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SHEVA, LESYA AND FRANKO: A CASE STUDY OF A NEW SYLLABUS IN LEIPZIG UNIVERSITY

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German Leipzig is known as a university town. The biggest town in Saxony boasts its second-oldest university of the country whose alumni were Gottfried von Leibniz, Johann von Goethe, Friedrich Nietzsche, Richard Wagner, and Angela Merkel. Leipzig University's library, Albertina, one of the most powerful resources for students, faculty and academics, hosts an impressive department of Slavistic Studies editions with the section of classic and modern Ukrainian literature, in English and German translations as well as in original. The texts of the authors mentioned in the top hit of Kolos & Brothers can be found on shelves of Albertina. What makes a good start of founding and developing a program of Ukrainian Studies in the framework of East Slavic Studies of Leipzig University combining traditional heritage with contemporary writings.

Since the beginning of war in Ukraine (24.02.2022) the Institute of Slavic Studies (further – the Institute) has been constantly supporting the increased demand of the students of the Ukrainian language providing the faculty for the groups of beginners and more advanced learners of the language. The Institute held

a number of events backing Ukraine and its academia including the panel session (07.07.2022, [link](#)) dedicated to the research in Ukraine before the war, the process of formation of Ukrainian science in times of Independence, as well as landmarks of Ukrainian literature, culture and history important for German audience.

Another crucial step in establishing Ukrainian Studies in Leipzig University is the active involvement of the Institute with the visiting female professor program in Saxony ([link](#)). The program aims to attract not only German, but also international scholars for research and teaching at Saxon universities in order to increase the proportion of women in professors at Saxon institutions. The program supports visiting professors who can implement their research into student study processes. Even though the 12-months duration of the visiting professor program is not sufficient for the full-fledged establishment of the new branch of studies in a rather deep-rooted curriculum, the implementation of the initial syllabus consisting of three interconnected blocks designed for two academic terms is a good beginning.

The goal of this lecture is to outline the framework of the pilot project Ukrainian Studies being implemented into the kindred network of East Slavistics at Leipzig University. The ethos of the syllabus encourages an interest in the classic and modern Ukrainian literature and its understanding in reference to today's war of the Russian Federation in Ukraine. The primary texts of the Ukrainian authors are provided in translation (English and/or German) and in original. Because of the bilingual materials for analysis the communication policy in the classroom is not limited only to one language. Students can report in German and Ukrainian but the teaching is conducted essentially in English. Three sections (seminars) of the syllabus constitute its core representing different periods in the history of Ukrainian literature, its culture and history in addition.

Introduction into Ukrainian literature

This part studies the major landmarks in the development of Ukrainian literature focusing primarily upon the texts of the national writers of the 18-20 centuries from Ivan Kotliarevskyi to Vasyl Symonenko. Not only does the section follow the buildup of the Ukrainian national awareness in literature through the texts of classic literary genres: epic, lyric and drama, but also via films and theatrical performances (e.g., dramatization of «Тіні забутих предків» (1965) by Serhiy Parajanov). The seminar detects the effects of the imperial bans on the Ukrainian language and literature in the run of the formation of the Ukrainian

