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Review: *Limits to Interpretation: The Meanings of Anna Karenina; Russian Science Fiction Literature and Cinema: A Critical Reader*

Serenity Stanton Orengo

Alla A. Smyslova

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Alexandrov, Vladimir E. 2017. *Limits to Interpretation: The Meanings of Anna Karenina*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press. Index. 353 pages.

Limits to Interpretation is a staple of Tolstoy scholarship. Newly reprinted in paperback, it is worth revisiting, even for those already familiar with this work. Alexandrov's aim in the book, outlined on the first page, is to "propose a text-specific reading methodology, one that is tailored as much as possible to a particular work, and that is thus designed to minimize the circularity of interpretation, or the process of mediation, inherent in any act of reading" (3). Alexandrov seeks to demonstrate how a work of literature can prompt a fixed range of contradictory and divergent interpretations simultaneously. He wants to demonstrate this "mapping out" of the relations among the plausible meanings, while also showing there are limits to interpretation and that some meanings will fall outside this realm of plausibility. Although the largest portion of the book covers his reading of *Anna Karenina*, the opening section addresses his methodology.

Alexandrov uses part of his introduction to sharply criticize the current trend of "'novelty' as a scholarly preoccupation" (4). He illustrates his point by citing the publishers' advertisements of new scholarly books that stress the books' originality. To be original, Alexandrov argues, means to not grant full attention to what others have said before, and this neglect leads to a limited view in the study. The need to produce a new interpretation of a literary work can lead to "distortion, hairsplitting and a reductive sense of the works' meanings" (3). His own proposed methodology, while innovative, avoids these problems by allowing and readily advocating for both old and new interpretations. Rather than claiming complete novelty, Alexandrov seeks to add to and modify the "range of a work's different readings, but without necessarily abandoning or overturning any, most, or even some of them" (9).

Part 1 of the book outlines the theory and methodology that Alexandrov applies to *Anna Karenina* in part 2. He utilizes both Roman Jakobson's structuralist approach and Yurii Lotman's theory of cultural semiotics, which he complements with arguments from reader-oriented theory, developmental and cognitive psychology, cultural anthropology, and ethics. He introduces what he calls "hermeneutic indices" — moments

of metalingual function in the text that can promote a multiplicity of interpretations but also help limit the text to plausible interpretations. He offers several examples of hermeneutic indices from different texts to help solidify his meaning before turning to *Anna Karenina*, including a moment from *Eugene Onegin*, when, following a poem by Lensky, the narrator states: "All this, friends, meant: / I have a pistol duel with a pal" (quoted in Alexandrov, 41). The narrator's translation and reduction of Lensky's Romantic poem displays the contrast between the narrator's and Lensky's codes, establishes the distance between the narrator and Lensky, and "contributes to the construction of the complex narrative-authorial persona in the work" (41). The narrator's translation constitutes a hermeneutic index. Hermeneutic indices create a map of readings, and this is the basis of the second, and largest, portion of the book: Alexandrov's reading of *Anna Karenina*.

Alexandrov found approximately 1600 hermeneutic indices in *Anna Karenina*, and his careful attention to detail shows in his many readings. Even careful readers of the novel will likely have overlooked several of the moments Alexandrov discusses. He grants new meaning to passages by cataloguing them together, such as with Dolly's seemingly contradictory characterizations of Stiva and his infidelity at various parts of the novel. There are too many strings of interpretation in the study to possibly be able to do justice to them here, so I will limit myself to a few of his more memorable readings.

Alexandrov understandably devotes the greatest number of pages to Anna and Levin but makes many salient and intriguing points about the other characters as well, such as when he suggests a possible link between Vronsky not paying his English horse trainer and the trainer later becoming a drunkard and abandoning his family, whom Anna subsequently takes in (217). Borrowing from Nabokov, as well as an earlier study of his own, Alexandrov tracks the ways in which time moves differently for Levin and Kitty as opposed to Anna and Vronsky, which indicates that the two sets of characters live in worlds isolated from each other (141). Kitty and Levin's time, even before they are a couple, typically lags behind that of Vronsky and Anna. Alexandrov examines the scene of the horserace, to which Vronsky is late and must rush. During the actual race, Vronsky fails to keep up with the horse, which results in Frou-Frou's death. The scene is often read in terms of Vronsky's relationship with

Anna, but Alexandrov suggests it is not Vronsky's rushing that kills Anna "but his inability to catch up with her as she rushes ahead of him" (143). This scene is juxtaposed with the scenes of Levin mowing, and Alexandrov concludes that while Anna and Vronsky rush through life towards death, Levin and Kitty "linger in slow time, which is life" (144). Thus, what appears to be mistakes in the time of the novel, Alexandrov argues, can be interpreted as deliberate plotting that correlates to the characters' development.

