represented in the book may not accurately reflect the current memory work, or the state of Lithuanian cultural studies, to which, I suggest, the studies of "folk" or traditional culture belong.

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Gaia, Queen of Ants. By Hamid Ismailov. Trans. Shelley Fairweather-Vega. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press. xii. 198 pp. Notes. $19.95, paper.
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Among contemporary Uzbek writers, Hamid Ismailov arguably boasts the greatest presence in the west. Several of his novels have been published in English, French, and German, were reviewed in leading journals, and won prizes. And yet, officialdom in Ismailov's homeland prefers to ignore him—for the last twenty-five years, the writer has maintained a fearlessly independent position as a sharp observer and uncompromising critic of human rights violations in Uzbekistan. Born in 1954 to an Uzbek family in Kyrgyzstan, Ismailov graduated from the Bagrationovsk military school in the Kaliningrad region in 1974, studied biology at Tashkent University, and worked as a translator. In the tumultuous years following Uzbekistan's independence, Ismailov became a persona non grata. He left Uzbekistan in 1992, settling in Britain in 1994, subsequently working as a journalist and writer-in-residence for the BBC. His literary career began with poetry written in Russian in the 1980s; in the 1990s, he gradually transitioned to writing fiction in Uzbek.

The mere facts of Ismailov's biography reflect the trials and tribulations of a searching mind thrown into heavy geopolitical turbulences. However, in his artistic work, Ismailov transcends the journalistic framework of his BBC day job: his creative ambitions go far beyond analyzing the political situation in Uzbekistan. Rather, Ismailov aims at an *aesthetic* exploration of the human condition, positioning Uzbek sensibilities and experiences within a modern global context. Conspicuously, *Gaia, Queen of Ants*, begins with a Hesiod epigraph, signifying philosophical ambition that is further developed by a multitude of mythological references. And yet, while avoiding political concreteness, this novel's artfully composed narrative does not exclude political phenomena per se. Instead, they begin to appear in an unexpected light, bringing the eastern post-communist legacy and western civilizational disorientation to a fascinating synthesis. To an open-minded reader, Ismailov's prose has the potential to transform perceptions both with respect to Central Asia and the west.

The novel's central character, Domrul, a thirty-year old Meskhetian Turk, escaped Uzbekistan's turmoil as a child and now lives in a serene provincial town near London. His encounter with an elderly émigré, Gaia Mangitkhanovna, forces him back into the past from which he fled; the consequences prove to be fatal. Gaia, an arrogant, strong-willed octogenarian hires Domrul as an aide and confidante (officially a "carer" in the British welfare system), secretly expecting him to assist her with suicide at a later time. But first, Gaia recruits the confused young man as her lover. Ismailov's ability to render the unusual plausible and to verbalize even the most intimate details of that March-December relationship without slipping into sensationalism or morbid voyeurism is masterful. Undeniably, this outrageous relationship has more to do with Gaia's hypnotic powers than with traditional romantic attraction, and Domrul's desperate attempts to free himself from the old lady's spell are bound to fail. Instead, he is increasingly alienated from his Irish girlfriend, Emer Finnegan, who grew up in the

Balkans, lives in Paris, is arrested for political activities in Tashkent and in the end pays the highest price for getting caught in Gaia's dangerous schemes.

Whatever the national or geographic backgrounds of Ismailov's characters may be, each one of them has been damaged by the geopolitical clashes of the past three decades, and every one of them carries a heavy baggage of repressed traumas determining their personal relations and decisions. The larger-than-life title heroine was shaped by Soviet norms: thus, as a girl, she denounced her own mother to Stalinist authorities. But Gaia's eerie powers are not the product of an immoral system; Ismailov depicts them as primordial. These powers found fertile ground in communism and, paradoxically, continue to cause destruction when transferred to the west. Indeed, the character of Gaia Mangitkhanovna is arguably the novel's most original and disturbing element, its conceptual center.

Syracuse University Press deserves special recognition for sponsoring the series *Middle East Literature in Translation*, in which this novel appeared. Shelley Fairweather-Vega translated it from the original Uzbek and not, as is often the case with fiction from Central Asia, from a Russian translation. Her attention to the subtleties of the original is exemplary and turns the reading experience into a vivid pleasure. In her introduction, she explains some of the linguistic intricacies of the original text. Most importantly, Fairweather-Verga treated the novel with utmost respect for its *poetic* qualities. Hers is a true labor of love, revealing the unexplored potential of a literature that is still largely unknown and unrecognized in the west.

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Wheels of Change: Feminist Transgressions in Polish Culture and Society. Ed. Jolanta Wróbel-Best. Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 2021. 240 pp. Index. Paper.
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Wheels of Change is a welcome English-language addition to gender studies both globally and in Poland. Starting with a theoretical introduction by Halina Filipowicz, this interdisciplinary compilation of articles analyzes the cultural and social transgressions of a number of outstanding Polish women from the eighteenth through the twenty-first centuries. As the editor, Jolanta Wróbel-Best, writes, the theme of transgression "creates a special form of debate that unifies chapters, but is not obviously harmonious, linear, and steadily evolving"; but rather "stress[es] [the] contextual character" of "feminist progress" (8).

In her clearly elucidated article, Filipowicz discusses the obstacles to a transnational feminism that includes a First World/Second World understanding and dialogue. First is what Filipowicz calls "the power dynamic of the translation trade" (41), in other words, the fact that only a very small number of texts have been translated from Polish, and other east European languages, into the major western languages. The movement into Polish is much larger, but still with significant gaps. Furthermore, since western feminists are in a position of power and privilege, their ideas "can represent a kind of imperialism" that attempts to fit east European phenomena into western theories (44–45). At the same time, Filipowicz sees two obstacles within feminist writing in Poland. First, Polish feminists focus on young, urban, well-educated women, neither considering class differences nor giving voice to low wage earners with conservative values. Second, Polish feminists insist that thanks to social/political conditions during the Partitions, Polish women broke the private/public wall already in the nineteenth century. Filipowicz explains that by looking only at a few