘sworn virgins’ living their lives as honorary men, heroic female partisans or, in more derisive accounts, alarmingly muscular and hirsute athletes, stewardesses and waitresses. But the notion of a characteristically masculine Balkans isn’t limited to outsiders. It can appear in travel accounts from the region as well, ranging from Aleko Konstantinov’s emblematic fictional Bulgarian traveller, Bai Ganio Balkanski, with his boorish disregard of European norms of behaviour (Konstantinov 1895/1966), to more polished travel writers who nonetheless find it useful to contrast a ‘Balkan’ model to Western versions of manliness. It is true that the area has not invariably been gendered as male: early German writings pictured the Balkan Slavs under Ottoman rule as feminized, unwarlike and subservient; while in the nineteenth century Philhellenes and others conjured images of Greece or Bulgaria as a defenceless Christian maiden, violated by a brutal Muslim tyrant (Petkov 1997, Roessel 2002). But associations of masculinity with the Balkans are sufficiently persistent to provoke curiosity. What purposes can they serve and what do they mean for understandings of the Balkans’ place in Europe? One way of pursuing the question might be to search for the origins of such images, whether in popular culture or in literary tropes. Tracing the genealogies of patterns of perception, however, does not necessarily tell us much about their uses and meaning. Instead, I propose a more limited investigation, exploring a handful of late twentieth-century travel accounts by Englishmen and by Yugoslavs, asking why their characterizations of place and people are engendered in particular ways in specific contexts, and what functions their gendered discourses of difference serve.

Concepts of gender become entangled with accounts of travel in complex ways. Notions of masculinity or femininity play a part in positioning traveller-narrators in relation both to their implied readers, and to the objects of their commentary. The sources of authority men and women can draw upon may differ; so may the myths they use to structure their travel tales (Ulysses voyages, Penelope waits at home). Gender expectations help constitute travellers’ national or cultural stereotypes: the voluble effeminacy of the Frenchman; the seductive feminine languor of Southern Europe; the dishevelled violence of a masculinized Balkans. And gendered characterizations encode –

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and naturalize – *relationships* between peoples and places, particularly relationships of hierarchy and power. The relation of male to female has conventionally represented relations of domination : subordination in Western culture – thus the regularity with which we encounter a gendered geography that opposes a masculine, rational and active West to a feminized, passionate and passive East.

Edward Said started off this particular line of discussion, along with much else, by noting the unchanging ‘feminine penetrability’ of the Orient in Westerners’ accounts (1978: 206); others have enlarged on the variety of gendered characterizations of East and West – less coherent and more contradictory than Said initially suggested – but have shown how the notion of gender as a relationship keeps them linked in a permanent opposition (e.g. Schick 1999, Lowe 1991, Behdad 1994). Analyses of colonial discourse have pointed out the ways an opposition between the male traveller-colonizer and feminized colony meant that women, conquered territories and non-Europeans were made to occupy the same symbolic space in the stories that defined their place in the Western imagination (Carr 1985, Kabbani 1994, Lewis 1996). What was at issue, we hear, was not just Western elite males’ self-definition, but their assertion of control over all these interchangeable domestic and foreign ‘others’. The mirroring this discourse of power involves has come to seem both ubiquitous and unvarying. This is so much the case that in her book *Imagining the Balkans*, Maria Todorova supports her argument that Western ‘Balkanism’ should be differentiated from Orientalism with the claim that persistent depictions of the Balkans as masculine place the region in a distinctive relation to the West. Unlike ‘the standard orientalist discourse, which resorts to metaphors of its objects of study as female, balkanist discourse is singularly male’ (Todorova 1997: 15). This is because Orientalism is ‘a discourse about an imputed opposition’, while Balkanism is ‘a discourse about an imputed ambiguity’ treating differences within Europe (17).

But just how stable and predictable are such mappings of gender and power? One suggestion that things might not be so simple comes from studies of women travel writers. For example, the neatly-linked binaries of male/female, dominant/subordinate, West/East, colonizer/colonized did not easily accommodate the problem of Western women travelling and writing in the age of imperialism. The solidarities or distinctions such women invoked could cut across categories of gender, class or race in a variety of ways: they might either draw parallels between their own subordinate position and that of the colonial population, or they might assert privilege as white Westerners in compensation for their oppression as women (Blunt 1994, Mills 1991; McClintock, Mufti and Shohat, eds. 1997). More generally, women travel writers could and did choose to write as adventurer-heroes, or as authoritative aesthetic ‘beholders’, in the process subverting and exposing the assumptions of discourses conventionally coded as masculine (Lawrence 1994; Bohls 1995). Still, is it so different for men? The consistency of masculine discourses is sometimes taken for granted, as is their stability over time, in order to set up a foil to the differences that emerge from other positions. But understandings of gender and race and class shift and change, altering the meanings of the rhetorical patterns they underpin. Men differ among themselves, by age or sexuality or nation, and so can take widely differing positions with relation to the intersection of gender and power. And male travel writers, even white middle-class ones, can deliberately satirize and challenge myths of masculinity and write across the grain of dominant understandings. Different ways of being a man in travel writing, and the implications for travel writers’ gendered geographies, deserve more explicit attention.

In what follows I explore some of these issues through two sets of travel accounts: the first by Englishmen describing their adventures in the Balkans (and Eastern Europe

more generally) after the events of 1989; and the second by Yugoslav writers travelling in the West in the 1970s and 1980s. I do not propose to compare their conceptions of the Balkans in any detail; still less to trace possible linkages between the images that they deploy. However, the texts are comparable in that both sets of writers use depictions of gender relations, and particularly issues around masculinity, as an important element in their representations of identity and place. For both the Englishmen and the writers from Yugoslavia, ideas of manliness define and reinforce divisions between us and them, self and other, norm and deviation, domination and subordination, West and East. At the same time, the writers link depictions of masculinity and of otherness for other purposes, suggesting personal or local interests that cannot be understood solely in terms of relations between East and West. Each set of texts raises related points about the ways gendered discourses of difference have been used in Western and Balkan travel accounts. And when they are considered together, each casts an unexpected light on the other.

