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Title: Turning Toward the Sun Ascending: Segalen and Leontiev's Orientalist Modernisms

Abstract:

The discourse surrounding such politically loaded words as “exoticism” and “Orientalism” has been a fraught territory for practitioners and critics alike. Whereas postcolonial studies have given us a broad base of new tools to understand and criticize these outlooks, 19th-century modernism provided some alternative answers to the problem which propose to redefine the question entirely. Homi Bhaba's notoriously slippery language already bifurcates the oriental into discovery versus invention, and such dialectics abound in studies of oriental aesthetics. Kipling's hyper-detailing seems in stark contrast to the Ballets Russes' mobilization of legible cliché, the oriental canvas' of Gerome take on an altogether different character than his Russian student Vereshchagin. Our tidy definitions seem more ephemeral the closer we look; even Said had to focus on particular cultural interactions and contexts to render his definition effectively.

In the Russian context the question becomes considerably more complex – particularly in the wake of Van Der Oye's *Russian Orientalism* (2010) which argues for Russia's historic and cultural proximity to the East. My research presents a case study which attempts to work through Van Der Oye's thesis by comparing two thinkers who provide enticing and fruitful takes on orientalism on the tale end of its naivete in the late 19th century.

I open discussing the temporal and spatial definitions of orientalism and the exotic, comparing the terms and attempting to place them within the Russian context. Next, I critically examine Victor Segalen's redefinition of exoticism as an ontological category regarding difference as such. By way of comparison I analyze the romantic reactionary Konstantin Leontiev whose “aesthetic hatred of democracy”¹ (Berdyayev) led him to propose an eastern turn for Russia, anticipating numerous trends in the Silver Age, as well as in the Eurasianist movement. Between these two authors I attempt to place their exoticism within more sophisticated philosophical frameworks, namely Heidegger and Shklovsky, whose respective ideas on aesthetics correlate in illuminating ways. Lastly I analyze the contemporary political implications garnered from this comparison by looking at Svetlana Boym's *Future of Nostalgia* (2001) as interlocutor into the temporalized exotic.

This comparison will not only serve to complicate the way we understand orientalism as an aesthetic, but will also make a claim about how these orientalisms functioned as reactions to the conditions of modernism, leading to contemporary resonance. In particular I want to make a case about the peculiarities of the Russian exotic as an essential aspect of understanding modern Russian geopolitics.

¹N. A. Berdyayev, “K. Leont'ev -- Philosopher of a Reactionary Romanticism,” *Berdyayev.com* (2006), accessed April 20, 2017.

