

**ROMANCE AND BELLIGERENCE BEHIND THE IRON CURTAIN.  
COLD WAR GENDER IDENTITIES IN ANGLO-AMERICAN PERSPECTIVE\***

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***Abstract***

*This article looks at fictional and non-fictional renderings of Cold War Eastern Europe from Anglo-American perspectives, with a focus on Romania, and proposes gender as a focus of reading that illuminates particular aspects of the relationship between traveller (frequently associated with a male gaze) and foreign country (feminised, and/or represented through an array of female figures). Cognisant of critiques from post-colonial perspectives, from East-European standpoints and from gender studies directions to this type of stereotyped interaction, this approach ponders the degree to which the texts selected here engage in a fruitful dialogue with the space of representation. Reading these narratives as Cold War romances, the article also suggests the emergence of the self-doubting Western narrator invited to question his own positions of power and knowledge, pointing to multiple routes of remembrance to a post-Cold War present.*

**Keywords:** McEwan, Ian; McGuinness, Patrick; Kaplan, Robert; Eastern Europe in fiction and non-fiction; Communist Romania in fiction and non-fiction

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***1. Introduction***

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It has been compellingly argued that the literary or journalistic encounter between Anglo-American observer and East-European subject frequently takes the form of a pseudo-colonial scenario played out between a “Western” self and a “native” (Goldsworthy, 1998; Todorova, 1999). What is more, it can also be noted that the East-European encounter is frequently cast as a confrontation between an objective, expert gaze and a changeable, enchanting, horrifying, exotic or abject subject, so that the fictional or non-fictional plot of “discovery” often reads either as a clinical attempt at diagnosis or as an emotionally charged romantic encounter, revealing surprising gender dynamics in realist as well as allegorical keys. This paper focuses on a body of Anglo-American literary and journalistic representations of communist Eastern Europe depicted in a state of war to reflect

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upon the extent to which the land is assimilated to/represented through female bodies, and to investigate the literary and cultural effects of this imagological continuity. The texts chosen for analysis are *The Innocent* (1990), by prominent contemporary British author Ian McEwan, a largely “forgotten” book, as the writer himself admits (McEwan, 2012: 33’37’), telling the story of a British engineer deployed to the divided Berlin of 1955-1956, and his love story with a Berliner, Maria, set against the background of operation Stopwatch/Gold, the joint US-UK spying project aimed at tapping Soviet phone lines; Patrick McGuinness’s novel *The Last Hundred Days* (2011), relatively ignored by criticism in spite of being heralded as “one of the great literary success stories of 2011” (Wood, 2012: n.p.), set in Bucharest, 1989, and focusing on a young British lecturer who experiences a devastated city, the end of the communist regime, as well as two successive love affairs, one with the daughter of a high-party Communist official, and another with a female doctor enduring the hardships of the period; and Robert Kaplan’s *In Europe’s Shadow* (2016), which continues the writer’s focus on the Balkans and Eastern Europe, and which overlaps the journalist’s impressions from visits to Cold War Romania with the perspective of 2013-2014, when a new Cold War – based on soft power – looms in the background. At the crossroads between literary and cultural studies, the discussion thus draws upon perspectives pondering the (post)-colonial status of Eastern Europe and upon feminist critiques of dominant gender representations in/of the communist and post-communist periods.

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## ***2. Apprehending the “East”***

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The manner in which East European countries and/or the Balkans have been represented from Anglo-American perspectives has long been a topic of scholarly critique. Following the veritable invention of an Eastern, internal other of Europe enabling the construction of the Western Enlightenment rational self (Wolff, 1994), drawing on an array of imaginary and mostly unchanging British constructions of Balkanness (Todorova, 1999) and on tropes and figures originating in British literature insidiously used to refer to political and social realities (Goldsworthy, 1998), representations of Eastern Europe or the Balkans have been shown to greatly depend on, and reflect, the historical and personal positioning of the British reporting subject, rather than of the object of description (Hammond, 2007). Seeking to remedy this divide between West and East, other approaches have argued for discursive continuities in an ampler understanding of points of contagion between apparently disparate areas.<sup>2</sup>

Gender as a category of analysis has been instrumental in contributing to this “unmapping” of the region by adding nuance, by undermining polarised scenarios

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<sup>2</sup> Hammond’s edited collection (2004) reveals facets of the Balkans speaking back; other approaches argue for new understandings of borderlands that go beyond imperial-like colonial relations (Hammond, 2007; Ștefănescu, 2014).

and by subverting tropes of evolution.<sup>3</sup> In what concerns the perception from the vantage point of the “Western” self, it has been argued that a polarised gendered dynamic often develops between a male-like traveller and a female-like country, even for female visitors to the area.<sup>4</sup> In point of the object of representation, the gender dimension has also produced highly salient perspectives, and it has been forcefully argued that women in particular are the easiest prey of stereotyped representation. For example, Radulescu and Glajar identify main images through which East European women are portrayed: “as wretches, as manly or Amazon-like, as naïve and innocent, and as alluring, slightly Oriental or exotic temptresses with an edge of vampirism” (Radulescu and Glajar, 2005: 6). More recently, this line of inquiry has also focused on the manner in which stereotypes of East European women have been subverted both before and after the fall of communism, with women co-opting obstacles in their own bid to power (Hashamova et al, 2017), and has dwelt on the manner in which the male gaze is internalized,<sup>5</sup> thus pointing to techniques of active interaction with - and subversion of - stereotyped gender identity.

