Dracula and the Cultural Construction of Europe*

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Professors Coundouriotis and Senf have written truly innovative articles regarding Bram Stoker's *Dracula* because of the focus that they have put on the importance of place to the novel. However, it is possible to go even further down the path that they have blazed and situate geography at the absolute center of the novel rather than just on the periphery. The purpose of this paper is not so much to disagree with Professor Coundouriotis, but instead to build on and alter her argument, in which I believe she is too concerned with specifics that are not entirely substantiated (as pointed out by Professor Senf in her reply). I do not believe that it was necessary for Stoker to know much about the historical Vlad (as argued by Miller 182), because instead of tapping into historical specifics, Stoker is tapping into a larger geographic construct (Eastern Europe) which has a series of meanings already attached to it.

Since it is impossible to adequately paraphrase Professor Coundouriotis' detailed and substantial argument, I will focus on a few of her major points. She, for the first time, puts *Dracula* in the historical and geographic context in which it was written by foregrounding the importance of the Eastern Question to Britain, and by extension, European identity. In this, I wholeheartedly agree. Furthermore, she claims that Dracula represents the Ottoman influence in Eastern Europe: "a source of history that 'logically' (but also anxiously) needs to be silenced" (144). To this, though, I must demur and posit another

^{*}Reference: Eleni Coundouriotis, "Dracula and the Idea of Europe," Connotations 9.2 (1999/2000): 143-59; Carol A. Senf, "A Response to 'Dracula and the Idea of Europe," Connotations 10.1 (2000/2001): 47-58

Europe," Connotations 10.1 (2000/2001): 47-58.
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possible reading in which Dracula represents not just the Ottoman influence and threat, but instead all of Eastern Europe, more extensive than the former Turkish areas. The important issue is less the Eastern Question than it is the cultural construction of Europe itself. To understand this position, one must pull back from the specific text of *Dracula* and instead look at the genre of travel literature during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a body of literature that *Dracula* imitates through its heavy use of journal entries and letters from abroad. Indeed, one must also pull back from the specific politics associated with the Eastern Question and instead look at the politics associated with the construction of "the East" within Europe itself.

Travel Literature and the Enlightenment

Larry Wolff (4) attributes the construction of an Eastern Europe that is separate from the "civilized" portions of Western Europe to Enlightenment philosophers (in particular, Voltaire and Rousseau) who perpetuated and mythologized each other's accounts of a backward and barbaric homogenous region (some of them despite never actually going there). For example, Voltaire's History of Charles XII (1731) was critical in mapping Eastern Europe in the popular imagination by describing Charles' march through Eastern Europe. This book was written in the first person and instilled a fantasy-filled image of Eastern Europe that later travelers would bring with them to Eastern Europe, inserting a lens of preconceptions in their imagination. We know that the book was extremely influential because it had several printings and translations, and its effect was far-reaching and long lasting. Later Voltaire would write a history of the Russian Empire under the rule of Peter the Great (1759) and he used the now popular image of Peter as a "modernizer" to paint Russia as innately backwards and in need of Europeanization (a representation of the Russian executive that was still dominant in the Western media during the more recent reign of Boris Yeltsin). Later correspondence between

Voltaire and Catherine the Great (which was all published at the time) further established Russia as a "backward" land in the minds of readers. Rousseau played a similar role in the cultural construction of Poland, constructing Poland and its neighbors as chaotic, despotic, or both:

Poland is a large state surrounded by even more considerable states which, by reason of their despotism and military discipline, have great offensive power. Herself weakened by anarchy, she is, in spite of Polish valor, exposed to all their insults [...]. No economic organization; few or no troops; no military discipline, no order, no subordination; ever divided within, ever menaced from without, she has no intrinsic stability, and depends on the caprice of her neighbors. (2: 431)

