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Lunde, Ingunn. *Language on Display: Writers, Fiction and Linguistic Culture in Post-Soviet Russia*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018. 232 pp. £75.00. ISBN 978-1-474-42156-0.

This study investigates the involvement of Russian writers in post-Soviet debates about language. It convincingly bridges disciplines that are usually engaged in a dialogue of the deaf, most notably (socio)linguistics and literary studies. The relevance and merits of this interdisciplinary undertaking are obvious. As Ingunn Lunde explains, the prestige of “great literature”—with its supposed norm-maintaining functions—has traditionally loomed large over Russian disputes about linguistic standards and change, a situation reflected in the Russian term for the linguistic norm: literary language (*literaturnyi iazyk*). In the post-Soviet era, however, the influx of foreign words, the rise of new linguistic practices on the internet, and wild postmodernist experimentation in Russian letters have challenged traditional ideas about linguistic (and literary) norms. The ensuing debates about the fate of the Russian language have gained marked political relevance in light of recent government legislation that aims to ban loanwords and obscenities in specific contexts.

Lunde’s focus is on writers’ responses to these debates and, especially, on their metalinguistic concerns and commentaries in fictional literature. The book contains an extensive prelude to the literary analyses themselves. Parts 1 and 2 map the dynamic field of contemporary Russian literature, identify the central topics in current linguistic discussions, and explore the prehistories of these debates. In part 3, Lunde turns to case studies, investigating, for instance, writers’ explicit comments on the post-Soviet language situation in interviews, surveys, and roundtable discussions. Among other cases, she zeroes in on the disputes sparked by a 2014 amendment to the Law on the Russian Language that (in its initial form) banned profanities (*mat*) in film, music, literature, and theater.

Lunde observes that, in contrast to the traditional notion that literature is the ultimate arbiter of correct cultured language, contemporary Russian authors adopt relaxed attitudes toward linguistic diversity and non-standard uses and tend to resist government interference. Writers’ liberal positions, however, are often accompanied by traditional beliefs. Defenses of *mat* in literature, for instance, regularly come with a denunciation of casual uses of *mat* in daily life. Such stances, Lunde argues, perpetuate romantic ideas about literature’s status as the treasure-house of the Russian language, the unique tradition of Russian *mat* allegedly being a part of its riches. The self-confident tone taken by writers, moreover, testifies to the continuing appeal of traditional notions of the writer as someone uniquely equipped (and authoritatively entitled) to speak out on the linguistic situation.

The protests against government legislation also included creative and aesthetic responses, in particular those of *Abanamat*. This movement consisted of writers and artists who protested the 2014 legislation and organized events in nine Russian cities to “commemorate” *mat* on the eve of its ban. As Lunde shows, their posters, poetry, songs, and statements often displayed, in a performative manner, the uncontrollable proliferation of *mat*’s forms and functions, thereby underscoring how the phenomenon defied top-down restrictions.

The performative character of the *Abanamat* protests provides a convenient transition to the literary analyses in part 4. Analyzing novels and stories by six popular and lesser-known contemporary authors (among them Vladimir Sorokin, Valerii Votrin, and Tat’iana Tolstaia), Lunde demonstrates how imaginative literature (implicitly) comments on and performs the language-related issues so fiercely discussed in the real world. Literature enacts linguistic diversity, plays with non-standard varieties of expression, highlights the problems posed by the Soviet linguistic heritage, and explores, through its fictional plots, the pros and cons of language regulation. As Lunde’s meticulous close

readings show, questions of linguistic change and norms are in these fictional works (as in the world outside literature) bound up with widely experienced ambiguities about shared traditions, cultural values, and collective identities.

A case in point is Vladimir Sorokin's short story "Monoklon," in which Lunde discerns Soviet jargons and styles that provide two parallel, though seemingly incompatible, prisms on the late-Soviet past and its continuing cultural reverberations in the present. Another example is Valerii Votrin's novel *The Speech Therapist*, which portrays an oppressive Russian regime with a single-minded focus on language regulation. As the story progresses, however, the border between linguistic "conservatives" and dissident linguistic 'liberals' proves increasingly hard to maintain.

Of central importance is Lunde's argument that imaginative literature not merely provides meta-commentary on the vexed topics of current debates on language, but also performs these issues through dialogue, style, vocabulary, and the discourse of narrators. Lunde coins the term "performative metalanguage" for these multilayered literary practices which comment on language precisely by "displaying" it.

The book caters to an audience of Russia specialists. Citations from literature are in Russian, with English translations provided in notes at the end of each chapter. The decision to target a specialist readership is understandable, given the uniqueness of the post-Soviet Russian linguistic situation and the fact that most of the texts discussed have not been translated into English. At the same time, Lunde's study deserves a wider audience than Slavists alone. Her groundbreaking interdisciplinary methodology, as well as the compelling argument about performative metalanguage, could inspire new (comparative) perspectives on other cultural and linguistic contexts.

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