In fact, it can be argued that there are subtle confluences between male and female gazes, while the personal and social layers underlying a writing persona obfuscate gender dimensions. Nothing could illustrate this point better, perhaps, than the following case study of a journal documenting a trip to Cold War Romania and included in the Sir Frank Francis Papers at the British Library. Because the journal is unpublished and, as far as my research could establish, undocumented elsewhere, and because the handling regulations for the Frank Francis papers did not permit any copying of the material, what follows will be a more detailed account of the journal so as to permit a degree of familiarity with archive material that is only available for consultation on-site.

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<sup>3</sup> With respect to Eastern European space, gender has successfully been used, for example, to enrich the representation of war (Bucur and Wingfield, 2001), of political thought (Bucur and Miroiu, 2002), of the transition to post-communism as part of a gender/class/ethnicity nexus (Gal and Kligman, 2000). Gender also enables a much-needed “unmapping” of Eastern Europe: Kacandes and Komska, 2018 argue against the geocoding of Eastern Europe and point to its links to discontinuous lands and populations, while Baker argues for an analysis of “gender regimes” “across the continent and around the world” (Baker, 2017: 13), also arguing against an evolutionary vision of gender relations.

<sup>4</sup> Allcock and Young, 2001 focus on the gender dimension of writing about the Balkans, and ponder the implications of a gender and geographical polarization made in a 1912 article on “Why the Balkans attract Women”: “the East attracts women because it is feminine to the core, just as the West is essentially masculine” (quoted in Allcock and Young, 2001: xxiii).

<sup>5</sup> For example, Engelen and van Heuckelom, eds. (2014) point to modes in which feminism has too often been conflated with state feminism, thus serving to reemphasize control over women.

Originally attributed to Sir Frank Francis, Director of the British Museum and head librarian at that time, the journal covers a journey to Romania in August and September of 1963, to Bucharest and other locations, most notably Peleş Castle and the Black Sea cities of Constanța and Mangalia, to establish contacts with cultural institutions, particularly libraries and museums. The journal also briefly notes daily life under communism, and includes reflections on possible positive changes brought about by the regime, but also on its restrictions and on its overuse of propaganda. On the inner cover of the journal, written in a notebook of recognizably Romanian origin (with the Romanian word for notebook, “caiet,” printed on the cover) there is a list of contacts of interest: a contact at the Bruckenthal museum, the telephone number for the Istria director of excavations, for Peleş Museum. The first page of the notebook contains hand-written contacts for the Central Library, for the Romanian Academy, for the Village Museum, for the University Library and for the Folklore Institute. The journal, written in the first person plural, commences on August 20<sup>th</sup> with the arrival in Bucharest, the sojourn at the Athénée Palace, and dwells on the agreeable welcome (a bouquet of roses and an encounter with two female figures, Mrs Popescu Bradiceni (National Library) and Sanda Iliescu, a student of foreign languages whose task is to translate, but this proves unnecessary, it is noted, as most of the people encountered speak French). The journal mentions a number of visits – to the Village Museum, to the University Library – in a factual manner, but the narrative is interspersed with some comments, in particular recording positive impressions of Sanda, a rich source of information, remarkable also for her almost perfect English, in spite of never having travelled abroad except to Bulgaria. The narrative is also punctuated by moments of local colour, as for example in the description of the trip to Mamaia with a speed-loving driver. The journal interestingly contains some wider-reaching remarks - which fit the range of responses from British travellers during the Cold War (Hammond, 2007) – such as those occasioned by the National Holiday of Communist Romania, August 23<sup>rd</sup>. After an explanation of the historical significance of August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1944, when Romania switched sides in the war and joined the Allies against Germany, the diary entry continues with a remark that the Romanians have done well, and posits that some form of totalitarianism was perhaps inevitable so as to accomplish necessary changes: “it may be that in a country which has been torn by struggles of one kind or another for centuries, the only hope is some form of totalitarian rule which steam rollers people & things.” In an almost textbook illustration of the argument that the West “reserves” “rational criteria” “for itself” (Todorova, 1999: 186) and uses other values to appraise political and historical situations in the Balkans, the entry continues with the comment that, in the “West,” people have done these things without the “undesirable concomitants of the system,” and reverts to a personal meditation on the interest of traveling to a space of otherness: “I think it is useful to come to a Communist country in its early stages like this to appreciate the benefits & the speed of change in conditions which can be brought about when there is an absolutely ruthless determination to get things done. And to realise that the

prevailing conditions before were so much worse than in England.” At the same time, however, the pervasive use of propaganda – even in archaeology – is criticized briefly, from an outsider’s perspective, without any reference to how this might impact the people living under the communist regime.

