Marci Shore. *The Ukrainian Night: An Intimate History of Revolution*. Yale UP, 2017. xxiv, 296 pp. Maps. Dictionary of Translatable and Untranslatable Words. Notes. $26.00, cloth.

In the years since the events that shook Kyiv's Maidan, or central square, over the winter of 2013-14, the term *Revolution of Dignity* has come to signify a set of meanings that only the diverse voices of those who experienced those tectonic shifts can fully capture. This book brings many of those voices forward.

The primary material in the book consists of interviews and correspondence conducted by Marci Shore during and after her residency at an academic institute in Vienna. The list of people interviewed features a broad range of established public figures from Poland and Ukraine along with commentators from other countries of east-central Europe. Shore's previous work *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism 1918-1968* is reflected here both in her schemata for understanding contemporary Ukraine and in the informal genealogy underpinning the connections drawn between people and ideas. While no single tradition of thought or paradigm is named, many of the figures included in the book reflect Shore's earlier work on Poland and the prominent authors, editors, and cultural critics, past and present, that have featured in the historical trajectories of the Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* (*Electoral Newspaper* [Warsaw]) and the intellectual journal *Krytyka Polityczna* (*Political Critique*, [Warsaw]).

The greatest strengths of *The Ukrainian Night* all hinge on the carefully transcribed dialogues between Shore and her interlocutors. These exchanges reveal sociolinguistic details, local debates, opinions, and observational statements that could serve as valuable primary material for additional research into how different individuals and populations adapt to extreme social and political change. The author invites reader engagement with profound questions about human consciousness, ethics, empathy, and the nature of violence.

We are guided along this path of questioning through language itself—in the vernacular of everyday people in Ukraine interpreting the chaos around them: most often, this chaos appears in the context of a protagonist seeking anchors of familiarity or the author's recognition of herself in the context of universals (family rituals, meetings, or other gatherings). Comparative meanings evolve from the author's view of events as they are narrated to her, each story filtered through her impressive range and depth across multiple Slavic canons. Quotes appear, spanning writers from Nikolai Gogol' (Mykola Hohol') and Fedor Dostoevskii to Osip Mandel'shtam, Anna Akhmatova, Vladimir Maiakovskii, Serhii Zhadan, and others. The "Dictionary of

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Translatable and Untranslatable Words" (271-72) included before the "Notes" (273-85) at the end of the book provides a welcome clarification of many key local terms that have appeared in the English language in mass media and elsewhere since the revolution, often as umbrellas or red herrings that can come to represent a range of contradictory meanings. This is the main thrust of the book's scholarly contribution: it is a demystification of everyday spoken language for Western audiences—a dialectic of slang. In no ordinary sense, this might also be considered a close transcription of the notion of *byt* (derived from Roman Jakobson's theory of the everyday in linguistics), an idea that loosely translates as *everyday life* in Slavic literary analysis. Yet here, in Shore's book, the language of her interlocutors is theirs: it is *byt* as it comes into conflict with the synthetic lingo of state control. This transcription is no simple task on the part of the author, and this is not a simple book. Structured as a collection of short essays organized within two parts, the text reads as a series of parables. It is a collection of excellently written prose. But in its composition, it is not, in the stricter sense of the word, a history.

The main premise is posed as an inquiry of analytic philosophy: "What conditions allow the boundary between reality and fiction to be effaced?" (xvi). This question is certainly worth asking, but with a caveat. Without the theoretical tradition of existentialism or metaphysics, younger students in the West today might instead think of revolution as either/or—*realpolitik*, or politics "with a capital *P*," to quote Viktor Pelevin's ironic reference to Pepsi in his novel *Generation "P*," which is about the roller-coaster life of an ad-campaign designer amid the radical economic flux of the 1990s. But isn't this also a reason to foreground the fact of the critical turn in both history and literary studies? Haven't we been here before? And yet, from the outset, in Shore's book we find ourselves parachuted into a similar predicament—into the dizzying task of placing Ukraine's Maidan in a "post-Francis Fukuyama" moment, beyond the End of History, where "Romantic will" has fused with postmodernism (xvi). Here, individuals previously alienated from one another momentarily unite and reach the Sublime. This corroborates the personal emotional recollections of that moment in the interviews collected by other scholars. But in foregrounding transcendence and in references from beyond the territories on which the Maidan actually took place, Shore overly extrapolates the transitive qualities of that moment.

The answer to the book's central question appears at the end: "[t]he moment when alienation was overcome[;] . . . the recognition of a capacity for an authentic encounter with the being of others" (270). This postscript about 2013-14, positioned after several chapters about the war, introduces a cyclic time frame into the overall organization of the material and collapses one phenomenon into another, without distinguishing the specific material

conditions driving violence in each case. Lasting social consensus is projected onto the imagined community of the Maidan, which is portrayed as a microcosm of Ukraine that might still be willed back into existence. The more compelling question not posed, however, seems to be not whether that imagined community can be re-imagined but why the microcosm—along with all of its internal conflicts—only persists for some and not for others.