In addition to this representation from philosophers who may or may not actually have been to Eastern Europe there were similar depictions available to the public from completely fictional travelers, such as those of Baron Munchausen (Wolff 100-06). While there was a real Baron Munchausen who did travel through Eastern Europe, the stories published about his namesake were tall tales written by Rudolf Raspe that portrayed Eastern Europe as a ridiculous and fantastic place. This representation became fashionable just as travel to the region increased, which is interesting as evidence supporting the cliché "familiarity breeds contempt" because Southwest Asia and East Asia received a much more romantic image, perhaps because of their inaccessibility for most Europeans at the time. Similarly, Goldsworthy notes: "the Gothic plot [as of Dracula] requires a setting which is sufficiently close to the reader to appear threatening, while nevertheless being alien enough to house all the exotic paraphernalia—the castles, the convents, the caverns, the dark forests at midnight, the mysterious villains and the howling specters" (75). Todorova outlines a similar process of "discovery" for the Balkans, where diplomats and other travelers to the region came back with stories and descriptions that were rich in detail and description, especially of the beauty of the women and the "crudeness" of the men. Thus, Jonathan Harker's journal entries must be viewed as they would have been viewed at the time they were written—as a throwback to a not-so-distant literary era, when Eastern Europe came to be known as a magical, timeless place, and *Dracula* serves as a part of that same politico-geographic project whereby Eastern Europe was constructed as something entirely different than the West.

The Cultural Construction of Eastern Europe

Built on a foundation of Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Lewis and Wigen have drawn in vivid colors this historical geography of the West and its polar opposite, the East. They note that although there are many cognitive boundaries that have been used as the East/West border, one of the most entrenched in the Western mental map is the frontier that marks the maximum sphere of Ottoman influence, which is seemingly the boundary that is being crossed by Jonathan Harker when he writes his "crossing over" journal entry: "The impression I had was that we were leaving the West and entering the East; the most western of splendid bridges over the Danube, which is here of noble width and depth, took us among the traditions of Turkish rule" (Stoker 1). These "crossing over" journal entries were common in the travel literature of the Enlightenment (Wolff 19).

The boundary line between the West and the East is commonly perceived to be somewhere in Europe, even if different people put it in different places (McNeill 513-14). This division has taken on a life of its own, reified by everyone from academics to policymakers. Many scholars have noted that the Cold War and its image of the "Iron Curtain" resonated so strongly because they reinforced an already dominant spatialization of Europe's regions. Take for example this quote from historian Thomas W. Simons, Jr. regarding the fall of the Iron Curtain, noting both the reification and the othering of the East:

The first scenario, as we all remember, was euphoric, in both West and East. It projected that the East would simply *become* the West, in short order and at practically no cost, because it has always been the West, and had been

prevented from being the West by the artificial Communist system [...]. But that scenario has had its day; it has run up against the creeping realization that the East is different from the West, that it will not simply become the West, and that efforts on both sides to harmonize structures and interests will be politically costly. (Quoted in Lampe and Nelson 8)

Larry Wolff goes on to relate his view that the East/West division of Europe stemmed from the economic differentiation that was becoming more visible between the two halves of Europe during the Industrial Revolution (8). The Enlightenment belief in teleological "progress" imputed a moral difference because Eastern Europe was "lagging" behind in industrial capacity and social relations. This "lagging" was ascribed to any number of "Eastern" influences, including irrationality, laziness, or superstition. In addition, by creating an underdeveloped and stagnant East, it was possible to ignore the formal delineation of the Europe/Asia border at the Ural Mountains. This continental boundary was a standard imposed by Peter the Great's geographer, Vassily Tatishchev (and later amended by Philipp-Johann von Strahlenberg), in the 1690s to enlarge Europe to the east, highlight the European nature of the Russian core, and construct the vastness of Siberia as an Asian space fit for colonial expansion (Lewis and Wigen 27). The Asian/European border could now be moved west to wherever the Enlightenment "ended" and the alleged stagnation began. This schism of Europe was not the first intellectual project of this sort; in fact it replaced the previously dominant view of two Europes, north and south. Until the Renaissance it had been in vogue in the West to contrast classical southern Europe with barbarian Germanic Europe to the north. However, with the development of the Northern Renaissance followed soon after by the Enlightenment, it was no longer plausible to maintain this division. In addition, it should be noted that the dialectic of Southern Europe/Northern Europe was nested within the larger Eastern Europe/Western Europe schism. For much of the medieval era the East was constructed by Byzantine elites as ascendant, while the West (both northern and southern parts) was the pejorative region, synonymous with "barbarity and crudeness" (Todorova 11). In return, the West constructed itself as being morally superior (if less affluent) in comparison to the corrupt East, represented by the Byzantine Empire (McNeill 516).