Evincing a depth of understanding and a subtlety of appreciation to the degree possible in a diary with relatively brief entries aimed more at recording the factual details of the trip and less at noting personal impressions and reflections, the voice originally ascribed to Frank Francis appears to seamlessly fit the perspective of the Western *and* male traveller-observer. Supporting this inference as to the ownership of the diary is the newspaper clipping from the paper *Scântea*, 27<sup>th</sup> of August 1963 (included in the folder) announcing the visit of Frank Francis to Romania, and making him the sole protagonist of the endeavour. The real surprise of the journal is the splintering of the “we” voice into a writing self and a third person singular – he, “Frank” – such as the August 24<sup>th</sup> entry (“We were in Constanta until 7:30. Then we were supposed to go to the Art Gallery but Frank struck!”), or the August 25<sup>th</sup> mention of “Frank,” who was to give a talk about libraries in Great Britain and about the British Museum. These instances prompted me to question the ascribed authorship of the journal, and to posit whether it had in fact been written by his wife, Lady Katrina Francis, who routinely joined him on some trips but who is not mentioned as having accompanied him to Romania. Upon the advice of the staff in the Western Manuscripts collection, I compared the handwriting in the journal with the letters attributed to, and signed by Lady Francis from their trip to Australia, and with letters signed by Frank Francis. The comparison supported my hypothesis, and I contacted the curator of the collection with the information gathered. After analysing the same material and performing the same comparison, the curator arrived at the same conclusion, and the British Library Catalogue now notes that the diary is in Katrina Francis’s hand. Apart from contributing to more precise attribution of archive material, this finding also nuances the perception of characteristics of the male expert traveller’s voice, highlighting continuities of perception that cross gender divides and that pertain more to national and class positioning, while also shedding light on the hitherto unacknowledged work of support and documentation provided by Frank Francis’s spouse.

Turning to the texts under discussion here, all three seem to rehearse the pattern of interaction between male traveller and female country. In fact, reviewers have been quick to insist on the romance plot as condensing the wider experience of being abroad. Thus a review in *The New York Times* reads *The Innocent* as marked by all the tropes of Cold War exoticism replete with “hugger-mugger atmosphere,” “secrecy and paranoia” as a background for an inter-national encounter between the “bland young clerk” from England and the “pretty West Berliner” (Kakutani, 1990: n.p.). *The Last Hundred Days* is similarly presented in the *Guardian* review as a story in which “the unnamed narrator becomes enmeshed in the complications of the doomed dictatorship [...] falls in love with the daughter of a party apparatchik

and falls in with a dissident group of people-smugglers” (Purdon, 2011: n.p.). It is telling that Kaplan’s non-fictional account of his trips to Cold War Romania is also read as a romance plot: “Robert D. Kaplan embarked on what this book portrays as an enduring love affair,” the “object of his affection and fascination” being “not a person, but a country,” although “it was hardly an instant romance” (Smale, 2016: n.p.). However, unlike Kaplan’s earlier clichéd feminisations of the country as a female body to be appropriated or diagnosed (as I have argued elsewhere), *In Europe’s Shadow* precipitates a fruitful engagement with local Cold War zones.

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### ***3. Memoirs of War, Sites of Devastation: Berlin and Bucharest***

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Berlin and Bucharest have interestingly often been linked as key spaces of belligerence. Thus, if a review notes a resemblance between *The Last Hundred Days* and Christopher Isherwood’s account of 1930s Berlin (Purdon, 2011: n.p.), Borcila, 2015 highlights Berlin and Bucharest as two sites upon which the fall of communism was predicated. In McEwan’s *The Innocent*, Berlin is presented as a site of devastation that allegorically captures the violence and chaos of post-war Europe, as McEwan himself intimates in an interview.<sup>6</sup> Expanding upon critical perspectives of McEwan’s Berlin, as well as upon insights into “rubble film” tropes (Bathrick, 2010) and tropes of separation (Pike, 2010) associated with the status of Berlin as Cold War capital, Bucharest also emerges as a similar representative site of Cold War devastation. In fact, while Berlin is telling for the early Cold War, Bucharest seems to epitomize the frozen violence of the depths of the Cold War that also coincided with its end.

In *The Last Hundred Days*, the overlap and contrast between Berlin and Bucharest is made evident in the scene in which the narrator and his friends listen to clandestine news about the fall of the Berlin Wall; while the two English characters “cheered,” Ottilia, the Romanian character, “really believed ...] that at any moment the tanks would roll in” and cannot “imagine” the scene, needing “live images, direct from Berlin” of people “pickaxing the concrete.” What is more, the next day, Bucharest remains frozen in its belligerence, with “the same grey corrugations of cloud, the same steely wind, the same police in their usual positions” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 3929-3940). In addition, McGuinness poignantly foregrounds the “rubble” theme, and the city emerges as a dystopian space of total devastation, where the natural occurrence of ruins is accelerated by totalitarian demolition and building projects, as evinced for example in amateur film footage of the demolition of a church, standing “in the rubble like a giant tortoise as they attacked it with hammers and pliers” while the “blurred and wobbly” image from

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<sup>6</sup> See the analysis of the topography of Berlin as an essentially psychic place (Benyei, 1999); McEwan mentions that violent episodes in the novel echo the violence between “nation states” (McEwan, 24.10.1990: 15’38”) and that, without intending to write an allegory, “geopolitics” seeps through (McEwan, 24.10.1990: 30’14”).

