

Mariia Revakovykh [Maria Rewakowicz]. *Persona non grata. Narysy pro N'iu-Iorks'ku hrupu, modernizm ta identychnist'*. [Persona non grata. Essays on the New York Group, Modernism and Identity.] Kyiv: Krytyka, 2012. 336 pp. Paper.

P*ersona non grata* by Mariia Revakovykh [Rewakowicz] is a Ukrainian-language collection of her various works that includes articles and conference presentations, originally written in English, as well as Ukrainian texts that she produced since 1992. The book consists of two parts. Part I focuses on the New York Group (NYG), while part II analyzes the history and theory of Ukrainian modernism by looking at its critical reception, including the “burden” of its rejection by mainstream discourse. Revakovykh could have written a separate book on the NYG alone, but she opted for a more daring approach, looking for similarities among the discourse of modernism, questions of identity formation, and the reader response theory. In her own words,

[O]ne cannot speak about the phenomenon of the New York Group without touching upon the issues of Western and Ukrainian modernisms; on the other hand, the issue of identity—which has been especially important in the period of independence and reflected upon many times by the new generation of men of letters—was similarly present in writings of diaspora poets, for whom the choice of writing in Ukrainian was one of the most important moments of their identity as writers. (7)

No doubt, the most valuable part of the book is the study of the NYG, which is based on numerous documents from the archives of the group, largely unknown to the public. Revakovykh wrote this part as an insider who entered the group in the 1980s, bringing with her a fresh perspective. In this part, she examines the writings of the NYG through three prisms—discursive, aesthetic, and thematic—focusing first on the group’s role in the Ukrainian literary process and then moving on to individual authors. Although she concentrates on the “leading” poets of the group—Emma Andievs'ka [Andievska], Bohdan Rubchak, Bohdan Boichuk [Boychuk], and Iurii Tarnavs'kyi [Yuri Tarnawsky]—she also contributes to the study of other poets affiliated with the group, such as Vira Vovk, Zhenia Vasyl'kivs'ka [Vasylkivska], Oleh Koverko, Iurii Kolomyiets' [Yuri Kolomyiets], Marko Tsarynnyk [Marco Carynnyk], and Roman Baboval. Of special value is her research on the most enigmatic author, Patrytsiia [Patricia] Kylyna (Patricia Warren, the only non-Ukrainian), for whom the journey into the Ukrainian language, as well as her later homosexual interests, turned into a form of constructing otherness.

Among the themes intrinsic to the group, Revakovych distinguishes eroticism, dehumanization, playfulness, exile, Spanish and New York themes, and homosexuality. These themes appeared as forms of the authors' self-identification through opposition to the conservative older generation, which was burdened with the past. Their other interests included new realities of American society and (post)modern influences, and their distinct personal experience, sometimes intertwined with those of the older generation (for example, motifs of exile) but more often rooted in their new discoveries and adventures.

In this thorough and well-elaborated book Revakovych refers copiously to existing studies on the group (for example, by John Fizer, Lisa Efimov-Schneider, and Melanie Pytlowany) as well as to unpublished archival documents. Most importantly, she places the group in the Ukrainian (MUR, diaspora, and Soviet) and Western historical contexts. Revakovych consistently refers to relevant theoretical frameworks—*The Dehumanization of Art* by Ortega y Gasset, the *Semiotics of Poetry* by Michael Riffaterre, the playfulness of human culture by Johan Huizinga, and numerous studies on exile and displacement (Edward Said, Andrew Gurr, and Bettina Knapp), which help give her own work a more structured and deeper insight. The author also defines the NYG as the final stage of Ukrainian literary modernism, seeing it as a somewhat hybrid entity, due to its connection with the historical avant-garde (via surrealism). In this regard, she extends the historical period of Ukrainian modernism, entering into dialogue with the late Solomiia Pavlychko, who marked its end with the writers of the postwar “Artistic Ukrainian Movement” (MUR).

In the second, more eclectic part, Revakovych examines early Ukrainian modernism in the novels by Ahatanhel Kryms'kyi and Mykhailo Iatskiy, as well as gender issues in Volodymyr Vynnychenko's novel *Chesnist' z soboiu* [Honesty with Oneself], in Ukrainian modernist poetry of the 1920–50s, and in the post-Soviet literary discourse. In addition, she investigates questions of language, literary canons, and identity, both regional and territorial.

What unites both parts of the book is Revakovych's argument about a similar lack of understanding or even the outright rejection that the authors of both the NYG and Ukrainian modernism experienced from the reading public. This rejection may have been caused by the unfavourable historical circumstances and, later on, intensified by “various prejudices, intolerance, and social conservatism...” (10). Looking for similarities in these rejections, Revakovych points, for instance, to implicit homosexual themes with decadent overtones in Kryms'kyi's novel *Andrii Lahovs'kyi* and in the American novels by Kylyna. At the same time, she indicates some peculiar differences in the portrayal of women in Ukrainian modernism and the NYG. The former, i.e., poets of the early Soviet period, portrayed their

heroines as lovers of “the commune” or as falling “in love with an airplane” (240, 241). The female characters of the latter are endowed with subjectivity and a natural sensitivity that is filtered-through personal experience.

In her analysis of contemporary Ukrainian literature, Revakovych notes a change in the social function of literary works, which are no longer able to influence society as they did before. The decolonization of Ukrainian culture, in her opinion, corresponds to a common pattern, which is characterized by plural identities, cultural hybridity, and bilingualism. Gender, geography, and language are seen as categories that help crystallize the postmodern national identity. Within this paradigm, Revakovych distinguishes an ever-growing contribution of female critics and writers (Pavlychko, Tamara Hundorova, Nila Zborovs'ka, Vira Aheieva, Oksana Zabuzhko, Svitlana Pyrkalo, Marianna Kiianovs'ka, and Mariana Savka) and compares the two centres of gender studies, Kyiv and Kharkiv, the former oriented towards Europe and the latter, towards the post-Soviet space.

When speaking about decentralizing and regional tendencies in contemporary Ukrainian literature, Revakovych points to their positive role in strengthening Ukraine's post-Soviet efforts to build a normal and multifaceted cultural process (here she follows Jim Miller's account of American literature). Her attempts to associate such cities as Rivne, Chernivtsi, and Lviv with one region (through the novels of Oleksandr Irvanets', Vasyl' Kozheliianko, and Iurii Vynnychuk respectively) are, however, quite problematic because the novels themselves are imbued with broader symbolic meanings, historical references, and national memories. More realistic, in her opinion, is the image of Kyiv by the Ukrainian author Andrii Kurkov, who writes in Russian and whose works undermine the ethnic model of Ukrainian culture and identity. Kurkov's writings also complicate the Ukrainian literary discourse by deconstructing the traditional role of the Ukrainian language as a homogenizing social tool, which is exemplified by writers of the Zhytomyr group, V'ichaslav Medvid' and Ievhen Pashkovs'kyi.

Despite some shortcomings (occasional repetitiveness and the absence of writers from Eastern Ukraine in her analysis of the regional aspects of contemporary Ukrainian literature), Revakovych's *Persona non grata* is certainly a skillfully written work and a significant achievement in the study of Ukrainian literature. It is also a good example of Western scholarly interest in Ukrainian literature and culture that connects Ukrainian and diaspora experiences, and places them in a broader international context.

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