The fall of the Berlin Wall was triggered by the raising of restrictions on travel to the West, but the events of 1989 were also the occasion for a less dramatic current of travel from West to East. As well as works by foreign correspondents and academic pundits bearing witness to the collapse of the socialist regimes, a host of accounts by travellers in the 'new Europe' began to appear from the early 1990s. In contrast to tours asserting the authority of long acquaintance or earnest study (e.g. Thompson 1992, Garton Ash 1993, Kaplan 1993), a cluster of books by Englishmen presented a deliberately inexperienced and dilettante-ish perspective on the region.

These journeys are unconventional, if not downright eccentric – though seldom without more serious ambitions. Giles Whittell, in *Lambada Country* (1992), cycled to Istanbul, while Jason Goodwin (*On Foot to the Golden Horn*, 1993) and Nicholas Crane (*Clear Waters Rising*, 2000) headed for the same destination on foot, all in pursuit of a deeper understanding of Europe's divisions and of themselves. Rory MacLean, in *Stalin's Nose* (1992) drove a Trabant through Eastern Europe accompanied by an aunt and a pig, seeking to grasp the tension between individual responsibility and collective evil in Eastern Europe's past, while Tony Hawks (*Playing the Moldovans at Tennis*, 2000) demonstrated the power of a can-do attitude by pursuing a bet that he could defeat the entire Moldovan football team at tennis, with the loser of the bet to sing the Moldovan national anthem, naked, in Balham High Street. Robert Carver (*The Accursed Mountains*, 1998) went to Albania looking for 'somewhere right off the map, with no tourists or modern development', and returned to 'explain Albania to the West'.

In *Lambada Country*, Giles Whittell adopts a typically self-deprecating tone:

It was 1990. Like thousands of others, I wanted to see Eastern Europe before it disappeared and became a mere annex of Western Europe. In particular – and this was as close as I got to what you might call a line of enquiry – I wanted to go to those parts which other forms of transport might not reach. That is, down minor roads, up steep roads, along dirt roads. Once there, the idea was to ask whether the revolutions had made a difference – to the beer, the newspapers, the prospect of going to work on a Monday morning, the way policemen spoke to you, the availability of bicycle spares (...) Then there were the grandchildren to think of. ('Yes, Tom, what your father says is true. Many years ago I rode a bicycle to Istanbul...') This being a bicycle trip, there was also, for the first time in my life, the prospect of developing some real muscles (xiii-xiv).

While these writers laugh off any claims to authoritative knowledge, they offer not only entertainment but also the implicit promise that the reader will in fact gain an insight into

the region that other, more conventional commentators cannot provide – precisely because of the authors' combination of amateurism (and thus a paradoxical authority derived from apparently innocent observation) with their predilection for the unbeaten track (and access to the ordinary and random, and therefore truly 'authentic'). Furthermore, they attribute an unknown quality to the region travelled to, not reducible to its post-socialist status. This lies at the heart of its attraction for these writers. As with Carver, these travellers' routes lie 'right off the map'; they saw a 'chance of finding places up there'; that is, places that were not yet like the rest of Europe, places that were – in short – different. And that difference is expressed, in all these travel accounts, in terms of gender and particularly in terms of masculinity.

But even before these travellers address differences of place, they deploy a series of gendered differentiations to establish their own identities. The writers' sense of what it means to be a man emerges, first of all, in the ways they set themselves in contrast to traditional images of the male traveller. For most, this takes the form of the heroic adventurer and gentleman scholar of the British imperial past. Their texts are haunted by men like Patrick Leigh Fermor, who set out in 1933 from the Hook of Holland to travel to Constantinople on foot. Carver sits at Leigh Fermor's feet, seeking advice on where to escape tourism and modernity; Crane solicits his approbation for his plan to hike Europe's mountain ranges; Goodwin cites him as an inspiration. Whittell mentions him only in passing in his own journey to Constantinople, but his account in many ways can be read as a parody of the older traveller's journal: inept where Leigh Fermor was omniscient, pursued by the *Lambada* rather than accompanied by folksong, tumbled by orange-fingernailed tarts in campsite *cabanas* rather than tumbling peasant girls in haystacks, passed from one Hungarian household to the next – for arguments over apartment kitchen tables rather than repartee in aristocratic salons. But similar elements of parody and bathos also structure the other accounts. These travellers recall the heroic men who preceded them only to present themselves in comic contrast, as incompetent, clownish anti-heroes, who have no idea what to pack (Goodwin's mountain of hiking equipment includes both silk and thermal underwear and five bars of Bendick's Sporting and Military chocolate, which he contrasts to the rucksack holding 'a toothbrush, an apple and a pair of socks' carried by 'our predecessors'; 13); whose embarrassing physical incapacities are detailed (Whittell's cyclist's crotch-rot, Goodwin's diarrhoea, Crane's endless list of excruciating ailments); who can't do anything without help.

Yet, for all their self-ridicule in comparison to the heroes of the past, these writers make sure to present themselves as travellers and never as tourists. They may not live up to the standards of the men who built the Empire, but they follow the same tradition of enterprise and adventure. Somewhat diffidently, perhaps, when it comes to the notion of an Empire whose passing they note by blaming their 'khaki empire garb' for incubating sweat rash (Whittell 1992: 104); by poking fun at the anachronistic language and pretensions of know-nothing British diplomats, summed up by the figure of 'Carruthers, Our Man in Tirana,' reduced to an embassy of 'three small rented rooms in an office building' (Carver 1998: 151-4); by lampooning an annoying sidekick's resemblance to all the 'maverick Foreign Office Arabists known through the bazaars from Alexandria (*sic*) to Lucknow simply as The Englishman' (Goodwin 1994: 8). Our writers are more confident about being adventurer-travellers when it comes to comparisons with their own contemporaries, particularly in chance encounters with Western tourists: usually likeable and well-intentioned, but basically consumers of guidebook experiences, whether passive and uncomprehending or earnest and over-prepared. Domestic social distinctions aren't foregrounded in this familiar traveller/tourist dichotomy – but the travellers' dogged egalitarianism isn't allowed to obscure their own very evident social advantages. (Carver

does highlight his own superior daring as a traveller by dismissing the travels of ‘waffling old Etonians on bicycles’ (331), but he also ensures we know about his own public-school background.) National differences are a more acceptable substitute for social difference. Germans and Americans are particularly apt as foils to our heroes: German fellow-tourers are equipped with ‘Lennon specs, Goretex overgarments, hyper-rugged bikes loaded for total self-sufficiency’ (Whittell: 172), or at least ‘a long, hard sausage’ (Crane 1996: 85), while American volunteers and tourists are unremittingly groomed and hail-fellow-well-met, as well as loaded with camcorders, super-soft sneakers, and money (Hawkes: 43, 144-45; Carver: 276-77; Whittell: 181). But what are all these advantages compared to their own gentlemanly English virtues of amateurishness, stoicism, whimsy? For all their self-deprecation, the young Englishmen are nostalgic for a vanished imperial masculinity that would give purpose and legitimacy to their anachronistic attempts at adventure. Crane sums it up for all of them, comparing his experiences to those of Leigh Fermor: ‘I was too late’ (328).¹

