

Nostalgia for Orient[ation]: Travelling through the Former Yugoslavia with Juli Zeh, Peter Schneider, and Peter Handke

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It [travel writing] satisfies a need. A need for a fiction answerable somehow, to the world. Or perhaps I've got it wrong. Perhaps it's a need for a world answerable to our fictions. (Buford 7)

The Western imagination has long relied on the fictions of the traveller to satisfy its desires for adventure and alterity. Yet in an age of globalization, mass media, and tourism these desires have become increasingly difficult to fulfill. As James Clifford has pointed out, the search for authentic Self and Other has become a futile one, for "one is always, to varying degrees, 'inauthentic': caught between cultures, implicated in others" (11). Myths of discovery and exploration have been exploded, and travellers are forced to seek increasingly extreme experiences in order to produce "a world answerable to our fictions." The war-torn region of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, a country long associated with cheap package holidays, offered a possible new destination to travellers seeking the heady combination of political relevance and physical danger. At the same time, the newly emerging Yugoslav states offered an escape from mass tourism, stretches of uninhabited countryside, a pollution-free environment owing to the destruction of industry, and the frisson of danger from landmines. Yet the region was "unwritten," since many European intellectuals and journalists had produced journalistic accounts of their visits to the besieged city of Sarajevo in the early 1990s. These interventions have subsequently been criticized by many, including participants at the time such as human rights scholar Michael Ignatieff, who has bitterly attacked the intervention as having "an incorrigibly narcissistic motivation" (xii). He goes on:

What was rescued in Bosnia, by this politics, was not Bosnia, but the image of the committed intellectual of the Left. Results were secondary. Indeed, failure either did not matter at all, or was understood as belonging to a line of noble failure stretching back to the Spanish Republican cause of the 1930s. (xiii)

It is important to note that the travellers who followed in the footsteps of the intellectuals, having sensibly waited until the conflict had ended, were clearly shaped by these early representations, not only in the sense that the Yugoslav conflict had been exploited to serve the fortunes of Europe's intellectuals, but also by the disappointment at the failure of Europe to intervene and prevent the killing. These belated travellers impart authority to their texts by defining themselves against those who preceded them, despite the many similarities still evident between the two types of traveller. This article will examine the texts of three such belated travellers, namely Juli Zeh's *Die Stille ist ein Geräusch: Eine Fahrt durch Bosnien* (2002), the Austrian writer Peter Handke's controversial text *Eine winterliche Reise zu den Flüssen Donau, Save, Morawa und Drina oder Gerechtigkeit für Serbien*, first published in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 1996, and a short story by Peter Schneider, published in 2003, entitled "Frühling in Sarajevo." All three authors derive their experiences from actual journeys to the region, although Schneider thinly disguises his narrator by making him a photo journalist. A significant difference between the three is that Schneider was in fact one of those who had travelled to Sarajevo during the siege itself. His travel fiction is thus a rewriting of his own first journey to Bosnia and also a self-critique.

Studies exploring Western discursive constructions of the Balkan region have relied heavily on Edward Said's path-breaking analysis *Orientalism* of 1978, although a number of recent studies have rejected the relevance of the term to the Balkan region for reasons explored below (Fleming; Todorova). Despite the important structural differences between the discourses of Orientalism and Balkanism, K. E. Fleming has nonetheless argued that "the case of the Balkans may prove uniquely equipped to interrogate, expand and elucidate the theoretical categories of inquiry first developed by those fields" (1220). This article's analysis of these three very different travel accounts by German-speaking writers shows how precisely the tensions inherent in the Balkanist discourse inspire a nostalgia for the Orientalist paradigm. This nostalgia is all the more peculiar as all three writers claim that the Balkans they visit are a part of Europe. Their main motivation in travelling, they suggest, is to dismantle dominant and negative representations that journalists and intellectuals constructed during the war in a way that has pushed the region to the margins of Europe. The starting point of these writers is generally their growing awareness of the distortion of media coverage and their desire to rectify this by producing their own accounts. Their attempts are thus presented as a personal quest for immediate, as opposed to "mediatized" or "media filtered" experience. They are trying to see "ob Bosnien-Herzegowina ein Ort ist, an den man fahren kann, oder ob es zusammen mit der Kriegsberichterstattung vom Erdboden verschwunden ist" (Zeh 11) or to travel "hinter den Spiegel" of the media coverage (Handke 13).

