

Maria G. Rewakowicz. *Literature, Exile, Alterity: The New York Group of Ukrainian Poets.* Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014. xxiii, 250 pp. Preface. Bibliography. Index. Cloth.

Maria Rewakowicz has written the first, and thus far only, English-language monograph examining the phenomenon of the New York Group (NYG) of Ukrainian poets. This informal association of Ukrainian-émigré modernist poets—loosely connected with New York, in spite of the fact that their actual places of residence were sometimes as far as Munich or Rio de Janeiro—was not widely influential at the time that it was active. Today, however, the work of these poets is generally accepted as an important stage in the evolution of Ukrainian modernist literature. The book under review deals almost exclusively with the creative work, “social history,” and discourse of the original NYG, which included: Bohdan Boychuk, Yuriy Tarnawsky, Zhenia Vasylykivska, Bohdan Rubchak, Patrytsiia Kylyna, Emma Andijewska, and Vira Vovk. In addition, the author focuses on the group’s initial, and most active, period—from the mid-1950s to 1971. There were also latecomers: Yuriy Kolomyiets, Oleh Kowerko, Marco Carynyk, and Roman Babowal, all of whom joined the NYG in the late 1960s, and Maria Rewakowicz herself, who became part of the group during the time of its revival in the mid-1980s; these poets are mentioned only briefly and in passing.

The fact that Rewakowicz narrows the scope of her study to original group members is understandable, when one considers that it is precisely these original seven members (or, more exactly, some of the original seven)—in NYG activities and publications, as well as independently—who have made the most significant contributions to Ukrainian letters. As Rewakowicz puts it, they have “influenced the path of the native poetic tradition” and “inscribed [themselves] permanently into the history of Ukrainian literature” (231). The group’s most notable impact on the Ukrainian literary process coincided with the initial period of their creativity (in particular, the 1960s). At that time the NYG occupied a somewhat precarious position between the older generation of Ukrainian émigré literati and the new wave of Ukrainian poets and writers in Soviet Ukraine, known as the *shistdesiatnyky* (“the 1960s generation”), who attempted to revive Ukrainian literature after the socialist-realist stagnation of the Stalinist period.

Rewakowicz rightly asserts that in spite of the considerable diversity and distinctiveness of their individual poetic voices, the NYG poets were unified by their unequivocally Western orientation. As well, for almost all of them their creative method incorporated “the elements of both international ‘high’ modernism and the historical avant-garde” (2).

Rewakowicz can name only one non-Western influence on the group—Russian avant-garde poet Velemir Khlebnikov, whose radical linguistic experiments persuaded one group member, Emma Andijewska (16). Overall, in contrast with the majority of their émigré predecessors and Soviet contemporaries, “philosophically and aesthetically the poets of the New York Group [were] firmly anchored in existentialism and surrealism” (230).

The book under review is unique, in that it was written with the wisdom and perspective of an insider. Although Rewakowicz joined the NYG some two decades after the most important period of the group’s activity, she still had special access to written sources (including personal correspondence) and cultivated extensive personal contacts with the group’s most active members: Boychuk, Tarnawsky, and Rubchak. This “insider’s knowledge” is particularly useful in her reconstruction of the group’s “social history” and her analysis of the “discursive practices” of NYG members (in chapters 2 and 3). In this reviewer’s opinion, this aspect of the book will most interest readers—those already familiar with the NYG and relevant scholarship, as well as those with limited knowledge of the subject. For example, although some scholars consider the genesis of the NYG to have been “somewhat spontaneous and anarchic,” Rewakowicz presents a substantiated argument that the group’s beginnings were, in fact, “strategically thought-out” on the basis of “practical if not pragmatic, considerations” (19). Her discussion in chapter 3 of the NYG members’ attitudes toward “the Center” of their cultural and intellectual tradition (that is, Ukraine, on the one hand, and mainstream Western literature, on the other) is also quite engaging.

Rewakowicz’s analysis of the creative contributions of NYG members includes many sound and interesting ideas and arguments that an informed reader might recognize from her published essays and/or her introductions to two NYG anthologies that she edited or coedited. What seems to be new (at least to this reviewer) is her discussion of the creative work of Patricia Nell Warren (who penned Ukrainian-language poems under the nom de plume *Patrytsiia Kylyna*), whose poetry has largely been ignored by Ukrainian literary scholars. An American from Montana with no Ukrainian heritage, she learned the Ukrainian language remarkably quickly, and it became her predominant linguistic medium for literary expression from 1957 to 1973 (when she was married to Yuriy Tarnawsky). After declaring herself a lesbian in 1973, Warren switched to writing fiction in her native English, frequently centring on homosexual themes therein. In chapter 9 of the book under review, Rewakowicz attempts to bridge the gap between the two dimensions of *Kylyna/Warren’s* oeuvre—her Ukrainian-language poetry and her English-language prose—analysing her literary work “from

an angle of alterity, understood as the condition of being on the margins, being the ‘Other’” (188).

Finally, chapter 10 introduces the reader to the “next generation,” so to speak, of Ukrainian New York poets. Here Rewakowicz discusses the poetry of avid New Yorker Vasyl Makhno and, among other things, sheds light on the disparity between the frequency of city themes in his works and the dearth of New York-themed poems in the creative legacy of the original NYG members.

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