



Vira Ageyeva,
Tamara Martsenyuk, eds.

*Insha optyka: Genderni
vyklyky suchasnosti*

[Other Optics: Gender Challenges of
Today].

Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 2019. 256 pp.

In Ukrainian.

ISBN: 978-617-7622-08-5

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A Collection of papers in honor of Solomiia Pavlychko *Insha optyka: Genderni vyklyky suchasnosti* (Other Optics: Gender Challenges of Today), edited by Vira Ageyeva and Tamara Martsenyuk is an ambitious attempt to examine contemporary cultural space through the prism of “the war of the sexes.” The work suggests a number of approaches to the category of gender at the crossroads of the humanities (literature studies) and social sciences (sociology, political science), providing special attention to the gender equality situation in Ukraine.

Furthermore, it should be emphasized that, apart from thematic papers, the book also contains a *Festschrift* in memory of Solomiia Pavlychko (1958–1999), Ukrainian literary critic, essayist, translator, and co-founder of Osnovy Publishing, written by her contemporaries—Vira Ageyeva, Ivan Drach, Oksana Zabuzhko, Mariia Zubrytska, Roman Liubkivskyi, Kyrylo Stetsenko, Maksym Strikha, and Mykola Sulyma. It highlights the role of Solomiia Pavlychko as a pioneer of academic feminism in Ukraine from whose studies on the history of Ukrainian literature and translations of *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millett, and works by Milena Rudnytska feminist scholarship in Ukraine is derived. Hence, this part of the book is aimed to maintain and preserve the documentary evidence of Ukrainian feminism and create “an effect of presence,” as history is made by the intellectual courage of living people and their lives embodied in their texts.

According to Tamara Martsenyuk, feminism in any authentic sense of the term is commonly referred to as a struggle for gender equality; a combination of analytical frameworks used to study and interpret social phenomena; a criticism of patriarchy as an unjust social ladder that subordinates, discriminates, or is oppressive to women. In other words, the feminist movement is simultaneously theory and practice, scholarship and activism.

Women in Ukraine have equal constitutional rights to men in the economic, political, cultural, and social fields, but they still receive lower salaries and have limited opportunity for career advancement. Despite the fact that one of the biggest feminist organizations in Europe was founded in the 1920s in modern Western Ukraine (the Ukrainian Women's Union led by Milena Rudnytska), during the Soviet era feminism was treated as a bourgeois and counterrevolutionary tendency. Thus, the timeline of the women's rights movement in Ukraine was interrupted: values of democracy, civil society, and feminism were inconsistent with Soviet ideology. Since Ukraine officially declared itself an independent state on August 24, 1991, a feminist movement again began to take root.

In recent years, there has been an increase in attention to human rights in Ukraine even outside of the academic community. But there is a paradox at the heart of this process: raising awareness for gender equality among citizens also activates anti-gender movements. More and more political debates are devoted to such topics as 1) mechanisms for increasing the number of women in politics, and 2) discriminatory conditions for women's employment opportunities. The third important question is the relationship between egalitarian values and language. By legitimating feminine-gendered nouns, the project of a new Ukrainian spelling system (from June 3, 2019) not only answers the question of how not to fear femininities but also mirrors androcentrism within linguistic structures. There is, therefore, a definite need for forcing Ukrainians to accept the necessity for change.

Gender issues have always been a concern in society, so naturally gender became one of major focuses of modern fiction. The book begins with five research papers in literature studies. The discussion centers on the ways in which written culture reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social, and psychological oppression of women. Looking at women's literary history in Ukraine in her article "A Voice of Her Own: Female Integrity and the Modernist Revolt," Vira Ageyeva is concerned with forms of double marginalization—such as the exclusion of colonial women writers from the traditional literary canon—and traces the ways how Ukrainian female authors—Olena Pchilka, Nataliia Kobrynska, Lesia Ukrainka, Olha Kobylanska, and Iryna Vilde—found not only their *voices*, but their own canons of literature, becoming literary mother-figures, in terms of Harold Bloom's *Anxiety of Influence*. Similar to their ancient Greek precursors Aspasia and Sappho, their tendency to counterstereotypic gender strategies in Ukrainian literature of the last decades of 19th and the first half of 20th is collateral to the widespread recognition of Western civilization. During the period of *fin de siècle* perceptions of reality, transformed by new scientific theories, new forms of artistic expression began to be generated. As recent studies have shown, the turn from objective 19th-century realism to the modernist accent on self-presentation and subjectivity depiction was more suitable for female artists. Furthermore, Vira Ageyeva concludes that women artists that have been involved in the making of modernist art throughout history were more pedantic than men in following and settling modernist aesthetic and ethical values.

