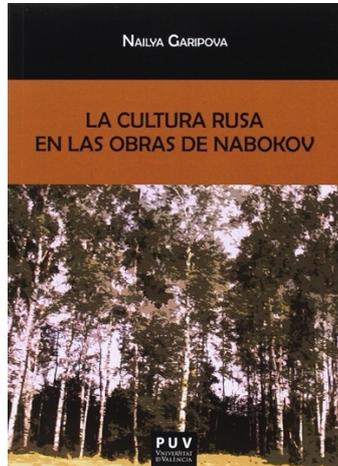


*La cultura rusa en la obra de Vladimir Nabokov*, by Nailya Garipova. Valencia: Universitat de Valencia, 2018; ISBN 978-84-9134-141-3. Bibliography. 355 pp.



**N**amed after a late scholar who pioneered US Studies in Spain, the Javier Coy Series might well be the leading European collection in the field today, with over 150 titles published so far. Volume 145 is the first entirely devoted to Vladimir Nabokov. Russian-born Nailya Garipova, who has previously done extensive research on the author of *Lolita*, has written a most ambitious critical study. She painstakingly traces the influence of Russia in the works Nabokov published not only in Russian, but also in English. Garipova largely succeeds in achieving her main goal, which she clearly defines as exploring “la cultura rusa en las novelas de Nabokov con la intención de resolver las dificultades culturales que los lectores no eslavos encuentran en ellas” (“Russian culture in Nabokov’s novels in order to solve the cultural difficulties that non-Slavic readers find in them,” p. 16). The title of her book is rather misleading, since she basically centers her study on Nabokov’s novels and, while she does comment on his poetry, his nonfiction work, and his controversial edition of Alexander Pushkin’s *Eugene Onegin*, no reference is made to his short-stories.

Garipova focuses on three crucial manifestations of that Russian element: the presence of the culture (folklore, popular sayings, food, traditions, etc.), the language, and the literature. The book, written in a very clear jargon-free language, has a straightforward structure, since chapter 1 (pp. 15-30) provides basic theoretical considerations, while chapters 2 (pp. 31-204) and 3 (pp. 205-332) explore, respectively, Nabokov’s works of ‘the Russian years’ and ‘the American years,’ clearly echoing the title of the two volumes of

Brian Boyd's masterful biography. In terms of organization, clearly delineated sections and subsections make the book quite reader-friendly.

Since this critical study is published in Spain, the country where Garipova has largely developed her academic career, she also discusses – somewhat briefly – how those three Russian elements have been rendered in Spanish translations of Nabokov's texts, thus giving her analysis an even wider intellectual scope. She is perfectly suited to do so, since – in truly Nabokovian fashion – she is a polyglot scholar who consistently demonstrates her command of Russian, English, and Spanish. In fact, her comprehensive Bibliography includes not only abundant primary and secondary sources in Russian and English, but also an entry in French by Tzvetan Todorov, and another one in Italian by the renowned scholar Cesare Segre. Furthermore, Garipova lists works by European Nabokov scholars in Spain (Asunción Barreras Gómez) and France (Marie C. Bouchet), thus reinforcing the transcultural approach that characterizes *La cultura rusa en las obras de Nabokov*.

Several sections of Garipova's critical analysis deserve special praise: in Chapter 2, her detailed scrutiny of the influence that both Nikolai Gogol (pp. 107-123) and Vladislav Khodasevich (pp. 194-198) had on Nabokov's Russian novels is highly revealing. In Chapter 3, she especially excels at exploring the presence of Alexander Pushkin in the English novels (pp. 264-78). This section, the longest one in the entire volume, explores the many connections existing between *Lolita* and *Eugene Onegin*, a text which Garipova proves to know exceedingly well. Her multilingual command of Nabokov's work is undeniable when, discussing the presence of Pushkin in *Lolita*, she asserts that “la versión rusa de la novela es mucho más rica en referencias intertextuales que el original” (“the Russian version of the novel is much richer in intertextual references than the original one,” pp. 269). Given the hostility that Nabokov always showed in public towards Fyodor Dostoevsky, it is likewise illuminating to read the pages about the influence of the latter in the novels that the former wrote in the United States (pp. 289-300). Garipova provides compelling evidence suggesting that the nymphomania theme in Nabokov partly derived from the author of *Crime and Punishment*; as in the case of Pushkin, she again asserts that this intertextual link is stronger in the Russian version of *Lolita* (pp. 289-290).

Another praiseworthy feature in the book are those footnotes in which Garipova displays her native command of Russian culture, either providing clarifying definitions of

elements of national folklore, or offering her own translations of Russian words or expressions which, in her opinion, have not been properly rendered in English, or even in Spanish.

However, at certain moments the critical analysis in *La cultura rusa en la obra de Nabokov* might have benefited from a deeper engagement with some theoretical concepts. Thus, the seminal reflections on exile penned by another illustrious twentieth-century *emigré*, Edward Said, might have suggested new ways of approaching the traumatic impact that departing his beloved Russia had on Nabokov. In a similar vein, academic fields such as Translation Studies or Reader-Response Theory could have made Garipova's insights even more penetrating. Brian Boyd's detailed biographical information on Vladimir Nabokov's aristocratic Russian upbringing would also shed light on the author's unique perception of his native land. Garipova's reference to the author's "apolitical position" (p. 222) does seem awkward, given that he always made clear his 'strong opinions' on Soviet Russia, Communism, Fascism, and dictators of any kind. Finally, a paradox that remains unsolved is how could Nabokov achieve so much international recognition, if his work depended so heavily on aspects of Russian culture that a foreign reader might not fully grasp.

To sum up, Nailya Garipova's *La cultura rusa en las obras de Nabokov* is undoubtedly a major contribution to understanding the Nabokovian cosmopolitanism from a truly transnational and multilingual perspective, since literary texts in three different languages are here studied. A Russian-born scholar like Garipova proves to be at a vantage point to discuss, with depth and rigor, the lasting influence that major aspects of Russian culture had on the novels that Vladimir Nabokov wrote, first in Europe and later in the United States. Even though it is written in Spanish, Nailya Garipova's book is a remarkable work of literary criticism that truly deserves to be known by Nabokov scholars worldwide.

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