

Traveling and Writing the Balkans

Instructor: Grace E. Fielder (gfielder@arizona.edu)

All lectures and discussions will be in English

Seminar Description

Travel writing is a genre that has existed since ancient times. An Egyptian tale of a shipwrecked sailor predates Homer's *Odyssey* by a thousand years. While Herodotus is perhaps best known as a 5th century BC historian, he was also one of the most famous and influential travel writers of his time. In this seminar we will examine travel writing about the Balkans from the times of the Ottoman Empire into the 21st century. Travel writing can be examined from several angles: as a genre of literature, i.e. narrative texts that can be analyzed for point of view, narrative choices and individual style, but also as a type of cultural and linguistic translation in which the author makes foreign cultures and peoples accessible to the readers back home. Travel writers themselves occupy a liminal position between their home culture and the cultures and places that they visit. In their encounters with new places, travel writers often experience shifts in how they perceive themselves and often return home as "different" people. Thus, the identity of the travel writer may shift in confrontation with "the other" in terms of a variety of social categories such as gender, race, ethnicity and class. Whether the travel writer is traveling for business, pleasure or sponsored by some official entity also affects how foreign peoples and places are depicted. In different accounts the same peoples and places may be portrayed as civilized or uncivilized in order to justify whether or not they should be treated as an independent nation or a colony. As Edward Said has pointed out, travel has always been a source of both knowledge and power. Following the breakup of the Ottoman Empire decisions about the boundaries of spaces as well as the national and linguistic identities of those people contained in those spaces were often made by political actors based on information from "trusted travelers". This is consistent with travel writing as a transactional genre which can persuade, argue, advise or inform.

In this seminar we will be reading excerpts from a number of travel writings focused on the Balkans, a region that has often been portrayed as exotic and oriental in travel writing. We will read a variety of texts and analyze them both as a genre of literature, e.g. purpose and point of view, as well as a kind of historical document that can provide insight not only on the people and places visited but also on how the travel writers position themselves with respect to the objects of their description, such as food, dress, cultural customs and language. The format of the

seminar will be primarily interactive lectures, i.e. with Q&A and discussion. All reading assignments will be provided as pdfs on our Learning Portal.

Required Reading

Week 1: The Ottoman Empire

1. Evliya Çelebi (1640-1670) *Seyâhatnâme [Travelogue]* excerpts.
2. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1763) *The Turkish Embassy Letters* excerpts.

Week 2: Grecophiles

1. Lord George Byron (1809-1823) letters from Greece excerpts.
2. Patrick Leigh Fermor (1966) *Roumeli* excerpts.

Week 2: Female Explorers: A different perspective.

1. Edith Durham (1909) *High Albania* excerpts.
2. Rebecca West (1941) *Black Lamb Grey Falcon* excerpts.

Week 4: Postcards from the edge: Traveling in times of trouble

1. Kaplan, Robert. 1993 “Old Serbia and Albania: Balkan “West Bank”. *Balkan Ghosts*, pp. 29-48.
2. Hall, Brian. 1994. “Toward Kosovo.” *The Impossible Country*, pp. 307-365.

Week 5: Sojourners: “Dwelling-in-Travel”

3. Patricia Storace (1996) *Dinner with Persephone* 3 chapters.
“Marble Eyes” 18 pp.
“The Blue Eye” 15 pp.
“Independence Day” 11 pp.
4. Malcom Bradbury (1981) *Rates of Exchange* excerpts.

Secondary Literature (excerpts from) Optional

1. Blanton, Casey. 1997. *Travel Writing: the Self and the World*. New York: Twayne Publishers. London: Prentice Hall International.
2. Goldsworthy, V. 1998. *Inventing Ruritania: The Imperialism of Imagination*. Yale University Press.
3. Hulme, P. and T. Youngs, (eds.) 2006. *Cambridge Companion to Travel Writing*. Cambridge.

4. Pratt, Mary Louise. 1992. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.
5. Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
6. Todorova, M. 1997. *Imagining the Balkans*. University of Chicago Press.

Dr. Grace E. Fielder is Professor Emerita of Russian and Slavic Studies and Second Language Acquisition and Teaching. Her research interests and courses deal with language and identity, discourse and pragmatics and all things Balkan. She has published extensively on language standardization in the Balkans, language and ideology, and historical sociolinguistics. Contact info: gfielder@arizona.edu