

JACQUELINE LOSS. *Dreaming in Russian: The Cuban Soviet Imaginary*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013. 254 pp.

Cuba's bitter "Special Period" of the 1990s resulted from the disintegration of the Soviet Union and its attendant abandonment of the island. Far from separating the Caribbean nation from the Soviet bloc, the disappearance of the Russians left a cultural and historical vacuum in Cuba that some Cubans subsequently filled with historical revisionism and nostalgic yearnings for Soviet culture. Jacqueline Loss's *Dreaming in Russian* gathers and displays many of these remnants – social movements, narrative fiction, anecdotes, material and artistic cultures, and an oneiric image – left in the wake of the Soviets' departure. A professor of literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Connecticut, Loss draws heavily on interviews, anecdotes, critical analyses, and also relates some sections of her book to impressions taken from postmodern, postcolonial, and post-Soviet theories. A work as interesting and novel as this study will be appreciated by many different types of audiences.

While, at first, hardboiled literary critics will be left looking for familiar critical and theoretical touchstones with which to understand *Dreaming in Russian*, they will soon become accustomed to the anecdotal and self-referential methodology Loss employs in her remarkable book. "Not a historical account" and "structured like a jigsaw puzzle," this study often relies on dinner party conversation, chitchat during desultory walking tours, and the personal speculations of individual informants as evidence for many of our critic's asseverations about Cuban culture from the 1960s to the new millennium (15). What is invaluable in this work is the focus on performativity, subaltern society, ephemera, social media, and non-literary art forms/performances. Given Loss's able use of these sources, the reader will be left wanting to see her engage with the paradigms of literary theory that she glosses in the book. Readers will also wonder why she does not engage at all (not even in her bibliography) the most significant of critics within Cuban studies such as Gustavo Pérez Firmat and Roberto González Echevarría when she delves into topics on which they have arguably written decisive studies: Cuban hybridity and Severo Sarduy respectively.

*Dreaming in Russian's* five chapters and coda do not necessarily have a causal connection; they are instead a jigsaw puzzle, as their author informs her readers in her introduction. The opening chapter, "Koniec," situates bicultural Cubans of both Cuban and Soviet bloc heritage within Cuba's rhetorical tradition of transculturation. Loss analyzes various types of visual documentation and auto-ethnographic pursuits to question the true syncretism available to children and adults of "mixed-marriages" on the

island. The next chapter, "Crossed Destinies," focuses primarily on drag performances, gay people, and a queer aesthetic that benefits from an extrapolation of "transloca" identity onto Cuban performers. Loss uses these lenses to interrogate notions of "progress and masculinity posited by the Cuban-Soviet relationship" related to sexuality and spatial displacement in Cuba (17). She is thus able to examine how the Revolutionary concept of the "new man" is transformed in modern Cuba. "Cuban Intermediaries," chapter three in this work, studies the travelogue as literary trope and reality from the 1980s to the twenty-first century. This chapter considers the disorienting or reorienting experience real and imagined travelers to the Soviet bloc have, which causes them to reevaluate what it means to be Western. This is one chapter in which Loss really shines as critic and writer. In particular, her analysis of José Manuel Prieto's novels is a *tour de force*. She delves deeply into their study and provides a lengthy examination of his work. Her chapter four, "Made in the USSR," focuses significantly on Russian cartoons and their nostalgic value for children who grew up exposed to that brand of popular culture. Surprisingly, these *muñequitos rusos* are touchstones of youthful kinship today, both in Cuba and in Miami. The cartoons originally provided Cuban children a glimpse of another type of world – "ways of thinking and expression, which ... make [them] have more in common with someone from Poland than someone from Spain" (128). Furthermore, this chapter takes on the internet as an agent of nostalgic development as allied to both artistic and sociological approaches. The final chapter in this book, "The Phantasmagoric Sputnik," considers the emotional and aesthetic responses of several visual artists to the seeming extinction, during the Special Period, of the Soviets' ostensibly invincible and meteoric advances in the sciences. The book's coda ties together, or frames – in keeping with the puzzle metaphor, the previous five chapters and sums up in satisfying terms Loss's ideas. The reader is reminded that its author's readings do not project a facile nostalgia for the Soviet bloc onto Cuba. It leaves us with the tantalizing consideration that "Cuba may be involved in a teleological passage toward capitalism" (21).

By the end of *Dreaming in Russian*, readers will want to study more deeply many of the intertexts on which Loss relies. She piques our interest in them and in Cuban-Soviet studies. This book is tremendously valuable within Cuban studies in general and other disciplines precisely because Loss collects and documents many anecdotal and performative data that are impossible or at least very difficult to amass. She also brings up intriguing questions of a more traditional sort, regarding the clichéd transcultural powers of Cuban society. She prepares the ground well for further research into both the nationalistic nature of the Cuban Revolution

as well as the shift in consciousness that might have been caused by the importation of Soviet commodities. Jacqueline Loss's book will ably guide the student who wants to pursue this subfield as well as experts in Cuban studies.

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KATHRYN M. MAYERS. *Visions of Empire in Colonial Spanish American Ekphrastic Writing*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press. 2012. xix + 165 pp.

Kathryn Mayers's *Visions of Empire* focuses on Luis de Góngora's influence on three colonial writers, Hernando Domínguez Camargo, Juan de Espinosa Medrano and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. The book looks specifically at the role played by Gongorine ekphrases and how these are adapted by Spanish American Creole authors, offering a personal and American approach to European literary codes, thus fostering a complex meeting of perspectives that shift between the Old World and the New. Ekphrasis produces word-pictures that perform both a representation and a contradictory dialogue with imperial power, asserting its prominence whilst exposing its weaknesses that were increasingly apparent in America's late seventeenth-century society, fragmented by various political, racial and sexual hierarchies, divided by the demands of the Creoles against the privileges of the *gachupines* and the exploited native and black population.

*Visions of Empire's* aims are thus manifold. Firstly, it seeks to revisit the often studied topic of Góngora's legacy in America; secondly, it analyses the relationship between writing and visual culture, establishing the ways in which art and ideology complement each other; and finally, it wishes to reconsider the role of Creole intellectuals in colonial Spanish America. The monograph is organised in five chapters where these issues are developed. Chapter one is devoted to the concept of ekphrasis; chapter two focuses on Góngora's original ekphrases and his innovative style; and each of the final chapters is devoted to one of the three colonial writers considered by Mayers. Her approaches are buttressed by a sound grasp of current debates on visual studies and Creole identity, as well as by historical knowledge of the period and valuable close-readings of various ekphrases present in Camargo, Medrano and Sor Juana.

Mayers's monograph is a welcome addition to the field of Spanish American Colonial Studies. Her work has the great virtue of going beyond