

GENDER ISSUES IN LESIA UKRAINKA'S LITERATURE HERITAGE

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Annotation: The article devoted to the 150th anniversary of the birth of prominent Ukrainian writer and public figure Lesia Ukrainka describes her vision and perception of woman's position in European literature and society. The uniqueness of Lesia's research is presented through the deep analysis of her personal life and professional activity as a writer, a poet and a scientist. In this article Lesia Ukrainka is depicted as the intellectual and scholarly woman who was one of the first in Ukraine and Europe who made the very detailed analysis of such new and undiscovered issue as woman's emancipation. The attention is on the fact that Lesia Ukrainka gave objective vision of the matter without supporting radical feminists in their desire to make a woman a super creature, more perfect than a man.

Key words: Ukrainian and European literatures, feministic approach, women's matters, emancipation, patriarchal society, analysis and perception, creativity, woman's position in the society.

Lesia Ukrainka was one of the first in the Ukrainian literature who addressed the problem of women's emancipation, their life, feelings and self-esteem in the patriarchal society. She tried to analyze the works of European authors, peculiarities of their perception and depiction of women's matters in European literature on the one hand, and on the other hand, Lesia presented her own stance on the issue.

Lesia Ukrainka viewed the problem of emancipation from historical background and those days' position. She differentiated the men's and women's attitudes to this problem. Being a poet and a writer, she researched the issue in literatures and experiences of such countries as England, France, Norway, Italy, Germany and others. She was the first in Ukraine at that time who was able to analyze and present her own view to problems of woman's place and role in the society. It should be noted that it was the 19th – the beginning of the 20th centuries. The research of women's matters was considered a great challenge to any European lady-investigator. Lesia Ukrainka lived and did her researches in Ukraine which was a part of the Russian Empire where any attempts of even a man to analyze a European tendency was suppressed, nothing to say about a woman. Ivan Franko named Lesia Ukrainka

an “alone man” of the Ukrainian literature. He held Lesia up as an example for men because of her will-power, courageous, good education and active social stance towards urgent problems and challenges.

Lesia Ukrainka was born in the ancient and noble Kosach-Drahomanov family which could provide her with good education, knowledge of foreign languages, ancient history, mythology and so on. The family values which were transmitted from one generation to another promoted the love to the motherland, independence and freedom, hard-working attitude and insistence. Lesia had a good example of her mother who was a well-educated woman. She gave birth to six children being, at the same time, a well-known poet, writer and ethnographer who passionately loved Ukrainian folk, songs and traditions. Lesia and her mother were emotionally very close to each other. Olena Pchilka tried to guide Lesia in her professional activity and personal life. But Lesia's will-power was so strong that she couldn't be a subordinate to anyone, even to her own mother.

Lesia Ukrainka inherited and possessed the character's traits of many generations of Ukrainian women who had been between death and life for many years, who had to survive in severe surroundings without men's support. That's why Ukrainian women had been developing for many years such qualities as will to

victory, courageous, insistence. Lesia Ukrainka was one of them. She even took a nickname Ukrainka. She wanted the world to know about Ukraine and especially about a Ukrainian woman.

In her article “New perspectives and old shadows. “New woman” in Western European fiction” Lesia Ukrainka presented the detailed analysis of women’s matters in European literature.² She analyzed a resurgence of interest in the woman’s matter in the French literature, especially, fiction pointing that a woman could “be either placed on pedestal or put into dirty”.² Such attitude to the women had existed for many years.

The women had been the targets for men’s jokes in which men compared educated women with funny and ridiculous ones. Those women who tried to be unlike others were considered to belong to funny. They committed their crimes because of their desires to be different from others. Besides, women from more poor layers of the society had been limited in their opportunities to achieve higher positions and to get promotion in the society because of their background, education and social status. Lesia noticed that every time when such woman had tried to advance men had cried her: “Stop! Return back to your place!” Such model of men’s behavior led to the creation of special women’s psychology which lacked freedom and desire to be free and independent.

It should be noted that Lesia Ukrainka stated the inequality of sexes for many centuries and found the parts of answers to the question: “Why hadn’t the women’s behavior been changed for so long time?” Having researched the image of ideal woman in the French man’s imagination, Lesia came to the conclusion that such woman was either completely impersonal or very passive in her own will.

