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A book review on Nathanaëlle Minard-Törmänen's PhD pöydissertation "An Imperial Idyll: Finland in Russian

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2017

Turoma, S 2017, 'A book review on Nathanaëlle Minard-Törmänen's PhD dissertation "An
pöydissertation "An Imperial Idyll: Finland in Russian Travelogues (1810-1860)"', Scando
2, pp. 227-228. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00806765.2017.1399587>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/308563>

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00806765.2017.1399587>

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An Imperial Idyll: Finland in Russian Travelogues (1810–1860)

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To cite this article: Sanna Turoma (2017) An Imperial Idyll: Finland in Russian Travelogues (1810–1860), *Scando-Slavica*, 63:2, 227–228, DOI: [10.1080/00806765.2017.1399587](https://doi.org/10.1080/00806765.2017.1399587)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/00806765.2017.1399587>

Published online: 22 Nov 2017.

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BOOK REVIEWS

An Imperial Idyll: Finland in Russian Travelogues (1810–1860), by Nathanaëlle Minard-Törmänen, Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 2016, 350 pp, ISBN: 978-9516534131.

Nathanaëlle Minard-Törmänen's monograph is a refreshing addition to scholarly discussions about Russian imaginings of Finland. It contributes to the research field – so far covered mostly by Russian and Finnish scholars working on the Romantic literary canon – by introducing a theoretical frame surprisingly unexplored in the study of Russian–Finnish relations. This is an approach that draws from Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). One must note at the outset, though, that however novel this may seem in the context of scholarly investigations of Russian and Finnish cultural histories, it is not entirely new in the study of Russian history or literature.

Said's work on the discursive power of the Western knowledge production of the "East," and the theories of postcoloniality that his work initiated, have long since become a well-established school of theoretical thought in studies of literature, history, and cultural history. It has been applied to the Russian imperial situation by a number of scholars working in Russian history and literature. Susan Layton's *Empire and Russian Literature* (1994) and Monika Greenleaf's *Pushkin and Romantic Fashion: Fragment, Elegy, Orient, Irony* (1994) were the pioneering works in Russian literary studies. Followed by Harsha Rams' *The Imperial Sublime* (2006), Katya Hokanson's *Writing at Russia's Border* (2008), and Olga Maiorova's *From the Shadow of Empire: Defining the Russian Nation through Cultural Mythology, 1855–1870* (2010), these works created a field of inquiry that has produced many enlightened readings of Russian literary texts, among them travel writing. Minard-Törmänen is well aware of this literature and engages in a dialogue with it.

The Saidian frame has proven to be especially productive in reviewing Russian imaginings of the Caucasus, Russia's "Orient." Minard-Törmänen expands the discussion to concern Russia's Western borderlands, in this case Finland. Combining the theoretical frame with a methodology developed in the research of tourism and travel, and contextualizing her analysis in the predominant stylistics of the early nineteenth-century pastoral and idyll, Minard-Törmänen sees Finland as providing the Russians with a space on which to project an image of an "ideal colony" in an "ideal empire."

Considering the potential of the theoretical framework Minard-Törmänen draws on, one would have expected, however, bolder analyses and more assertive conclusions about the colonial, or imperial, nature of the Russian literary encounters with Finland. Instead of John Urry's "tourist gaze," it may have been productive to engage more vigorously with Mary Louise Pratt's theorization about the imperial vantage point and the rhetoric of natural wonders typical of

European travel literature of the colonial era. Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992) is a ground-breaking study of the topic.

Despite these reservations, I salute Minard-Törmänen's solid study and its many fine analyses of texts that have been given little attention in literary or cultural histories. The author deserves to be congratulated for her effort to update the methodology of scholarly discussions of Russian nineteenth-century travel literature about Finland. Moreover, based on careful analyses of her materials, Minard-Törmänen identifies ambivalences and contradictions in Russian encounters with Finland that were previously uncovered or ignored, and argues, thus, against some of the predominant interpretations by leading Finnish historians.

Minard-Törmänen's monograph – with well-chosen and beautifully reproduced images – is a welcome contribution not only to Russian literary studies but also to studies of Finnish history. With this, it enters an entirely different body of research literature and scholarly debate, which is also interesting for wider audiences in Finland. The study offers new analytical perspectives on the historical narratives of Finnish national identity and sheds new light on the conventional wisdoms concerning these narratives, rarely challenged in Finland.

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/00806765.2017.1399587>

Haunted Serbia: Representations of History and War in the Literary Imagination, by David Norris, New York/London: Routledge, 2016, 200 pp., bibliography, index, ISBN: 978-1909662650.

David Norris's *Haunted Serbia: Representations of History and War in the Literary Imagination* analyses the depiction of conflict in prose works by a number of Serbian authors. Conflict is here manifest as a historical fragment that threatens to disrupt the order of the present and as an unfolding contemporary event. The book is chronologically organized and moves from the early 1980s to the end of the 1990s. The historical parentheses are marked by, on the one hand, Tito's death in 1980, and, on the other, the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999. The choice of literary material (novels and short stories) is determined by the presence of spectres, ghosts or uncanny motifs that Norris reads as a "communal image of both dispossession and recuperation" (34). That "communal image" always refers to a collective history or memory that has been disrupted, marginalized or repressed, leaving individuals burdened and traumatized. Extending this "cultural haunting" (a term developed by Kathleen Brogan) into his theoretical framework, which also encompasses Freud's Uncanny, Norris analyses what happens to the spectre of history in the context of the novel's universe (characters, plot developments) but also looks at the implications of the meta-literary discussion