A certain nostalgia is perceptible, too, in the way they establish their relations with Western women. Several of the accounts record the shadows of ex-girlfriends and wives left behind, who have no intention of waiting for the traveller to return, and are more interested in getting on with their lives than in taking part in boy’s games. Goodwin, unusually, is accompanied by his girlfriend and future wife: she thought his plan of ‘bridging the gap between traveller and indigene’ by ‘grubbing about in mud and boots’ was ‘dim’, but realized she would have to come along if only to ward off possible dangers (10). Other Western women met on the road are self-confident travellers, more frightening than attractive. Their emancipation seems to imply a corresponding emasculation on their menfolk’s part. Carver is quite explicit about the equation:

Over the last thirty years the gradual feminization of society in Britain, and most of the formerly macho northern European democracies such as Holland and Germany, had blanded men down to an acceptably low-testosterone product, suitable only for occasional use by the quasi-liberated women, as and when required.

He goes on to contrast ‘use-and-chuck, Kleenex-style, Euro-wimps’ to ‘real, old-fashioned Western males, authentic gas-guzzling pre-feminist models’ – now largely extinct. (184) Carver is particularly scathing, but anxieties about what it means to be a modern man in a society where women are understood as equals are shared by all these writers.

The part played by local women is superficially similar to that of Western women. The travellers are constantly being taken in hand by local women who rescue them and solve their many problems. On the one hand, their calm assurance, like the confidence of the Western women, gives substance to the travellers’ claims to incompetence. But while Western women don’t need the travellers, these women do. Skilled, dynamic and capable Balkan women are regularly described as deserving better than the limited opportunities available to them – and as needing to be rescued. These are not instances of Gayatri Spivak’s classic colonial romance: ‘a white man is rescuing a brown woman from a brown man’ and in the process justifying colonial rule as the protection of victimized women. These abortive romances never reach fruition: an Englishman is *failing* to rescue a Balkan woman. But the reason is always the same: the woman’s material motives and the fear that the man represents nothing but ‘an escape route from this country’ (Hawks, 159; Carver, 184). These Englishmen hesitate at the thought that these relationships might depend on something other than their own individual qualities: they want to be loved for themselves alone, not because they might stand for Western political and economic might. This is a masculinity that still romanticizes masculine power and feminine dependence (placed in piquant contrast to the independence of the modern Western

woman). Yet, also in line with older understandings of bourgeois respectability, the travellers insist on hiding any hint of a more calculated transaction behind an ideal of sentimental reciprocity.

Encounters with prostitutes follow the same principle, but are much more straightforward. Not only does the sentimental Englishman never pay for sex, the very prospect of such a transaction confuses his reactions entirely. Nicholas Crane is importuned by an attractive Bulgarian whore: 'You, me – sex!' (357-58). He feels that a woman is a fair reward for his travails: 'Didn't I deserve a dose of delicious coddling?' But all he can think, as things get out of hand, is: 'What about the transaction? Do you arrange a price before, or after? Would she take a traveller's cheque or demand dollars? Is it a flat fee or do they charge by the minute?' He comes to himself by remembering who he is: 'No, thank you. I'm English'. The woman is incredulous: 'English? Polish? What the difference?' She doesn't understand. For Crane, men are *not* all the same, and for him, as for other post-imperial travellers, it is crucial that the Englishman maintains that difference by preserving the boundary between eros and commerce.

Crane makes the prostitute and his encounter with her stand for Bulgaria in general: she smells of roses, the symbol of Bulgaria, 'not a subtle hint of roses, but an overpowering pall which must have been applied as body-lacquer with a high-pressure hose,' while her cleavage echoes the countryside itself: 'wasn't there a Valley of the Roses in the Stara Planina?' The abortive romances between local women and English travellers regularly serve as a metaphor for the encounter between the East and West: our travellers are obscurely disturbed when it turns into a commercial exchange. Expecting gratitude and even love as the reward for deliverance, they find that the East has more material interests, and knows what she has to bargain with. It's not the relationship that their nostalgia seemed to promise. The new Englishman can find the new Europa rapaciously capitalist, even if deliciously feminine.

These versions of modern, post-imperial English masculinity are thrown into higher relief by encounters with local men. The travellers are constantly comparing themselves to their hosts and, once again, failing to measure up according to standard virility indicators. A whole series of set pieces sees them outmatched in competitions over drinking to excess, shooting guns off recklessly, driving dangerously, pursuing women, sword-fighting, or moustache-growing. These encounters define a stereotypical *machismo*, compulsively competitive, rooted in physical or sexual prowess. The English travellers treat this hyper-masculinity as both familiar and exotic. It is an aspect of Eastern Europe's backwardness, a marker of a phase that their own society has passed through, as corny and outdated as the Lambada; but at the same time different, engrossing, simultaneously repellent and attractive. These may be 'real' men, but this is a version of masculinity that the writers see as lagging behind their own society's gender norms. Such *machismo* makes the region somehow less modern and less 'European' – though local men are never compared to the Spanish or Italians, nor indeed to working-class British men.

