

Lidia Stefanowska. *Mission Impossible: MUR i odrodzenie ukraińskiego w obozach dla uchodźców na terytorium Niemiec 1945–1948.* [Mission Impossible: MUR and the Ukrainian Renaissance in Refugee Camps on German Territory 1945–1948.] Warsaw: Uniwersytet Warszawski, Katedra Ukrainistyki, 2013. Paper.

After World War II, over 200,000 Ukrainians found themselves in Displaced Persons (DP) camps on German and Austrian territory. Between 1946 and 1949 this political emigration, which included many leading intellectuals from both Eastern and Western Ukraine, created an entire mini-civilization, dubbed “Planet DP,” which produced 1,200 publications, theatres, schools, and educational initiatives. Lidia Stefanowska’s volume is devoted to the main literary grouping, called MUR (an acronym for Artistic Ukrainian Movement). It focuses on the development of literary and artistic positions in the journals *Al'manakh MUR*, *MUR*, *Arka*, and *Khors*, during conferences and press debates, and in private correspondence. Much of this material is brought together and analyzed for the first time. The volume constitutes the first complete study of MUR’s literary pronouncements.

Although there is some commentary on the main literary figures and the works they produced (especially the writings of Iurii Kosach, Ihor Kostets'kyi, and Viktor Domontovych), emphasis falls on the ideological positions and views of Iurii Sherekh (real name Shevel'ov), Viktor Petrov (who signed his fiction with the pseudonym Domontovych), Ulas Samchuk, and the criticism of MUR voiced by figures like Volodymyr Derzhavyn, Dmytro Dontsov, Mykola Shkemkevych (pseudonym M. Ivaneiko), and Ostap Hrytsai. MUR supported the idea of producing a “great literature,” while Sherekh promoted the concept of an “organic national” style. Both concepts have been widely criticized: Sherekh himself later beat a retreat from his own program.

In analyzing these developments Stefanowska draws attention to a fundamental contradiction in MUR’s position: the group declared that literature’s role was to serve the nation and simultaneously indicated that it intended to produce high-quality “artistic” works. To some members, serving the nation meant educating, uplifting, inspiring; to others it meant introducing Ukraine to the Western European public. As for producing high-quality works, to some this meant creating a modernist literature (Kostets'kyi was a fan of T.S. Elliot and Ezra Pound), while to others it meant producing weighty epics with an overarching historiosophic structure. Tensions developed among members, which Stefanowska interprets as a clash between the modernist and nativist, apolitical and

political, artistic and patriotic, collectivist and individualistic, avant-garde and realist.

Looking back on the DP period, Kostets'kyi later argued that the attempt to graft modernism onto Ukrainian literature proved unsuccessful because no theorist had been up to the task of promoting it, because publications had made compromises with traditionalists and advocates of realism, and because Ukrainians had focused too much on politics and the need to create an independent state. However, in spite of these perceived failings, MUR is now generally regarded as representing a fundamental break from the populist-nativist mentality, a moment when the Ukrainian writer was set free from narrowly-conceived views of patriotic duty. It is also lauded as a decisive turn toward European styles and values. From this moment Europe became a symbol for universal values, among which freedom of conscience and the right to self-expression played prominent roles. It has been argued that MUR succeeded in laying the groundwork for the appearance in emigration of the New York Group (in the fifties), the journal *Suchasnist'* (in the sixties), and the literary organization Slovo.

Perhaps reconciling the popular with the avant-garde is indeed a "mission impossible." But this still begs a number of questions: Do Domontovych, Kosach, and Kostets'kyi have a readership today? How are they received and interpreted by contemporary critics? Stefanowka provides a few guidelines. She suggests that the first two writers have made their way into the literary canon, although not necessarily as modernists, while the third, the most "programmatically" modernist, has hardly been recognized or understood. This raises the issue of how to place these writers within the evolution of Ukrainian literature. What constitutes Ukrainian modernism? Is it complexity, irony, polyphony? And what constitutes high-quality or "artistic" literature? It is easy to dismiss the views of Hrytsai, or Dontsov, as Slavophile nativism and to celebrate MUR's attempt to create a new language, culture, and identity—one that is pro-European, democratic, and associated with modernity. In constructing a grand narrative for modernism, critics have portrayed the movement as a heroic struggle against the nativist and politically retrograde. It began in the late nineteenth century, flared up in the 1920s in Ukraine when Mykola Khvylovyi championed the struggle of "Europe" against "Prosvita," then continued in the DP camps with MUR's attempt to break from fossilized thinking. There is much to recommend this narrative, but does it provide an adequate understanding of modernism, or of twentieth-century cultural development? How is one to deal with the missing link, the interwar right-wing modernism of Galicia and the emigration? After all, these writers were also pro-European and espoused a radical socio-political and cultural modernization. The idea of a reactionary modernism, or even the possibility

that modernism could be reactionary, has hardly as yet been raised in the discourse. This “other” modernism is, however, embedded in the debates of the forties. Samchuk, one of MUR’s leaders, was also a leading figure in the literature of the thirties. So were Iurii Klen, Kosach, Leonid Mosendz, and Ievhen Malaniuk. Should they be included among the modernists of the forties, or the thirties? Did their modernism change and adapt? Or are we talking about a different kind of modernism in the forties, and still another kind in the fifties and sixties?

A reading of Stefanowska’s book raises these and many similar issues. She is particularly good at pointing out incoherencies in MUR’s programmatic positions. Moreover, she indicates how the idea of Europe meant different things to émigrés writing in the forties, and to the Lviv artists in the ANUM (Association of Independent Ukrainian Artists) in the thirties. A much-needed companion volume is planned, which will be an anthology of sources. Together these publications will no doubt stimulate a much wider debate on this important and singular episode in diasporic literature.

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