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From Post-Yugoslavia to the Female Continent: A Feminist Reading of Post-Yugoslav Literature. By TIJANA MATIJEVIĆ. Bielefeld: Transcript. 2020. 274 pp. €70. ISBN 978-3-8376-5209-3.

Tijana Matijević lectures on post-Yugoslav literature, culture, and languages at two European universities, and this monograph reflects her expertise while consolidating her previous research. The book attempts to examine contemporary literature from the regions of former Yugoslavia through the lens of feminist analysis and also in the light of its theorized connections with the Yugoslav neo-avant-garde. It expands and redefines existing concepts (such as the idea of post-Yugoslavia as a liminal socio-political space defined, in Bhabha's phrasing, as 'the time never completely beyond' (p. 8)) while introducing new notions (such as framing and understanding the literary landscapes of today's Yugoslavia as a 'female continent'). As such, this book represents a nuanced integration of literary and feminist analysis applied to several key texts, including the Serbian author Slobodan Tišman's *Bernardijeva Soba* (*Bernardi's Room*, 2011) and the Croatian writer Olja Savičević Ivančević's *Adio, Kauboj* (*Adios Cowboy*, 2010). It is carefully researched and meticulously argued, if a little densely worded at times. Matijević engages ambitiously with various theoretical fields, which underpin her close textual and interdisciplinary analysis of the primary sources examined in Chapters 2–6. While Western

scholars may not be familiar with all of the authors discussed here, as they are not widely known outside the Balkan region (with a few notable exceptions such as Daša Drndić), Matijević's comparative approach makes her study relevant for non-specialists as well as regional experts.

Matijević's main focus is on writing produced in the first half of the second decade of this century in three of the former Yugoslav republics (Serbia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina), all of which now exist as separate legal, political, and geographical entities. However, she argues for the existence of a non-physical entity which she terms 'post-Yugoslavia', where certain continuities can be identified with the literary conditions and preoccupations of the former state, particularly from a feminist standpoint and in terms of the marginalization of female authors. It is these continuities that the author attempts to dissect and explore, with particular interest in how gender, sexuality, and body combine with themes of war and particularly with the narrativization of war by female characters. The author views the publication and mainstream status of war novels by female authors in this period as crucial to illustrate her point that, in post-Yugoslavia, 'non-phallic and non-masculine bodies and identities' (p. 10) begin to invade literary domains hitherto dominated by male authors. Another principal strand of her argument concerns the connection between the post-Yugoslav literary field and the Yugoslav neo-avant-garde, both of which endured, and continue to suffer, a certain elusiveness or even failure of integration into the literary mainstream, despite often relating to similar themes and discourses. Matijević makes a strong case for this link, illustrating it with specific examples through analysis of works by such seminal neo-avant-garde authors as Judita Šalgo and the aforementioned Slobodan Tišma. While any text referring to Yugoslavia has to acknowledge the lasting impact and damage of the wars fought during the 1990s, nevertheless Matijević ends on a hopeful note: that post-Yugoslav writing demands that we reconsider Yugoslavia's past in new ways—for example, by inventing improved alternative pasts and futures, even by allowing for the possibility of 'projecting' socialist utopia (p. 217). She calls this process "choosing the optimal variant" in prevailing over reality' (p. 251). In summary, Matijević's book represents a salient contribution to an under-researched area, which will be of great interest and benefit to both students and established scholars in the field of European and literary studies.

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