Part IV, ‘Religion’, is distinguished by an excellent article, which I have referred to in passing already, by Boris Tikhomirov. Tikhomirov explores Dostoevskii’s personal interpretation of apocalyptic events and his exegetical efforts to place children at the centre of the eschatological scenario. Dostoevskii’s theology is in this respect unconventional, for the ‘theme of children’ is not given the same eschatological emphasis in either the Gospels or Revelation that he ascribes to it in his writings. This emphasis is, however, crucial to Dostoevskii because for him children serve as an example of Christ, and thus love for children is the most compelling counterargument to those who claim that the ego is insurmountable, and who declare, like Ivan Karamazov, that universal love is impossible, that one may love one’s enemy in theory but ‘as soon as you see his face — love vanishes’.

I must also mention the contributions that Sarah Young and Vladimir Zakharov make to this final section. Like Tikhomirov, Young elucidates some of the idiosyncrasies of Dostoevskii’s Christianity, in her case by using The Idiot (principally) to draw out those aspects of his religion, particularly the relationship between death and time, which invite comparisons with Buddhism. Zakharov, meanwhile, underscores why an understanding of Dostoevskii’s religious consciousness is essential to fully grasp the Dostoevskian notion of the ‘fantastic’.

In summation, then, Dostoevsky: on the Threshold of Other Worlds is, as anthologies of this kind often are, something of a mixed bag. This is no great criticism, however, and if you have even a passing interest in Dostoevskii you will find something here to excite your curiosity.

HAAIRI NAQVI


The Russian-speaking community of former Soviet Jews in Israel numbers more than a million people. However, its cultural output, its flourishing literature, journalism, theatre, and art are rarely examined in critical scholarship, neither is the community familiar to the general public due to the lack of translations, exposure, and analysis. This is why Olga Gershenson’s book, Gesher. Russian Theatre in Israel: A Study in Cultural Colonization is a very important contribution to the nascent field of Russian-Israeli cultural studies. While focusing on the most famous Israeli theatre troupe, ‘Gesher’ (The Bridge), Gershenson succeeds in mapping a very large territory of contemporary Israeli cultural landscape by exploring the life of Russian immigrants in Israel and analyzing their complex relationships with sabras, the native-born Israelis. As such, Gershenson’s book is an invaluable guide to anyone who is interested not only in theatre arts but also in the dynamics of immigrant communities and their cultural production.

In the context of theatre arts and the larger society, Gershenson questions the various social categories applied to Gesher theatre-makers and to the immigrant community as a whole. On the one hand, aliya, the immigration of Jews from the Diaspora, is the cornerstone of Israeli society and Zionist ideology, and the foundation of Israel’s survival; on the other, the immigrants themselves are often resented and viewed as profoundly foreign and even alien to Israeli culture and society. Russian Jewish immigrants are thus confounded by the expectations of ‘coming Home’ and the reality of marginalization that imposes on them the role of the Other. Gesher’s art is situated at the very core of this paradox, making the theatre not quite Russian yet not quite Israeli either. Gershenson builds her analysis of Gesher on the foundation of the theories of hybridity, claiming that Gesher is the quintessential example of a cultural hybrid, a polyphonic multicultural artistic environment that is yet to be accepted as such by the Israeli ideological elite.

Following the Russian philosopher and literary scholar Bakhtin, Gershenson presents Gesher as an example of complex dialogic imagination — that is, the incorporation and interweaving of various voices to create a sum much greater and more generative than the parts — and of the artistic qualities associated with the fusion of multiple genres, styles, languages, and cultural traditions. According to Gershenson, hybridity is first and foremost a phenomenon of cultural exchange, which ‘brings forward contestation and collision’ (p. 107). Thus Gershenson traces the dynamics of the exchange between the Russian immigrants and the native-born Israelis through a meticulous examination of critical responses from the Israeli press to Gesher’s various productions. She notes that throughout the 1990s the voice of Russian Israelis has been at best marginal as an immigrant cultural expression appearing on the periphery of Israeli media and art. In the case of Gesher, however, theatre critics who publish reviews function not only as taste arbiters but also as gate-keepers who determine the troupe’s position in Israeli culture and attempt to bring the theatre-makers to order if the critics perceive subversion or threat to established norms.