identity. The first meeting is built on the introduction of Ukrainian history (Kyivan Rus, Cossacks, the Hetmanate, serfdom) and geography (Right-bank and Left-bank Ukraine) the knowledge of which is the necessary condition for understanding the country's culture and literature. This section of the syllabus is extremely important for the further comprehension of the development of the national literature of the following generations because it reveals the complexity, versatility and sometimes dubious reception of the greatest triad in the history of the Ukrainian culture – Taras Shevchenko, Lesya Ukrainka, Ivan Franko, who are referred to by modern teenagers and adolescents as Sheva, Lesya and Franko. The heritage of the classics requires twice more time to get to know the texts and modern interpretations of the staples of the national literature. In addition, the students are expected to do scholarly research of the representatives of the triad on their own sharing their findings with the group mates in the form of presentations or reports. Here is one of the assignments (“My Sheva”) uploaded on the university Moodle platform: “Read the translations of Shevchenko's poems (or/and the source texts) from “Kobzar” and choose one of them for literary analysis and further presentation for a seminar. The time of presentation is 5-10 minutes. Focus on the emotions that the selected poem evokes in you; its imagery (symbolicity) along with the plot (if available), conflict and characters; when and where the text was composed; timespace of the poem; its stylistic devices (e.g., metaphors); be ready to explain why the selected poem is meaningful for you”. The supportive materials for students in English provide them an up-to-date perception of Shevchenko in Ukrainian society, in which one can find his “Kobzar” in practically every family (links, hipster, Grabowicz). Interestingly enough the students are eager to share their perception of the texts of Ukrainian classical authors choosing short and often non canonical pieces (e.g., “Sorrowful Nights” by Shevchenko) for analysis. Below is the tentative plan of this section of the syllabus in which the selection of the primary texts is justified by just one criterion – available English or German translation:

Prolegomena

Introduction: before the 18th century and onwards

Ukrainian literary classic “Aeneid” by Ivan Kotliarevs’kyi (1769-1838)

Ukrainian literature in the 19th century and fin de siècle

Reworking of Ukrainian legends and folk tales in the writings of Mykola Gogol’ (1809-1852)

“Kobzar” by Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861)

Close reading of the selected poetry of Taras Shevchenko

Versatility of Ivan Franko (1856-1916)

Close reading of the selected texts by Ivan Franko

Belief in Ukrainian idea and poetic depth: Lesya Ukrainka (1871-1913)

Ukrainian Romeo and Juliet in “Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors” by Mykhailo Kotsiubynsky (1864-1913)

Ukrainian literature of the 20th century

Executed Renaissance: poetry (Pavlo Tychyna) and drama (Mykola Kulish)

Executed Renaissance: prose (M. Khvylyovy, V. Pidmohylnyi)

National literature in Exile

A case study of “The Hunters and the Hunted” by Ivan Bahrianyi (1906-1963)

The secondary literature relies on George Grabowicz and Serhiy Plokhiy (links). It is necessary to mention that two following blocks of the syllabus have topics that sometimes overlap with those in the first section.

Ukrainian literature through the lens of women writers

Needless to say that this seminar is especially popular with female studentship. It focuses on the texts of women predecessors in the history of the Ukrainian literature: Marko Vovchok, Ol’ha Kobylans’ka, Lesya Ukrainka, Liudmyla Starytska-Cherniakhivska and also on the literary works of 20th and 21st century women poets, novelists and playwrights: Lina Kostenko, Oksana Zabuzhko, Maria Matios, Sofiya Andrukhovych, Natalka Vorozhbyt. In this block we read and interpret the texts of the classic Ukrainian women writers and modern female authors from the perspective of feminist philosophy, postcolonialism, aging and today’s war of the russian federation in Ukraine. Most students are inspired by patriotic spirit of Marko Vovchok and Ol’ha Kobylans’ka whose decision to speak and write in Ukrainian are given choices in spite of the fact that their mother tongues were others. Of course the specific interest is in Kobylans’ka’s writings because of the writer’s deep connection with the German language; yet the development of a “new woman” in her system of characters, modernist technique and the mesmerizing nature depictions of Bukovynian novelist reveal the advanced European figure for the modern reader.

It should be remarked that Leipzig (as well as other German towns and cities) has longtime tradition of organizing literary events with participation of living legends (often international guests) who read in original and translation

(sometimes with the help of professional actors and actresses) their recently published books. Students, faculty and everyone interested have the unique opportunity to meet those celebrities, put questions and sign the books. Such events gather full houses demonstrating the level of intelligence and culture of the country. It is also one of means of popularizing the Ukrainian culture: in October 2022, Oksana Zabuzhko presented her new collection of essays written since the beginning of war “The Longest Book Tour” in Hannover; the next month Kateryna Kalytko read her texts in Leipzig. Both wordsmiths whose writings are on the list of the second seminar illustrate the courage and perseverance of Ukrainian women in person.