the camera records how “[l]orries came and went in silence as the ghost of a sun rose behind the ruins” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 2591-2593), or in the scene on the Boulevard of Socialism, with “narrower unfinished streets that stopped abruptly a few hundred yards further down in a mass of rubble and slabs,” coming up “against an old monastery that blocked its path” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 1399-1401). The cityscape thus memorializes a Cold War violence that is presided by a one-and-a-half times larger than life (and hence all the more intimidating) representation of dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu, “standing Ozymandian against a background of broken stone and half-erected pillars” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 883-884), a contemporary “‘Shelley’s ‘Ozymandescu,’” as another character muses later (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 1408-1409). In a similar logic, a ruined city *en abyme* is constituted by the unfinished, dilapidated Casa Poporului, a “shanty town” for conspirators, a site of violence and a home to “people living rough, gypsies, alcoholics, druggies, homeless...” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 1503-1504).

With its focus on conflict and devastation, Kaplan’s memoir also reads as a memory of war, subtended by a vision of an ampler European conflict called “the Long European War of 1914–89” (Kaplan, 2016: 44). The narrative overlaps his 1973 visit “during the height of the Cold War” (Kaplan, 2016: xxxi-xxxii) onto the 1980s visit to what was then a “news backwater” - compared to his previous location in Israel, visible to world media because of overt conflict - with Kaplan actually including the two sites of belligerence (Romania - muted, Israel - visible) into a wider-scale conflagration of which Romania is representative: “Romania was the Cold War, the signal conflict of the age, whereas the Arab-Israeli crisis was but a critical sideshow of it” (Kaplan, 2016: 15). Thus in memories of the 1970s, but especially of 1981, Bucharest emerges as a muffled but no less active conflict zone, an embodiment of the “theme,” “pattern” of Communism: “somber, formidable, and suffocating in the silence it inflicted upon the streets and boulevards” (Kaplan, 2016: 35). Musings on the complexity and amplitude of conflict also enable Kaplan to return to some vexed questions of his previous writings, in particular his description in *Balkan Ghosts* of this area as backward and inherently violent, with consequences on US foreign policy. Now conceding that “[t]he Balkans may not have had, at least theoretically, an especial predisposition to war and conflict,” Kaplan puts forth a more nuanced vision of a region still prone to conflict, given its “very poverty and underdevelopment,” which inflame “historical disputes,” and insists that he believes - unlike the “American president” “depressed” “on the possibilities of stopping a war in the former Yugoslavia” after reportedly reading Kaplan’s book - that “it is only the darkest human landscapes where humanitarian action is ever required in the first place” (Kaplan, 2016: 24-25). In some contrast to its ex-Yugoslav neighbours, Romania seems to have emerged relatively unscathed from the Cold War, while the emphasis on “the individual and his well-being” makes the rest “madness,” including the “idea of the ethnic nation,” which, “if not dead,” is at least in “momentary remission” (Kaplan, 2016: 44). The distance from

that state of warfare can be gleaned from the mausoleum at Mărășești, with its “slamming-shut-on-the-tomb finality” declaring “the futility of war in the grip of remembrance,” which explains the Romanian desire for “an escape from history” (Kaplan, 2016: 44-45).

Interestingly, in this long war played on the European front, the US is often cast as a remarkable absentee, and Kaplan repeatedly resonates with reproaches launched by Romanian public figures such as Silviu Brucan, “the grand old man of Romanian Communism” (““You were nowhere,” referring to how the United States was altogether missing from Central Europe until 1944” (Kaplan, 2016: 19)) or Neagu Djuvara, who explains that ““[n]one of us could have imagined in 1940 [...] that America would ever get involved in the war and would then go on to actually win it,”” which again reminds Kaplan of Brucan, who had also bluntly put it that “America was nowhere when the West deserted Central and Eastern Europe at Munich in 1938” (Kaplan, 2016: 143).

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#### ***4. Political Romance, Romancing the Political***

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If post-war Berlin and Cold War Bucharest emerge as sites of devastation indicative of the sometimes muffled but no less violent conflict of a “long European War of 1914-1989,” as Kaplan puts it, these cities also signify as sites of romance - enabled, rather than hindered, by war - between the male outsider and local female figure(s) representing, or in Kaplan’s case constituting, the country itself. In fact, the constant slippage in McEwan’s *The Innocent* between “a love story in a political (war) context” and a “(cold) war story with a love story in the background” (Benyei, 1999: 187) suggests the main parameters of an ampler discussion pointing to how the novel meanders between the personal and the political (Slay, 1996; Heiler, 2009). Thus, in *The Innocent*, the personal romance and the national connections become inextricably intermingled in a fiction interspersed with documented Cold War events surrounding the planning, implementation and discovery of Operation Stopwatch/Gold to such an extent that the novel effectively reads as a political romance and, simultaneously, romances early Cold War politics. It is not only that the affair between Leonard and Maria must be scrutinized as a matter of security, given the nature of Leonard’s assignment, as the American Bob Glass explains (McEwan, 1990: 90), but their flowering relationship is heralded as symbolic of Europe healing and reuniting after the war. In spite of Maria’s protests that people are not countries (“Does he think I’m the Third Reich?” – McEwan, 1990: 129), Glass’s words at the engagement party to the effect that “Leonard and Maria belong to countries that ten years ago were at war” (McEwan, 1990: 124) permeate the intricacies of the novel: from Leonard’s fantasy of violence against Maria, reiterating (male) conqueror’s dreams of possession, to the collapse of the personal and the political into a single narrative thread at the climax of the novel, when Leonard betrays the tunnel for purely and acutely personal reasons, unaware that the tunnel had already been

