

David Robbins, thesis director

Thesis evaluation

Rudolf Stansky

Demetra Vaka-Brown as a Representative of American Orientalism in Literature

Mr. Stansky's thesis consists of an introduction, seven chapters, and a conclusion, all examining the relation of two fictional travel narratives (Haremlik—Some Pages from the Life of Turkish Women, 1909; and The Unveiled Ladies of Stamboul, 1923) and the authorial and narrative identities of their author (Demetra Vaka-Brown, 1877-1946), to the constructs of "Orientalism" as developed by Edward W. Said. Mr. Stansky also presents an analysis of how Ms. Vaka-Brown's "hybrid" ethnic identity (she was an Istanbul-born American writer and journalist of Greek origin) in many places added particular, and occasionally complex, shadings to her Orientalism. Demonstrating in each of his chapters various ways in which Ms. Vaka-Brown's narratives correspond to a number of "Orientalist" characteristics as articulated by Mr. Said, Mr. Stansky concludes that the work of Vaka-Brown can be classified mostly as an example of orientalist discourse, intentionally tinted with so-called "cryptoethnic" pro-Greek political connotations.

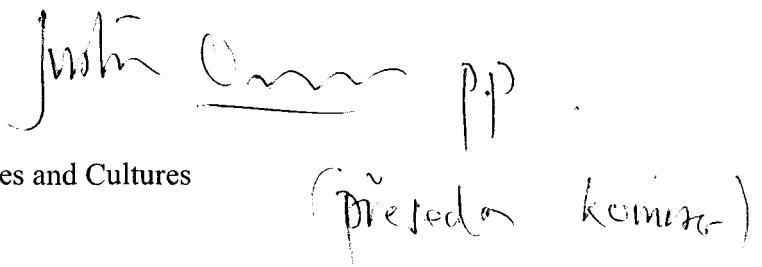
Mr. Stansky's English is exceptionally good, which allows him to present a very clear and convincing characterization of Vaka-Brown and her work. His exposition of his thesis is progressive and cumulatively compelling. Having read the thesis, one can have little doubt of the careful reading and analysis of Vaka-Brown's work that the writer has undertaken, or that his reading and conceptual placement of her is well-founded. His bibliography is short because, as he explains, not much secondary writing has been done on Vaka-Brown; and in bringing her to our attention he is, in fact, opening up a previously under-analyzed writer to critical reevaluation. Mr. Stansky might have included the chapter specifically on the characteristics of "Orientalism," as he promises in his introduction; but his exposition of those characteristics on a chapter-by-chapter and subject-by-subject basis go far to make up for that omission. His introduction and his conclusion are articulate and economical, both serving well to highlight his themes. One sometimes has a sense that Mr. Stansky has set himself a task that is too simple; that, in reading Ms. Vaka-Brown as an Orientalist in the Saidian sense, he is "shooting fish in a barrel." Nonetheless, he has done a first-rate job in accomplishing the analysis he has set for himself, and his product is an admirable example of exposition in support of that thesis.

Thesis evaluation: "1-, between vyborne and velmi dobré"

Signed:

Prof. David L. Robbins, Ph.D.

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