Nevertheless, the author pointed to the fact that there were attempts in French literature to look for the new type of woman, but they led to finding a woman with dirty reputation and background which made a woman even worse than just funny and ridiculous. The traditions and laws of patriarchal society viewed independent, free and different woman as to be dishonorable and brutal. Only at the beginning of the 19th century Stendal began to demand the normal education for women instead of

saloon's one which could give the opportunities for women to get access to freedom and independence. Lesia Ukrainka analyzed the position of women in French fiction and showed that while French writers were discussing in their books the qualities of a woman from higher layers of society, the real life was left behind the literature. Such women as madam de Steel, George Sand, A. Rachel and others proved in real life that independent and free women could have their special place in patriarchal society. Lesia indicated that literature accepted such happened fact and allowed some rights to talented women. But the woman who received some rights and freedom should have been talented. Only some talent was a pass to some freedom and respect to a woman. But the rest women remained unfree legally and morally.

Lesia Ukrainka tried to analyze where, in which spheres of professional activity, a woman could be independent. According to her, it was on the stage, variety show and literature. In the patriarchal society, an ordinary woman had no chances for promotion. Women's manual labor was paid very little if compared with men's. Scientific activity was unavailable, because women didn't have enough educational level which could allow them to be engaged in different scientific researches. Women could have the opportunity to be tutors in a family or monastery. The situation as to women's employment and self-esteem was awful, they couldn't earn as much money as men could. There was unequal social position for women in the society.

Lesia Ukrainka interpreted all these facts very deeply and gave her own reasoning and explanation. The depth of her reasoning is fascinating. It is worth noting that Ukrainian poet and writer Lesia Ukrainka was the first in the European literature who presented such detailed analysis of women's position in literature and society. This topic was common to many women. English writer V. Wolfe in her essay "Individual space" depicted the nature of literature creativity, woman's talent, conditions at which a woman worked in literature. The world knew and honored Wolfe thanks to this essay written at the end of 1920s.

Our Lesia Ukrainka made the similar analysis almost 30 years earlier than Wolfe and her interpretation was deeper and more detailed, because Lesia had

researched the reflection of women's matters in European literatures. Such detailed highlighting deserves its popularization not only in Ukraine, but abroad.

We need to inform the world about Lesia Ukrainka not only because of chronological order of the first woman who dared to make research of such difficult and even forbidden topic, but because the world should know that there were the Ukrainians who were able to perceive and treat European realities the first. It is a remarkable fact that there was the Ukrainian who could felt herself freely in European intellectual surrounding, and represented Europe without suffering from any complexes and who was able to assess critically European advantages and disadvantages, particularly as to the position of women in literature and society. It is important to note that Lesia Ukrainka lived and worked at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and the socio-political realities in the empire didn't foster such wide and free vision of European tendencies.

Lesia Ukrainka deeply analyzed the men's attitudes to women's matters, their vision of woman's destiny. She drew attention to men's reasoning about women: "What is a woman's desire?", "What does she want?", "What should a woman be?". It was even funny for Lesia Ukrainka to read some men's interpretations of women's desires. Duma's son stated that a "new woman" needed love, respect, good family and freedom. Such vision was rather liberal compared to the later statement of A. F. Prevo who proclaimed that a woman needed love, respect, patronage or man's protection, right and good family or monastery. P. Marguerite gave a woman the role of a mother and a wife. Lesia wrote about those men's reasoning with irony and skepticism, because none of those men asked women about their desires and preferences.

Nevertheless, Lesia Ukrainka stated about the spread of completely different views and approaches to women's matters in the 19th century. For example, Norwegian B. Bjornsierne uttered about moral equality between a man and a woman and in his opinion both of them should be virgins before marriage. But Lesia noted that Scandinavian mind was inclined to believe in panacea. As to Russia, the author pointed out to more moral and material independence of a woman compared to

Europe. In Lesia's opinion, the women's matter was solved in England to some extent, but the English women needed more political rights and freedom, and especially the right to vote.

Lesia Ukrainka didn't leave without attention the works about women written by women. She read and analyzed the works of George Sand, de Steel, A. Rachel, M. Oliphant, A. Scram and others.

It is important to note that Lesia didn't support radical feminists who claimed that women didn't have their own motherland and love was something which existed only in the men's heads. Lesia Ukrainka criticized the image of a new woman created by radical feminists. She didn't understand why the new woman behaved only like victim of the circumstances, society and men, she acted because of duty and self-sacrifice. The main characters of feministic novels were women-students, women-doctors, women-teachers who had nothing common with the men who worked together with them. The men were fulfilling their work while women were struggling for some ideas, and were rather martyrs than professionals of their occupation. Such type of a new woman was quite funny for Lesia Ukrainka. But at the same time, she understood that they were realistic, they lived and "struggled" for imaging idea in real life. Besides, Lesia didn't perceive C. Belau's maxim, who demanded not only equality between man and woman, but to have more than men could do and achieve. Izolda is the main character of C. Belau's novel who wanted a woman to become a super human. Lesia wondered why a man wasn't given such a right to become a superman, why only a woman was. She supposed that it was for the sake of women's revenge. Lesia Ukrainka didn't agree with the feministic statement that all women were able to achieve higher perfection. It wasn't the matter of sex who was more perfect or imperfect, it was the matter of person's qualities and character.