Although some readers may at first be put off by Alexandrov's decision to not use clearly defined chapters but rather divide his readings into numbered sections with limited foci, this format can also be counted among the strengths of the book. Alexandrov nearly constantly refers readers to other sections, further demonstrating the mapping of interpretations that his methodology proposes. Despite Alexandrov's dislike of novelty, both old and new readers of his study are likely to find several new ways of thinking about *Anna Karenina*.

Serenity Stanton Orengo
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign

Bauckus, Susan, Susan Kresin, eds. 2018. *Connecting Across Languages and Cultures: A Heritage Language Festschrift in Honor of Olga Kagan*. Bloomington, Indiana: Slavica. 215 pages.

This volume pays tribute to Olga Kagan, who was a pioneer of Russian heritage language (HL) studies and a core figure in the rapidly growing field of heritage languages in general in the US, and who connected pedagogical research with linguistic research and researchers with practitioners. Sadly, Olga Kagan passed away on April 6, 2018. This loss to the field will be felt through years to come. The editors of the volume continue Kagan's legacy and present a collection of the latest contributions in heritage language linguistics and pedagogy.

This volume opens with a bibliography of Kagan's publications, including her last work, a five-hundred-page book that presents a comprehensive overview of HL programs and practices for language maintenance and development, setting the stage for future work in HL

education and research¹.

In the *Foreword*, Terrence G. Wiley, a long-time contributor to HL research, provides a concise overview of the evolution of the HL field in the US, from Joshua Fishman's groundbreaking work in the 1960s to Kagan's involvement with the online *Heritage Language Journal* and the National Heritage Language Resource Center (NHLRC) in the 2000s. Kagan, who was instrumental in starting the journal and served as a founding director of the NHLRC, was a tireless and passionate advocate of HL education and research. Kagan's work spanned many disciplines, crossing academic and geographic borders and engaging scholars and practitioners nationally and internationally.

The first section details the different types of relationships that individuals have with their HL in terms of proficiency, identity, and culture. The section opens with Maria Carreira and Claire Hitchens Chik's article, which summarizes "the main linguistic and affective characteristics of HL learners" and provides an overview of effective HL teaching practices. Carreira and Chik make a compelling argument in favor of HL-specific courses—separate from non-heritage (L2) learners—especially in the lower levels of instruction. The differences in language needs between these two types of learners "render L2 pedagogies ineffective, if not counter-productive" (19). Carreira and Chik focus on approaches that have proven most effective for helping HL learners reach the highest levels in language programs tailored to their strengths and needs. The authors assert that language departments can benefit from offering HL-specific courses, thanks to increased enrollments by attracting more students and by enabling departments to increase the number of upper-level courses offered since students in HL-dedicated courses can advance to higher levels of proficiency faster than L2 learners (20).

Netta Avineri and Nelleke Van Deusen-Scholl look at different ways individuals connect to their HL. Avineri's article explores the relationship with identity through the model of a "metalinguistic community," which is based on a range of nostalgia socialization practices (27). Avineri argues that personal experiences and historical context may

¹ Kagan, Olga, Maria Carreira, Claire Hitchens Chik, eds. (2017). *A Handbook on Heritage Language Education: From Innovation to Program Building*. New York: Routledge.

strengthen or weaken an individual's bonds with HL. Van Deusen-Scholl then takes a closer look at the concept of heritage identity of students of rarely taught languages who are remote from their HL speech communities. These students take language courses through the Shared Course Initiative (SCI), which allows American universities to use distance-learning technology to conduct language instruction. By evaluating the successes as well as the challenges the program faces, Van Deusen-Scholl demonstrates how SCI has helped students who are disconnected from their actual HL communities maintain their "heritage identity" through virtual communities.

Anna Mikhaylova and Lara Ravitch offer insights into the features of the narratives of teenage adoptees from Russian-speaking countries several years after adoption, in comparison with the narratives of L2 learners. Their results support the idea that "early exposure to the heritage language puts HL speakers at an advantage over post-puberty L2 learners" (132). Despite this advantage, Nila Friedberg and Anna Kudyma argue in their articles that even highly proficient HSs lack cultural knowledge. They reveal that Russian heritage learners are most familiar with classical nineteenth-century writers, but unfamiliar with twentieth-century writers and even less familiar with films.