betrayed by a (real) British double agent, George Blake, engaged in a high-level political game. Moreover, the permanent oscillation between the personal and the political lead to an initiation of the innocent both in terms of erotic relationships as well as in terms of awareness of worldliness and complexity. Through his involvement with Maria, Leonard becomes enmeshed in human, moral and political dimensions that were unfathomable before, and the novel obfuscates the meaning of innocence and complicity in a way that fully comes to bear in the last imaginary conversation between Leonard and Maria, as the former revisits Berlin and reads a letter she had addressed to him after decades of separation (McEwan, 1990: 225-226).

*The Last Hundred Days* is played out as a similar initiation scenario of which the protagonist is another innocent - this time, recognisably posing as Western: when, early on in the novel, after just having arrived in Bucharest, he is asked to sign an already-written recommendation for a student he had never met, he protests that “*This wasn’t the sort of thing that happened at home...*” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 357-358). This innocent is introduced into a world of complexities by another British national turned native, Leo, but particularly by female natives, including the afore-mentioned student, Cilea. At various points in the novel, Cilea - who is also the first object of the Englishman’s romantic interest - is a constantly glamorous presence, woven into the fabric of communist Romania, while at the same time precipitating the narrator’s poignant awareness of complexities too deep to fathom, as his lack of knowledge about her life when they are not together signals a general state of “partial knowledge” which is the “condition of every friendship here” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 1525-1526). Cilea herself treats the narrator as an unknowing Westerner, theatrically calling him a “gap-year deprivation tourist” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Location 1004) at the beginning or, after they have broken up, describing him as an unanchored self, floating along “with what there is, with whoever there is” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 3711-3712). The narrator himself navigates between a poignant sense of non-belonging (with “nowhere and nothing to go back to” in England (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 2351-2354)) and the status of foreigner “[g]oing native,” as Cilea’s father remarks when he sees the young man smoking cheap Carpați cigarettes, the only ones widely available to the Romanian population (McGuinness, Kindle Location 2254), and he is haunted by a growing sense of being caught up “in a world whose terms were perpetually shifting, yet whose rules would never change” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 2568-2569). Nonetheless, towards the close of the novel, the narrator ends up possessed of a perhaps temporary, but no less compelling, sense of a collective “we” keenly resonating with others trapped in a Cold War prison when he expresses his awareness that, unlike other sites of increased freedom, Warsaw or Prague or Berlin, Bucharest is “a reminder of how much we remained bricked in, that sense that there would never be enough light to go round” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 4072-4073).

With the transition from innocence to confusion predicated around the relationship with Cilea, the imperfect but nevertheless palpable transition to a state of meaning-bestowing belonging is enabled by another figure with whom the narrator has a relationship, Otilia, the female doctor. A point of contrast to the exotic Cilea, Dr Moranu is representative of the overworked professional trying to maintain standards of morality (refusing the standard carton of cigarettes) or, during their second meeting, as the sister of the missing Petre, “[e]merging from the stairwell, pale and exhausted, in a dirty, once-white clinical coat and flat-heeled shoes” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 2100-2102). Both innocent of the depths of complicity that Cilea navigates, and yet quicker to learn than the narrator (as she gleans the game being played by Trofim, the party dissident preparing his own power coup), Otilia reflects the narrator’s increasingly close relationship to the wanton country, and signifies a comforting naturalness (they cross “unspokenly into couplehood”), causing a fissure in the protagonist’s frozen defences against intimacy (the narrator becomes aware of “a far-off feeling, ice on a long-frozen lake starting to crack at some tiny bankside seam (McGuinness, Kindle Location 3105-3113)). His closeness to Otilia is accompanied by a sense of homing in an unlikely setting, Bucharest before the downfall of the regime. Not only does the narrator join himself to others in a collective “we,” as mentioned before, but, in the increasing confusion and uncertainty of the December revolution (also represented as at least partially orchestrated), he comes to identify the chaotic city and his relationship with Otilia as inseparable from each other and as tied with the only possible imaginable future: “I could not imagine our life together anywhere but here; and in spite of its unreality, I had stopped being able to imagine my own life anywhere else either” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 4149-4150).

