

Westland. Polen und die Ukraine in der russischen Literatur von Puškin bis Babel. By Mirja Lecke. *Postcolonial Perspectives on Eastern Europe*, Vol. 2, eds. Alfred Gall, Mirja Lecke and Dirk Uffelmann. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015. 409 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. \$88.95, hard bound.

In her monograph, Mirja Lecke looks into the question of how the western regions of the Russian empire are conceptualized in Russian language literature of the long 19th century. For this, she not only focuses on great authors such as Aleksandr Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol', Nikolai Leskov or Isaak Babel', but also on "second rate" writers such as Mikhail Zagoskin and Faddei Bulgarin. In addition, she also discusses the late romantic poets Fedor Tiutchev, Apollon Maikov and Aleksei K. Tolstoi. In spite of the conscious restriction to specific territories (Poland and Ukraine) and authors, the range and heterogeneity of the analyzed works result in a telling image of Russian (anti-)imperial writing. The complexity of this image is complemented by writers who were positioned between Russia and Poland or Russia and Ukraine and who demonstrated different or hybrid perspectives: Adam Mickiewicz, Faddei Bulgarin or Gogol'.

Lecke relies on the heuristic potential of Postcolonial Studies, emphasizing the special characteristics of the colonial empire that was Russia and its "civilizing" mission. The specifics of Russian colonialism was the domination of the *more* civilized western regions and the strong inclusion of their representatives into the power structures of the empire (something about which many scholars have written before). For Lecke, it is not so much the historic but rather whether the discursive application of postcolonial concepts to literary fiction that is important; the coloniality of imperial writing finds its expression primarily in the orientalist view of the Other (21–22).

It remains regrettable that Lecke does not take into account a number of significant theories from the field of cultural topographies such as approaches from Cultural Geography, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Realities of Modernity* by Rob Shields, the concept of Geoculturology (Geokulturologie) that was coined by Susi Frank, as well as many other approaches that would be highly informative for the literary conceptualization of the periphery.

The merit of this study obviously lies in the fact that it not only elicits the fictional image of particular topographies in the imperial context, but also investigates which literary genres, language and poetics this literature produced. In this way, the development of imperial relations is incorporated in literary and cultural history. The multiethnic and multilingual Russian empire is reflected differently in the textuality: in the character constellation, focalization, the tropes and linguistic structures. For instance, that the Russian realist novel as a genre leans towards a universalist view of national history, particularly ignoring the multiethnicity of the imperial (33). In contrast, the short narrative form and the alienated Skaz-writing of Leskov develops an explicit sensibility with regards to the multiethnic periphery.

The monograph rightly questions the conventional concept of Russian literature by conceiving Russian literary history as a dynamic system of different languages and contexts. Thus, the corpus of examined texts automatically appears to be partial, limited, and complementary. This, however, is not a deficiency of the study, but rather inherent to the postulated thesis that is supported by a cultural-historical analysis.

The systemic approach of Lecke's study is illustrated by the highlighting of the macro-cultural context. Part of this is the description of the book market, the literary public and the distinct language policy in the center and the respective periphery of the empire (Chapter 5 of the introduction). From this, a high inequality in educational landscape becomes apparent, between Petersburg and Moscow on the one hand and what today is Poland, Belarus, Ukraine and Lithuania on the other hand. In addition to territorial criteria, Lecke also includes the multilingual literary recep-

tion within the Polish, Ukrainian and Jewish populations. However, many interesting sociocultural circumstances are only depicted in the introduction and are not incorporated in the text analysis chapters.

Mirja Lecke presents us with a highly ambivalent image of imperial Orientalisms and the ambiguous literary positions (mimicry) resulting from them. For example, the observant analysis of Gogol's Ukrainian texts shows the partly stereotypical image of the heavily folklorized, irrational, and subaltern Ukrainian culture, as it was easy for the Russian educated public at the time to "digest". The works of the Russian imperial humanists Leskov and Aleksandr Kuprin, too, show a complex mixture of stereotypical (here also anti-Semitic) and cosmopolitan positions that poetologically constitute their texts. It needs to be noted, though, that Lecke bases her theses on the extensive pre-existing research that should be seen as the preliminary work for her study.

Lecke's study, despite its high academic quality, shows a number of shortages in its argumentation. The approach to Postcolonial Studies is somewhat superficial and is limited to only a few concepts: this is even more surprising because it is precisely this theory that is declared to be at the center of the study. The now flourishing field of postcolonialism that inspired Russian studies is labeled as a "peripheral phenomenon" (17) and its broad spectrum is neglected. Also, the implementation of Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism is not very convincing, for the equal rank of the fictional voices in the examined texts is rare. In contrast, plurality is mostly negated in favor of an implied author thesis (for instance of the orthodox spirituality as the substructure for the community of different ethnic groups). Finally, for a Slavic studies research volume it is rather unfortunate that quotes from Russian-language texts are often presented only in German.

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Optical Play: Glass, Vision, and Spectacle in Russian Culture. By Julia Chadaga. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014. xvi, 315 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Figures. \$89.95, hard bound.

In her fascinating book, *Optical Play: Glass, Vision, and Spectacle in Russian Culture*, Julia Chadaga narrates Russia's cultural and literary history through the prism of material culture and specifically glass. Glass, as Chadaga shows, connects to transparency and reflection, reality and irreality, magic and technology, modernity and anti-modernity, and other significant binaries in Russian literature and culture. As she argues, material culture in Russian history has often been relegated to a status of muteness. "Glass plays a part in culture that is often overlooked, perhaps because of the transparent nature of the material and its manifold uses in modern life," writes Chadaga (46). With her keen scholarly eye, Chadaga restores the visibility of glass, reminding the reader of its omnipresence, manifold uses, and manipulations in Russian literature, culture, and history.

Optical Play: Glass, Vision, and Spectacle in Russian Culture consists of six chapters that revolve around different glass objects and their cultural and literary significance. Chapter 1, "Looking through Glass: The Transformation of Vision," considers the window and its role in mediating vision. The chapter looks at the reflection of the Petrine reforms in material culture, especially problematizing the idea of St. Petersburg as a "window to the west." As with the other chapters, the discussion of the window is not confined to one period, but transitions from Petrine times to the twen-