The representation of women in modernist fiction is also under focus in Olha Poliukhovych's "Creators of History in the Prose of Yurii Kosach" (poet, writer, and dramatist; nephew of Lesia Ukrainka and grandson of Olena Pchilka). The article traces the evolution of the author's strategies of depicting female characters, from schematic figures in the early texts (*Dyvymos v ochi smerti* (We Look Death in the Eyes), 1936) to works written prior to Kosach's emigration to the United States, especially the novel *Volodarka Pontydy* (Regina Pontica, 1987), the main female character of which, kniazhna Darahan, promotes a sense of Kosach's Ukrainian European identity and association with the "imaginary homeland."

Rostyslav Semkiv's article offers new insight on the image of woman-agent in literature and prescribes its main features. It is shown how much in common Milady de Winter (Alexandre Dumas), Molly (both from James Joyce's and William Hibson's prose), Maia (Mykola Khvylovyi) and Alevtyna (Serhii Oksenyk) have with the Old Testament characters Dalila and Judith, the concept of the medieval witch, and subjects of modern history, such as Charlotte Corde.

Mariia Shuvalova examines gender aspects of the short story in different national literatures: Etgar Keret, Israeli writer; Olga Tokarczuk, Polish novelist; and Ukrainian authors Emma Andrievska and Volodymyr Dibrova. Short stories, concerned with situations instead of heroes, clearly prove that family cannot be treated as the only way to self-realization.

Iryna Borysiuk seeks to clarify the transformation of gender roles by analysing Viktor Blyznets's adventure novel *Zhenia i Synko* (Zhenia and Synko, 1974), the protagonist of which is not typical for Soviet times: Zhenia Tsybulko is a girl with a gender-neutral name that behaves like a boy. Literature for children always transmits typical models of an education system that supports explicit and implicit gender inequality and illuminates a number of issues that lie beyond purely literary categories, namely the horizon of expectation for activities appropriate for boys or girls, also taking into account traditional game and toy accessibility for both sexes.

The sociological part of the book is devoted to several multifaceted themes. In her article "Gender Studies in Ukraine After Independence..." Tamara Martsenyuk provides a diachronic analysis of the stages of development of the feminist movement in Ukraine and gender studies departments at Ukrainian universities. In addition, the study raises two pivotal questions: does higher education scholarship still fear feminism and how motives of anti-gender movements in Ukraine can be interpreted and clarified. Svitlana Oksamytna, in response to Anne-Marie Slaughter's question of why should women choose between career and family, attempts to investigate what Ukrainian women today value more: their own career or their spouse. In comparison to the American scene, described in *The Gendered Society* by Michael S. Kimmel, the data collected in contemporary Ukraine presents a less optimistic picture. This may be contributed to not only by sociocultural reasons, but also the structure of labor market and the higher education system. Tetiana Kostiuhenko concludes that public opinion polls on gender stereotypes demonstrate both increasing egalitarian values and the consolidation of

gender inequality among Ukrainians. Olena Bohdan investigates the gender gap in religion around the world, taking into account two views on the ordination of women in the history of Christianity and asks whether full clergy rights for women can be treated as a controversial reality or a perspective one for the near future. Finally, Maryna Bardina places stress on gender politics in Ukraine in general and gender quotas in particular. Perspectives on the past decade are optimistic: discriminatory laws have been abolished (for example, in 2017 order No. 256 banning women from being employed in 450 professions associated with physical labor was revoked); moreover, despite the obstacles, women are actively trying to engage in Ukrainian politics.

Altogether, *Insha optyka* is intended for a broad audience of both Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian readers, including feminist scholars and non-professionals who are engaged in the questions of gender, sexuality, and the development of human rights and liberal values in East-Central Europe.