The reaction ranges from fear, through a sort of aesthetic appreciation, to attempts at emulation – sometimes all in the same text – as the writers position themselves and their hosts on a spectrum of manliness. Carver, for example, weighs up the risks of 'failing a local test of *machismo*' when offered a pot-shot with the bus-driver's automatic on an unscheduled Albanian rest-stop; he turns his back and walks away from the gaggle of armed Gheg passengers, trusting the camera-bulge under his shirt to suggest his gun-carrying credentials, simultaneously terrified and proud of his grasp of the rituals of Albanian manhood (he reasons that they won't shoot him if there's a chance of hitting

the boy standing in his path and thus causing a blood feud) (229, 233-36). For Carver, it is a violent, patriarchal and irresponsible masculinity that defines Albania (the 'Land of the Eagle' is summed up in terms of its 'Sons': '...hospitable rapists and elegant torturers, welcoming robbers and wife-beating family men' and so on) (337). Other encounters are less melodramatic but equally emblematic: Rory Maclean falls in with Kristan in Romania, and finds himself being instructed in womanizing, in ingenious methods of counterfeiting cigarette packets, and in black-market transactions in a chapter entitled, ambiguously, 'riding with the best man' (ostensibly referring to conductors who take bribes on the railway, but also summing up Maclean's experiences with Kristan) (169-78). Whittell is floored by *slivova* in Bulgaria while his smuggler companion drinks till morning and stumbles in to bed, but still manages 'incredibly, to swivel back to the door and open it before urinating and vomiting' (185-86). Whatever the sphere of action, the Englishmen usually come off second-best by local standards of manliness.

However, there are limits to self-deprecation. Their hosts may possess an old-fashioned machismo, but this only highlights the qualities that the Englishmen see as their own defining features. The first of these, touched on by most of the writers, has to do with money and work. While local men may be virile in physical and sexual terms, they are emasculated by being poor – especially when they cannot provide adequately for their families. The travellers are constantly irked by the assumption that they, in contrast, are rich. Several contrive to be perpetually short of cash as part of their adventures on the road, lessening the apparent distance between themselves and their hosts and allowing them to accept hospitality gratefully or to reward it at their own whim – but without noting that their temporary penury is entirely self-inflicted and conceals their ability to spend their time at their leisure. (None of these writers tells us how his journey is financed.) They hesitate to interpret economic power in itself as evidence of a fundamental difference between themselves and the locals. They attribute the poverty they see to the collapse of the economy and the welfare network resulting from large-scale political and economic change: the structured inequalities between east and west cannot easily be translated into evidence of personal qualities or codes of behaviour. But this analysis is constantly undermined by the way they comment on the local men's passive, fatalistic acceptance of their circumstances, or else their desire for easy money, for something for nothing. It's not money that differentiates these Westerners from their hosts, it's the work ethic. Even Tony Hawks, who admits that his aim of beating Moldovan footballers at tennis is a frivolous waste of time and money, in dubious taste in such a poverty-stricken country, differentiates himself from his Moldovan acquaintances on the basis of his conviction that any difficulty can be overcome by effort. His greatest victory in Moldova is not trouncing the footballers, but getting the teenage son of his host family to laugh at his antics (139-40) and finally, as his crowning achievement, to admit the power of his positive philosophy and to take Hawks as his model of manhood for the future (249). That passivity or inertia is a characteristic of local men is underlined by the pointed contrast made with enterprising (if frighteningly rapacious) local women intent on achieving change for themselves and their own families by any means possible.

This suggests a second quality which differentiates the Englishmen. The travellers notice the ways in which local women are exploited by their menfolk and by society as a whole. For Whittell, the typical rural family 'seems to consist of a hospitable alcoholic husband and a haggard, sober, overworked wife. In taking advantage of the hospitality I am abusing the wife' (93). These Englishmen see the inequalities that go along with a division of gender roles and deplore them, open-mouthed at women who are proud of being dominated by their husbands (Goodwin, 153), accepting their ministrations self-consciously, not as a right but as an embarrassing throwback to a 'colonial childhood'

(Carver, 92), only allowing their ‘impeccable credentials as a politically correct male’ to slip briefly when pushed beyond endurance by a woman whose ability to annoy outweighs the evidence of her oppression (Crane, 223). Local men are presented as taking the patriarchal gender regime for granted. The Englishmen can see themselves as feminists by contrast. Straightforward and unreflexive, local men provide a contrast to the Englishman’s stance of self-awareness and self-doubt. Balkan men may be shown as struggling to adjust to economic and political transition, but they haven’t noticed that it’s no longer so simple for modern men in other spheres either.

These travel accounts should be read in the context of the so-called ‘crisis in masculinity’ in 1980s and 1990s Britain, a state of affairs usually attributed to feminism, changes in the economy (the decline in traditionally male-dominated industrial sectors, the growing presence of women in the labour market), and an increased acceptance of alternative sexualities. Responses ranged from the long-standing feminist critique of patriarchy to popular attempts to define a ‘new man’ (Connell). Our travel writers, too, use their adventures abroad to play with a variety of notions of manliness and stake out a revised version for themselves: more enterprising than their stay-at-home peers; more daring than the Western tourist with his package holiday; nostalgic for the privileges and certainties of an imperial past, but at the same time more responsible, more emotionally literate, more feminist, more politically correct than that of the standard Balkan male. The Eastern Europe depicted in these accounts serves largely as a backdrop, painted in such a way as to foreground the revised English male identities being developed through travels in the East. While being a ‘Euro-wimp’ might be a source of anxiety to the Englishman abroad, the new masculinity he is in the process of mapping out is at least superior to the outdated and superseded models he encounters on his travels.

The character of the depiction does not completely match the mappings of gender and power conventionally attributed to Orientalist or colonial discourses: Western supremacy is not asserted in terms of the general pattern of ‘the demasculinization of colonized men and the hypermasculinity of European males’ traced elsewhere (Stoler 1991: 56). But just as studies of Western women travellers have drawn attention to the diversity of their purposes and circumstances, so too an examination of these male travel writers shows various factors at work. Looking at the images used by our Englishmen in the context of the 1990s ‘crisis in masculinity’ helps show why the usual gender polarities of alteritist discourse might have been reversed in this way, at this particular juncture, and using this particular tone. Parody and inversion of conventional expectations, accompanied by changes to Western middle-class gender norms, underpin the discourses of these travel accounts.

