

Monika Kowalczyk-Piaseczna
(Uniwersytet Śląski)

IN SEARCH FOR THE EXOTIC: COLIN THUBRON AND WILLIAM
DALRYMPLE'S JOURNEYS TO THE EASTERN FOUNT
OF CHRISTIANITY

FORMATION OF THE EXOTIC¹

The concept of **Exoticism** has been interconnected with both colonial practices and travel writing since relocating and exposing oneself to the unfamiliar became possible². An image of a conqueror who was not only expected to discover exotic lands but also to make them subordinate³, was created in the European tradition, which largely contributed to the establishment of a particular relation with the inhabitants of the explored areas, tinged by a superior/inferior dependence⁴. Benedict Anderson describes the peculiarity of this dependence in *Imagined Communities*⁵, naming this phenomenon of subjection “**colonial racism**”⁶ and illustrating the inclination members of colonising communities manifested to subjugate the outlying territories. This proclivity to subjugation was evidently provoked by the fact that the traditions of imperial communities have built their foundations on “the idea of European identity [...] [being] a superior one in comparison with all the non-European peoples and cultures”⁷. Anderson elucidates the phenomenon in these words:

Colonial racism was a major element in that conception of ‘Empire’ which attempted to weld dynastic legitimacy and national community. It did so by generalizing a principle of innate, inherited

¹ A. Bell, J. Millar, eds., *Encyclopædia Britannica, Or, A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Miscellaneous Literature*, for A. Constable, 1810, Vol. 8, p. 382.

² Pramod K. Nayar, *Colonial Voices: The Discourses of Empire*, John Wiley & Sons, 2012, pp. 67–71.

³ This aspect of colonial discourse which enhanced creating the figure of European male subject is well described in i.e. A. Howson, *The Body in Society. An Introduction*, Polity Press/Blackwell Publishing Ltd., Cambridge 2004, p. 45; S. Scholz, *Body Narratives. Writing the Nation and Fashioning the Subject in Early Modern England*, MacMillan Press Ltd., Chippenham, Wiltshire 2000, p. 156; Pramod K. Nayar, *Colonial Voices...*, p. 87.

⁴ E.W. Said, *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, India, 2006, p. 7.

⁵ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Verso, London – New York 1991.

⁶ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities...*, p. 150.

⁷ E.W. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 7.

superiority on which its own domestic position was (however shakily) based to the vastness of the overseas possessions [...]⁸.

To indoctrinate “colonial racism”, the European empires used one of the strongest and most effective tools for shaping reality – namely, language⁹. As one can read in *Colonial Voices*, discursive measures allowed people to name the so-far obscure phenomena, and thus to seemingly familiarize themselves with the Exotic¹⁰. Denoting uncustomary objects and phenomena, different from those in the familiar spaces of Europe, the terms **Exotic** and **Exoticism** have become categories considered opposite to the European identity¹¹. Since using English as a universal language was tantamount to holding authority, the Europeans’ conviction of their alleged superiority could be consolidated. *The Empire Writes Back*¹² aptly captures this unique quality of language:

One of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language. [...] Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ become established¹³.

Since it allowed its native speakers to establish meanings of the above-mentioned fundamental terms, similarly, English language served to endow concepts such as **Exoticism** and **Orientalism**¹⁴ with particular connotations, which, according to Edward Said, “[was] a way of coming to terms with the Orient [...] based on the Orient’s special place in European Western experience”¹⁵. It does not mean, however, that inhabitants of the colonised lands have never perceived themselves in opposition to their invaders. Yet, it was the violence implicit in the use of the bipolar quality of their relation with the East, specific for European colonisers, that made it so maleficent.

The same linguistic violence enabled them to intensify the image of inferiority they attributed to the Exotic in various forms of travel literature¹⁶ which, at that time, largely consisted of written accounts from colonial expeditions. Unable to examine worlds which are not within their reach, readers of colonial travelogues accepted the travellers’ records of the alleged eye-witnesses as reliable data¹⁷ and, on these grounds, created their own image of the far-off territories. Thus, describing their travels to the distant lands, colonial writers were certain to relish their readers’ unconditional trust and, consequently, could reinforce their common convictions that these areas were indeed exotic and utterly different from those they inhabited¹⁸.

⁸ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities...*, p. 150.

⁹ B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures*, Routledge, London – New York 1989, p. 7.