Striking perhaps is the fact that both Zeh and Handke embrace the perspective of tourist, a role more commonly associated with the experience of fake authenticity and exploitation. They both make a point of describing the surprise they encounter, prior to leaving, at their choice of tourist destination: “‘Tourist’, was doch zutraf, wurde als unglaublich angesehen (war ich der erste seit Kriegsausbruch?),” writes Handke (21), while Zeh is allowed to look at a map at a travel agency only “weil ich ‘Recherche’ statt ‘Tourismus’ sage” (9). The tourist gaze “in any historical period is, as John Urry has shown, constructed in relationship to its opposite, to non-tourist forms of social experience and consciousness” (1). Embracing the role of tourist is associated in these author’s works with the belief that their travelogues could avoid the essentializing of the travellers that had preceded them, namely the journalists and intellectuals. These writers conjectured that in rejecting the role of traveller their subjective and noninstrumental touristic approach would guarantee their powerlessness. Here one can draw a useful parallel with the scientific travellers of the eighteenth century who adopted the role of “sentimental, experiential subject” as a way of distancing themselves from the imperialism that had preceded them. As Mary Louise Pratt has argued, this (predominantly male) “experiential subject” presented himself as the “non-hero of an anti-conquest” (78), much as these twentieth-century travellers represent themselves as mere tourists. Zeh, for example, feigns ignorance of the reasons for the conflict, pretending throughout the book to be approaching this issue without any preconceived ideas. At the same time their position of “anti-conquest” can also be linked to the caution with which they approach representation, although the nature and degree of this awareness varies among the different travellers.

Part of these writers’ mission as “non-hero[es] of an anti-conquest” is to show normal, everyday aspects of life in the former Yugoslavia, and they are thus immediately faced with a dilemma. Their intention of countering dominant essentializing images of Yugoslavia as being, for example, the eternal powder keg clashes with their attempt to escape their own experiential worlds through travel. While they wish to underline the essential European identity of the region, they are also torn by a desire to reveal its alterity. Here we find the age-old dilemma of the Balkanist discourse at work in these contemporary travel texts. For Balkanism differs from Orientalism in that it is torn between highlighting both the essential alterity and the sameness of the region. The historian Maria Todorova, for example, rejects the notion that the Balkans have been Orientalized, for this would suggest “an imputed opposition, Balkanism is a discourse about an imputed ambiguity” (17). Todorova shows that the Balkans have never been “other” to the West as the Orient has been, but that they occupy an ambiguous position “not as other but as incomplete self” (18), “Balkanism treats the differences within one type” (19). For Todorova the Balkans were never colonized. Because they were part of a precolonial non-European empire – the Ottoman Empire – and always retained a degree of

autonomy, they are European in terms of dominant religious and racial groupings, and they refer to a concrete geographical entity as opposed to the vastness of the mythical Orient (15–19). The tensions that arise from the ambiguity of being same but “other” provoke what Todorova has described as an “exasperation before complexity” (17), which this article argues to be in evidence in these accounts. Like many before them, these travellers find a region that they construct as both European and different, both familiar and alienating. It is the tension of this ambiguity that leads these writers to give in to their desires and succumb to what will be termed here an “Oriental nostalgia” that is, at least for Zeh and Schneider, a nostalgia for an unambiguous Oriental Other. Handke’s response is more complex, since, as this article will show, he is inspired by the ambiguity that he encounters in the region.

This Oriental nostalgia draws our attention to the “Westernizing” process that lies at the heart of the original dualism. Said had, of course, analyzed this effect of the discourse, claiming that “[i]n addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (1–2). Such ideas have been further developed by scholars such as Meyda Yëgenođlu, who has focussed both on the gender aspect of the binarism (West/Orient) and on the possibilities of overcoming it. Rather than seeing the concept of “Westernizing” as a process “in addition,” she directs her attention away from the myth of the Orient to the myth of the West, seeing this operation of “Westernizing” as consisting in “the fashioning of a historically specific fantasy whereby members imagine themselves as Western” (3). By this reading, the loss of Orient leads to what Annegret Pelz has described as an “Orientlos- bzw. Orientierungslos-werden des europäischen Ich” (5). This loss of Orient[ation] is at its most acute in the Balkans, for they disrupt the binarism and thus the process of imagining oneself as a Western, autonomous subject. The reading of the three texts offered here adapts the concept of “imperial nostalgia,” as coined by Renato Rosaldo, to refer to the nostalgia that ensues when “someone deliberately alters a form of life and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to his or her intervention” (108). This destructive intervention is in itself inspired by “a peculiar sense of mission, the white man’s burden, where civilized nations stand duty-bound to uplift so-called savage ones” (108). In these travel accounts the “white man’s burden” has taken on more complex forms. Western interference can be seen to be partly responsible for the destruction of Balkan otherness, but these writers themselves are implicated. By setting out to “uplift,” if only textually, these authors are forced to destroy what they seek in travelling, namely “a world answerable to their fictions.” The nostalgia that ensues takes many different forms. The main problem is that these travellers are at the same time the self-conscious “non-hero[es] of the anti-conquest,” and their nostalgia for the Orient is a forbidden longing. This explains the peculiar form that their Oriental nostalgia takes, for it is present only in its absence, always in the process of disappearing. It is remembered, dreamt, and even imagined – but it is never experienced in the present.