In any event, the construction of an informal meridian of difference between East and West has influenced Western policy makers and academics for centuries. In particular the Iron Curtain embodied the policies influenced by the East/West cultural dichotomy. It is incredibly easy for the Western observer to imagine Eastern Europe as living behind a curtain, with the flame of Enlightenment knowledge having been extinguished and the people having submitted to the free reign of cunning Slavic/Oriental despots. Oriental despotism is a common representation of "the East" that typically stemmed from the environmentally deterministic view that Asian society was despotic because of the necessity of centralized control over irrigation. This now discredited idea nevertheless spawned the stereotype of the East as a place that requires dictatorship, or is unfit for democracy. For example, although Eastern European agriculture requires no more irrigation than Western European agriculture, the region was nevertheless viewed as a territory fit for despotism (Lewis and Wigen 75-76). Historian Tony Judt perhaps best states the Cold War political ramifications of this "hydraulic authoritarian" paradigm in the context of Yalta:

In the Western intellectual and political imagination, reconstructing Europe after 1945 became synonymous with creating economic and diplomatic cohesion among the Western allies and the reconstructed countries of Western Europe [...]. The 'lands between' entered into cultural limbo and Russian political tutelage. (Quoted in Graubard 26)

Most relevant in this quote is the casting of Eastern Europe as "the lands between" the West and the Soviet Union, almost devoid of spatial reference.

The Geographic Context of Dracula

It is this construction of Eastern Europe as "the lands between" that is central to the geographic interpretation of *Dracula*. Professor Coundouriotis writes:

I want to argue that Stoker is setting in motion a delegitimation of the Ottoman history of Eastern Europe through the figure of the vampire, whose hybrid identification (a result of his history) as both Christian and Ottoman, makes him monstrous and ultimately incoherent, a source of history that "logically" (but also anxiously) needs to be silenced. (144)

I am arguing that the hybrid identity of Eastern Europe is less decided in favor of a "delegitimation of the Ottoman History of Eastern Europe" than it is a reaffirmation of that Ottoman history as a way of distancing Western Europe from Eastern Europe. Professor Coundouriotis notes, quite rightly, the historical context of the Eastern Question in which the novel was written. With new Balkan states gaining independence, Western Europe was indeed forced to make a decision-how to identify these liminal spaces on the edge of Europe? These states were Christian and within the boundaries of Europe as they were commonly understood-yet this territory had been abandoned by the Enlightenment as uncivilized, Oriental spaces fit to be ignored or treated as a Tabula Rasa by the West. A stark choice had to be made. The two alternatives were to shift to a larger conceptualization of Europe that included the new Southeastern European states, or instead to continue to represent them as "the East," beyond the bounds of European civilization.

Thus, Dracula can be seen as the geographic disciplining of these new Eastern European states. Instead of being allowed into "Europe," they have instead been driven back into "the Orient." If Count Dracula is understood to represent the new Balkan states, this theme is mirrored in Dracula by the Count's desire to move to London—leaving Old Europe behind and joining the dynamic New Europe. Instead, Dracula is repulsed and driven back to Eastern Europe by the representatives of the West—Van Helsing the Dutchman, Harker the

Englishman, and Morris the Texan. Thus, the new Balkan states are disallowed admission into Europe by representatives from the West.

Furthermore, the story's main action can be seen not just as a disciplining of Eastern Europe, but also reciprocally as a disciplining of the West. Because many of the "exotic" features of Eastern identity, such as lust, pain, sexuality, and violence, are seen as both tempting and contemptible in Western society, it is necessary not only to exclude actual "Easterners" (i.e., Dracula and the new Balkan states) but also the Eastern lifestyle in order to protect Western identity from "contamination." The story of *Dracula* not only constructs a spatial order in Europe but also reminds Western readers of the justice that is meted out to those who are corrupted by the East.