While the “love story” identified in *The Innocent* and *The Last Hundred Days* in both a realist and an allegorical key is ostensibly absent from Kaplan’s non-fiction, the story still reads as a love affair with a country which is a long-standing object of fascination, and which the narrator has claimed as his subject. If *Balkan Ghosts* is imbued by a passion that seems to oscillate between contempt and surrender to inescapable charm, *In Europe’s Shadow* might appear to be less a work of love than of knowledge, with Kaplan arguing for the wisdom of Musil’s idea that “[t]ruth is the successful effort to think impersonally and inhumanly,” suggesting that “a banker is more dependable than an angel, because the desire for money preserves objectivity more than love,” and pointing out that Bucharest, alongside his “raw reactions” to in in 1981, taught him the lesson that “while empathy helps, sympathy can distort” (Kaplan, 2016: 11). And yet, Kaplan’s book can be read as a traveller’s romance in which, in addition to the plot of discovering the other (a constant, as Goldsworthy argues, of textual colonization) there is a parallel process of self-discovery through emotional exploration. Taking a cue from Kaplan’s idea, borrowed from Thomas Mann’s *Magic Mountain*, that “[a] man lives not only his personal life, as an individual, but also consciously or

unconsciously the life of his epoch...’ ” (Mann qtd. in Kaplan, 2016: 15), it is worthwhile to explore the mix of the personal and the political in Kaplan’s “romance” with the country. Memories of how Kaplan re-discovered Romania after an initial brush with it in the 1970’s, after a period of personal and professional erring (working “at a small newspaper” in the US, saving “enough money to resume traveling, this time through the Arab world, ending up in Israel with no clear purpose” and “terrified of wasting my life” (Kaplan, 2016: xxxii)) rely on a rich language of affect to describe a relationship between an analyst and his subject. Thus Kaplan highlights the sense of destiny not experienced elsewhere (“here in Communist Romania, I felt that I was finally beginning to do what I always was meant to” (Kaplan, 2016: 13)), and the sense of intensity (“intellectually alive,” “alone,” “with no emotional attachments to this place, with no personal stake in its destiny” (Kaplan, 2016: 14)) that develops into a veritable “fixation” for the Balkans, of which Romania was the “master key” (Kaplan, 2016: 25). What is more, Kaplan admits to feeling possessive about the country he claims as his own, commenting how, in 2014, he “anxiously hoped that Romania would not be drawn into the maelstrom,” also for “purely selfish reasons”: “Like many a traveler and not a few journalists, I liked having a place to myself” (Kaplan, 2016: 178).

These avowals of personal investment suggest the voice of a mellowed innocent. If, in earlier writings, the voice of the male narrator had identified the country with a lascivious available femininity (see Kaplan, 1993: Part 2, “Latin Passion Play”), this stance has now morphed into that of a compassionate and self-doubting Westerner, in a discursive continuum with the perspectives into which the protagonists of *The Innocent* and *The Last Hundred Days* have been initiated through romance plots, and all three accounts are informed by the awareness of having made mistakes, and are marked by intimations of hitherto-unfathomed complexity. At times, Kaplan’s empathy for the suffering of people under Communism is at odds with his apparently complete endorsements of previous writings containing jarring clichés intermingled with fair intuitions into the politics of Communist Romania, as for example the following passage cited to explain the writer’s early sense that Ceaușescu was tolerated by Moscow: “As I would write later in 1984: “Far from being a bold maverick, Ceaușescu—who reigns over a Marxist banana republic of his own making—is a bird singing loudly in a cage”” (Kaplan, 2016: 16). At other times, the mature narrator revisits earlier stances to fully mark his distance from a younger self (labelled as “ignorant”), as for example the younger self who tended to divide the world neatly into East and West in his first impressions of Cluj in the summer of 1973 when, wandering “into a bar near the main square where a group of Gypsies were playing music while others drunkenly caroused,” he “stupidly” thought “Now I am in the East,” unaware that Cluj was “the Kolozsvár of the Hungarians and as the Clausenburg of the Saxon-Germans” (Kaplan, 2016: 204). Moreover, revisiting old clichés that Kaplan admits to having used (such as the adjective “gothic” to describe Romania) occasions an

inspired reworking of clichés into creative associations with ample explanatory potential. Thus Kaplan notes that Gothic in uppercase – indicative of a Europeanising aspiration – is more appropriate, and finds an epitome of this Gothic spirit in the Maramureş wooden churches, which have reduced the Gothic principle “down to its purest and most abstract form, giving it the power of a mathematical theorem” (Kaplan, 2016: 214). These re-framings are also occasions to ponder the quandaries of traveling (registering with deep regret the momentary rudeness to an old local woman in Moldavia, and fully aware that “[t]he more fragile and embattled the country, the more sensitive the people are to what a stranger thinks” (Kaplan, 2016: 165-166)) but, more generally, they enable Kaplan to formulate the quandaries of writing, or “how to generalize without going too far, and yet at the same time to describe honestly what one has experienced—and draw conclusions from it—without being intimidated by a moral reprimand.” Acknowledging “a vast distance between describing obvious cultural peculiarities and provoking the specter of both racism and essentialism,” Kaplan makes a remarkably refreshing admission as to the fallibility of the analyst: “I have failed in this regard in the past, and have struggled for years trying to find the right balance. And I am more and more unsure of myself as I get older” (Kaplan, 2016: 55).