¹⁰ Pramod K. Nayar, *Colonial Voices...*

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 26, 106; See also: G.S. Rousseau, R. Porter, eds., *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, Manchester University Press, 1990, p. 5.

¹² B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back...*

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

¹⁴ The term used after E.W. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 1.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 6.

¹⁷ Pramod K. Nayar, *Colonial Voices...*, pp. 51–52.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

Quite notably, the more distantly the areas were located, the more discordant with the picture of European territories they were in the writers' renditions. Additionally, the mystical atmosphere wreathing the travellers' descriptions intensified people's curiosity and their interest in the unfamiliar¹⁹. The desire to explore spaces which have not been examined so far and thus to inscribe oneself into the traditional image of a European conqueror²⁰ was of an inexplicable appeal to the surging number of prospective explorers. It imbued them with enormous interest provoked, to a considerable extent, by the anticipated subordination of these areas, precluded to by numerous travel reportages demonstrating their seductive power²¹. Moreover, in the face of the unknown reality the feeling intensified, as the world that the travellers encountered was so distinct from their own habitat that could hardly be inscribed into any other concept than that of the Exotic.

Though, with travelling becoming increasingly attainable, travel reportages had to, eventually, yield their absolute authority in creating images of exotic realities, contemporary travelogues²² still evince their authors' desire to discover the least visited places and to expose themselves to the most intense experiences of Exoticism²³. Moreover, like participants of colonial expeditions, present-day travellers tend to depart for their journeys with a set of expectations towards the place they intend to visit. Yet, in case of the latter's accounts of expeditions to Eastern areas, the conflict between their expectations and the actual shape of the unknown reality is being exposed. On the basis of two British writers' accounts of their journeys to the Middle East: Colin Thubron's *Mirror to Damascus*²⁴ and William Dalrymple's *From the Holy Mountain*²⁵, the article aims at exposing the adherence of the British travellers to the set of assumptions evoked by their unreflective beliefs in the Exoticism of the unfamiliar – the legacy of colonial travel writing – and at presenting the outcome of the actual confrontation with the Eastern reality, which most often distorts the travellers' world views. Moreover, it intends to present the need for extension of the Exotic concept once the recognition of similarities between the European travellers and the allegedly exotic inhabitants of the East takes place.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 30.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 87; see also: A. Howson, *The Body in Society...*, p. 45 and S. Scholz, *Body Narratives...*, p. 156.

²¹ A considerable part of G.S. Rousseau and R. Porter's, *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, is devoted to the "fascination with the exotic," p. 35. The alluring power of the pristine, "inferior" and "submissive" areas of East, are elucidated and exemplified in S. Scholz, *Body Narratives...*, p. 149.

²² As various stages of contemporaneity, not only in literature but also in the historical and social dimensions, are often heterogenous, I should note that my use of the term refers to travel reportages from the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries.

²³ W. Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain. A Journey Among the Christians of the Middle East*, Holt Paperbacks, New York 1999, p. 160; C. Thubron, *Mirror to Damascus*, Vintage Books, London 2008, Introduction, [XI–XII].

²⁴ C. Thubron, *Mirror to Damascus*, Vintage Books, London 2008.

²⁵ W. Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain. A Journey Among the Christians of the Middle East*, Holt Paperbacks, New York 1999.

THE MYSTICAL ABODES OF EASTERN CHRISTIANITY

Raising strong objections against the biased European approach towards **the Orient**, postcolonial theory exposed certain inconsistencies in the shape of reality established and adhered to by the West, which has facilitated a significant change in the Western conceptualization of the East²⁶, discernible also in post-colonial travel literature. One such illustrative instance of alteration to the traveller's perspective, provoked by disillusionment with expectations that have structured his *a priori* knowledge²⁷ about Eastern reality, is William Dalrymple's reportage *From the Holy Mountain*. It provides an account of the writer's travel to Christian monasteries in the Middle East, at the same time revealing the traveller's reasons for embarking on such a journey. Among the ancient Christian residences, Dalrymple is looking forward to some mysterious, exotic experience, expecting to find traces of primitive worship regarded as the origin to the present-day well-developed religion of the civilised West²⁸. Moreover, aware of the aims that travel literature has always posed for itself, he claims that "[wandering] the world in search of strange stories and remarkable travellers' tales"²⁹ has been the fundamental task of any travel writer. For not only is that desire driving the traveller's actions, but it definitely is what the travelogue reader has ever expected from the genre, since the beginning of its existence.