This article examines first the humorous travelogue written by Juli Zeh, whose narrative is marked by her initial difficulties in locating herself in Bosnia. The alienation she experiences in the city of Sarajevo is alleviated only after she dreams about the “real” city of her desires, a dream that fades the moment she awakens. The second travel account examined here is by Peter Schneider, who has written a fictional short story about the journey of a man who returns to Sarajevo, ostensibly to attend a conference, but more importantly to reunite with a woman with whom he had a brief affair during the siege of Sarajevo. His former lover does not appear, and he is left with the memories of their forbidden encounter. The last text – perhaps the best known of the three, since its publication provoked intense controversy in the mid-1990s, when it first appeared in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* – is Peter Handke’s travelogue. It is undoubtedly the most stylistically sophisticated and self-reflexive of the three texts examined here. It offers no evidence of an “exasperation before complexity”; rather Handke finds the ambiguity inspiring. His text will be considered as an example of a more heterogeneous representation of Oriental nostalgia that might be seen to overcome the dilemma of the exasperated Balkan traveller.

In a 2002 article in the magazine *Der Stern*, Juli Zeh comments as follows on Bosnia:

Dieses Land liegt mitten in Europa. Wer von uns fährt mit Angst durch Europa?
Die Menschen dort sind genauso wie wir, wir haben nur durch die Berichterstattung das Gefühl, als hätten sie nichts anderes im Sinn, als einander umzubringen. (“Von Angst und Scham”)

Zeh’s visit to Bosnia, published as an entertaining travelogue entitled *Die Stille ist ein Geräusch: Eine Fahrt durch Bosnien*, appeared in the same year. Accompanied only by her dog, she attracted the attention of critics who made much of her bravery as a young woman alone in a society still marked by ethnic violence and destruction. In each interview Zeh replied indignantly that, since Bosnia was in Europe, it could not be a dangerous place – even though she reported to the contrary. While one might question Zeh’s view that European boundaries guarantee the safety of a young woman travelling alone, these comments establish her perspective on the region as a part of Europe. Yet critics failed to point out that her text was actually marked by the alienation, fear, and loneliness that she, unlike the male travellers discussed here, describes openly. Of particular interest is the narrator’s description of her sojourn in Sarajevo, a place that has become the symbol of the courage of multiethnic Europe in the face of adversity. Her account portrays that time as the longest and most difficult part of her journey. Her stay starts with an incident of verbal sexual abuse that evokes the tie to the gender relations that recent studies have seen underlying the construction of Orientalism (Yëgenođlu). Yet reacting to that incident in the ensuing days Zeh turns to

Orientalist fantasies that enable her to overcome the difficulties she experiences as a woman travelling alone (cf. Pelz 177–78).

Arriving in Sarajevo, Zeh is at first unable to associate the toponym with the place before her: “Im Takt meiner Schritte flüstere ich den Namen, Sa-ra-je-vo, als könnte ich ihn auf diese Art ins Pflaster stampfen, wo er hingehört. Es klappt nicht” (61). Wherever she goes, she is disappointed to find no signs of the war (63). However, her alienation begins when she is verbally harassed by the man in the hotel room next to hers. He is not a Bosnian, but a Turk from Germany: “Mitten in Bosnien höre ich Baustellenschwäbisch von einem Türken” (66). In response to this frightening (yet also familiar) encounter she takes to the streets, where she seeks orientation by resorting to metaphors dominant in Balkanist discourse:

Erst jetzt, peinlich genug, begreife ich, dass ich mit eigenen Augen sehe, was man den Schnittpunkt europäischer Kulturen, die Grenze zwischen Morgen- und Abendland, den Vielvölkerstaat nennt. (67)

Yet this attempt to unravel the ambiguity does not satisfy her: “Dennoch spüre ich weder Spannung noch Geheimnis. Die Dinge sitzen unbeteiligt nebeneinander wie Ausstellungsstücke” (67).