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### ***5. Female Bodies, Sites of Power***

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Drawing on the themes explored above, it can be argued that the narrator’s Cold War romance plot with a woman and/as country sets into motion an accelerated maturing that enables both an authentic – albeit provisional – engagement with a local setting as well as a conscious scrutiny of previous simplifications detrimental to the richness of perception. In this context, it is also worth pondering to what extent the female bodies or countries which catalyse this deepening of knowledge and affect resonate with multifaceted local issues. It has already been remarked in *The Innocent* that Maria’s body is apprehended as a continuation of the defeated city of Berlin in Leonard’s fantasies of conquest, and that the dynamic between Leonard and Maria thus offers a reflection on the “exploitative nature of the individual psyche” and addresses a new “personal-political dynamic” (Head 91). These insights can also illuminate *The Last Hundred Days*, where Cilea’s body is consubstantial with the narrator’s experience of the city as, after their break-up, for example, she is both everywhere and nowhere in Bucharest (“the sense that she had only just left would overpower me” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 1518-1519)), and where the decrepit Princess Cantesco joins the landscape of ruins that characterises the totalitarian city (the narrator notes that one visits the old woman “as one goes to visit ruins” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 1135-1136)).

What is more, female bodies are richly inscribed with Cold War stories. Thus Cilea, apprehended by the narrator as simply “arresting,” has a body explicitly encoded as desirable (“tanned” skin, mouth “lipsticked bright red”) and as marked by political privilege (“her hair black and shiny as a Politburo limousine”

(McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 719-720)), while her effect upon the narrator originates in both individual traits (“her mix of carnality and untouchability”) as well as in her appurtenance to a privileged class (“she wore the best and latest western clothes, not the way people wore them around here – with preening amateurism, labels pointing outwards – but casually, from an inexhaustible stock” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 695-697)). At the same time, Cilea also embodies, quite literally, a hidden legacy, as is made poignant in the scene when she makes a surprise appearance at a clandestine museum party where confiscated and black-market artefacts are viewed and sometimes traded (or even bought back by the ex-owners), and where she demonstrates not only her contingency with the class overseeing all activities, the people “up there” who know about this “stuff” and tolerate it, but also her descent from the persecuted “*haute bourgeoisie*,” interested in looking at her family’s confiscated belongings (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 1356-1357). In this sense, Cilea’s body enables the memory of the young Princess Cantesco (admired in one of the “decadent modernist” paintings on show in the museum), who brings in the remote spectre of a cosmopolitan chic inter-war femininity, now completely incongruous in Communist Romania (with “her haggard finery – outrageous feather boas in the summer, 1940s Chanel two-pieces and moulting furs the rest of the year” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 1122-1123)), and tolerated as an exotic and harmless relic (with her “annual parties for the King’s birthday which the authorities monitored and treated as a piece of folklore: hand-kissing, curtsying and crossing” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 1126-1127)). In fact, Cilea’s body precipitates multiple other routes through which a variety of women’s stories are addressed. Noting on Cilea’s bedside table her passport and her contraceptive pills, the narrator painfully remembers another female character, Rodica, traumatized by a miscarriage and investigated under the suspicion of having undergone an illegal abortion, and Otilia Moranu, offended when she is offered cigarettes to treat the ailing Rodica, thus musing upon restraints imposed upon less privileged women’s bodies<sup>7</sup>: “two of Romania’s most controlled subjects, travel and fertility, side-by-side. Having these was an imprisonable offence, but Cilea had nothing to fear” (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 1277-1278).

As the narrative increasingly concentrates on Dr Moranu, the latter not only mediates the relationship to the country in the amorous plot, as argued above, but brings in another range of female experiences under communism. Perhaps initially a beneficiary of increased/enforced gender equality, a version of the comrade woman who can navigate the demands of a tough job carried out in precarious conditions, who manages to stay relatively free of compromises, who makes do and survives in spite of all deprivations (resonating with the range of women’s

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<sup>7</sup> See Bucur in Baker, 2017 on how the rhetoric of equality coexisted with economy (scarcity) and with the intrusion into private spheres.

experiences in Eastern Europe<sup>8</sup>), while also living in a constant regime of vulnerability (as attested by what happens to brother), Ottilia's very body bristles with the rich and nuanced experience of women's life under communism. She is representative of an overworked, yet resilient Romania, her face "thin and drawn," and is a spectre of another self, as the writer tries to imagine "what she would look like happy, well slept and properly fed," while also suggesting an archetypal Balkan femininity, with "something Greek about her, with her dark brown eyes and high cheekbones, her thick crinkled hair pulled back with a Monocom clip but which kept tumbling over her eyes: a ruthlessly suppressed beauty" (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 2129-2131).

Moreover, women's bodies are also sites upon which power games are enacted, and where political as well as erotic violence is inflicted: from fragile bodies attesting to female vulnerability, such as the figure of the young gymnast ("big wide eyes", "slim, toned body" and looking "unsteady" in "[s]tiletos and a miniskirt," with "the air of a foal taking its first steps" (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 1956-1958)) forced to join the entourage of the dictator's predatory son, to bodies upon which is enacted a "testing of the structures of power," as in the scene when, at an outing for the children of top party officials from Romania and Yugoslavia, Cilea's bodyguard abruptly intervenes to halt the advances made upon her by the afore-mentioned son of the dictator, an episode understood by the narrator as indicative of the fact that the crude die-hard allies of Ceaușescu were losing face to a rank of more sophisticated and open Communists, among them Cilea's father (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Location 1996). Interestingly, when the violence is self-inflicted, (female) bodies also encode radical forms of resistance, a "yearning for liberty" and an "underground culture that is not a mere whim but a way of surviving," as in the case of the girl who is a member of the underground group of people-smugglers, and whose "self-administered piercings" emerging "through her eyebrows and cheeks and in the taut skin of her throat above her voicebox" make the narrator's eyes "water" (McGuinness, 2011: Kindle Locations 1429-1432).