Shushan Karapetian's article addresses the struggles that HL speakers experience when they engage with more proficient speakers of their HL and perceive negative reactions. Although, as research shows, heritage learners have lower levels of anxiety than L2 learners, their fear of judgment still creates high affective filters and reduces the impact of comprehensible input. Based on an overview of the research on language anxiety and examples drawn from learners of Spanish, Turkish, and Korean, Karapetian links language knowledge, language output, and language anxiety into "a seemingly vicious cycle" (85). To break the cycle, Karapetian suggests educating HL speakers, community members, and teachers of HL courses to understand that HL speakers are not failed native speakers (NSs) but multicompetent speakers in their own right (97).

The second section focuses on how close the language system of HL learners of various proficiency levels is to the system of native speakers. The article by Andrew Lynch and Maria Polinsky examines the linguistic strengths and weaknesses of HL learners, whose abilities vary

widely and present the biggest challenge to researchers and instructors. The authors provide a particularly relevant overview of HL research focusing on the “native-like” and “non-native-like” linguistic strategies used by heritage learners of all proficiency levels in language production and language comprehension. Their observation suggests that HL speakers resemble NSs far more than previously acknowledged, leading Lynch and Polinsky to conclude that HL research should be considered “as an extension of research of NS competence or ability in general” (146). The authors recommend that future research in the field should examine second-, third- and fourth-generation heritage speakers (151) to better understand how language change may unfold in real time rather than reconstruct historical changes hypothetically (154).

Other articles in this section further support the conclusion of “the native-likeness” of Russian HSs’ linguistic abilities. Kira Gor studies the phonological aspects of word storage and retrieval in HSs compared to L2 learners. Previous research has demonstrated that “there are substantial differences in the mechanism underlying native and nonnative lexical access” (166). Gor’s study confirms that highly proficient HSs follow the NSs’ patterns in word recognition. Oksana Laleko and Irina Dubinina explore control over word order. Their data demonstrates that HSs, like NSs, exhibit a strong preference for canonical word order. When using non-canonical word order, specifically dislocation and inversion, both heritage and native speakers prefer dislocation (210).

However, at lower the proficiency levels, the gap between HL learners and NSs widens. Tanya Ivanova-Sullivan’s experimental study examines discourse coherence at the intersentential level and discourse maintenance in narratives produced by low-proficient HSs. The study demonstrates that low- and intermediate-proficient HSs produce a much higher percentage of ambiguous pronouns, a redundancy of overt pronouns, and a lack of variety in temporal and spatial references, in contrast to highly proficient HSs and NSs (184–85).

Each study in this volume addresses the current challenge in the field of HL, namely the diverse levels of language competence among HL speakers, and contributes to the argument for HL-dedicated courses that harness language strengths to compensate for weaknesses in linguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge, enabling heritage learners to attain higher proficiency levels over a considerably shorter period of time than non-

heritage learners. This volume, in addition to honoring Olga Kagan's legacy, will help a broad audience of school administrators, foreign language curriculum designers and instructors, and researchers better understand the needs and strengths of heritage learners, as well as what foreign language programs can do to attract this group of language learners, potentially leading to an increase in the breadth of offerings in foreign language programs.

Alla A. Smysova
Columbia University

Banerjee, Anindita, ed. 2018. *Russian Science Fiction Literature and Cinema: A Critical Reader*. Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press. Index. 380 pages.

Anindita Banerjee's critical reader provides excellent insight into the development of science fiction literature and cinema in Russia from the early nineteenth century all the way to the mid-2000s. The book features four sections, each of them comprising four articles by different authors, and an introduction from the editor. The latter provides a brief but brilliant overview of Russian *nauchnaia fantastika*, or "scientific fantasy," positioning it within the context of literary, social, and scientific life in the USSR, as well as outlining the existing scholarship on the topic. From the very beginning, when the genre first emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, through the entire twentieth century, and to its current metamorphoses, the author claims, "science fiction in Russia has been cocreated and coproduced by an astonishingly large community that included scientists and engineers, philosophers and policymakers, social and political activists, journalists, artists, illustrators and, above all, consumers" (xiv). Following this claim, the critical reader broadens the borders of the science fiction canon by adding essays about science and its perception in the USSR, the impact of electrification, cosmic societies, Soviet eugenics, media coverage of spaceflight, and many others. Together, these essays create an amazingly detailed picture and demonstrate that science fiction in Russia has never been limited to a few well-known names, but rather presents a complex literary and social phenomenon, heavily influencing everyday life and being influenced by