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Book Review

Images of Turkey in Western Literature by Kamil Aydın, 1999, 199 pages. Available from: The British Council, Esat Caddesi No. 41, Küçükesat, 06660 Ankara, Turkey.

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As is true of many North Americans who came of age when I did, one of my first introductions to Turkey was the anti-Turkish *filmMidnight Express* (1978). The impact of this film cannot be overestimated; many of my friends, colleagues, and acquaintances, not one of whom had ever traveled to Turkey, advised me against coming here because of this film. To base one's impression of an entire country on one film may seem (and is, undoubtedly) so ridiculous as not to bear comment.

However, in his ambitious historical survey of western depictions of Turkey, *Images of Turkey in Western Literature,* Kamil Aydm provides a wealth of examples to show the power of this and other pejorative images to shape western attitudes toward Turkey. The image of Turkey *inMidnight Express* has the weight of centuries of negative depictions behind it. Indeed, one of Aydm's main arguments is that we cannot divorce twentieth-century representations of Turkey from past representations; "the historical process of repeating past images," Aydm writes, "has never been explicitly countered or brought to an end" (97).

Though the majority of the texts to which Aydm refers are British, *Images of Turkey in the West* culminates in a discussion *ofMidnight Express,* a North American film. Just as we cannot wrench contemporary representations of Turkey from the past, nor can we easily separate out British from North American depictions, so much does the discourse of Orientalism saturate western discourse. It would seem to be unfeasible now to discuss Orientalism without at least a passing reference to Said's pioneering work *Orientalism* (1978), and so we see Aydm begin his survey by locating his analysis within Said's discursive framework. Within his introduction Aydm also addresses the phenomenon of Turkey itself: what is Turkey? Though located partially on the European continent, Turkey typically is regarded by western writers as a Middle Eastern, rather than as a European, country, and tends to be indissolubly linked to its past history as the Ottoman Empire. Aydm then goes on to examine why the West is now so interested in Turkey. That interest has to do in part with the role of "chivalry and manliness which were effectively employed in the service of imperial expansion during the nineteenth century" (15), and was then disseminated by popular fiction and travelogues, both of which were very popular.

In his first chapter Aydm continues to explain this western interest in Turkey: it has to do largely with Turkey's geographic position and its role in western history, and in fact western depictions of Turkey often highlight its role in western wars and politics. Aydm offers very helpful historical background information on nineteenth- and twentieth-century Turkish history. He then presents a historical survey of western depictions of Turkey, beginning with the conquest of Istanbul (Constantinople) by the Ottomans in 1453, and moving on through portrayals on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage, in travel books and works of prose fiction in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and ending in post-Enlightenment Romantic and romanticizing fiction and poetry in the nineteenth.

Half of *Images of Turkey in Western Literature,* chapters two to five, focus on twentieth-century representations. Aydm organizes chapters two and three thematically, with chapter two addressing images of violence, and chapter three images of the exotic. Though he refers to a number of different primarily British but also American texts, those to which he devotes most of his attention, in his discussion of violence, include Dennis Wheatley's *The Eunuch of Stamboul (1935),* Rose Macaulay's *The Towers of Trebizond* (1956), Eric Ambler's *The Mask of*

Dimitrios (1966), Philip Glazebrook's *Journey to Kars* (1984), and William Dalrymple's *In Xanadu: A Quest* (1989). No one text nor small group of texts is highlighted in the third chapter on the exotic.

Chapter four, entitled "Impressions of Turkey and the Turks," adopts the point of view of a traveler, of what she or he might see and write about. Some of the topics here include representations of train travel in Turkey; of Istanbul, the first city most western travelers encounter when they first arrive in Turkey; of women, with a particular emphasis on what, to western eyes, appears to be their downtrodden and exploited status in society; and of stereotypes of Turks as villainous, corrupt, depraved, indifferent to history, ignorant, and so on. These first impressions are exploited in contemporary film, especially *Midnight Express*, as Aydm concludes in his fifth and final chapter, "Conclusion: From Verbal to Visual—Representations of Turkey into the 21st Century." The final paragraph of this chapter functions as a hopeful coda; these kinds of negative depictions, Aydm writes, may be "countered through mass tourism, since it is likely that direct perceptions of people make positive images" (148).

Images of Turkey in Western Literature is a useful and highly readable book for anyone who is interested in Orientalist studies, particularly for those focusing on Turkey. However, it would be more so if it were better edited and better organized. It contains a number of copyediting errors, most apparently those in the table of contents, where the titles of the chapters are not numbered, and do not correspond to the page numbers listed. The chapters themselves could give a clearer indication of the contents; for example, chapter one, given the vague title of "An Assortment of Negative Images," would have been more appropriately labeled "Four Centuries of Depictions of Turkey: 1453-1853." Yet this chapter is about more than that; it also addresses the reasons why Turkey features so prominently in western literature. That topic in itself perhaps belongs in its own chapter.

Aydm might have further contextualized his argument within the discourse of Orientalist criticism, and made it sharper, so that his book would be more analytical and not quite so descriptive. Aydm's writing style is clear and objective; as such, he might have quoted less. For example, more than a fourth of chapter three, "Images of the Exotic," consists of lengthy quotations. Perhaps it was the word "images" in the title of the book that led me to open the book first in search of pictures. If Aydm continues to work on this topic, and write an updated version for the future, perhaps one that highlights film, he might consider including photographs. Finally, in his effort to prove how unfavorably Turkey is portrayed in western literature and film, Aydm tends to exclude any mention of instances when Turkey is positively represented, and to elide over distinctions. There is a big difference, for example, between Mary Lee Settle's *Turkish Reflections* (1991) and Philip Glazebrook's *Journey to Kars.*

However, *Images of Turkey in Western Literature* is an important contribution to the field of Eastern studies, and particularly more so in that, as Aydm suggests, it is part of a growing *oeuvre* of work on the East written from a non-western perspective. More non-western perspectives will help to offset the egregious stereotyping that can result when one's only contact with a distant place is through the medium of romanticized and exoticized texts and images.

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