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## **Fractures & integrations between Russia, the East Slavic World and the West. History and Arts from the Middle Ages to the Contemporary Era**

*April 16-17, 2015 - University of Florence, Italy*

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Last month scholars and young researchers from France and Italy gathered together at the University of Florence to reflect upon new analytical approaches to the complex relationship between the Western cultural tradition and the East Slavic one. The French-Italian symposium “Fractures & integrations between Russia, the East Slavic World and the West. History and Arts from the Middle Ages to the Contemporary Era” (April 16-17, 2015), held in the heart of Tuscany, was an important opportunity to look at the developments of Russian and Ukrainian history through the lenses of literature and arts.

The different perspectives offered by Italian scholars and researchers coming from Sorbonne University (Paris IV) framed this complex cultural context made of blurred interactions.

The topics debated during the meeting gave rise to new possible research perspectives to be followed by joint projects between French and Italian researchers. The opening was devoted to the discussion of the cultural nuances which characterized the era of Muscovy and the origins of the Russian Empire. M. Garzaniti (Florence) reflected on the role played by Maksim Grek (XVI century), an emblematic example of the contamination of culturally heterogeneous elements, in developing early modern Russian culture. An interesting evidence of this constant interaction between different textual traditions was offered by E. Priadko (Paris), who talked about *Domostroj*, the XVI century Russian set of household rules, instructions and family matters. While L. Pubblici (Florence) envisioned Mongol Crimea (XIV century) as a land of contacts between Italians and local people, the perception of modern Russia (XVI-XVIII centuries) in the West was analysed by I. Melani (Florence) and A. Lavrov (Paris), through their insights on the diplomats’ writings. On the other side, the perception of the newly born Soviet country was highlighted by a fascinating reading of Fascists’ travel writings by A. Farsetti (Venice). Then, the Soviet view on the Nazis, during the Siege of Leningrad, was presented by S. Gruszka (Paris), on the evidence of diaries written by Soviet citizens who experienced this dramatic historical moment.

Interesting remarks were drawn by A. Morard (Geneva), whose paper was focused on the cultural impact of the ‘monstrous’ iconography in Russian imaginary, on the evidence of language, literary and iconographic data. Figurative cultures (Repin and Gericault) and Theatrical traditions (Commedia dell’Arte and Mamontov circle’s heritage), analysed by P. Gonneau (Paris), D. Gavrilovich (Rome) and A. Pieroni (Florence), confirmed the reciprocal interchange of stylistic, thematic, ideological elements between the West and the East.

In C. Delaunay’s (Paris) presentation, the ambivalent position, which leads one of the leading Russian writers, Lev Tolstoj, to appreciate the narrative strategies adopted by such authors

as Sterne and Rousseau or to dislike the aesthetic tendencies of the XIX century, could be interpreted as an emblematic example of the twisting relations between Russia and the West. Consequently, D. Sinichkina (Paris) focused on the Bolshevik Revolution and its utopian ideologization in literature, which finds an aesthetic dimension in Nikolaj Kljuev's poetry.

An interesting moment of reflection was inspired by Leonid Livak's (Toronto) paper. The scholar introduced new interpretive paths towards the conceptualisation of Russian Modernism. According to Livak, the process of ideologisation of such a historical fracture as the October Revolution represents an obstacle for a clear understanding of the specific role of this artistic phenomenon in the Russian cultural scene.

Political repression literary heritage, testimony and culture found their voice in C. Pieralli, L. Jurgenson and C. Depretto papers. The first two researchers focused on modernistic elements in lager clandestine poetry and prose (Shalamov, Solzhenitsyn, Dombrovsky) and the third one presented the project of construction of dialogue with western Slavic studies and Russian diaspora promoted by Ju. Oksman. It was a fruitful opportunity to reconsider the role of Russian intelligentsia and its achievements under the totalitarian regime.

Finally, The presentations offered by E. Faccioli (Ferrara), A. Achilli (Milan) and M. Puleri (Bologna) gave an interesting overview on the developments of Ukrainian culture during the XX century. E. Faccioli could highlight the modernist project carried on at the beginning of the century by Les' Kurbas with his innovative theatrical techniques. 'Between Europe and Russia' was the title of A. Achilli's presentation, devoted to the complex poetical experience of the Ukrainian poet Vasyl' Stus. Achilli stressed the role played by such authors as Rilke, Pasternak, Tsvetaeva, Shevchenko and Goethe in the formation of Stus' artistic world. Finally, Puleri's presentation offered an insight on the Post-Soviet Ukrainian literary production in Russian. The Italian researcher analysed the complex cultural and artistic position of the Russophone literary phenomenon, placing it symbolically at the crossroads between Nikolaj Gogol's cultural heritage and the artistic dimension of Franz Kafka's literary world.

The final debate gave rise to a fruitful reflection, opening the way to futures collaborations and joint projects.

*Claudia Pieralli, Marco Puleri*