The claim on the new Balkan states to Europeanness is, like Dracula's claim on Europe, based on history. As Professor Coundouriotis notes, Dracula's professed history is not so much the history of an individual, but of a people (148). This elision creates a free-floating association between the figure and the region. Dracula notes the debt that Europe owes to his people: "to us was trusted the guarding of the frontier of Turkey-land" (30). Therefore, the very Ottoman influence in the Balkan states that is held against them by the West is their claim on Europe—they were the front lines against the Turk; they suffered to protect Europe. However, the West's reason for excluding the Balkan states, and by extension the Count, is rooted in ontology. As Professor Coundouriotis has noted, Van Helsing delegitimizes Dracula's history by using it as a weapon against him (148). To Van Helsing, and by extension the West, Dracula's history is not a justification for admittance to the New Europe and therefore its delegitimation is a necessary act. Instead, Dracula's characteristics are the inescapable bonds that tie him to the Orient. Thus, Dracula's claim is based on what he was, while Van Helsing's exclusionary action is based on what Dracula is.

The Asserted Ontology of East and West

This section will show the method by which Van Helsing, and by extension, Western Europe, have characterized Dracula and Eastern Europe as fundamentally different in order to make the exclusionary argument cited above. It will draw on the original thoughts of many distinguished scholars and put their insights into a new framework. In Dracula, as in other literature of the time, Western Europe and Eastern Europe are portrayed as opposing spaces, which together embody a series of dichotomous relationships. As mentioned prior, this process of othering was rendered invisible by Western Europe's hegemonic economic and cultural power. Professor Senf alludes to some of these dichotomies, but the importance of them to the constitution of Eastern Europe is not recognized (24, 37). The first of these dichotomies is Western Europe's civilization versus Eastern Europe's barbarism. This opposition is one of historic importance, as "civilization" is a value-laden statement that originally meant simply a settled, non-nomadic existence but has since come to be associated with good manners, ethical decision-making, distinguished culture, and other normative goods. Barbarian, in its original formulation (by the ancient Greeks-see McNeill), simply meant "one who does not speak Greek," but has since become associated with all that is un-civilized: poor hygiene and appearance, cruelty to enemies, a lack of distinguished culture, and a lack of attachment to place. This normative geography is inscribed in Dracula's text, as Transylvania and the Count himself are portrayed as barbarian. For instance, Jonathan Harker writes this in his journal on the way to Transylvania:

The strangest figures we saw were the Slovaks, who were more barbarian than the rest, with their big cow-boy hats, great baggy dirty-white trousers, white linen shirts, and enormous heavy leather belts, nearly a foot wide, all studded over with brass nails [...]. On the stage they would be set down at once as some old Oriental band of brigands. (3)

According to this, not only the Slovaks are "barbarian," but so is

everyone else in Eastern Europe. In addition, they are clearly inscribed as "Oriental."

The next dichotomy between East and West on display in Dracula is that of Western Europe's mind versus Eastern Europe's body. This opposition is perhaps best embodied in the character of Renfield. Renfield, a representative of the West, is converted to Dracula's cult of personality, which is interpreted in London as insanity. Thus, he is committed to an asylum, despite the fact that he essentially has incorporated the truth as embodied by Dracula: "My homicidal maniac is of a peculiar kind. I shall have to invent a new classification for him, and call him a zoophagous (life-eating) maniac. What he desires is to absorb as many lives as he can, and he has laid himself out to achieve it in a cumulative way" (74-75). The West interprets Renfield's commitment to Dracula's Eastern ideology as irrationality. Later, after continued treatment in a Western asylum, Renfield casts out his Eastern influence and chooses to take sides with the West when he turns on the Count to try to protect Mina. Furthermore, as Professor Coundouriotis has noted, the story is told in large part through a series of journal entries (145-46)-a style that is immediately acceptable to Western audiences as authentic despite its obvious epistemological flaws. The journal entries, because rational Western actors have made them, are acceptable in a way that the narrative from the East (carried by Renfield) is not.

The rationality of Western Europe is contrasted with the carnality of Eastern Europe. Although Bram Stoker's Count is less sexualized than later incarnations of Dracula, Transylvania is infused by both sexuality and violence. This is most obvious in the scene with the female vampires:

There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear [...]. One said, "Go on! You are first, and we shall follow. Yours' [sic] is the right to begin." The other added, "He is young and strong. There are kisses for us all." I lay quiet, looking out from under my eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation. The fair girl advanced and bent over me till I could feel the movement of her breath upon

me. Sweet it was in one sense, honey-sweet, and sent the same tingling through the nerves as her voice, but with a bitter underlying the sweet, a bitter offensiveness, as one smells in blood. (39)

This blending of pleasure and pain helps to construct Eastern Europe as a place of physicality and desire that is easily contrasted to Western Europe. This is not the first time that Eastern Europe has been portrayed in this way. Larry Wolff quotes Casanova in his autobiography, *The Story of My Life*, discussing with a Russian army officer how to purchase a 13 year-old girl from the girl's father:

"Suppose I were willing to give the hundred rubles?"

