

Intermediaries of the two cultures

Introduction

- **Lord Alfred Tennyson**

-

- **Montenegro**

-

- *They rose to where their Sovran eagle sails.*
- *They kept their faith, their freedom, on the height.*
- *Chaste, frugal, savage, armed by day and night*
- *Against the Turk; whose inroad nowhere seals.*
- *Their headlong passes, but their footstep fails,*
- *And red with blood the Crescent reels from fight*
- *Before their dauntless hundreds, in prone flight*
- *By thousands down the crags and thro' the vales.*
- *O smallest among peoples! Rough rock – throne*
- *Of Freedom! Warriors beating back the swarm*
- *Of Turkish Islam for five hundred years, ...*
- *Great Tsernagora! Never since thine own*
- *Black ridges drew the cloud and brake the storm*
- *Has breathed a race of mightier mountaineers.*

-

-

(1877)

***“Velika Crna Goro! Još nikada otkad su tvoji
Crni grebeni privukli oblak i prolomili burom
Nije disao narod hrabrijih gorštaka!”***

(translated by Ljubomir Nenadović)

- **Tennyson's** sonnet "**Montenegro**", a panegyric dedicated to Montenegrins, was written under the influence of **William Gladstone**, the leader of British Liberals.
- Gladstone was the British Prime Minister (1868-1874)
- Gladstone supported whole-heartedly the tyrannized people in the Balkans in their fight against oppressors.

- In 1876 Gladstone published his pamphlet “Bulgarian Horrors and the Question of the East”.
- He also wrote “Montenegro: A Sketch”.
- In **May 1877** Gladstone addressed the House of Commons. His speech lasted for more than two hours. He talked passionately about the Montenegrin cause as well as other oppressed people in the Balkans.

“Tennyson participated in provoking public debate about the Balkans by responding to Gladstone’s appeal and publishing ‘Montenegro’ which appeared to readers in the May issue of the *Nineteenth Century* just as Gladstone delivered a rousing speech to Parliament promoting action in the Balkans. [...] Here Tennyson is merely the artistic expression of a campaign by Gladstone, whose sketch portrays the people of Montenegro as courageous, civilized mountain folk with a long history of martial heroism that parallels a long history of Turkish aggression recently demonstrated in violent oppression in Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Albania. Yet Montenegrins courageously held out against the Turks and refused to let go of their Christian freedom. [...] Gladstone shows the Montenegrins intellectually comparable to other western nations, because their leader carried the printing press into the mountains and used it to print laws.” (Ledbetter, 2007: 129-131)

- The image of Montenegro in Tennyson's sonnet is idealized and romanticized – this is the country of brave warriors, the impenetrable mountain kingdom whose heroes are compared symbolically with eagles.
- There are numerous translations of the sonnet.
- It was translated in a prose form as well as in a free verse poetic form; in some translations it even lost its sonnet form.
- Ljubomir Nenadović was the first one who translated this sonnet from English. This translation was published twice in 1877.

- Čedomilj Mijatović, a Serbian diplomat, writer and translator, wrote an article dedicated to Lord Tennyson. He also translated Tennyson's sonnet "Montenegro".
- He influenced a Montenegrin poet Jovan Sundečić to write a poem on Tennyson's death (1892). This poem was translated by Mijatović's wife, an English woman, Elodie Lawton Mijatović.
- Elodie Lawton Mijatović wrote a political article about Montenegro as well as a poem dedicated to her well-known countryman, Tennyson.
- Elodie and Čedomilj were important intermediaries between the cultures (diplomatic ties, translations to English / from English...)
- Čedomilj's successful translation of John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*; Elodie is considered to be the first translator of **Dickens's** literary works in this region.

Elodie Lawton Mijatovich




**Peter Preston, “From Illyria to James Bond:
Montenegro in British Writings 1601 – 2006”**

*in Recounting Cultural Encounters, New Castle upon Tyne, Cambridge
Scholars Publishing, 2009*

(pp13-15)

***an extract on Montenegro**



The Balkans simultaneously belonged to Europe and yet embodied various kinds of alarming difference and otherness. Here could be found a potential Europeanism of the purest kind, represented by Greece, the very cradle of Western civilised values, but a Europeanism that had been spoiled or turned by its long contact with and domination by the Ottoman Empire. Nor, as I have already suggested, was this situation entirely straightforward, because although in moral and religious terms, the English were anti-Turkish and anti-Islam, in political terms their official stance was pro-Turk and anti-Russian. Nonetheless, it was Gladstone's conversation with Tennyson about the courage of the Montenegrins in defying the Turks in March 1877 that led to the composition of a sonnet about Montenegro by England's most celebrated living poet.

*

They rose to where their Sovran eagle sails,
They kept their faith, their freedom, on the height,
Chaste, frugal, savage, armed by day and night
Against the Turk; whose inroad nowhere scales
Their headlong passes, but his footstep fails,
And red with blood the Crescent reels from fright
Before their dauntless hundreds, in prone flight
By thousands down the crags and through the vales.
O smallest among peoples! Rough rock-throne
Of Freedom! Warriors beating back the swarm
Of Turkish Islam for five hundred years,

Great Tsernagora! Never since thine own
Black ridges drew the cloud and brake the storm
Has breathed a race of mightier mountaineers.⁶

With words like “eagle,” “scales,” “headlong,” “crag,” “rock-throne,” “ridges,” and “mountaineers”, the sonnet is packed with images of height, while the stoniness of many of these words lends them additional associations of obduracy and firmness. It also associates height with freedom, a trope that Tennyson also employs in a poem written in 1833 and published in 1842, which begins “Of old sat Freedom on the heights.”⁷ This is developed into the poem’s overall sense of elevation, of the Montenegrins occupying the heights both literally and metaphorically, physically and morally. Tennyson also emphasises the relative size of the opposing armies: the Montenegrins, “smallest among peoples,” are numbered in hundreds, while the Turkish “swarm” (conveying a submerged image of venomous insects) runs to thousands. The numerical inferiority of the Montenegrins is set against their heights of courage: they are “dauntless warriors,” people of “Great Tsernagora,” “mightier mountaineers,” who have defended their country over the enormous time span of five hundred years. Against this is set the comparative weakness of their opponent, whose “footstep fails,” who “reels from fright” and is to be seen “in prone flight,” a vulnerability emphasised by the rhyming words “fright”/“flight” and the emphatic alliteration on the letter “f”. The Montenegrins are “[c]haste, frugal, savage” and although the last word hints at the notion of a lack of “civilisation” in the European sense, Tennyson’s placing of these qualities at the beginning of the line and the metrical emphasis they carry suggests that they are rough but admirable virtues in the context of their defiance of the Turk. Furthermore, the alliterative link of “faith,” “freedom” and “frugal” balances the judgement of the Turks in “fail,” “fright” and “flight.” The rhythm and metre of the poem are steady and dignified, and Tennyson, who according to his son Hallam placed Montenegro “first among his sonnets,” is intervening in a tradition of sonnet-writing, also to be found in the work of John Milton

⁶ Alfred Lord Tennyson, “Montenegro,” *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, 1969), 1240. The sonnet was first published in the prestigious periodical the *Nineteenth Century*, May 1877 and was accompanied by an article about Montenegro by Gladstone.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 617-618.