Yet, what Dalrymple actually encounters in the Middle East bears more resemblance to the Western contemporary religion and customs than he or his readers had ever been capable of conceiving. The feeling of bewilderment that this unexpected affinity evokes, lingers throughout his journey, as each of his consecutive experiences escalates his anxiety resulting from unfulfillment of his *a priori* conceptions. Describing one of the factions of early Christian faith, the Nestorians, the author illustrates both the process of creating his presumptions about this religious congregation and the following disappointment, once the alleged mystic exoticism he ascribed to the convent turns out to be spurious.

Once, browsing in a library in Oxford, I remember stumbling across a rare copy of *The Book of Protection*, a volume of Nestorian charms and spells. It was strange and wonderful collection of magical formulae which purported to have been handed down from the angels to Adam and thence to King Solomon. The spells [...] gave a vivid picture of an isolated and superstitious mountain people, surrounded by enemies and unknown dangers. They also emphasised the Nestorians' backwardness [...]. I told George how much I wanted to try to get into the camp and talk to the Nestorian refugees. But even as I was speaking he shook his head. It was impossible for outsiders to get in or out of the camp, he said. It was surrounded by barbed wire [...] I would be wasting my time even to try. [...] 'But you could always try to interview some Nestorians when you get back to England' he suggested. [...] There should be far more Nestorians in London than here. Ealing has the largest Nestorian community in Europe.' Such are the humiliations of the travel writer in

²⁶ G.Ch. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Harvard University Press, U.S., 1999, pp. 349–350.

²⁷ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. R. Ingarden, PWN, Warsaw 1986, p. 2.

²⁸ W. Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain...*, pp. 141–142.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

the late twentieth century: go to the ends of the earth to search for the most exotic heretics in the world, and you find they have cornered the kebab business at the end of your street in London³⁰.

Dalrymple's approach towards the early incarnation of Christianity that the Nestorian religious group represents is quite telling. He clearly emphasises the natural sense of anticipation that reading of *The Book of Protection* evoked in him. The possibility of a direct experience of the magical practices apparently prevalent among the members of the congregation triggers particular curiosity and desire to succumb to them. Yet, the same set of expectations that encouraged Dalrymple to look for Exoticism among Middle Eastern Christian followers provokes him to feel disappointed, once it turns out that the people whom he considered to be distant predecessors of his civilisation, both in geographical and ontological terms, are to be found in his own, well-known habitat. Moreover, he calls this discovery one of the "humiliations" of a contemporary traveller. Such a slightly ironic response, may have a twofold basis. First, the expedition in search for the Exotic turns out to be superfluous. Second, the distance between the primitive magical practices and the 'mature' system of current Christian beliefs is diminished. Hence, the fact that the alleged "backwardness" turns out to be an element of his own well-developed Western civilisation may become a derogatory and humiliating experience to him.

Yet, in his feeling of disappointment, Dalrymple seems to disregard the fact that, although the image arising in his mind after reading the Nestorians' "Holy Bible", was of a group of "superstitious" religious followers, their system of beliefs which, after all, laid the foundations to the current shape of Christian faith, cannot be entirely at odds with contemporary doctrines. In fact, he neglects the evident similarity among all beliefs functioning and winning followers around the world: the fact that, be it spells or magical charms, a godly figure which has never been seen by a human being or a certain artificially created image of some exotic space, the existence of these phenomena is dependent on one's faith and imaginative capacities. From this perspective, the beliefs of the "superstitious [...] heretics"³¹ and the religion of the 'intellectually developed' current population of Christians do not seem to be so remote from one another.

An aspect that also seems to be overlooked in Dalrymple's disenchanted account concerns the fact that, most likely, it was precisely this affinity of the present form of Christianity to the Nestorian pre-Christian beliefs that had inclined him to depart for the journey aimed at finding the origins of his culture's most professed faith. Choosing a route among Christian monasteries as central destination points during his travel in the Middle East and, to that end, determining to traverse the same paths the ancient travellers – John Moschos and Sophronius, his disciple³² – once covered, Dalrymple creates in his mind an already recognisable track which he and his readers may follow³³. Since the route has been experienced in reality, in the traveller's eyes, it may be regarded to be a correct and truthful representation of the area he intends to explore.

³⁰ Ibidem, pp. 141–142.

³¹ Ibidem.

³² Ibidem, pp. 11, 21.

³³ Ibidem, p. 261.