It is sometimes precisely this ‘revised’ masculinity that works the hardest to continue to sustain a hierarchical relationship between East and West. Not overtly: straightforward assertions of superiority have become suspect, in geopolitics as in gender and class. The writers’ self-parody as hapless anti-heroes, undercutting and deflating their own pretensions, serves as a self-defensive strategy here. But their self-deprecating depictions still have consequences: their stories draw on and reinforce older notions of geocultural difference, and they evaluate their simplifications and generalizations in moral and hierarchical terms. The West is still the superior norm and Eastern Europe and, even more, the Balkans represents the inferior deviation. These English travellers may be ‘new men’ in contrast to older models, but what they give us is definitely an old Europe.

The line of analysis followed above fits comfortably within the Orientalist (and Balkanist) paradigm (Wolff 1994; Todorova 1997, Goldsworthy 1998). However, scholars have insisted on the distinctness of the relationship between the Balkans and Western power: the absence of direct colonial rule in particular has meant a corresponding stress on Western cognitive hegemony in the region (specifically in the Gramscian sense of the consent of the dominated). Claims have even been advanced that the categories of self-identity have been colonized by Western modes of thought. Whereas beyond the borders of Europe, 'the logic of domination is imposed by colonial rule', in the Balkans it seems to be 'the immanent logic of self-constitution itself that generates the incapacity to conceive of oneself in other terms than from the point of view of the dominating other' (Močnik 2002: 95). Internalization of Western ideas of the Balkans, and the notion of being *in* Europe but not wholly *of* it, is blamed for inflicting a whole series of traumas associated with ambiguity, assessed in terms that range from 'self-colonization' (Kiossev 2002) to 'self-stigmatization' or 'geocultural bovarism' (Antoši 2002). In such analyses of the Balkan variant of Orientalism, the idea of 'the Balkans' becomes essentialized even as it is deconstructed: understood in abstract structural terms, as a dark destiny imposed on South-Eastern Europeans by the inescapable logic of centre and periphery.

Such notions can appear in a slightly different light if we examine depictions of masculinity, 'Europe' and 'ourselves' in different contexts. It is to this end that I explore my second set of travel accounts, published in Yugoslavia in the 1970s and 1980s. At this time, travel accounts of Western Europe and the United States were a well-established genre in Yugoslav publishing, accorded a degree of literary prestige and often published by authors with a reputation in other genres. I examine here three such accounts, by a fairly cohesive group of established writers. Momo Kapor is a Serbian novelist and journalist; his travel account, *Skitam i pričam* (I wander and I talk, 1979/ 1981/ 2001) consists of brief, anecdotal sketches, grouped by region (Dalmatia, Europe, the USA, Belgrade), which use his travel experiences to pass judgement on cultural difference. Moma Dimić, Serbian poet and novelist, had also previously published travel accounts; his *Monah čeka svoju smrt* (The monk awaits his death, 1983) recounts his travels in Greece, Western Europe and the USA, mixing literary encounters with cultural critique. Ivan Kušan, Croatian playwright, novelist and children's writer, presented his travels through Western Europe, Russia and the USA in *Prerušeni prosjak* (Beggar in disguise, 1986) as erotic picaresque (a genre that the cover blurb identifies as 'globetrotterotica').

Accounts of the West had their own legitimacy in post-WWII Yugoslav literature: they were frequently set in parallel to travels in the socialist bloc, with the point being to highlight ideological contrasts between Western capitalism, Warsaw Pact socialism, and Yugoslavia's own brand of socialism. However, such distinctions became less emphatic from the mid-1960s, with the easing of ideological strife and the spread of international *détente*. In these accounts differences are defined less in political-ideological terms than in civilizational ones. The writers draw on and reshape ideas of East and West, the Balkans and Europe, Europe and its American other. Yugoslavia is the primary framework for the authors' self-identification in these texts, with greater or lesser emphasis on a Serb or Croat national affiliation. But the authors regularly blur any more specific definition of identity (whether Serb/Croat, Yugoslav, or Balkan) by the frequent use of 'us', 'ours', *po naški* – 'the way we do it'. Who this 'we' is needs to be deduced in each context from the relevant others – Europeans, Americans, or Westerners for instance, or Russians and 'socialist fraternal brothers', or other Yugoslav and South-East European nations, all placed in gendered terms. 'Balkanness', masculinity and difference are linked in all of these texts. But at the same time, the Yugoslav writers actively *use* these equations to

make a variety of claims that are difficult to understand solely in terms of 'self-stigmatization' or imaginative colonization.

In these Yugoslav texts, sex is used extensively as a topos for representing difference and fleshing out conceptions of 'us' and 'ours'. Especially for Kapor and Kušan, contacts with the West (and the rest of the world) are presented primarily through erotic encounters between 'our' men and 'foreign' women. Western women pose a challenge to the traveller's virility and authority, as well as a means to cultural mastery. Having a woman is, predictably, a way of becoming a part of an otherwise unattainable world. Kušan's Parisian Bernadette is thus different from his Yugoslav *petites amies*; he needs her (and Monique S. and Jeanne and Colette and so on) in order 'not to feel a tourist'. 'I had to have a native Bernadette like this one to give me the illusion that I had at least some lasting root connecting me to this quay, to which I had no right at all (...) I'm no longer completely a foreigner here' (93). But sexual success is presented not in terms of masculine 'possession', but rather as passing an examination. The West is thus feminized and eroticized, but it is by no means subordinate or inferior: these women are shown as independent, choosy, critical. They may appreciate our travellers' Balkan virility but they insist on their own standards in other spheres (gastronomy, hygiene, fidelity).

