

## **Images of the Western Balkans in English Translations of Contemporary Children's Literature**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Since the late 1990s there has been an increasing interest in the representation of Balkan culture in the literary works of authors writing in English. Scholars (Bakić-Hayden 1995, Todorova 1997, Goldsworthy 1998, Norris 1999, Hammond 2010) have shown how literary representations of the Balkans have reflected and reinforced its stereotypical construction as Europe's "dark and untamed Other". However, the contribution of translated literature in the representation of these images has rarely been considered, and in particular that of children's literature has been seriously neglected. Thus, this study of images of the Western Balkans in translated children's literature published in the period of 1990–2013, adds a hitherto uncharted literary terrain to the Balkanist discourses and helps shed a new and more complete light on the literary representations of the Balkans, and more precisely the Western Balkans. The study approaches translations as framing and representation sites that contest or promote stereotypes in the global literary market.

The study looks at the images embedded in the texts, and their representation in translation, including the translator's interventions, but even more at the level of paratexts, and especially in the use of illustrations. The discussion also considers how a book is selected for translation, and how different production participants contribute in the whole process of translation, including their motivations and goals, as well as their location.

Using the methodology of imagology (Leerssen, 2007), and multimodal visual analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006), five case studies are elaborated, covering books from five different countries in the Western Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, and Montenegro) and from five different types within children's literature (non-fiction, anthology, novel, picturebook, and e-book).

The five case studies confirm the complexity of the topic at hand. Although there are no firm patterns in the production of English translations of contemporary children's literature from the Western Balkans, we can point out several observations. While the translations of the text, in most cases, closely follow the source text, with slight interventions by some of the translators, the translated books differ quite significantly in their paratexts, especially illustrations.

In terms of the representation of violence, as one of the predominant stereotypical characteristics of the Western Balkans, images vary from direct representation of violence to full erasure of violent acts. In cases of self-representation, the case studies show a network of production participants in which the source author can be seen as the driving force in the

process, usually recruiting friends and supporters to perform other tasks in the process – translators, illustrators, publishers, etc. The auto-images take the form of ‘nesting’ Balkanisms, balancing (non)violent masculinities, or centering on love and humaneness. On the other hand, networks led by translators/editors located in the target culture will more often be motivated by commercial factors, along with representation of the source culture, thus either emphasizing the preconceived stereotypes of dominant violence in the Western Balkans, or turning towards globalizing the images of violence.

**KEYWORDS:** children’s literature, English, Translation, violence, Western Balkans

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