Female bodies as sites upon which Cold War violence is predicated are also an underpinning imaginative revenant of Kaplan's account. In an imagological continuum with McGuinness' narrative, the women said to be "serially violated" by the dictator's son "in the course of his alcoholic excesses" (Kaplan, 2016: 33) quite clearly echo the sorry history of Romania, described on the same page as a female victim aspiring to recover after trauma: "Because Romania was so violated in the course of the twentieth century, there was now the ever-present artistic and spiritual need to restore earlier, more normal epochs, to recognize the past and

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<sup>8</sup> Verdery, 1994 argues that communism promised an array of gender practices and increased equality (only partially delivering on that promise), while post-communism has seen a tendency to retraditionalize gender roles.

show a way to the future” (Kaplan, 2016: 33). This traumatic past is also signalled in a horrific key, again through women, either in non-verbalised fashion, through the screaming mother of Herta Müller’s prose, “faithfully” reconstructing a “more mundane and punishing tedium” (Kaplan, 2016: 186) or, at the opposite end, through the dictator’s wife, a “shrewd peasant” increasingly in charge, whose irrepressible and violent drive to power is represented in the spirit of the monstrous-looking Casa Poporului (Kaplan, 2016: 1055-107).

Interestingly, female bodies also signify a way of measuring change and of relating to Romania. In memories of the past, the absence of women signals an uncouth and seedy atmosphere, such as in the description of Caru cu bere restaurant in communist times, “a tub of cigarette fumes and body odor” where “[w]omen were rare,” while the improvements of the present are signalled through women: present-day Caru’ cu bere is distinguished by “a lavish menu,” by “officious and lithe waiters and waitresses,” and it sports “a clientele of young couples with children, all looking wholesome and middle class” (Kaplan, 2016: 34). In a similar imaginative mechanism associating female presence with a relatable setting, the formerly seedy Athénée Palace is now a welcomingly seductive space, from its architecture of “fleshy Corinthian columns with faded gold capitals” to the “flirtatious, dark-haired waitresses who served red Moldavian wine with a nice metallic aftertaste” (Kaplan, 2016: 45). Moreover, female figures serve to highlight a discrepancy between a morally and aesthetically inferior past (of which remnants can still be felt) and forward-moving energies, a contrast most visible in certain towns Kaplan visits, such as Focșani or Kishinev, where there is a contrast between women (“fashionably dressed,” with “expensive hairstyles,” “sipping exotic fruit concoctions,” “making stringent economic sacrifices for the sake of their appearances, a phenomenon especially common in the former Soviet Bloc and the Mediterranean”) and men, who “mostly looked like slobs” and who are slightly reminiscent of “a kind of debased, lumpen folkishness” encouraged by Ceaușescu and visible in “archaic, polluting factories destroying the landscape and the government television channels dominated by peasant dance groups” - a world that “by the looks of this bar deep in the countryside, had been completely eviscerated” (Kaplan, 2016: 94-95).

And yet - and coming full circle to the trope of women’s bodies embodying cities - it is still women who capture the strange combination between Bucharest’s Oriental spirit and its Occidental façade. In a case of postmodern “incongruous juxtapositions,” the heart of Bucharest is glimpsed through its assortment of female figures, some in “space-shoe heels, and others in bathroom slippers,” some in “leotards,” others in “pajamas,” so that “despite the haphazard gentrification” the scene is “as close to the dust-blown urban bleakness of Anatolia” as it is to Central Europe; in fact, the whole city is akin to a woman using cosmetics to enhance an impression - “Scrape away the lipstick and there was still the mournful, mealy face” (Kaplan, 2016: 36).

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## 6. Conclusion. Routes to Present Homelands

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Inevitably, the three writings analysed here act as nodes of memory that enable returns to the post-Cold War present. McEwan's Berlin of the 1950s is viewed from the vantage point of 1989 (finished in June 1989, McEwan already anticipates the thawing of the Cold War, and the end of the novel has Leonard return to Berlin in 1987, contemplating the wall but looking forward to its imminent fall), while McGuinness's 2011 standpoint re-members both the Bucharest frozen into conflict as well as a refashioned younger self thawing into an adult capable of navigating emotional intimacy as well as worldly complexity. Finally, Kaplan remembers the Cold War Bucharest of the 1970s and 1980s both as a point of contrast to the present as well as a *memento* enabling Kaplan to warn of the likelihood of a new Cold War based on soft power. Resonating as memoirs of love and war, and drawing on an arsenal of gendered geographical tropes to productively engage with local complexities and with routes to selfhood, the narratives discussed here are richly suggestive of how the personal and the political intermingle in constructing views of otherness.

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