European men scarcely appear in these encounters. At most they appear as vague collectives, the generalized voices of Kapor's stereotyped conversations, or distantly observed 'solid citizens' or 'queers'. They aren't even rivals. If the Englishman's failed Balkan romance can be compared to Spivak's colonial plot, the Yugoslav romances are not comparable to Frantz Fanon's reverse fantasy, in which the possession of white (read: Western) women by black (read: Balkan) men constitutes both revenge against white men and the appropriation of their civilization and dignity (Fanon 1967). Here, women are not just the terrain upon which an East/West struggle is enacted; they have their own interests. And Western men are already emasculated in advance. The same is not true of Third World men, or men of other Balkan nationalities, who regularly appear in these texts as potential rivals. Their presence further locates the sphere of difference our writers are constructing. Kušan, for instance, finds the most threatening masculine challenges to his mastery and self-esteem in Paris in the person of a well-endowed Moroccan who also has a big wallet and native French (shared 'non-alignment' does not prevent them aligning in their rivalry over the Englishwoman Gill); in America in Petru, a tall, dark and handsome Romanian with British-accented English as well as near-native French ('as though Romanian were anything more than French *à la* Dracula, a Latin language on the lips of Slav bats') (209). Russians ("Scythians") don't threaten so much as *thwart*: Kušan's whole Russian journey is a tale of not-being-able-to which gives substance to references to Soviets/Scythians elsewhere in the text.

Much more striking than encounters with Western men, and more fully developed, are the writers' relations with 'our' men, whether travellers, émigrés, friends or companions. These men function as yardsticks against which our heroes measure their Europeanness, assimilation (or the ability to 'pass'), maleness. Kapor's 'Piter' or 'Džordž', with their successes with women and in business and, equally, their distinctive capacity for pleasure, disrespect for bourgeois behaviour and their nostalgia for home, seem to serve as surrogate selves, placed in the narrative to show an ideal of Balkan manliness abroad in contrast to de-nationalized emigrés with their foreign wives and children. Kušan has a whole series of side-kicks: most exemplify the shamelessly inassimilable Balkan man who takes his culture with him wherever he goes, picking up European habits (swapping his *Drava* cigarettes for *Gauloises*) but never adjusting his own values or his abandoning capacity for gross physical pleasure; there to show just how far Kušan himself has been changed in his encounter with the West.

'Our' women also play a prominent role in these travel tales, not just as sexual partners, but as emblems – for good or ill – of the differences between home and abroad. They are markers of all that the traveller has left behind (or wants to shake off) like Kušan's Vera, companion on his earliest French travels but outgrown and discarded (along with a taste for home cooking, or the need to shop for textiles to take back as gifts), or Branka, whose sexual attractions wax and wane in Kušan's eyes in inverse proportion to the availability of her German or American rivals, accompanied by approving or derisive assessments of her 'Balkan' qualities – mentality, appetite and bottom ('a peasant girl's ... firm and compact' or else 'like the bald, fat, red cheeks of our village alcoholics' (166, 180)). Kapor's Snežana has left the Balkans behind: after wasting three years with a drunken charmer at home (Kapor himself?), she sought security with a thoroughly Helveticized anaesthesiologist ('everyone thinks he is a native Swiss, he's so punctual; the greatest compliment that a barbarian from this unhappy part of Europe can receive'). But how can she be happy? 'Don't you want to quarrel like a human being, to break all the dishes, to sing while you wash the windows, to borrow coffee or oil from your neighbours, to eat watermelon without a knife or fork, and wash your fingers in the river?' (123-24).

These Yugoslav authors, like the Englishmen, draw gendered maps of the Balkans and the West, with contours that are sometimes strikingly similar. But while the Englishmen use the Balkans as a point from which to reconsider modern masculinities, the Yugoslav writers I have considered are more interested in using the mantras of masculinity in order to meditate on 'us' and 'them', on the meanings of the Balkans, Yugoslavia and Europe. While they agree on the fact of difference, and even on some of its markers, they do not all come to the same conclusions. The Yugoslav writers produce a range of assessments of East/West differences, and use these concepts to place themselves in a variety of different ways, for a variety of purposes.

Comparing accounts of prostitutes and sex shops, a recurring topic in these travel accounts, provides a convenient way of illustrating this point. A scandalized description of prostitution had been a standard set-piece in early socialist accounts of the West, serving conveniently to condemn the degradation of women under capitalism. By the 1970s Momo Kapor, in contrast, can poke fun at prudish socialist travel accounts from the 1950s describing a 'Parisian hell' where 'just imagine, the girls in the Pigalle sell love for money!' Now the world is no longer so simply divided; 'the West hasn't been sunk in eternal darkness for a long time, and the sun doesn't invariably rise in the East'. Instead, Kapor identifies another pattern of exchange, with 'our' young men offering Paris 'their fresh Balkan blood and new ideas that they never dream have long since been being taught here in the elementary schools', writing poetry and living off susceptible older Frenchwomen who translate their verses. 'Older women in Paris are in luck, as long as our boys go there! Any one of them can find an Edith Piaf who remembers better days. And one day his French verses will be retranslated into Serbian and our grandsons will have to memorize them in school.' This allegorical relationship between Frenchwomen and Balkan men turns on an established geo-cultural difference: 'our unrequited love for Paris is as old as our provincial yearning for world-wide fame' (114-16). But the qualities characterizing the Balkan side of the equation are reducible neither to poverty, ignorance and provincial yearning, nor to a marketable virility. What is it these men have, that others lack?

The answer is hinted at in his European travels, but most fully developed in the American section of his account, entitled 'The Marquis de SAD' – SAD being the Serbo-Croat abbreviation for the USA. Here again, selling sex becomes emblematic. Kapor spends an entire day on New York's Broadway and 42nd Street, escaping 'the crowds of

transvestites, homosexuals and whores', as well as a cold north wind, by visiting a peep-show. Though his description echoes the disapproving sociological investigations of earlier accounts, he also makes unfavourable comparisons with sexier European shows: 'Not a trace of the coquetry of the Parisian ladies in the Pigalle, none of the fleshy femininity of the Antwerp prostitutes in their red window displays... Nothing apart from the deadly boring parting and closing of legs, twisting of bodies and monotonous changes of position, like an anatomy lesson'. But the real point of his observations is elsewhere: 'I'm almost more interested by the faces belonging to the feverishly burning eyes peering through the little openings than I am by the tired movements of the two enslaved female bodies offering themselves listlessly to this painful curiosity' (164-65). What sort of men are these Americans, to satisfy themselves in such a manner? The peep-show sets up a dichotomy between American perversion and European pleasure that persists throughout this section, with work- and money-obsessed American men contrasted, for example, to 'a whole naïve army of European lovers, who are still up for love. They haven't forgotten how to be tender, coarse when necessary; rogues hungry for love, just like their old continent, unpredictable and crazy. They aren't ashamed to buy yellow roses at six dollars a stem and to whisper tender words' (194). They're doomed to disappointment, though: American women only have time for this sort of thing on the weekends. And there's always the danger of losing your true self in this alien land. Kapor lunches with 'one of our countrymen' in San Francisco, but he had become 'so refined and delicate that he had gone completely vegetarian. His great-grandfather had hoisted a live Turk in his teeth, his grandfather had eaten roast ox for dinner, his father had snacked on a half a lamb from the spit, his mother had raised him on fresh liver, but he says: "A vegetable cocktail, please, with extra carrots"!' (Kapor makes a point of ordering the beefsteak, very rare: *he* isn't going to be a traitor to his sex or to his origins) (158-59). Kapor's scale of values sets appetite, abandon, and the capacity for pleasure against reserve, control and an obsession with time and money, in what might be called an 'affirmative Orientalism'.

