

Shkandrij, Myroslav. *Modernists, Marxists, and the Nation. The Ukrainian Literary Discussion of the 1920s*. Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1992. ii + 265 pp. 24.95. C\$24.95.

Myroslav Shkandrij claims in the introduction that this book is the first devoted to the subject of the Literary Discussion and to the whole Ukrainian avant-garde movement of the 1920s in the arts in general. When I first received this work for review, I wondered how Shkandrij would further elaborate upon the topic of the Literary Discussion after G.S.N. Luckyj's seminal work *Literary Politics in the Soviet Ukraine* which was revised and updated in 1990. However, from the very first pages, Shkandrij's monograph quickly distinguishes itself from Luckyj's. The latter chronicles literary activity in Ukraine in broad strokes against the background of history and politics from 1917 to 1934. It devotes one chapter to the Literary Discussion, and then frequently refers back to it. The former presents an exhaustive study not only of the Literary Discussion from its inception to 1930 but also of its repercussions in the other Ukrainian arts—painting, sculpture, architecture, theater and film.

Shkandrij has taken advantage of material in the Ukraine that became accessible only after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Therefore he is able to provide a wealth of new information and references for further research on this rich and fertile area of literary/cultural studies. I would especially like to applaud both the author and publishers of the book for its convenient layout designed for easy cross-referencing. Shkandrij provides chronologies for each of the arts covered, beginning with "The Literary Discussion," then continues with "The Art Debate," "The Political Debate" and "Cinema and Theater." All the important publications issuing from the Literary Discussion or paralleled in the other arts are listed on a year-by-year basis. The reader is also supplied with a bibliographical survey, a selected general bibliography and an index of names. What I found to be exceptionally useful were the detailed footnotes for each chapter, including the introduction and the conclusion. Here, not only the writings of the major players in the Literary Discussion are supplied, but also extensive publication lists of minor figures in the cultural life of Ukraine in the 1920s.

Shkandrij treated two pivotal issues in literary politics of Ukraine in the 1920s which I believe need to be placed more within the perspective of party policies for the whole Soviet Union and not aimed uniquely at Ukraine. It is a question of policies overlapping. The first is the "struggle of the two cultures theory," that is, destruction of peasant culture in favor of culture for the workers. Here Shkandrij reiterates the Ukrainian view that this was a vehicle for russification of Ukraine—which it undoubtedly was. However, this policy was certainly not implemented in Ukraine alone. It was the cornerstone for party policies throughout Russia

and the other republics as well. The other issue was raised in the chapter on the dissolution of VAPLITE (Vilna Akademiia Proletarskoi Literatury). Certain attacks by spokespersons for VSUPP (Vseukrainska spilka proletarskykh pysmennykiv)—the Russian-oriented writers' union—upon Mykola Khvylovy as representative of VAPLITE are cited by Shkandrij as examples of Russian chauvinism. He quotes one of their attacks upon Khvylovy for his being interested only in the artistic effects of a work. It seems to me that this is nothing more than a carryover of the party's battle with formalists in general and its superimposition of this upon the Ukrainian situation, rather than an attack leveled specifically for the purpose of denigrating Ukrainian literary policies.

With the exception of these two points, I found that Shkandrij maintained an exceptionally objective stance in his invaluable study of the Literary Discussion and the Ukrainian avant-garde movement in general. *Modernists, Marxists and the Nation* should be in every collection of libraries supporting Slavic departments and of readers interested either in twentieth-century Ukrainian literature and culture or the East European avant-garde in general. Shkandrij's style is eminently readable, with relatively few typos, no annoying lapses of grammar or scholarly turgidity.

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