AMONG THE 'GARDENS OF EDEN'³⁴

An analogical need for seeking the Exotic along a track which, at least partially, bears traits of familiarity to the traveller, is exposed in Colin Thubron's *Mirror to Damascus*. Awaiting exotic experience the author, simultaneously, provides himself with quite a credible image of the unknown derived from the Bible, as he decides to commence his exploration with the well-known beginning – a place where Christianity is regarded to have its source – the house of Abraham³⁵.

It needs to be noted, however, that the ideas the writer had developed about the place before his actual journey, had their source not only in the Holy Scripture. In case of Thubron, his *a priori* knowledge had been largely influenced by stories regarding the site, which he managed to attain and which, apparently, the residents of Damascus themselves had been conveying to others³⁶. For a traveller who goes on a journey in search for the 'true' image of a far-off land, the knowledge acquired directly from its inhabitants appears to have an even greater value than the image of the country deriving from the European conceptions³⁷. Thus, Thubron places his trust in what apparently is the Eastern inhabitants' conception of themselves. As far as Damascus is concerned, the reality that its residents apparently believe in and are determined to present to the Western travellers' eyes is an idyllic one.

Moslems, who believe in early Christian tradition, have for centuries thought of Damascus as the original Garden of Eden. God fashioned Adam from the clay of Barada river, and Adam had roamed over the mountain where I stood; Here Abraham built an altar to the Lord; Moses and Lot and Job prayed on its summit; Christ himself came. [...] Men once located paradise in mysterious antipodes of the world. The Chinese imagined theirs at the Himalayan source of a perfumed river. The Greeks envisaged the Garden of the Hesperides at the axis of the earth. Homer and Strabo dreamt of a continent beyond the Pillars of Hercules; among the remote seas of North Britain,

³⁴ The comparison to the 'Garden of Eden' occurs many times in various publications concerning colonial expeditions. One of them may be found in H.J. Sage, *Introduction to American Colonial History*, 2010, referring to Page Smith, *A New Age Now Begins: A People's History of the American Revolution*, Vol. I, p. 27. <<http://www.sageamericanhistory.net>>. Thubron and Dalrymple also make such a comparison repeatedly in the reportages analysed in the present article: W. Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain...*, pp. 138, 295; C. Thubron, *Mirror to Damascus*, pp. 8, 13.

³⁵ As Frances Worthington's research proves, and Thubron seems to acknowledge, except for Christianity, Abraham may certainly be considered a father to four other religions. F. Worthington, *Abraham: One God, Three Wives, Five Religions*, Baha'i Publishing Trust, 2011, pp. 3–4. Yet, in the context of Thubron's expedition it is Christianity that comes to the fore in the Western traveller's associations.

³⁶ C. Thubron, *Mirror to Damascus*, p. 3; A similar tendency of presenting a particular image of one's country to the foreigners is depicted in Michael Moran's *A Country in the Moon. Travels in Search of the Heart of Poland*, Granta Books, London 2008, which I analyse in my article *On the Reverse Side of Europe: Images of Poland in Michael Moran, Edward Enfield and Tom Fort's Reportages from the East* in *Studia Litteraria Universitatis Jagellonicae Cracoviensis* No. 9 (2014), Jagiellonian University Press, Cracow 2014.

³⁷ *Mirror to Damascus* illustrates Thubron's intensive search for historical facts and his simultaneous fascination with Damascenes' "legends" in quite an delineative way. C. Thubron, *Mirror to Damascus*, p. 3.

fiends and heroes dwelt in the Isles of the Dead. [...] Only the Damascenes till and irrigate their Eden, live in it and die there and still link it with paradise³⁸.

The promise of a paradisiacal land that may be reached by a human being on Earth has not ceased to arouse desire in explorers since colonial times³⁹. Moreover, the image that Damascus inhabitants depict is not so distant from the biblical descriptions well-known to the British traveller. The exoticism of Damascenes' beliefs intermingled with recognisable associations the images from the Bible evoke, provides an alluring incentive for the traveller, whereas the prospect of touching upon Eden and following the paths of biblical prophets promises to constitute a desired journey to 'paradise.' The quasi-holy sensations that would probably accompany anyone, were he/she provided with an opportunity to enter 'the Gardens of Eden'⁴⁰ are best illustrated in the description of Thubron's stroll among the "al-Ghuta orchards"⁴¹. The abundance of fruit the orchards offer to their visitors seems to confirm their divine nature. Yet, this divinity the traveller is allegedly granted in this area does not protect him from feeling disappointed when his idyllic 'experience of Eden' is aborted. Once he discerns certain inconsistencies in the surrounding scenery, the verification of both Damascenes' stories and biblical parables⁴² destroys his initial ideas of the Exoticism of the place. He describes his disenchantment in these words:

Slowly I felt the absurdity of it all. Here was I looking for the cave of man's first victim [Abel], crushed with a stone or a cudgel; and all around, in the aegis of barbed wire and bayonets, lay the guns and tanks of his descendants⁴³.