In Kapor's American travels, 'ours' becomes equivalent to 'European'. Sometimes this is ironic: 'The Americans have a "European complex". And it's well known that we are part of Europe. That means they have a complex about us, too. Oh, what sweet consolation!' (175). But elsewhere the distinction is between a 'European' sensibility and 'ours'. In his descriptions of Paris, in his 'Sentimental Journey' through Southern and Northern Europe and, even more, in his observations of domestic and foreign tourists in Dalmatia ('Summer') and in his celebrations of Belgrade, 'ours' is interpreted as Balkan, Yugoslav or Serbian, depending on the context. The pair of compasses measuring off this symbolic geography have their pivot planted at the centre of a circle that can expand or contract, depending on the alliances or exclusions that are implied. But virtue lies at the centre for Kapor: 'Balkan' is beautiful. He sums up his position in considering the concepts of East and West in his 'Sentimental Journey': 'Since we happen to live in between the East and West, we believe that truth and the measure of man lie somewhere in the middle' (92).

While Kapor is interested in evaluating the divisions between home and the world, Moma Dimić's preoccupations are more local. His account of Hamburg dwells on the Sankt Pauli district, but without much trace of moral condemnation. Prostitution is primarily an economic activity, one that has 'done its part in Germany's post-war "economic miracle"' by soliciting the financial contributions of 'our gasterbeiters,' among others (117). The description of the possibilities on offer and the conventions governing the transaction is completed – and given animation – by a quizzical vignette of a pair of compatriots:

Once, in nearly the same place [the Eros-Centre brothel], I saw two of my countrymen. The farther north you go, the easier it is to pick out our men. Lean, no longer quite so young, they wander indecisively through the voluptuous twilight, gape, and stare endlessly at the girls on display: the heart shapes formed by their unclad buttocks, the tender skin of their thighs, their uncovered shoulders. Anything above and beyond that would cost too many of their *gastarbeiter*'s marks – carefully hoarded but never enough. They will go round all the courtyards and the streets with girls on display several times. They will approach the doors of topless restaurants and variety shows featuring female mud-wrestling or boxing, timidly, but these too will be too expensive for them. They began their free Saturday night with such excitement and such luxuriant nakedness, but they end it alone, in a cheap Oriental café, with a piece of *burek* (119).

Dimić's countrymen have little in common with him besides nationality. He takes for granted what they desire but cannot afford, whether sex or other Western consumer goods. These emasculated *gastarbeiter*s are doomed to remain mired in the Balkans wherever they may actually travel, work and live, subsisting on *burek*, that emblematic Balkan fast-food pastry. Dimić, with his experience, *savoir faire*, and economic power, has access to other ways of life. In such texts, Dimić – and other writers – uses concepts of East and West to mark out (and perpetuate) the social distinctions that existed at home, as well as abroad, between an educated elite and a working class. Yugoslavia's *gastarbeiter*s had their own extensive experience of the West and made this evident at home (not least in the form of hard-currency savings accounts). But experience of the world counts for nothing in Dimić's account unless it translates into discernment and the power to choose. In spite of his use of the word 'ours', Dimić places himself on the other side of a cultural divide from his 'oriental' compatriots. He is aligned against the Balkans alongside the cosmopolitan men of the world who know how to enjoy Hamburg's opportunities and have the means to do so, rather than with his working-class compatriots.

Ivan Kušan is much more ambivalent about being Balkan. Neither his attempts to master the Western world through his sexual adventures with its women nor his attempts to pass as a Westerner are presented as successful; each failure contributes to his sense of inferiority and his lack of entitlement to the life he tastes in the West. Hence the title, with its inverted reference to Odysseus:

I put on a pretence that I wasn't only here [in the West] by chance, but had been here from the beginning. The point of my mimicry wasn't to hide, but rather not to stick out as an undesirable, inassimilable intruder. Not *disguised as a beggar*, so that the suitors (the swine) wouldn't guess, but *disguised as a man of means, a beggar in disguise* (363).

Each failure serves to show where he really belongs: 'I had turned to be what I really was: a little Balkan scribbler megalomaniacally trying not to fart, in the face of the world's iron indifference' (108). Kušan can never be a Western man of the world. He is constantly dragged back by cultural and geo-political circumstance, his self-doubt reinforced by Yugoslav socialism's unattainable promises of a paradise of 'tempting fruit, hams, bottles and, above all, beautiful naked girls' (104) and the West's abandonment of his half of Europe 'to the favour and disfavour of the Scythians' (107). But neither is he the same as his Balkan compatriots who don't even worry about such differences and enjoy themselves without anxiety. He makes this clear in a text that, once again, focuses on prostitution. He cannot emulate a colleague who feels completely 'at ease' in Western brothels ('he didn't even bother to think in our language').