"Then you would have her in your service and you would have the right to go to bed with her."

"And if she did not want it?"

"Oh, that never happens. You would have the right to beat her." (51)

While Casanova's amorous exploits throughout Europe were famous, it was only in Russia that he was confronted with societal mores such as this, where violence, power, and sexual relations were so intimately interrelated. This equation of sensuality and passivity is not merely an artifact of the past—instead it is a longstanding portrayal of the East. This can be seen in a simple search on the World Wide Web for "Russian Wives." There are a plethora of services for arranged marriages available, each advertising a connection with a woman who "expects to be treated as a lady, she is the weaker gender and knows it. The Russian woman has not been exposed to the world of rampant feminism that asserts it's [sic] rights in America." Thus, Dracula partakes in a long-standing cliché-ridden tradition of representing Eastern Europe as a place of sexualized violence where power informs every romantic relationship.

In a manner similar to the distinction made between Western *mind* and Eastern *body*, Stoker's novel maintains a historical distinction between Western *science* and Eastern *magic*. This is easily seen in the latter parts of the book, when Dracula is fleeing back to his home in Eastern Europe and the Westerners are chasing him. Dracula's power

is elemental, with his seemingly magical control of the weather propelling his ship east. The counterpoint is the mechanical power of his pursuers, who use the (in 1897) innovative technology of the locomotive to race across Europe in an effort to beat Dracula back to his castle. In addition, the Westerners' knowledge of the Count's plans comes from psychology (in particular, hypnosis), a rapidly advancing scientific field of the time. Van Helsing in particular serves as the icon of learning and reason:

He stepped over and sat down beside me, and went on, "You are a clever man, friend John. You reason well, and your wit is bold, but you are too prejudiced. You do not let your eyes see nor your ears hear, and that which is outside your daily life is not of account to you [...] Ah, it is the fault of our science that it wants to explain all, and if it explain not, then it says there is nothing to explain." (200)

Van Helsing is promoting a pure scientific method—one that is not prejudiced against phenomena that it has not yet explained. Thus, Western Europe is portrayed as a space of rationality and scientific advance.

In contrast, Transylvania (and by extension, Eastern Europe) is portrayed as a place of magic. Dracula greets Harker to his castle with this comment: "We are in Transylvania, and Transylvania is not England. Our ways are not your ways, and there shall be to you many strange things. Nay, from what you have told me of your experiences already, you know something of what strange things there may be" (28). Harker has this verified for him via experience and he writes about it in his journal:

But my very feelings changed to repulsion and terror when I saw the whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over the dreadful abyss, face down with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings. At first I could not believe my eyes. I thought it was some trick of the moonlight, some weird effect of shadow, but I kept looking, and it could be no delusion. I saw the fingers and toes grasp the corners of the stones, worn clear of the mortar by the stress of years, and by thus using every projection and inequality move downwards with considerable speed, just as a lizard moves along a wall. (35)

That Eastern Europe is a place of fantasy and magic is a long-held truism in travel literature. This is a fundamental theme of Baron Munchausen's travelogue. For example, the Baron's journal includes this fable:

A frightful wolf rushed upon me so suddenly, and so close, that I could do nothing but follow mechanical instinct, and thrust my fist into his open mouth. For safety's sake I pushed on and on, till my arm was fairly in up to the shoulder. How should I disengage myself? I was not much pleased with my awkward situation—with a wolf face to face; our ogling was not of the most pleasant kind. If I withdrew my arm, then the animal would fly the more furiously upon me; that I saw in his flaming eyes. In short, I laid hold of his tail, turned him inside out like a glove, and flung him to the ground, where I left him. (Quoted in Wolff 102)

Both the Baron's experience and the Count's lizard-like mode of transportation are only comprehensible within the bounds of Eastern Europe—a space that is defined by its connection to the unexplainable and irrational.