Ukrainian women classics of the fin de siècle

An outline of the period: historical, political, social, cultural implications

Ukrainian Jeanne d’Arc in “Maroussia” by Marko Vovchok (1834 - 1907)

Feminism of Ol’ha Kobylans’ka (1863 - 1942)

Close reading of the selected texts by Ol’ha Kobylans’ka

Ukrainian Romeo and Juliet in “The Living Grave: A Ukrainian Legend” by Liudmyla Starytska-Cherniakhivska (1868- 1941)

Belief in Ukrainian idea and poetic depth: Lesya Ukrainka (1871-1913)

Close reading of the selected texts by Lesya Ukrainka

Ukrainian women literature of the 20th century and today

Iryna Vilde (1907-1982) and Emma Andiiivska (b. 1931)

Political “dissidence” in poetry of Lina Kostenko (b. 1930)

Intellectual prose of Oksana Zabuzhko (b. 1960)

Bukovyna in “Sweet Darusya” by Maria Matios (b. 1959)

Ivano-Frankivsk in “Der Papierjunge” by Sofiya Andrukhovych (b. 1982)

War Poetry: “Words for War” (anthology)

War Drama: Natalka Vorozhbyt “Pohani dorohy” (Bad Roads)

The references used for this seminar are Solomia Pavlychko, Tamara Hundorova and Oleksandra Wallo ([links](#)).

Ukrainian literature in the context of the World / Western literature

The final block in the series correlates with both *Introduction into Ukrainian literature* and *Ukrainian literature through the lens of women writers*. Usually students who choose this seminar have a prior knowledge of the texts of modern Ukrainian wordsmiths because a number of novels by Zhadan, Andrukhovych,

Tschech and others are available in German and English translations. This section is twofold and centers on comparative analysis of the prose, drama and poetry of traditional Ukrainian authors with their Western counterparts as well as on the close reading of the texts of modern Ukrainian writers from the period of Ukraine's Independence: Serhiy Zhadan, Maria Matios, Oksana Zabuzhko, Yuriy Andrukhovych, and others. Since there are lacunas in the history of Ukrainian literature of the 20th century, as the heritage of the sixties and the eighties these works are covered in the routine run of the seminars or offered to students as forms of self-study or term papers.

Zhadan is a frequent visitor in Germany. Berlin festival. Andrukhovych is always welcome in Leipzig. Prokhas'ko

World context of the fin de siècle

An outline of the period: historical, political, social, cultural implications

Aspects of the comic in the texts by Ivan Nechuy-Levytskyi and Mark Twain: modern reverberations in the series directed by Natalka Vorozhbyt

Neoromanticism in the texts of Ol'ha Kobylans'ka and Edith Wharton

Temporal dimensions and rhythmical patterns in poetry of Lesya Ukrainka and Emily Dickinson

Ukrainian literature in the context of the Western literature of today

Rock singer Serhiy Zhadan: a close reading of "Voroshilovgrad" or "Die Erfindung des Jazz im Donbass" (the German translation)

Free Ukraine in the words of Serhiy Zhadan: a close reading of poetry

Postmodern manifest of Yuri Andrukhovych

Close reading of the selected texts by Yuri Andrukhovych

Intellectual prose of Oksana Zabuzhko (b. 1960)

The Stanislav phenomenon: close reading of the selected texts by Taras Prokhas'ko (b. 1968)

Bukovyna in "Sweet Darusya" by Maria Matios (b. 1959)

Modern Ukrainian Drama: Oleksander Irvanets, Les' Poderev'yanskyi, Pavlo Arie, Natalka Vorozhbyt

Modern Ukrainian Poetry: Words for War (anthology)

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