

Alexander Grammatikos, *British Romantic Literature and the Emerging Modern Greek Nation*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. Pp. 221. £64.99. ISBN 9783319904399.

The continental political theatre during the Age of Revolution had Greece amongst its most critical trouble spots. As an oppressed nation and community, crucially positioned under the sphere of influence of the declining Ottoman Empire, and as the historical – however controversial – objective correlative of what had come to be perceived as the vital legacy of classical culture and art, Greece, and the Greek question, played a central role in early nineteenth-century European geopolitics, developing discourses of nationalism, and cross-European intercultural relations. Alexander Grammatikos's original study investigates and dynamically situates Romantic-era British responses to the complexities of modern Greece against a nuanced and contradictory background, where the construction of an idealised Hellenic past as the formative core of Western art, culture and politics, uneasily coexisted with present Greece's perceived contiguity with the Ottoman Empire. Expanding on established scholarship on Romantic Hellenism (from Timothy Webb to Jennifer Wallace and David Ferris), and infusing his critical outlook with Mary Louise Pratt's notion of 'contact zone', Grammatikos argues for the centrality of British Romantic literary culture in carrying out the process of disentangling Modern Greece 'from the Ottoman world' (11), thus contributing to creation of an often 'Western-oriented, *Hellenized* Modern Greece' (12).

The range of case studies discussed in the volume is wide, as it engages with a variety of both canonical and lesser- or little-known writers and texts. Within the tight time span of the two crucial early decades of the nineteenth century (1809-1826) positioned before and during the Greek War of Independence, the monograph identifies an aptly diversified selection of close readings, thus indirectly supporting the opening claim regarding the relevance of 'generic and formal experimentation' (2) to the early nineteenth-century debates about Modern Greece. Chapter 2 contrasts two dissimilar views of Modern Greece and its prospective emancipation, as exemplified in Sydney Owenson's *Woman: Or Ida of Athens* (1809) and Thomas Hope's *Anastasis; or, Memoirs of a Greek* (1819). In Chapter 3, Lord Byron's *Child Harold's Pilgrimage* I and II (1812) and John Cam Hobhouse's *Journey through Albania and Other Provinces of Turkey in Europe and Asia* (1813) are shown to provide contrasting perceptions of both culture and education in Modern Greece, and Greek struggle for self-determination, which define the different modulation of their authors' philhellenism, as evidence that 'the ideology of Romantic nationalism, in a Greek context, was never neutral or innocent' (97).

Chapter 4 brings together three texts produced in the midst of the Greek War of Independence, including P. B. Shelley's 1822 verse drama *Hellas*, Catherine Grace Godwin's novel *Reine Canziani* – significantly subtitled *A Tale of Modern Greece* – and Felicia Hemans's narrative poem 'The Bride of the Greek Isle', both published in 1825. What these three diverse works share, Grammatikos suggests, is a questioning of the Western (British) construction of Modern Greek life and society and its political predicament, as conveyed through their nuanced articulations of the captive woman trope. In the three texts under consideration, this is intended to elicit support for the Greek struggle for self-determination, while at the same time acknowledging European powers' liability in the Eastern war theatre. Interestingly, the 'limits of European [and specifically British] philhellenism' that all the three works address emerge as inherent in the symbolic core of the captive woman trope. Felicia Hemans's narrative poem in particular is shown to carry out a major critique of the gendered figuration of oppressed Greece, whereby the captive woman Eudora's act of self-immolation signifies women's agency, thus disrupting, in Grammatikos's view, 'the sexual politics of early nineteenth-century philhellenic representations of Greece' (138). In the final

chapter, again two novels – Tertius Kendrick’s *The Travellers* (1825), and Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man* (1826) – are read contrastively, where their use of ‘historical imagination’ – whether projected back into past as in the former, or forward into future as with the latter – is discussed as accounting for their (not necessarily intentional) contribution to ‘the larger philhellenic mission of providing Greece with a national narrative’ (160).

A compact and systematic study, this book provides a dense, solid, and at the same time dynamic account of the cultural, ideological, and political nodes underlying the process of Greek national independence, in a transnational and cross-cultural perspective. Against this background, Romantic-era writers, as the study shows in great detail, actively entered the debate, especially as they positioned themselves in relation to the relevance of the Greek question in shaping ‘discussions about British hegemony and West-East power dynamics’ (14). In this respect, the book, by shedding light on the consequence of Romantic-era debates on Modern Greece and the process of its formation as a nation state, contributes an original approach to both ‘the field of British Romantic Hellenism’ (1), and the related area of Romantic nationalism studies.

Franca Dellarosa
Aldo Moro University of Bari