

Balkans, lives in Paris, is arrested for political activities in Tashkent and in the end pays the highest price for getting caught in Gaia's dangerous schemes.

Whatever the national or geographic backgrounds of Ismailov's characters may be, each one of them has been damaged by the geopolitical clashes of the past three decades, and every one of them carries a heavy baggage of repressed traumas determining their personal relations and decisions. The larger-than-life title heroine was shaped by Soviet norms: thus, as a girl, she denounced her own mother to Stalinist authorities. But Gaia's eerie powers are not the product of an immoral system; Ismailov depicts them as primordial. These powers found fertile ground in communism and, paradoxically, continue to cause destruction when transferred to the west. Indeed, the character of Gaia Mangitkhanovna is arguably the novel's most original and disturbing element, its conceptual center.

Syracuse University Press deserves special recognition for sponsoring the series *Middle East Literature in Translation*, in which this novel appeared. Shelley Fairweather-Vega translated it from the original Uzbek and not, as is often the case with fiction from Central Asia, from a Russian translation. Her attention to the subtleties of the original is exemplary and turns the reading experience into a vivid pleasure. In her introduction, she explains some of the linguistic intricacies of the original text. Most importantly, Fairweather-Vega treated the novel with utmost respect for its poetic qualities. Hers is a true labor of love, revealing the unexplored potential of a literature that is still largely unknown and unrecognized in the west.

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***Wheels of Change: Feminist Transgressions in Polish Culture and Society.*** Ed. Jolanta Wróbel-Best. Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 2021. 240 pp. Index. Paper. doi: 10.1017/slr.2022.262

*Wheels of Change* is a welcome English-language addition to gender studies both globally and in Poland. Starting with a theoretical introduction by Halina Filipowicz, this interdisciplinary compilation of articles analyzes the cultural and social transgressions of a number of outstanding Polish women from the eighteenth through the twenty-first centuries. As the editor, Jolanta Wróbel-Best, writes, the theme of transgression "creates a special form of debate that unifies chapters, but is not obviously harmonious, linear, and steadily evolving"; but rather "stress[es] [the] contextual character" of "feminist progress" (8).

In her clearly elucidated article, Filipowicz discusses the obstacles to a transnational feminism that includes a First World/Second World understanding and dialogue. First is what Filipowicz calls "the power dynamic of the translation trade" (41), in other words, the fact that only a very small number of texts have been translated from Polish, and other east European languages, into the major western languages. The movement into Polish is much larger, but still with significant gaps. Furthermore, since western feminists are in a position of power and privilege, their ideas "can represent a kind of imperialism" that attempts to fit east European phenomena into western theories (44–45). At the same time, Filipowicz sees two obstacles within feminist writing in Poland. First, Polish feminists focus on young, urban, well-educated women, neither considering class differences nor giving voice to low wage earners with conservative values. Second, Polish feminists insist that thanks to social/political conditions during the Partitions, Polish women broke the private/public wall already in the nineteenth century. Filipowicz explains that by looking only at a few

“gender-bending trail-blazers” they distort the historical situation and ignore the majority of women, who did not break into the public sphere (47). She argues that in order for feminism to be truly inclusive, it must consider both local specificity and global processes.

Articles focusing on different areas of culture and society follow the theoretical introduction. Thus, Part II opens with an article by Lynn Lubamersky on the transgressions in the plays, letters, and archival work of the eighteenth century aristocrat and writer Franciszka Urszula Radziwiłłowa, who “challeng[ed] patriarchal codes of conduct. . . by champion[ing] freedom to choose her own partner in marriage, and. . . express[ing] positive feelings about sexual satisfaction within it” (63). Grażyna Borkowska then analyzes the work of the nineteenth-century writer Narcyza Żmichowska. Borkowska shows how a conservative belief in the value of religion and family can be a form of transgression, if the writer seeks in these values the right to personal freedom and to living the way one wants.