Thubron's perception of the Eastern land through the prism of exoticism becomes distorted, as the nonconformance of the presumed picture of the country's antiquity with the one he, in fact, finds in the East becomes evident. Hence, to provide himself again with elements of the landscape which would be fairly recognisable to him, he resorts to a search for vestiges of the Damascenes' "European past" – the historical proofs of the Roman reign⁴⁴. Yet, once he begins his examination, it turns out that the remnants of European culture are intertwined with ruins of the *Oriental* city, and [t]hough "the level of the ancient city lies fifteen feet beneath the present one, [...] here and there a plastered-up column leans out of a wall, the base of a broken pillar is used for a seat or a doorstep, [...] [whereas] hewn stones support a minaret"⁴⁵. Thus, the emblems of European former presence apparently protrude from among the contemporary Eastern exoticism, creating an interfusion of the two cultural traditions⁴⁶. The same mixture of cultures becomes visible, as the remains of European

³⁸ Ibidem, pp. 3–4.

³⁹ R. Page quoted in G.S. Rousseau, R. Porter, *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, p. 46.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, p. 5. Describing this phenomenon the authors also relate to: H. Baudet, *Paradise on Earth*, New Haven 1965.

⁴¹ C. Thubron, *Mirror to Damascus*, p. 39.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 3.

⁴³ Ibidem, p. 5.

⁴⁴ Ibidem, pp. 28–29.

⁴⁵ Ibidem, p. 29.

⁴⁶ An example of a mingle of cultural artefacts is well presented in the book in a description of the "sanctuary Jupiter-Haddad". C. Thubron, *Mirror to Damascus*, pp. 34–35.

predecessors appear to mingle with the remains of Syrian antecedents forming “the mound of Tell es Salihiye, [...] a hill of bricks and bones piled on top of one another”⁴⁷, which Thubron determines to ascend.

With an unquestioning respect for its holiness, people of successive religions have fed the hill with their dead, era after era, until it has become a confused mansion of races and beliefs. Thorn bushes stubble its lower slopes, and shreds of artemisia carry on the ascent until they mingle with Moslem graves on its summit⁴⁸.

Thus, the historical site in which Thubron hoped to find signs of European past, in the light of its evidently indissoluble interrelation with the Orient, starts to disclose its intercultural, “unordered” aspect⁴⁹. Though he does not acknowledge his close historical connection to Eastern Exoticism without toil, it becomes clear that during his travel, certain adjustments in the semantics of the Exotic concept need to be pursued. For only expanding the range of meanings attached by the Europeans to the notion of the Orient, one may expect to find sense of their mutual relation in congeniality⁵⁰.

RECOGNISING THE EXOTIC IN ONESELF

Though the post-colonial critique has brought significant changes to the Western violent practices towards East⁵¹, the remote area has not lost its oriental status in the eyes of Western explorers, and it continuously evokes a feeling of curiosity and hope for exotic experiences in the prospective visitors to this part of the world. Consistently with Saidian claim the conceptual division into **the Orient** and **the Occident** has exerted a substantial and long-lasting impact upon the arrangement of power and ideological relations between the Western and Eastern parts of the world. Convincing the members of British culture of their preeminence over territories existing beyond their reign, the orientalisising discourse, though perhaps attenuated with perceptual advancements of post-colonial critical approach, seems to be pertaining, among others, in the contemporary travel literature⁵².

Hence, it is hardly surprising that departing for a journey to the unknown, a European traveller is usually not aware of the fact that an encounter with the alleged Exoticism is most probable to disperse his idea about the East. The fallacy of this idea, however, becomes exposed as, after finding himself in the Eastern land, the explorer realises that the attributes he has hitherto ascribed exclusively to the inhabitants of the Orient may equally easily be found among his own

⁴⁷ Ibidem, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Ibidem.

⁴⁹ The European “love for order” Thubron juxtaposes with “confusion” and “irrationality” of Damascus, already at the beginning of his journey. C. Thubron, *Mirror to Damascus*, p. 3.