Her sense of alienation in Sarajevo is evident in her permanent tiredness, unhappiness, claustrophobia, intermittent desire to leave, and loss of identity, which she describes in detail. It is broken only by the sound of familiar music in her rented car (87) and by incidents of sudden and rare reception on her cell phone (72), which help to remind her of who she is. Previously, the absence of violence had unnerved her: “Die ganze Stadt heiratet, das Gedröhn der Autohupen und Geflattere von Fahnen geht mir auf die Nerven. [...] Kaum jemand ist zu jung für die Erinnerung. In den Augen der Händler suche ich nach Spuren davon und finde nichts” (75). Yet now she attempts to persuade herself that the violence surrounding her is causing her anxiety: “Seit Tagen gelingt es mir nicht mehr, das Böse als Ausnahme von der Regel des Guten zu begreifen” (94). Her sense of despair lifts only after a dream sequence that finally energizes her and enables her to find Sarajevo and thus, by implication, herself:

Später träume ich, im echten Sarajevo zu sein. Zwischen den Mauern einer türkischen Befestigungsanlage bewege ich mich auf Straßen aus gestampfter Erde, spüre die historische Bedeutung des Ortes, seine besondere Schönheit. [...] Menschen unterhalten sich aufgeregter in den Gassen, sie haben wache, offene Gesichter. Mit einem Mal verstehe ich, dass dies das wahre Sarajevo ist. Ein Vorhang wurde beiseite gezogen, mit der Projektion der anderen, falschen Stadt darauf. Ich bin erleichtert, eine Last fällt von mir, etwas Schlechtes ist zu Ende gegangen. Lange schaue ich mich um und genieße die Echtheit des Ortes, sein

Verwachsensein mit dem eigenen Namen, die Abwesenheit von Täuschungen,
und ich bin froh, keine Sekunde an das andere, falsche Sarajevo geglaubt zu
haben. [...] Am Morgen verschwindet die Stadt von neuem. (95–97)

After this, her days are still hot and uncomfortable, but her sense of alienation has passed. She begins a brief flirtation with a Frenchman she meets and decides to stay in the city for a few days longer. Here the peculiar functioning of Oriental nostalgia is at its most apparent. Dissatisfied with her initial Balkanist construction, which locates the region on the interstices of East and West, she invents another. The Sarajevo of her dreams is true to itself. This Turkish fortress of well-trodden earth is resonant with historical meaning, and its citizens revel in their completeness. They are wholly “Oriental,” not half European. Yet there is no disappointment on awakening to discover that this Sarajevo is her own fabrication, for it has served its purpose. It is not Sarajevo that has achieved “Verwachsensein mit dem eigenen Namen,” but the narrator.

This scene is especially remarkable, since Zeh is one of the few travellers to the region who attempts to make Bosnia familiar by underlining the interconnections between Germans and the citizens of the region. Almost everyone she meets is familiar with Germany, having either emigrated from or visited the country during the war years, and she mocks her own irritation at discovering that they all have fond memories of her home country. She also seeks out German soldiers based in Bosnia. Her travelogue attempts to show interconnections and to challenge constructs that present the region as living in a different time than does “civilized” Western Europe. Yet in Sarajevo she discovers that such boundaries can also function to protect the traveller from a knowledge that paralyzes her: “Sie haben im Kleinen vorgeführt, was auch woanders und im Großen jederzeit möglich ist. Das will niemand wissen, und auch ich darf es nicht wissen wollen” (95). Her exaggerated escape into Oriental Sarajevo is intended to be read critically, as a Western fantasy that her waking being would – and will – reject. As Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan have pointed out, nostalgia is a prominent device in travel writing by which travellers express their longing to freeze cultures in the past. At the same time, Holland and Huggan make the observation that nostalgia “is also the mark of a genre that acknowledges the impossibility of its own controlling gestures, that ironically seeks reassurance through the appeal to an invented past” (140). Zeh makes clear that her fantasy Sarajevo is precisely that: a product of her Western imagination and a sign of her inability to decipher the city. The dream sequence may have provided solace for Zeh; for the reader it serves to direct attention to the contrast between the contemporary city of cosmopolitan citizens and the Western fantasies of an Oriental Ottoman city.