Part III moves to modernism and opens with Józef Figa’s study of the male writer Władysław Reymont, whose “parafeminist” novels are “neither explicitly nor intentionally feminist” (79), yet by presenting reality through the eyes of female characters, these works force readers to question patriarchal norms and the violence to which women are frequently subjected. Next, Jolanta Wróbel-Best discusses Zofia Stryjeńska’s approach to art and femininity, as extrapolated from her diary. Stryjeńska was a famous Polish Art Deco painter, and the diary itself is in a transgressive, patchwork form. Wróbel-Best writes that for Stryjeńska “life is a labyrinth requiring transgressive acts to create and exist” and that Stryjeńska offers “a revolutionary approach to aesthetics” that she calls “a feminine caring for ideas” (116–17). Part III ends with Anna Gąsienica Byrcyn’s analysis of the transgressions of Tamara Łempicka, another Art Deco painter, through the prism of poems about her by the contemporary poet Robert Dassanovsky. Inspired by classical Italian painters, Łempicka is a very different type of artist than Stryjeńska. She engages in “significant transgressions” when, through a woman’s gaze, she employs the classical tradition to paint female and male nudes as well as figures that combine classical elements with modern ones (121).

Part IV goes back in time and switches genres with Aleksandra Świącka’s article on nineteenth-century composer Tekla Bądarzewska. Świącka begins with a background on the discrimination against women in music and on Polish women’s social situation during the Partitions. Bądarzewska transgressed social codes by printing her own scores and personally distributing them to booksellers. Świącka shows how a single composition of hers, not especially well received in Poland, became a hit around the world into the twentieth century. Next, Aleksandra Gruzinska explores how the gender transgressions of Marie Skłodowska Curie within the scientific world create challenges for representation in artistic works, focusing especially on a play and a movie about Curie, both written by the French writer Jean-Noël Fenwick.

Part V returns to the present and to literature. Daniel Kalinowski discusses how Polish women’s cultural boundaries changed after 1989. As part of this process, both the psychoanalytical and archetypal novels of Olga Tokarczuk and the naturalistic works of Manuela Gretkowska helped “stimulate women to define their freedom and femininity” (20). The last two articles, by Krystyna Zabawa and Elwira M. Grossman, look at recent children’s literature. Both describe how the best examples offer female characters who transgress boundaries, search for their own identities, and “recognize themselves most importantly as human beings” (205). Grossman also mentions “the role of the internet as an alternative educational. . . platform” (222).

Overall, the compilation should be of significant interest to western scholars of gender unfamiliar with Polish culture. For scholars in Poland, Filipowicz's article calls attention to the weaknesses in their approach. The one caveat that I have is the uneven quality and depth of analysis in the articles—a problem that clearly stems from having to introduce relatively unknown figures in a small number of pages. Some authors present so much background material that there is little room for the actual analysis. However, I hope that the brief introductions to these extraordinary women will stimulate readers to look for more information both about them and about Second World feminism.

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***Bulgaria's Democratic Institutions at Thirty: A Balance Sheet.*** Ed. Kjell Engelbrekt and Petia Kostadinova. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020. x, 305 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Figures. Tables. \$115.00, hard cover.  
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The volume consists of twelve chapters (including an introduction and conclusion) divided into three sections—"The National Electoral Process," "Civil Society," and "The European Context."

Petia Kostadinova produces a scorecard of Bulgarian democratic achievements by linking electoral institutions with the role played by civil society and the EU. She highlights the legislative elections during the period, recapitulates major electoral system changes, including summarizing presidential, local, European Parliament elections, and overviews all parties in Parliament. She outlines the crucial role of civil society for consolidating democracy as a vehicle for interest articulation and check on government accountability, followed by a synopsis of the major social mobilizations in Bulgaria. After recapping the Bulgarian pathway towards EU integration, the author demonstrates the dual positive impact of EU conditionality: preventing democratic backsliding and increasing the quality of democracy, the latter being tarnished after the rise of populist and nationalistic parties.

Tanya Bagashka presents the aspirations for direct democracy as exemplified in the three national referendums, none of which resulted in binding decisions due to low turnout. The institutional and procedural backgrounds of each are dissected by discussing the public debates, party rhetoric, and media coverage. One conclusion is that parties used referendums to steer public opinion, rather than to represent their supporters' standpoints. The author surmises that increased participation in subsequent referendums could be interpreted as increased civic responsibility, but it can also be attributed to coincidence with nation-wide elections, as long as similar public support in collecting signatures for all three was observed. The chapter ends with a perspicacious analysis of electoral systems in comparative perspective and their application in the post-communist context.

Using data from four national elections and observations on five major parties, Tatiana Kostadinova touches upon one aspect of the electoral reform: substitution of the closed-list with an open-list proportional representation system. Drawing on relevant comparative studies, she argues intra-party democracy increased the probability that supporters of such parties exercise their preference. She also posits that preferential voting was more active in cases of coalitions that were naturally less centralized. Finally, she observes that the open list PR system exerts pressure on parties