⁵⁰ That process of assimilation is well described in another reportage of a British writer – J. Elliot, *Mirrors of the Unseen. Journeys in Iran*, Picador, New York 2006, p. 259.

⁵¹ G.Ch. Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason...*, pp. 349–350.

⁵² E.W. Said, *Orientalism*, p. 219.

European territories. Moreover, unknown to the inhabitants of the East, he himself is most likely to be perceived as exotic, just as these inhabitants appear exotic to him, and thus, he needs to recognise his affiliation to the Oriental category.

Yet, once the traveller realises that his European identity may be regarded as oriental, he starts to feel threatened, as the Exoticism that the Western culture was so much afraid of over the years now appears to be a feature residing in the European personality⁵³. In fact, it appears to be an internal part of every individual, containing all the projections and prejudices that one usually locates in the unknown. Thus, the desire for the Exotic becomes replaced by the apprehension about similarity, as the European traveller's image of himself, omitting the innate exotic dimension of his selfhood and ascribing it, so far exclusively, to the Oriental identity, is not only unadapted to a non-European area, but it also turns out to be spurious, as, in the new land, the European and Middle Eastern realities begin to merge and the Exotic starts to peer from under the traveller's *European* self-image.

Though initially a Western traveller tends to recoil from perceiving himself through the Exotic prism, he eventually undergoes the unrestrainable process of recognition. As he acknowledges affinity of his cultural and historical background to that of the Eastern dwellers and the resemblance of the explored areas to the ones he is familiar with⁵⁴, he starts to apprehend the capacity for expansion that the concept of Exoticism manifests, and realises that the elements which contributed to the construction of his European self-perception are, to a significant extent, comprised in the Exotic concept which therefore has to be broadened with the recognition of his own Exoticism.

Contemporary reportages from travels to the East which often result in such an act of recognition, have become the post-colonial travellers' measure for gaining the unique *a posteriori* knowledge⁵⁵ of what the term Exoticism apparently contains. William Dalrymple, looking for roots of the religion which, to a considerable extent, has become the general optics through which Western Europeans perceive the world⁵⁶, relies on ancient relics and holy books of the followers of the early faction of Christian faith. The predecessors of Christianity, however, do not fulfill the traveller's assumptions that regarded them as retrograde. Similarly, Colin Thubron's intention to order Eastern reality according to historical evidence of its exotic character is futile, as the "oriental" world turns out to be a mingle of cultures and civilisations, and thus it is shattering his idea of the Orient.

Therefore British postcolonial writers, illustrating the process of disillusionment they are exposed to in the East, seem to remind European readers that the concept of the Exotic is a product construed by the European culture⁵⁷, thus urging them to expand that concept with the acknowledgement of their own exotic

⁵³ E. Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors*, Oxford University Press, New York 1995, p. 90.

⁵⁴ W. Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain...*, pp. 141–142.

⁵⁵ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 2.

⁵⁶ G.S. Rousseau, R. Porter, *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, p. 32.

⁵⁷ Pramod K. Nayar, *Colonial Voices...*, p. 105.

features. Such a change in European writers' self-recognition introduces significant realignments to the Western relation with the East and to cultural and literary representations of Exoticism. That in turn, opens postcolonial writers and readers to new ways of perceiving the external reality and prepares their minds for the acquisition of new – *a posteriori* – knowledge.

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W POSZUKIWANIU EGZOTYKI: PODRÓŻE COLINA THUBRONA I WILLIAMA
DALRYMPLE'A DO WSCHODNICH ŹRÓDEŁ CHRZEŚCIJAŃSTWA

Streszczenie

Odwołując się do Saidowskiego rozumienia praktyk orientalizacyjnych jako realizacji potrzeb kolonizacji Wschodu, niniejszy artykuł ma za zadanie zaprezentować obecność owych praktyk w postkolonialnej literaturze podróżniczej. Analiza dwóch tekstów autorstwa brytyjskich podróżników opisujących swoją podróż w rejony Bliskiego Wschodu: Williama Dalrymple'a *From the Holy Mountain* i Colina Thubrona *Mirror to Damascus*, ma za zadanie przedstawić sposób, w jaki przekonanie o egzotyce wchodnich obszarów, głęboko zakorzenione w kulturze europejskiej, prowokuje rozczarowania eurocentrycznym sposobem klasyfikacji tego obszaru oraz potrzebę poszerzenia znaczenia egzotyki o element europejskiej tożsamości.