Peter Schneider, a German writer known throughout his career for his public interventions, was one of the many intellectuals who travelled to Sarajevo during the

siege itself. He published a short report of his experiences in *Der Spiegel* in 1994, which described some of the encounters he would later fictionalize (Schneider, “Der Sündenfall Europas”). In 2003 he published a volume of “Erzählungen” entitled *Das Fest der Missverständnisse*. It includes the story of a second trip to Sarajevo by an unnamed narrator four years after the siege had ended. The main difference between his original account and his later fictionalization is the fact that his fictional narrator had travelled from Berlin to make a film for the French organisation “Médecins sans Frontières” with a Bosnian film crew during the war (88), whereas Schneider had travelled as a journalist. This fictional narrator appears to share many of Schneider’s own views, particularly his anger at Germans who found his journey to the besieged city distasteful and sensationalist. The story “Frühling in Sarajevo” begins with the narrator’s arrival in the city after the war, where he is disappointed by his first encounter after four years: “Damals war mir die Stadt, [...] geheimnisvoll und kostbar erschienen. Jetzt, da ich sie im Schrittempo wahrnahm, kam sie mir hässlich und verwahrlost vor” (84). On his second visit he can see only destruction, even admitting that what he had previously attributed to war damage was in fact simply the result of disrepair. The demystification of Sarajevo is complete. His disappointment is soon augmented when Aida, the woman with whom he was to reunite and stay, fails to appear. Staying alone in her flat, he escapes the dreariness of Sarajevo into the memories of his forbidden affair:

Kein Kommentar, das war ihre Haltung schon am Flughafen gewesen, als sie mir in der Ankunftshalle auf ihren Plateauschuhen entgegnetrat und sich mit ihrem Namen vorstellte: Aida. Eine Weile hatte ich sie angestarrt, als hätte ich mich verhört. (84)

Of course, “Aida” is also the name of the opera that Said has defined as one of the salient examples of Orientalist representation, with its story of forbidden love in the Orient – a view countered by John M. MacKenzie (xvi). There is no doubt that Schneider, too, is treating this Oriental encounter ironically, playfully mocking his own fantasies. The figure of Aida had in fact made a previous appearance in Schneider’s writing, although in her earlier incarnation she was named Fadila Serdarević (Schneider, “Sündenfall” 141). The story of her narrow escape from a sniper’s bullet and the long scar that it left on her back appeared not only in Schneider’s early article, but also in that of his friend Hans Christoph Buch. Where in the earlier work she had represented the optimism of the citizens of Sarajevo, she has been rewritten in the 2003 work into the narrator’s forbidden fantasy. His male Western gaze alights on her scar – “Die lange, wie durch meinen Blick erglühende Spur des Streifschusses” (88) – and this awakens his desires (88). His erotic gaze is interrupted by his reflections on the intellectuals who accuse him of having directed a sensationalist gaze on Sarajevo: “Was ist los mit dir? Geil

auf Kriegsbilder?“ In this fiction he self-critically links his journalistic and erotic gaze: “Dieser aggressive deutsche Unschuldskomplex, der Glaube, man könne unschuldig bleiben, indem man den Blick abwendet” (88–89). The narrator’s gaze on Sarajevo and its citizens is a theme developed throughout the story, highlighting power differentials and implicating the traveller in the ways in which Westerners have possessed the region.

Like Zeh’s Orientalized Sarajevo, Schneider’s Oriental Aida is never written into the present time. She exists in the past as does their love affair. Like Zeh’s dream, Schneider’s Oriental fantasy does not have to become reality, for its evocation has sufficient power to banish the Sarajevo that he experiences. It is indeed her absence that allows him to evoke his erotic fantasies: “Da meine Erinnerung an sie durch ihre Gegenwart nicht korrigiert wurde, schossen mir alle möglichen Phantasien durch den Kopf” (87). He relives the sexual experience itself recalling the frisson of fear that marked their erotic encounter: “Oder war es Angst, die mich zurückhielt, Angst vor einer Geschichte, deren Regeln und deren Ansprüche ich nicht kannte?” (90). Their relationship was consummated in front of the window that had brought the stray sniper bullet: “Was wir dann am Fenster miteinander trieben, gehörte nicht zu den Arten der Liebe, die ich kannte” (90). Alone in Aida’s flat, the memory of the sexual encounter serves its purpose of orientating him in the past, but also in the now unfamiliar city: “Ich, der Kriegsbesucher, der in ein paar Tagen wieder im Sicheren sein würde, der Abgesandte aus einer Welt, in der es alles, das Notwendige wie das Überflüssige, im Überfluss gab” (90). The encounter does not have to be repeated, since it has served its purpose and he does not regret its passing: “Es war ein Ereignis, schön und rätselhaft wie eine nie gesehene, rasch dahinziehende Wolkenformation, die nicht wiederkehrt” (91). Nor does Aida.

