



Between East and West: Polish and Russian Nineteenth-Century Travel to the Orient (Rochester Studies in East and Central Europe)

Izabela Kalinowska

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This study analyzes and compares Polish and Russian texts of travel to the Romantic and Biblical Orient and situates Polish and Russian Orientalism within the broader context of contemporary post-colonial studies. At the same time, it elucidates the shortcomings that arise when such theories are applied whole cloth to the Polish and Russian cases. In the nineteenth century, scholarly and literary Orientalism enjoyed great popularity in Eastern Europe, in part because the 'East Europeans' desired to participate as equals in the intellectual life of Europe as a whole. Historically, both the Polish and Russian nations had always existed in close proximity to the Muslim world, and each of them had experienced extensive exposure to a fusion of Western and Eastern cultural traditions. But while the two cultures shared the intersection of Western and native cultural traditions that in turn played a determinative role in their encounters with the East, the growing political empowerment of Russia and the disenfranchisement of Poland differentiated the Polish and Russian perspectives. It is precisely this striking and fascinating power disparity between the two Slavic nations that has inspired this study's juxtaposition of Polish and Russian texts. The records of individual Oriental voyages provided in Polish and Russian works of literary Orientalism document a quest for cultural self-definition. This is the case with Adam Mickiewicz's 'Crimean Sonnets,' Aleksandr Pushkin's Caucasian poetry, and with other nineteenth-century accounts that, in spite of their original popularity, subsequently underwent marginalization. East European records of travel constitute a work of interpretation and translation on several levels. As such they provide us with a fascinating repository of the authors' attempts to locate their own cultures in the intermediary space between the East and the West. Izabela Kalinowska is an assistant professor of Slavic literatures and cultures at Stony Brook University.

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