

Reviews

Puleri, Marco. *Narrazioni ibride post-sovietiche: Per una letteratura ucraina di lingua russa*. Premio ricerca 'Città di Firenze', 53. Firenze University Press, Firenze, 2016. 257 pp. Bibliography. Index. €12.90 (paperback).

THE language question has been central to Ukrainian politics and their perception abroad for several years, at least from the 2012 highly contested 'On the Principles of the State Language Policy' law, which aimed at granting Russian and other minority languages the official status of 'regional languages'. Discussions on the place of Russian, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian and other languages spoken in Ukraine in the context of the strengthening and normalization of Ukrainian after centuries of limitations and several waves of Russification are a constant in the political landscape of contemporary Ukraine, including the debate around the latest education reform, harshly criticized by Ukraine's neighbours in both the east and west of the country.

Marco Puleri's Italian-language monograph represents an important reminder of how clashes on issues of language policy may tend to obliterate intricate and fascinating multi-language configurations at the level of cultural production and reception. Puleri's book can be seen as both an important contribution towards a flexible re-evaluation of the cultural sphere of the post-Soviet space, one that does not fall into the trap of applying rigid binary schemes to complex situations, and a compelling study of present-day Ukrainian literature and culture. The object of Puleri's work is contemporary Russian-language Ukrainian literature, including both prose and poetry, although with a clear focus on the former. The author does not intend to provide his readers with a systematic inventory of the several Ukrainian authors who use or have used the Russian language as a medium for artistic expression in today's Ukraine or of their works, but to present a set of methodological tools to analyse and understand the nature and functioning of a 'minor literature' in a hybrid cultural context. Puleri openly recognizes his embracing of Deleuze and Guattari's paradigm, which he successfully applies to contemporary Ukraine. His book is thus to be seen as both a crucial instrument for a more thorough understanding of contemporary Ukrainian literature and as a model for the study of multilingual literary environments.

The first chapter of Puleri's volume, titled 'Shifting Identities: Identity Dynamics in the Post-Soviet Context', is dedicated to a discussion and re-evaluation of such widespread yet ambivalent and controversial concepts as 'post-colonial' and 'post-Communist' in the Ukrainian context. The author, drawing on the work of several scholars from both the anglophone and the post-Soviet world, analyses the Ukrainian tendency to give a binary reading of its much more variegated cultural landscape as a consequence of the historical

traumas of Ukraine, pleading for the acceptance of fluid frontiers over rigid borders (see A. J. Rieber, 'Changing Concepts and Constructions of Frontiers: A Comparative Historical Approach', *Ab Imperio*, 1, 2003, pp. 23–46) in the characterization of cultural negotiations in contemporary Ukraine. The second chapter, 'Literature, Language and Identity: Moving Frontiers', pursues the author's reflection on the applicability of mobile frontiers to the nexus of literature, language and identity in post-Soviet Ukraine through a historical excursus from imperial times to the present day. Puleri analyses Gogol's reception in the context of the epistemological choice between exclusive and inclusive cultural identities and makes his way to the contemporary age through the experience of the Soviet period from the point of view of Ukrainian complex linguistic and political landscape. The third chapter, titled 'Textual Mappings: Heterogeneity and Polyphony in Post-Soviet Ukrainian Literature', offers a comprehensive survey of contemporary Ukrainian literature, with special attention to Yuri Andrukhovych and Serhii Zhadan, probably the two most influential authors of post-Soviet (Ukrainian-language) Ukrainian literature. The fourth chapter, 'Ukraiins'kyi/Rosiis'komovnyi/Rosiis'kyi. Defining New Interpretational Windows', provides the reader with various insights on the complexity of cultural positioning in contemporary Ukrainian culture that are meant to help them understand the relationship between language, tradition and cultural belonging. This is obtained through a challenging reconstruction of the most widespread attitudes concerning the role of language for the definition of the boundaries of national culture among foremost writers and critics in contemporary Ukraine. The last part of the chapter is dedicated to a fascinating discussion of the role of anthologies, publishing houses and literary prizes in the process of cultural negotiations between Ukraine, Russia, Ukrainian culture, Russian culture and the interstitial space in which these seemingly binary juxtapositions merge under the sign of hybridity. The fifth and last chapter, 'The Post-Soviet Hybrid. Toward a Minor Literature', develops the re-contextualization of the tenets of *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (Paris, 1975) in the space of contemporary Ukrainian culture. Puleri focuses on several major representatives of contemporary Russian-language Ukrainian literature, such as the poets Boris Khersonskii and Aleksandr Kabanov, the international star Andrei Kurkov, and the affirmed prose writers Aleksei Nikitin and Vladimir Rafeenko, who has interestingly managed to establish himself as one of the most respected Ukrainian authors in the post-Euromaidan era, after being forced to leave his occupied hometown of Donetsk for the capital. The last chapter is followed by an appendix containing the text of the author's late 2013 interviews with Kurkov, Nikitin, Rafeenko and Zhadan, which provide a privileged picture of the cultural atmosphere of Ukraine on the eve of the Euromaidan revolution.

Puleri's first monograph is sure to confront scholars of both Ukrainian and Russian studies with the need to put aside binary schemes by challenging rigid schemes of national exclusivity and monological narratives. Puleri's ability to show the vividness of Russian-language Ukrainian culture, its diversity and its rootedness in the cultural life of contemporary Ukraine, will surely help both specialists and non-specialists to better grasp the vitality of the culture of Europe's largest country. The book, at the same time a model of solid, although accessible, literary scholarship and an indirect political statement promoting dialogue and openness, clearly deserves to be translated into English, Ukrainian and Russian.

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Knapp, Liza. *Anna Karenina and Others: Tolstoy's Labyrinth of Plots*. The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI, 2016. x + 326 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$79.95.

ALL roads lead to (and from) Tolstoi in this beautiful book, which reads nineteenth-century novels of adultery as works that explore the complexities of loving one's neighbour. In *Anna Karenina*, as Liza Knapp convincingly demonstrates, Tolstoi 'novelized' (p. 4) the spiritual questions that would afflict him thereafter. Taking her cue from Tolstoi's own oft-quoted statement about 'an endless labyrinth of linkages' (p. 19) that comprised his art, Knapp investigates these linkages, first within the novel itself and then between *Anna Karenina* and Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, English evangelical Protestantism, Pascal's *Pensées* and, finally, Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*.

The linkages seem endless indeed, especially in the first chapter, where Knapp shows how 'segments of the novel that appear unrelated [...] complement one another in Tolstoi's labyrinth through the subtle interaction of mundane details from related spheres' (p. 23). Thus, Petritskii's spilt coffee is linked to the spoilt broth eaten by Oblonskii's children as both episodes allude to the chaos these adulterers' behaviour provokes, while Levin's care for his cow is contrasted to Vronskii's mistreatment of his horse, each signalling those men's treatment of their human paramours. In addition to the many intratextual linkages, Gogol's *Dead Souls* and Tiutchev's poem 'Day and Night' appear as intertextual influences on certain parts of the novel.

Chapters two and three compare *Anna Karenina* to her American and English 'cousins' in what I would call a contiguous reading of these novels. While neither *The Scarlet Letter* nor *Middlemarch* bore a direct influence on Tolstoi's