

Queer Identity in Ukrainian–Canadian and Ukrainian Literature

Projektbericht

My fellowship at the Alfried Krupp Wissenschaftskolleg Greifswald has given me the opportunity to commence my post-doctoral project *Queer Identity in Ukrainian–Canadian and Ukrainian Literature*. Having collected necessary literature, I began my research by familiarizing myself with queer theory. Queer studies, present in academic discourse for a considerable time, have developed a body of theoretical work (e.g., Henry Abelove, Gloria Anzaldúa, Judith Butler, Diana Fuss, Heike Gerds, Elizabeth Grosz, Judith Jack Halberstam, Donald E. Hall, David M. Halperin, Annamarie Jagose, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Bidy Martin, Cherrie Moraga, Adrienne Rich, Nikki Sullivan, and Monique Wittig) that continues to grow steadily, while new perspectives on and contexts of this field of study are introduced by literary works (e.g., Dorothy Allison, Marusya Bociurkiw, Dionne Brand, Beth Brant, Nicole Brossard, Leslie Feinberg, bell hooks, Larissa Lai, Sky Lee, Audre Lorde, Daphne Marlatt, Suzette Mayr, Mary Meigs, Shani Mootoo, Jane Rule, Gail Scott, Betsy Warland, and Eve Zaremba). Thanks to my readings of major queer studies theorists, I have gained a theoretical basis necessary for my analysis of chosen works representative of Ukrainian–Canadian and Ukrainian literary explorations of queer

subjectivity. Due to the fact that my current project is a new piece of my research, which I have begun conducting at the start of my fellowship at the Krupp Kolleg, I decided to focus firstly on the Ukrainian–Canadian part of the project and devote my research during the time of my fellowship to the study of works by Marusya Bociurkiw, one of the most prolific and versatile contemporary Ukrainian–Canadian writers.

The various genres that Marusya Bociurkiw engages in include prose writing: a novel *The Children of Mary* (2006), a memoir *Comfort Food for Breakups: The Memoir of a Hungry Girl* (2007), and a collection of short stories *The Woman Who Loved Airports* (1994); as well as poetry *Halfway to the East* (1999); blog writing "Recipes for Trouble: A World of Food Stories, Culinary Memories, and Ingredients Queerly Political" or other online publications dealing with current affairs particularly in Canada and Ukraine; but also film, for example, her documentary *What's The Ukrainian Word for Sex? A Sexual Journey Through Eastern Europe* (2010) and the most recent one *This Is Gay Propaganda: LGBT Rights and the War in Ukraine* (2015). Taking into account a wide generic spectrum of Bociurkiw's works as well as their thematic depth, it is highly surprising that, so far, critics

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Weronika Suchacka studied English at the University of Szczecin in Poland, from which she holds a BA. In 2005, she was granted the Mecklenburg–Western Pomerania State Scholarship for the MA programme in British and North American Studies at the University of Greifswald in Germany. Having completed her MA studies in 2008, she received the State Scholarship for Doctoral Students at the University of Greifswald to pursue her PhD studies, which she finished in 2011. In 2009, she received a prize (Forschungspreis der Stiftung für Kanada-Studien) which en-

abled her to go on a research trip to Canada. Her academic interests include Canadian studies (anglophone Canadian literature), postmodern theories of identities, and gender studies. She taught seminars on Ukrainian–Canadian literature at the University of Greifswald. Currently, she is employed at the Department of English at the University of Szczecin, where, in 2011, she co-founded, together with Hartmut Lutz and Uwe Zagratzki, the *Szczecin Canadian Studies Group* (SCSG).

Kurzvita

» Queer Identity in Ukrainian–Canadian and Ukrainian Literature

The discussion of queer identity has been present in academic discourse for a considerable time, and while the body of scholarly work on this subject continues to grow, new perspectives on this field of study are also introduced by literary works. Among the examples of literature concerned with queer identity is Ukrainian–Canadian literature, which, however, still remains largely outside of scholarly research and interest in both Europe and Canada. The same refers to the topic of queer identity presented in this writing as its analysis has also been neglect-

ted by critics. Thus, the project is devoted to the study of queer identity as discussed in the works of Marusya Bociurkiw, who is, so far, the only Ukrainian–Canadian writer publishing works that concern this aspect. Moreover, the analysis of Bociurkiw's queer writings is to be included within a comparative study that covers an example of Ukrainian queer literature, so that a wider view on the idea of queer identity, as presented from both European and North American literary perspectives, is given.