The interviews themselves divulge deeply personal experiences of extreme upheaval, which are often described in material terms: physical suffering, the loss of a family member, poverty, and hunger supply a just and needed overview of the endemic structures that people revolted against. For example, in one account the author writes: "No matter how well she spoke English—Victoria Narizhna told me—the ubiquity of *corruption* was something she just could not explain to foreigners. This was not a question of language; the phenomenon itself was inexplicable to people coming from the West" (243; my emphasis). As elsewhere in the book, the careful selection and inclusion of quotes such as this one places emphasis on the role of civic terms (as opposed to national languages) in the sociolinguistics of revolution and interstate conflict. This emphasis complements more recent analyses in the field of political science of post-Maidan Ukraine, in which scholars cite the unwieldly definition of corruption itself as a hurdle to reforms. Where *corruption*, as a term, is difficult to quantify, the idea of "an imagined community" in the case of Ukraine signals a distinct need for more specificity. The iron structures of the Soviet Union, while oppressive, were quantifiable. One could oppose them. But they no longer exist. How does one oppose a system that is viewed as corrupt and, thus, undefined legally with "the return of metaphysics to Central Europe" (see "Preface"), as Shore describes the main outcome of the Maidan? This is not to devalue the concept but only to point out that what this book truly presents to readers is not at all at the locus to which Shore points here, in her references to the Polish experience of 1989. There is a need for more situated knowledge specific to Ukraine on the world stage; this is a critical gap in the overall construction of Shore's text—perhaps one that future research can work to fill.

This discursive lack is the source of the book's two drawbacks. The first is connected to the above and relates to the need for more locally rooted terms and references. Readers may be left wondering how, on the one hand, this text, as a selective set of voices, intervenes in the post-Maidan era of reforms. The meaning of nationhood—both political and in terms of cultural self-identifications—has galvanized and divided global peace processes and policy-makers alike, for example, with regard to military assistance and aid packages and in debates around the decommunization laws introduced in May 2015. Data could be cited throughout Shore's book from the extensive range of studies by social and political scientists, anthropologists, and others

writing about the Maidan (such as, Lucan Way, Mikhail Minakov, Paul D'Anieri, Bohdan Harasymiw, Serhy Yekelchyk, and Sarah D. Phillips). This would adjust for the causal logic of interlocutors' passing observations, account for the (un)reliability of witnesses, and explain some of Shore's discursive choices, which appear disconnected or contrived. Marginalized voices of the elderly and poor are rarely heard, if at all, drowned out by others who reflect middle-class sensibilities in the book's underlying fixation on traditionally gendered roles within the nuclear family unit as the prime marker of social and national stability. It is too easy to assume that the prerequisite for membership to the West, which Shore puts forward as the primary aim of the revolution, resides in a defence of a set of shared values largely communicated in and through a selective and privileged population. As a result, her version of events remains blind to critiques of Ukraine's widening income inequality, failing to consider the full range of impact(s) of neo-liberalism, poverty and its feminization, or to what extent EU membership might actually benefit those who do not belong to the strata with socio-political agency in Ukraine, strata that are not only non-representative but remain inaccessible to the majority of protestors on the Maidan. Where Shore's own voice as a scholar blends in with those of her interlocutors, she buries her questions, and we lose the thread.

The second drawback stems from the first. Assumptions are drawn around popular imaginings of the Maidan linked to a pro-Western stance. There could be more exploration around what these terms mean, especially *democracy*, given the repetition in the book of *polis*, *demos*, and so on. On balance, a full exploration would then need to include those characters placed opposite to the book's heroes: the anti-Maidan activists, far-right groups, and separatists, who are not contextualized and usually appear in retellings of the behaviour of attackers. The narrator too often adopts the same stance as her informants. In the chapter "World Order," one reads: "It was obvious to Pavlo that, regardless of any problems in the European Union, Ukraine should join Europe as quickly as possible. These were questions less about territory than about values. He considered integration into the European Union a necessity" (221-22). More distance and self-reflexivity would clarify when, where, and why different interlocutors make certain terminological choices over others.

This would also help distinguish Ukrainians' individual and collective fears and hopes for the future by offering readers more interpretive frames for the multiple opinions, dilemmas, and paths that Shore's actors navigate within the text. Nonetheless, Shore does bring the region to life in her own voice by sharing her first-hand memories of the fall of Communism. Expansive empirical knowledge guides her probing of the very idea of

revolution, writ large, which is the main site of inquiry running through all of the chapters.

And yet, the second half of the book is not about revolution—it is about war. Shore aptly foregrounds the violence and losses shouldered by her interviewees as they strive toward a better life: their experiences during the clashes on the square and in the war are presented with utmost respect and deep compassion. But the descent into violence on the Maidan cannot be fused with the Russia-Ukraine conflict to form a single existential struggle for Western values. The Soviet past would then become too easily reduced to quotes from fiction rather than its being an ongoing and live process of struggle and reconciliation.

And while the horrors of that past by any measure may be stranger than fiction, the corrupt regime that turned its police against the people of Ukraine in 2013-14 was not Soviet; it was beyond evil in every Nietzschean sense of the word, made obvious by the fact that, at one time, its incumbents had even proffered the exact opposite of their actions in the negotiations leading up to the European Union Association Agreement. The years intervening since the writing of Shore's book have painfully shown that in post-Maidan Ukraine, as elsewhere in the world today, achieving democracy is still a work-in-progress. This book gestures toward the people of Ukraine, as they continue to redefine in their own words the meaning of perseverance and resilience in dark times.

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