In the second part of the story the narrator, left alone, is forced to occupy himself in the streets of Sarajevo, since the conference he is attending, like the city he encounters, “berührte mich nicht” (94). Instead, he crosses a bridge into the deserted Serbian quarter of Sarajevo, which is full of burnt out buildings. The people he meets pass him without a glance (94), denying his presence “als würden sie mich trotz meines roten Schals und der weißen Jeans gar nicht wahrnehmen” (98). A woman who may be a Serb ignores him, refusing to meet the gaze he turns towards her (99), forcing him to seek recognition in his memory of his defining encounter. Instead of being acknowledged in the present he turns his gaze inward, “und kehrte meine eigene Blickrichtung nach innen. Wie ich dastand und zu ihr aufblickte, [...] wünschte ich mir, mit Aida durch diese Straßen zu gehen, nicht nur durch diese Straßen, durch alle Straßen” (99). In Aida’s absence he finally finds another way of becoming present on the streets of Sarajevo. After meeting another couple who avoid his gaze, he pulls some German banknotes from his wallet: “In seinen Augen, die meine Anwesenheit jetzt zum ersten Mal anzuerkennen schienen, sah ich Misstrauen, ja Abscheu” (101), but he is acknowledged. Without

Aida he can undertake the remainder of his journey handing out Western currency to passing Bosnian Serbs, relieved “als hätte ich einen Bann oder Fluch gebrochen” (101). He leaves the city without ever reuniting with Aida.

Schneider’s text is clearly intended to be a contemporary reworking of Verdi’s opera, which describes “the power of love to transcend not only national differences, but also the gulf between the dominant and subordinate in a conquest situation” (MacKenzie xvi). Yet the question remains whether his mocking use of Oriental referents and his overtly forced analysis of the Western gaze serve to interrogate or to affirm ethnic and gender stereotypes. What is revealing in this story is not so much his self-criticism of Western male fantasies of sexual possession, but his own careful construction of “nesting orientalisms” within Sarajevo itself. This term, coined by Milica Bakić-Hayden, describes “a pattern of reproduction of the original dichotomy upon which Orientalism is premised.” In other words, hierarchies are constructed by designating one’s neighbours as more “Oriental” than oneself. As Bakić-Hayden shows, this construction functions both within and outside the former Yugoslavia to distinguish between Self and Other and can encompass both ethnic and political difference. Schneider uses the term to distinguish between the Bosnian Muslim Aida and the Bosnian Serbs whom he encounters on his walks, but he reverses the construction, much as Zeh has done. Where Aida is Orientalized as erotic and alluring, the Bosnian Serbs the narrator encounters are Balkanized with familiar stereotypes of being “uncivilized, primitive, crude, cruel, and, without exception, dishevelled” (14), as elaborated by Todorova. The contrast between the Bosnian Serb, the “breitschultriger Riese,” who adopts “eine drohende Haltung” (100) and bares his teeth (101) when the narrator offers him money, and the “ältere, ziemlich fröhliche Männer” (102), who turn out to be Bosnian Muslims, is striking. So although the Oriental referent is initially used to mock his male gaze, the narrator effectively extends the construction to differentiate between the ethnic groups living in the city. Arguably the self-irony, rather than attempting to show how such myths are part of a Western imagination, is lost as the Oriental allusion becomes part of a broader scheme of controlling and labelling degrees of otherness, necessary for its self-definition. In Schneider’s text the Western traveller is redeemed by leaving his self-ironic Oriental fantasy and asserting himself by essentializing ethnic difference. While he mocks his own gesture of handing out money to passers-by on the street, this does not prevent him from constructing “nesting orientalisms” himself, reversing the construction but not undoing its basic functioning.

Challenges to Said’s analysis of Orientalism have questioned his unambiguous insistence on the dualism between the West and the Orient. John M. MacKenzie, for example, has argued that the relationship has always “been one of instabilities and fusions” (211). In the final text explored here, the Oriental referent is also in the process of disappearing. Yet rather than affirming the identity of the

Western traveller, here it opens the way for coexistence. Peter Handke's account of his journey to Serbia in 1995 sparked a debate that matched the Christa Wolf debate in both intensity and bitterness (Deichmann). It became clear that he had touched a nerve in the German public sphere that was clearly linked to the entire controversy over German military involvement in the region (Oppen). His critics took him to task for his supposedly pro-Serbian attitude, and accused him of ignoring the plight of Bosnian Muslims and overlooking war crimes (cf. Deichmann 180–86). As mentioned, Handke travels as a tourist, provoked by the demonization of the Serbs that he feels has dominated the media. Like the “non-hero[es]” of the “anti-conquest” he insists that his poetic approach distinguishes his writing from that of the “Rotten der Fernfuchter” (122) who had preceded him: “Meine Arbeit ist eine andere. Die bösen Fakten festhalten, schon recht. Für einen Frieden jedoch braucht es noch anderes, was nicht weniger ist als die Fakten” (133).