It was Lesia Ukrainka's attitude to feministic statements. But at the same time such position didn't prevent her to criticize men's visions and opinions who had said to be perfect in any field of the activity and she denied men's advancement. The latter considered the woman of that time to have regressed morally and physically if to compare with a woman of previous years. Lesia completely disagreed with these

statements. The researcher avoided extremes, trying to remain as objective as it was possible in her judgements and assessments. Lesia Ukrainka didn't like the image of a woman created by Kipling either. That woman belonged to the "third" sex. Kipling's woman was ready to sacrifice everything and everybody for the sake of her independence and freedom. She didn't enjoy anything, she wasn't satisfied with anything, even art and her own success, because she couldn't have any talents and gifts to any vocation.

Lesia Ukrainka's rejection of radical feminism didn't mean that she was indifferent to women's matters. She always stressed the necessity of equal rights and positions between a man and a woman, especially the right to have equal access to education and to active participation of women in social life. As to the feministic literature, Lesia considered such novels to be interesting only from the point of mode of life details. But they had nothing common with literature and art.

One more interesting fact is that Lesia also tried to find the answer to a very important question: "Why do the greater majority of men object women's emancipation?" She analyzed the novel "New suffering" by G. Bua and pointed out the fact that the author described new shadow of a modern man's jealousy, which was conditioned by new woman's attitude to him. Lesia Ukrainka concluded that a new woman was focused mainly on art, science and feministic activity, but not on man. So, a man had got a new type of suffering: he was jealous of her books, businesses, conferences, clubs, etc. He had never been so jealous of her dress, balls, races, games and so on. He hated the book she was writing, as if she had had a child born from other man. Lesia stated that such jealousy couldn't make a new woman postpone her favorite business. But that jealousy was enough to poison the life for both a man and a woman if they really loved each other.

So, we can see that Lesia's vision of that time women's matters looks very accurate and progressive even nowadays. Her deep understanding of the woman's position in the society is amazing. It is worth noting that Lesia was analyzing women's matters in Western European societies while she was suffering very deeply emotionally because her beloved Serhii Merzhynskyi was seriously ill far away from

her in Minsk. Her personal life wasn't happy: the man whom she desperately loved was deadly ill and they couldn't be together. Because of personal unhappiness all women's characters in her works are tragic. Choosing between death and life, Lesia's characters chose death. It was her own choice in the fiction world, but in real life Lesia chose life with its suffering, ache, struggle and strong desire to live and to be happy. Lesia desperately wanted to be happy as a woman. But she had her own vision of marriage. In the verse "Woman's portrait"³, the author presented her perception of patriarchal marriage. Lesia viewed a marriage like the act of woman's soul purchase by her husband who was the master of that woman. A patriarchal marriage was not suitable for Lesia. She wanted to be a partner for her husband. That's why she refused to get married in church to her husband Klymentii Kvitka, because church marriage meant to have a subordinate position for a woman. She wanted to be equal. Lesia was different from others: stronger, more independent and more individual. She was different not only from other women in the society, but different from other family-members. She wasn't understood by many people. But at the same time, she was admired in intellectual circles. That's why she immersed completely into literature activity, analyses of social tendencies. It was like challenge to herself: to work hard in order to abstract from her own unhappiness. Knowing this, we can't help admiring the will-power of this strong woman. She had got great, brilliant education, she worked very hard to get new knowledge, she knew many foreign languages which gave her the opportunity to have access to many sources of information, because it was rather difficult to get access to European literature at that time. Ukrainian literature has got Lesia Ukrainka who presented our country in the world and is the pride of the nation.

So, we can conclude that Lesia Ukrainka was the first woman in Ukraine and Europe who deeply analyzed the position of a woman in European literature and society. She researched different approaches to women's matters, and presented her own objective vision of this problem. At the same time, she didn't support radical feminists who proclaimed woman's superiority. Lesia's vision of a woman was to be

equal to man, and free in her choice. That's why, it is possible to state that Lesia Ukrainka's contribution to researching this issue is valuable and enormous.

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