Standing in front of those famous Amsterdam windows, I recalled how, when his eye fell on some modest 'housewife' in her display window, darning and reading her Bible on her immaculately clean bed, with gleaming sanitary ware in the background, he burst

into the idyll without a second thought. The curtains closed, the light went out, the Bible thumped onto the nightstand – and my colleague ordered the complete programme, since it didn't have to be paid for in advance. Only afterwards did it occur to him that he was only carrying dinars. Since the girl's madam had never seen anything like them, she phoned the bank – and she clearly heard bad news. They carted my colleague off to the police, questioned him, expressed their disgust, and let him go. The whole time he was completely 'at ease', grinning childishly. He was still enjoying it the fifth time he told me this story, behind the bar of a luxury Frankfurt brothel, while we sipped *sekt* from real champagne flutes, naked, with our numbers on a chain around our necks (the Germans love order, they immediately take your name and give you a number) and selected our partners (I was only careful that she shouldn't be one of 'ours'). I paid in advance, naturally, but that's why he's the one who is a business operator on an international scale and is contributing – in his own Amsterdam way – to the exchange value of the dinar (54-55).

It is not so much economic power as it is shamelessness and the inability to see the difference between 'them' and 'us' that separates his more Balkan colleague from Kušan. But he, like Dimić, knows he is different: he has learnt to think in terms of shame and self-consciousness (he has scruples about 'our girls'), and has acquired a Westernized sensibility that distinguishes him from his countrymen, even though his sense of inferiority prevents him from asserting equality with European 'men of means'.

All three of these writers used their accounts of sex, masculinity and their travel adventures in general to elaborate a slightly rebellious and unconventional authorial persona. Their positions make more or less political points. Kapor's raffish Bohemianism was deployed against 'bourgeois values' (though his rebelliousness had limits: his critique of Western capitalist gender norms fit comfortably with Yugoslav socialist ideals, though with successive editions of his book the balance would shift to a more explicit celebration of Serbian national values). Dimić and Kušan stood more directly at odds with the existing system in their matter-of-fact acceptance of prostitution and their frank appreciation of capitalist consumerism (and their implied criticism of the Yugoslav failure to match Western standards). Kušan, in particular, criticizes Yugoslavia's in-betweenness, 'non-aligned' alongside the Third World but not quite free of 'Scythian' socialist fraternalism, just capitalist enough to introduce time-clocks to control the workers but not capitalist enough to care about satisfying consumer desire. This rebellious individuality was marketable in the 1980s, as the Yugoslav political and social system began to lose its legitimacy and new forms of criticism and dissent were finding not just a voice but an avid reading public.

But for all their subversiveness, these writers laid claims to a masculinity recognizable in conventional terms – independent, experienced, virile. Their air of mastery asserts a manliness not always available or conceded to the intellectual in a society where the man-of-letters is not necessarily quite a man (v. Džadžić 1987: 180-202). Moreover, these accounts promote the intellectual as having enviable masculine advantages: the resources to travel, the experience and the taste to participate in the good life of the European elite, aspirations to equality with Westerners. This in turn reinforced domestic divisions: the gap created in the text between the educated man-of-the-world and the emasculated and orientalized *gastarbeiter* legitimated the Yugoslav intellectual's claims to prestige and authority at home as well as abroad.

These discourses of difference derived from depictions of masculinity – and from other categories – trace a symbolic geography that divides up the world in all-too-familiar ways. What these divisions are named, and how they are evaluated, however, varies. It is significant that the term 'Balkan' does not appear consistently in this second set of texts, and the writers' use of 'us' and 'ours' varies too. Who 'we' might be expands and

contracts, ranging from Kapor's Belgrade or Kušan's Zagreb suburb; a shared Yugoslav sense of belonging; a larger Balkan identity; to all of Europe, in contrast to America. (The English travel writers' maps, in contrast, locate 'them' on a sliding scale that differentiates the Balkans from the rest of Eastern Europe only as a matter of degree.) Neither is the stigma attached to 'Balkanness' constant: Kapor's celebration of a positive Orientalism contrasts with Kušan's ambivalence and Dimić's disassociation from the label. 'The Balkans' would appear much more regularly – and in a much more consistently negative light – in travel accounts from the 1990s, but the world had changed by then and so had the place of those who had once lived in Yugoslavia. The masculine characteristics helping to define the boundaries being erected between 'us' and 'them' need to be understood in context, too. Exaggerated masculine egos and physical appetites paired with a lack of shame or constraint might recur in representations of the Balkans from inside and from without (cf., for example, travel accounts by Kazantzakis, Henry Miller and Patricia Storage), but this is neither the only available local model for manliness, nor is it limited to the Balkans.

What *is* constant is the 'technology of place': the way that the shifting categories of us and them, the Balkans and Europe, are defined in opposition to one another, insisting on the fact of difference regardless of the content. These differences often have much less to do with great geopolitical dichotomies than with specific local divisions and agendas: 'Europe' and 'the Balkans' become weapons to be used in contests that lie much closer to home. Others have analysed the ways Orientalist stereotypes have been used in a process of 'nesting orientalism,' intended to consign neighbouring nations to Eastern darkness while advancing one's own claims to European legitimacy (Bakić-Hayden 1995; Kiossev 2002). But representations of East and West can also trace lines of division *within* a society. Yugoslav political and ideological changes, as well as its persistent social tensions, can be seen reflected in the ways the writers in the second group chose to align themselves through their evaluations of Europe and of masculinity. The politics of gender and the unravelling of class privilege in a post-imperial Britain also shaped the ways the English travel writers engendered difference.

Thinking about the choices made by these travel writers and the uses to which they put notions of East and West, us and them, machismo and emasculation, opens up new perspectives on 'the Balkans'. It begins to seem less a matter of a Western projection imposed upon the region or a traumatic geo-cultural destiny (however such claims might suit Kušan's defensive self-inculpations, for example) than a *strategy* – available to be used for particular purposes in particular contexts, and varying in salience and in character according to when and how it is wielded. Neither the Yugoslav nor the English writers are free to invent their own identities – they are constrained by the social and ideological resources they draw upon – but they are *makers* and *users* of difference as well as its victims. Thinking about the ways these writers used notions of masculinity and gender also helps move us beyond generalizations about the 'feminized other' and 'Western hegemony' based on monolithic and a-historical concepts of both gender and power to an appreciation of the varied and changing ways in which systems of difference can interact, and at the same time to a more complex understanding of the character of East-West divisions within Europe.

¹ This was neither a new mode of writing travel, nor one limited to writing on the Balkans: Holland and Huggan (2000: 27-37) discuss imperialist nostalgia and the 'English gentleman traveller' with particular reference to Eric Newby and Redmond O'Hanlon.

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