Handke's journey takes him from Belgrade to the rivers of the title of his book, accompanied by two Serbian friends and his wife. Unlike the other two writers discussed here, Handke is familiar with Yugoslavia, not least through his Slovenian mother, and he describes previous journeys through the region. He also differentiates clearly between his attachment to Slovenia, which he describes as “meine Gehheimat” (108) because of his many walking trips, and Serbia, for which, apart from his respect for its history of antifascist resistance during World War II, he has no particular affection. So although he is travelling in Serbia, his thoughts take him back to Slovenia, and, in remembering the many journeys he had made through that country, he mourns what has been lost through the break-up of Yugoslavia. As the hotels prepare for German tourists, “vollends ausgerichtet auf die Deutschsprachigkeit” (109), the shops are full of familiar items, “das deutsche Bild bereit, gleich neben den Tuben- und Dosenstapeln mit Nivea” (110). While elsewhere entry into the European Union has been presented as an opportunity for the region, Handke sees it as a “jähes Abwenden, solch plötzliche Verschlossenheit und Unzugänglichkeit des Landes” (109). Deliberately reversing common conceptions of EU membership that highlight the freedom of movement and present it as a release for former Eastern European states, Handke sees Slovenia closing itself off from its previous multiethnic past, and he constantly finds new ways of depicting this disappearing ideal, from the multiethnic headwear of children (99) to the murals in a train station:

Und in dem immer noch schön ländlichen Bahnhof von Bohinjska Bistrica sind dann, natur- oder geschichtsgemäß, die geradezu gemäldehaften Abbildungen der serbischen Klöster, der montenegrinischen Bucht von Kotor und des mazedonisch-albanischen Sees von Ohrid ersetzt worden – nicht einmal durch rein-slowenische Landschaften, sondern durch Drucke von Kinderzeichnungen. (111)

This entire section of his travelogue is rich in nostalgia for a world disappearing, and Handke can certainly be accused of self-indulgence by seeking to freeze time in Slovenia in the name of cultural diversity. Clearly, nostalgia for a supposedly more diverse past is a familiar trope of travel writing, particularly for those seeking alterity in far flung corners of the world. His revelatory moment of Oriental nostalgia occurs within this context, on a road in Slovenia where he chances upon a truck driver having a break. This encounter with the Orient is, as in the other texts, a defining moment for the author, and it too evokes primarily through absence:

[...] und sah dann am Wegende, vor der Karstsavanne, einen Lastwagen geparkt, mit einem Kennzeichen aus Skopje/Mazedonien, früher auf den slowenischen Straßen keine Seltenheit, jetzt freilich eine Einmaligkeit, dazu der Fahrer bei der Rast, draußen im Steppengras, allein weit und breit, wie aus den Jahren vor dem Krieg übriggeblieben; und hörte dann die Kassette aus seinem Transistor, eine ziemlich leise gestellte orientalische, fast schon arabische Musik, wie sie hier einst mit tausend anderen Weisen mitgespielt hatte und inzwischen sozusagen aus dem Luftraum verbannt war; und der Blick des Mannes und der meine begegneten einander, momentlang, lang genug, daß das, was sich zwischen uns ereignete, mehr war als bloß ein gemeinsamer Gedanke, etwas Tieferes: ein gemeinsames Gedächtnis; und obwohl sich das Umland durch den Klang jetzt neu zu öffnen und zu strecken schien, [...] verpuffte solch kontinentales Gefühl [...] und es zuckte nur ein Phantomschmerz durch die Luft, ein gewaltiger, mit Sicherheit nicht bloß persönlicher. (112–13)

In contrast to the author's desire for a Slovenia free of German tabloid newspapers and Nivea, the Oriental nostalgia he experiences here by the roadside derives its force from his sense of communion with the Macedonian truck driver. The epiphanic moment of loss is a shared one, and it attempts to bridge the gap between the lone traveller and the driver, not to affirm the authority of the former. Indeed, it is important that this epiphanic moment occurs not in Serbia – in a travelogue about Serbia! – but in Slovenia, the country to which the author is much closer. Handke's narrative is marked throughout by his cautious self-reflexive approach to interpretation and representation. Where Slovenia is homeland to him, in Serbia "blieb ich ein Reisender, ja ein Tourist" (114). Passages such as this encounter with the driver are absent in his account of Serbia, where the reader encounters instead Handke's frequent and irritating refusal to reach a definitive interpretation by regularly concluding "Was weiß ein Fremder?" (e. g. 59).