The central recurrent motif in the relationship between the theatre and the critics is that the critics systematically fail to approach Gesher on artistic terms by evaluating its aesthetics. Rather, they focus on the theatre-makers’ cultural identity and social position often at the expense of actually reviewing the plays, the acting, or the direction. Gesher’s artistic director, Yivgeny Arie, a towering cultural figure with unusual vision and scope, emerges as the main target of often personal attacks that border on xenophobia and intolerance. Gershenson’s model of analyzing Gesher’s controversial media reception (parallel to the public reception embodied in ticket sales) is presented as an extension of postcolonial theory, yet would most certainly benefit from a new name.

Conceptualizing Gesher as the result of the cultural synthesis so common in Israel as well as of the complex network of channels of mutual influence between Russian émigrés and the sabras, Gershenson calls this model ‘Mutual and Internal Colonization’ in the sense that sometimes Israeli critics sound condescending towards Gesher’s art, functioning as a colonizer, and sometimes self-deprecating, elevating Gesher’s achievement to the levels above Israeli culture, thus functioning as a colonized. It is valuable to apply the terms of postcolonial critique to the analysis
of Gesher’a art and its reception since the writer clearly focuses on the power
dynamics implied in all discourse. Yet this terminology might be slightly mislead-
ing to those readers who will pick the book up off the shelf thinking in conventional
political terms. A study in cultural colonization is not connected to any actual
geopolitical conflicts in the Middle East; it is in fact an analysis of internal Israeli
dynamics of power, ideology, cultural and linguistic identity, and the judgment
of artistic expression. Gershenson succeeds in bringing our attention to all these
important aspects of the Israeli cultural landscape and her book is a milestone
contribution to the understudied arena of Russian-Israeli culture.

Wellesley College

Anna P. Ronell

Z ts’oho mozhna zrobyty kil’ka opovidan’ [‘From This Could Be Made Several Stories’]. By TARAS PROKHASKO. Ivano-Frankovsk: Lileia-NV, 2005. 128 pp. $23.45. ISBN 9666680939

For a good few years now Iurii Andrukhovych has been by far the most dominant
figure on the Ukrainian literary scene, his winning of the Leipzig Book Prize in
April 2006 being the latest chapter in his meteoric success story. However, there are
several other writers who have been steadily building up a solid literary repertoire
against the background of Andrukhovych’s success, as well as a number of younger
writers beginning to emerge from under his considerable shadow, at the same time
owing much to his influence. Of the latter, writers such as Serhii Zhadan, Andrii
Bondar, Tania Maliarchuk, Lubko Deresh and Sofiia Andrukhovych, are all produc-
ing prose and poetry of great promise, and beginning to be noticed beyond Ukraine
itself. The Orange Revolution turned the world’s eyes toward Ukraine, and some of
this attention filtered through to Ukraine’s writers, who played an active role in the
campaign for political changes. Andrukhovych himself was awarded a prestigious
scholarship in Germany, followed by the above-mentioned prize, and neighbouring
Poland held a year of Ukrainian culture, which saw a glut of translations and
successful publicity tours by writers.

In the context of Ukrainian literature this group of writers is indeed very young,
with Lubko Deresh producing his third novel and Sofiia Andrukhovych publishing
several novellas before the age of twenty. The combination of the work of this
younger generation and that of the writers of the so called Stanislav phenomenon,
most notably Iurii Izdryk and Taras Prokhasko — still only in their thirties — has, in
the space of just over a decade, produced a substantial contemporary literary canon,
which is beginning to look more and more like the sort worthy of a large European
nation, something that Ukraine has for so long sadly lacked.

Taras Prokhasko has been one of the most active figures in the literary life of
Ukraine over the last decade. His debut collection of short stories Inshi dni Anny,
with their combination of startling descriptive language, local mythology and
philosophical interludes immediately won him a local cult following and, since
then, with the publication of a collection of mini-essays originally broadcast on local
radio, Halychyna FM (2001), a further collection of stories Leksykon taemykh znan'