

**Yuliya V. Ladygina. *Bridging East and West: Ol'ha Kobylians'ka, Ukraine's Pioneering Modernist*.** U of Toronto P, 2019. xiv, 284 pp. Illustrations. Notes. Works Cited. Index. \$63.75, cloth.

**Y**uliya V. Ladygina's monograph, dedicated to one of Ukraine's most known and celebrated female authors, Ol'ha Kobylians'ka (1863-1942), is a welcome addition to the recent surge of anglophone publications within the fields of Slavic and Ukrainian studies devoted to a single author's body of work (see, for example, Hrytsak, Tarnawsky, and Koropeckyj). Ladygina presents a meticulously researched and engaging reading of Kobylians'ka's prose, addressing how ideas on the broad topics of comparative feminism, Nietzscheanism, modernism, and even fascism found expression in Kobylians'ka's short stories and novels at different stages in her life. Ladygina's analysis is threefold. First, she offers a nuanced and complex view of Kobylians'ka's oft-discussed feminism, suggesting that the notions of *conscientious motherhood* and *radical conservatism* are reflected in Kobylians'ka's vision of the New Woman (50, 68). Ladygina then links this topic to Kobylians'ka's engagement with Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of *Übermensch* ("overman"), augmenting it with the nineteenth-century Russian radical thought that Kobylians'ka studied—about a public intellectual's moral duty and service to society. Finally, Ladygina assesses Kobylians'ka's World War I and interwar legacy. She deconstructs the elements of fascist discourse in Kobylians'ka's late works, labelling Kobylians'ka's aesthetic choices as "'anti-fascist fascism'" (following Peter F. Sugar's concept—219; 250, note 48) and distancing Kobylians'ka's use of fascism from Nazism. These discussions underpin the general thesis of Ladygina's book—that Kobylians'ka attempted to construct a political vision for Ukraine in her collected oeuvre (despite Kobylians'ka's later claims about the apolitical nature of her works) and through this vision to promote the Ukrainian nation-building project.

Ladygina's book is structured chronologically and opens with two chapters (chapters 1 [11-50] and 2 [51-86], which follow an introduction [3-10]) that centre on Kobylians'ka's use of feminism in her early prose and on her uneasy relationship with fellow feminist Nataliia Kobryns'ka, the pioneer of the women's movement in Galicia. Ladygina provides background for the publication of Kobylians'ka's major novels from the 1890s, *Liudyna* (*A Human Being*, 1894) and *Tsarivna* (*A Princess*, 1896), and offers an in-depth gendered interpretation of these texts within the framework of Nietzschean philosophy. In the case of *A Human Being*, she challenges the traditional scholarly reading of the novel's ending as tragic and hysterical, proposing

instead to view in more positive terms the impending marriage of Kobylians'ka's female protagonist (47-49). In this way, Ladygina enriches our understanding of Kobylians'ka's idea of the New Woman. She suggests that Kobylians'ka's heroines reject the symbolism of martyrdom, traditionally imposed on female characters in nineteenth-century Ukrainian literature, and offer a victorious and hopeful image. Ladygina proposes to link the latter notion with Kobylians'ka's hope for the liberation of Ukraine.

In chapters 3 (87-118) and 4 (119-62), Ladygina pays attention to Kobylians'ka's uneasy vacillation between overt populism (into which Kobylians'ka was pushed by literary criticism of the time) and the veiled modernist affinities consistently displayed in her prose throughout her creative career. One important aspect of Ladygina's analysis in chapters 3 and 4 (and also in other chapters) is her formal study of Kobylians'ka's modernist narrative techniques—for example, her use of internal monologue to offer a complex portrayal of her characters' psychology. Another important aspect is Ladygina's comparative reading of Kobylians'ka's most populist work, the novel *Zemlia* (*The Earth*, 1902; also known as *Land*), and Émile Zola's novel of the same name (*La Terre*, 1887). Ladygina offers a nuanced and insightful discussion of the way in which Kobylians'ka distances herself from Zola's naturalism, prioritizing the psychological motivations of her characters over hereditary and social conditions.

Chapters 5 (163-89) and 6 (190-220) examine Kobylians'ka's legacy after World War I—a legacy that is often overshadowed by scholarly examination of her earlier feminist texts. Ladygina skilfully traces the progression of political affinities in Kobylians'ka's war prose, showing how the writer withdrew from her pro-Habsburg loyalty in support of Ukraine's political independence. Kobylians'ka came to realize that such a political project could not be reconciled with the imperial aspirations of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires. Ladygina also reflects on Kobylians'ka's rhetorical choice to render the inexpressible horrors of World War I in her prose. In chapter 6, Ladygina provides a fascinating literary examination of Kobylians'ka's last major novel, *Apostol cherni* (*Apostle of the Rabble*, 1926-28; final version, 1936), which presents a story that disengages from and simultaneously continues Kobylians'ka's past legacy. The novel features a male protagonist instead of a female one, and it promotes modernist aesthetics within a fascist ideology, merging several opposing themes (tradition and progress; science and faith). Ladygina meticulously analyzes the manner in which Kobylians'ka's aesthetic evocation of fascist ideology did not serve to endorse either ethnocentrism or xenophobia but was directed inward—at Ukraine's state-building project and the efforts to

protect the country from external aggression. Ladygina's study also sheds light on Kobylians'ka's perceptions of the peasant population, whom she depicts as "pristine in their culture but often chaotic and ruthless in their behaviour" (224), and on her continual criticism of provinciality and the ineffectualness of Ukrainian intellectual elites.

Ladygina's monograph contributes a biographic study of Kobylians'ka and a thorough textual reading of her major works. It also engages in a thought-provoking dialogue with previous scholarship concerning her from Soviet and post-Soviet periods (for example, works by Pavlyshyn and Hundorova). Although a brief explanation is given regarding the Ukrainian critical milieu in Kobylians'ka's time (97) and the manner in which it shaped her philosophical and aesthetic identity, closer attention to Kobylians'ka's engagement with this milieu would have provided a more thorough grounding of her creative legacy within the debates and discourses of Ukrainian intellectual circles of the time. For example, chapters 1 and 2 link Kobylians'ka's creative legacy to the Russian radical thought that was prevalent at that time, and they present a concise examination of her responses to the criticism regarding her novels that was expressed by Ukrainian populists in Galicia. What is lacking, however, are parallels to the creative legacies of Ukrainian writers contemporary to Kobylians'ka. Reading Kobylians'ka's modernist experiments, even briefly, alongside Ivan Franko's novels about the lives of Galician intelligentsia or comparing intertexts in Kobylians'ka's legacy to works by Lesia Ukrainka, Vasyl' Stefanyk, and Mykhailo Kotsiubyns'kyi would have helped to better situate Kobylians'ka within the Ukrainian literary milieu and to position that milieu within the European cultural interchanges and aesthetic experiments of the time.

Ladygina's monograph will appeal to scholars in Ukrainian and Slavic studies focusing on nineteenth-century and fin-de-siècle literature, particularly literature involving Nietzscheanism. Given that Ladygina supplies each chapter with the concise and helpful historical background information necessary for understanding the context of her analysis, her book can serve, either in its entirety or in part, as a great auxiliary tool for courses in European literary studies and comparative and world literature. I hope that this monograph will be translated into Ukrainian in the near future, as it can help strengthen academic dialogue and contribute to scholarship in Ukraine.

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