Of the three authors examined here, Handke comes closest to approximating what Leslie Adelson has called "responsible narrative," which is "one that acknowledges the power of discursive construction without being able fully to

control it" (321). The important point is that Handke constructs a different type of narrative in Slovenia, justifying, as it were, the indulgence of his epiphanic moment with his close family ties to the region, whereas in Serbia he remains an outsider unwilling to interpret and rarely straying beyond his own clearly marked observations. Commenting on the stance adopted by reporters during the Bosnian war, Petar Ramadanović has made a similar distinction by criticizing journalists for blurring the difference between an account and a witnessing of the event. He cites Mark Danner as an example, claiming that the ABC news reporter often lacked self-reflexivity by pretending "to know what he sees" and "to be able to use power (or order, for example) without himself being affected by it" (356). Instead, he should have recognized "his different detached position with respect to other participants in the event," and he should have borne witness "to his position firstly and, through it, to the events" (355). In Slovenia, but not in Serbia, Handke becomes a participant witness, and the moment of Oriental nostalgia is one in which he knows what he sees, to paraphrase Ramadanović. With Handke having carefully negotiated his narrative perspective, his desire for the Orient is less a sign of irritation at Balkan complexity than it is a longing for ambiguity. The Oriental referent is nostalgic, in that it mourns a lost multiethnicity; at the same time it is critical of the loss of Balkan complexity (MacKenzie; Marchand). Handke describes Slovenia while travelling in Serbia, remembering a truck driver from Macedonia listening to Arabic music. While he evokes fluid boundaries across central and southeastern Europe, the Oriental referent serves to transcend difference, not to affirm Handke's discursive authority.

Meyda Yeğenoğlu's conclusions about the power of Orientalism are worth reexamining in the light of these contemporary uses of motifs and images of the Orient in Yugoslavia.

[...] if we admit that the power of Orientalism does not stem from the "distortion" of reality of the Orient, nor from the dissemination of "prejudiced" or "negative" images about other cultures and peoples, but from its power to construct the very object it speaks about and from its power to produce a regime of truth about the other and thereby establish the identity and the power of the subject that speaks about it, then it becomes a peripheral concern whether the images deployed to this end are "positive" or "negative." (89–90)

Conscious of the burden of representation – of what Clifford has described as "the predicament of culture" – the three writers discussed here reject previous accounts of Balkan barbarity and define themselves against earlier travellers. They are thus aware that their discursive authority is part of the problem of representation, and they define their roles in opposition to the journalists and intellectuals who have written about the region before them, claiming innocence by adopting a tourist

perspective. Thus they are conscious that it is not only a question of positive or negative images of the other. Yet at the same time they are also concerned with the actual images of previous representations, and they set out to relocate the region in Europe as opposed to describing it as a Balkan powder keg. Here, Zeh and Schneider encounter the dilemma of Balkanist constructions, namely that they become irritated by the “unimaginative concreteness” of the Balkans (Todorova 14), and they escape into a more exotic Oriental fantasy. In doing so they appear to achieve “Verwachsensein mit dem eigenen Namen” (Zeh 96). Yet they remain aware of the fundamental difficulties of doing this, and they fictionalize their encounters, as if to point self-critically to a need in the Western imagination for Oriental tales. Schneider later undermines his self-critical construction by using it to support his own political arguments about guilt and responsibility in Bosnia. Handke’s position is virtually reversed. Although he does not fictionalize the encounter, his text is also marked by his awareness of his narrative authority, and he attempts to address this by positioning himself as in- and outsider in Slovenia. Handke deploys the Oriental referent to transcend difference, not to highlight it.

Ignatieff described the intervention of the original travellers to Sarajevo – namely the intellectuals and journalists – as having been driven by narcissism. It was the fact of their intervention that mattered to them, not the outcome. This second grouping of reflexive tourists is perhaps more astute, for they disguise their narcissism through irony. Arguably, it is because the three travellers show such awareness of their discursive authority but nonetheless indulge in Oriental nostalgia that these texts quite starkly illuminate the power of the Orient in the Western imagination, even if used self-ironically. In the end, Bill Buford may have missed the point. The use of Orientalism in these texts does not suggest “a need for a world answerable to our fictions,” nor indeed the reverse, but rather “a need for a fiction” that remains just that. For it is clear that the Orient, because it is now clearly marked as fiction, has lost none of its power – at least not for these travellers.

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