Furthermore, Eastern Europe is portrayed as a place eternally of the past, with London (and all of Western Europe) portrayed as the dynamic source of change and innovation. Professor Senf argues a point that directly ties into this dichotomy: "I suggest that readers also look at Dracula as a remnant of a primitive and warlike past that was being replaced during Stoker's lifetime with something more scientific and democratic" (51). This obviously ties into the representation of Western Europe as the home of science, but it goes further than that. It is an explicit connection between the spatial and the temporal; anything in Dracula's castle is literally hundreds of years old, including the Count himself. Dracula is, of course, aristocracy-a symbol of Europe's socio-economic past. In contrast, Harker, Van Helsing, and Mina Murray are all middle-class and self-made, symbols of the modern Europe. Mina gives further evidence of the rapid pace of social change in Western Europe in this journal entry: "Some of the 'New Women' writers will some day start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see each other asleep before proposing or accepting. But I suppose the 'New Woman' won't condescend in future to accept. She will do the proposing herself. And a nice job she will make of it too!" It would be easy to think that the forces of modernity were preordained (out of sheer teleological necessity) to defeat the forces of the past; but Harker realizes that this is not so: "And yet, unless my senses deceive me, the old centuries had, and have, powers of their own which mere 'modernity' cannot kill" (37).

To further differentiate between Eastern Europe and Western Europe, travel literature from the West often called into question the Christian credentials of the Eastern Europeans, and Dracula is no different. However, Dracula's religious role is definitely problematic and is not categorically defined as we have seen in the earlier dichotomies. The Count served, as he reminds the reader, at the front line in the defense of Christendom against the Muslim Turks. Nevertheless, at the time of the novel's action, Dracula is decidedly non-practicing. This ambiguity is expressed in the travel literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For a region as closely linked to Christendom as Europe was, a journal entry like this one from the Count d' Hauterive acted as a marker of East/West difference: "The imams and priests always have the same indulgence for alliances between the faithful of the two religions. It is not at all rare to see turbans and images sheltered under the same roof, and the Koran and the Gospel one upon the other" (quoted in Wolff 118). This hybridity of religion marks the East as less pure than the West, simultaneously Christian and not Christian; since Christendom is also linked to the idea of Europe, it therefore marks Eastern Europe as something separate from, yet linked to, the larger idea of Europe.

Conclusions

This formulation of Eastern Europe as something neither Asian nor fully European is the ontological assertion that Van Helsing, Harker, and the rest of the Western coterie make regarding the Count, and by extension Eastern Europe. The persecution of the Count, based on his

characteristics (barbaric, pagan, dangerous), parallels the cognitive distance that Western Europe has imposed between itself and Eastern Europe, which is also based on Eastern Europe's characteristics as attributed by the West (uncivilized, pagan, etc.). Thus, *Dracula* must be seen in its full literary and historical context. The Count *must* be from Eastern Europe for the story to have its maximum cultural resonance; the story is as horrifying as it is because Dracula is this emblem of Eastern European danger threatening the West. *Dracula* is not the only novel to take advantage of this geographic imaginary—Goldsworthy notes that "Typically, because of the need for a dichotomy between the familiar and the exotic, Gothic locations are on the edges of a particular geographical area, in its remote corners and on its borderlands" (76).

Dracula is part of a larger literary politico-geographic project that constructs difference between Eastern and Western Europe, spanning such varied genres as the travel literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Enlightenment philosophy, and the Gothic horror novel. This project has vast political and cultural ramifications, as it helps to structure the geographic imagination of the reader. Most readers of this literature will never travel to Eastern Europe and as a result will gain their perceptions of that place from the literature cited above (or media influenced by that literature). *Dracula*, as part of this project, is particularly important because of its literary longevity and its role as the inspiration for an entire genre of books and movies, as well as a sub-culture, each of which reconstructs the division of Europe into east and west and makes it more of a taken-for-granted fact of life.

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NOTES

¹This book could also fall into the category of travel literature—Casanova's life story is told in a very geographic fashion.

²From http://www.chanceforlove.com (accessed 9/22/03); emphasis added by author.

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