
REVIEW

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**Kisseljova, L.N. *Estonisko-russkoe kulturnoe prostranstvo*
[*The Estonian — Russian cultural space*]. Moscow : Vikmo-M, 2018.**

The end of 2018 saw the release of a book by Ljubov Kisseljova, professor of the University of Tartu. The Federal Agency for Press and Mass Communications supported the publication under the targeted programme The Culture of Russia 2012—2018. Let us start with the obvious. There are few books by Estonian professors written in Russian. Strictly speaking, there are few Tartu professors, regardless of what language they write their works in. There are obvious reasons for the dearth of Russian-language academic contributions. Although famous among specialists across various fields, the University of Tartu is a small establishment. There are few Russian, or more precisely, Russian-writing professors. Moreover, Russian-Estonian relations, which are not at their best today, do not create a favourable environment for academic collaborations.

Fortunately, the reviewed study was published in Moscow by the Vikmo-M publishing house. The book makes an interesting and effective attempt at formulating the question about cultural contacts between two neighbouring peoples — Russians and Estonians. The Russian—Estonian cultural space is such a significant phenomenon that it is recognised even by those who deny the very need for Russian—Estonian interactions, i.e. those who see their country, Estonia, as bordering on something big and familiar in the west and by a different world, a different civilization in the east [1, p. 185].

Not only it is denying the significance of the Russian—Estonian cultural space; but it works against the very logic of how the Estonian people and language develop. *Keeled suus — teed lahti* [roads are open to those who has mastered languages] is, after all, an Estonian proverb. It seems short-sighted to replace this century-tested wisdom with the motto ‘Blocked roads for those without a language’.

Having busied herself with an ambitious task, Prof. Kisseljova achieved much more in her monograph. Her book is an anthem for multilingualism, which emerged within the borders of today’s Estonia throughout the burdensome history of the country. In the preface to her monograph, the Estonian-born author writes that for as long as she can remember herself she has been hearing Estonian, Ger-

man, and Yiddish along with Russian, which was spoken in her family [p. 11]. Although most of the study focuses on the Russian—Estonian cultural space, it also examines the Estonian—German, Russian—German, Russian—Jewish, and other cultural spaces. The contribution of each to the culture of contemporary Estonia is invaluable.

The monograph is deliberately de-politicised. It could not be different. Otherwise, it would be a work in a different field of study. There are political and economic strands in the study since cultural spaces develop hand in hand with political evaluations made not by researchers but by the members of those spaces.

The monograph opens with a chapter devoted to the great Estonian writer Jaan Kross. It juxtaposes his characters with real public figures in the 19th-century Estonia, who were Kross's inspiration. The central motifs of the writer's works examined in Kisseljova's research are nation-building in Estonia as well as Estonians becoming aware of themselves as such and starting to perceive their native tongue as not the peasant language (*maakeel*) but as the Estonian language (*eesti keel*).

The processes that led to nation-building and the rise of national identity in Estonia in the 19th century are often invoked by the adherents of the so-called modernist theory of nationalism. According to that teaching, European nations appeared in the 18th—19th centuries following the Industrial Revolution, urbanisation, and modernisation; later, nationalism spread across the world together with modernisation [2, pp. 11—12].

The emergence of the Estonian nation in the form that it took in the 19th century would have been impossible without contacts between Estonians and members of other ethnic groups living in the country, first of all, the Russians and the Germans. Those interactions helped Estonians to understand that the Estonian-born peasant Jakob, son of Peter, does not cease to be an Estonian even after having obtained an education and having moved to a mansion. Therefore, the Russian—Estonian, Estonian—German, and other cultural spaces played an important role in nation-building in Estonia.

Prof. Kisseljova examines the biographies of ethnic Estonians, such as Friedrich Nikolaus Russow, who belonged by birth to Estonian German culture. A state counsellor and a holder of Russian orders of chivalry, Russow was a member of the St Petersburg circle of Estonian patriots and fought for better conditions for Estonian peasants. Most representatives of the first generation of Estonian intelligentsia were in the same situation. Aware of the severe and irremediable deficiencies of the Russian emperor's rule, they had good reasons to see St Petersburg as an inhibitor of orthodox German influence.

Prof. Kisseljova offers a new perspective on familiar faces. She tells the story of Thaddeus Bulgarin, who wrote fascinating essays about Estland and Liefland,

lived in Tartu (at the time, Derpt) for a long time, and settled permanently in the city. Bulgarin was an ethnic Pole with a well-known political background. At the same time, he left copious notes on the nature and culture of the region [p. 135].

Remarkable are the facts collected by Kisseljova on the perception of Estland and Liefan by wealthy and influential travellers from Petersburg. Their travel logs tell plenty about the lives of people and contain reflections that have an immediate bearing on the topic of the monograph. An informative piece of travel literature is the memoirs and essays of Stepan S. Zhykovsky (pp. 162–164).

Prof. Kisseljova shrewdly juxtaposes Zhukovsky's and Bulgarin's travel logs to the memoirs of those who saw in Estland and Liefland nothing but German lands. The latter view was supported by Nikolai I. Rozanov, the author of the first Revel travel guide in Russian.

Rozanov mentioned many positive aspects and emphasised the learnedness and family virtues of Estonians, yet he described Estland as a purely German land. All the travellers in the region, eastern and western, were asking themselves whether they were in a German, Russian, or some other land.

Written at the Department of Russian Philology of the University of Tartu, the reviewed book could not ignore the figure of Yuri M. Lotman and his work at the Departments of Russian Literature, Foreign Literature, and Semiotics. The influence of Lotman goes beyond his home university. His work is a good example of a researcher's contribution to the whole rather than the division of the particular.

In Soviet Estonia, Lotman (especially when he headed the Department of Russian literature at the University of Tartu) was advancing the development of multilingualism, the anthem for which is Kisseljova's monograph. As she writes, 'everyone born in Estonia was gaining the experience of multilingualism long before the onset of globalisation' (p. 11).

In the era of globalisation, multilingualism remains a distinctive feature of Estonia and its cities. This is how Narva looked at the beginning of the 21st century: 'A primarily Russian-speaking city at the border between the European Union and Russia, Narva is a place where multilingualism, cross-cultural communication, and inter-ethnic interactions are entering into a new phase' [3, c. 152–153].

Prof. Kisseljova concludes the narration with an account of the untimely death of Lotman. He had passed away before globalisation, whose fruits we are witnessing today, began in Estonia. The history of the Russian–Estonian cultural space, however, did not end there. A new chapter in the 21st-century history is, for example, the restoration of St John's Church (*Jaani kirik*) in St Petersburg. We can only hope that this and all the following chapters in the history of the Russian–Estonian cultural space will be covered in the literature, the level of which will be as high as that that one can enjoy when reading Prof. Kisseljova's book.

References

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