Fellow-Projekt

have largely ignored Bociurkiw's literary and artistic endeavors. Although Bociurkiw is mentioned in major companions to Canadian literature as one of the most important queer or lesbian authors in Canada and her works are included in the anthologies of Canadian writing, there are virtually no critical studies of her works. Hence, my objective is to fill this scholarly gap and create a monograph that would focus on Bociurkiw's work, hoping to draw also public attention to it. Besides its literary merit, Bociurkiw's work deserves both critical and public attention particularly because of its transnational queer, feminist, and political perspectives that it takes on many issues, for example, current affairs in Ukraine, and given the alarming political developments there, her literary, film, and publicistic work has much relevance for the present and the world's understanding of the current status quo in this country.

Bociurkiw's works not only contribute to queer literature, but they also significantly enrich the scholarly debate on the concept of 'intersectionality' (developed by, for example, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Kathy Davis, Leslie McCall, Floya Anthias, Nira Yual-Davis). In fact, the literary and filmic explorations of intersectionality make up the crux of Bociurkiw's oeuvre. All of her works mentioned above can serve as perfect examples of how identity cannot be perceived as fixed and homogenous, but rather needs to be seen in terms of plurality, multiplicity, and process, in which different belongings cross meaningfully, neither excluding each other nor taking precedence over each other, an idea of identity promoted by lesbian feminists of color like Gloria Anzaldúa, whose writings about the intersectional aspect of identity are crucial for my analysis of Bociurkiw's works. Bociurkiw also explores this idea in her scholarly writing. For example, in her essay "Bordercrossings: Skin/Voice/Identity"

(in: *Canadian Women Studies/les cahiers de la femme* 14.1 [1993]: 6-8), the writer states that "my positioning of my various subject positions, and therefore of my identity in various artistic or feminist or 'queer' contexts is constantly renegotiated" (8). Being aware of her multiple belongings, Bociurkiw's choice to locate herself cannot tend towards speaking from the sphere of being "either . . . or," but rather requires exploring the state of her in-betweenness, or as she puts it, her "intersectionality . . . [and] [h]ybridity" (private correspondence, 28 Oct. 2014). Consequently, Anzaldúa's question with which Bociurkiw closes her 1993 essay, namely "*Where are our alliances, with our cultures, or our crotch?*" (8; italics in orig.), is actually a rhetorical one with respect to Bociurkiw's work: I believe the interconnectedness and influence of her multiple subject positions is evident in her writings, documentary and publicist work, while she herself confirms this idea quite directly when defining the key aim of her work in the following way: "The crossing of borders from the realm of sexual identity to the realm of cultural identity, and of finding a language that works for both, is, I have to say, the biggest challenge I have faced in my work thus far" (6-7). Consequently, my project engages in proving the thesis that the expressions of lesbian, feminist, cultural, and political identity in Bociurkiw's works cannot be analysed separately, as all of these concepts of belonging coexist in reciprocal relationships. Thus, the objective of my project is to examine intersectionality and border crossings as well as expressions of queerness, ethnicity, feminist and political ideas and activity in Marusya Bociurkiw's literary work.

Besides establishing my theoretical basis, I have already analyzed Bociurkiw's first two collections, the volume of short stories *The Woman Who Loved Airports* (1994) and her volume of poems *Halfway to the East* (1999).

My examination of the two works was the focus of a fellow lecture that I gave at the Krupp Kolleg on November 26, 2014. In my talk, I centered the analysis of Bociurkiw's two collections on five main aspects: family/community, personal and public politics, language, culture (e.g., the art of food making), and memory (e.g., the art of storytelling). I showed how queer/lesbian subjectivity and ethnic belonging intersect and influence each other; how family and ethnic community become important for one's (lesbian and feminist) self-expression; how homophobia in one's immediate familial surroundings, or society on the whole, discourages or even prevents one's coming-out and traumatizes the individual; how (following Janice Kulyk Keefer's idea) our family stories should be revised in view of historical records and vice versa; how all these influence political personality; and finally, how the art of storytelling and food-making is important for the act of personal and collective remembrance. Consequently, the content of my lecture constitutes part of the research that will be incorporated into the final version of my scholarly study.

The five aspects of literary analysis mentioned above are, in my view, constitutive of all of Bociurkiw's literary works. Therefore, my examination of her novel *The Children of Mary* (2006) and her autobiographical writing *Comfort Food for Breakups: The Memoir of a Hungry Girl* (2007) will also focus on intersectionality as expressed on all five levels. What is more, an analytical examination of Bociurkiw's memoir, which I have also managed to finalize during my fellowship, is expanded by a discussion of its formal and structural composition. The subtitle of the work loosely classifies it as a "memoir," but its categorization is, in fact, far more complex because the work combines different genres; thus, apart from being an example

of autobiographical writing, it also includes the elements of a travelogue and a recipe book. Consequently, I would like to explore its structure as its intersecting, multi-generic form seems to run parallel to, or perhaps creates a structural backbone for, its thematic representation of intersecting, multiple belongings. However, Bociurkiw's memoir is captivating for yet another reason, namely its focus on food as a vital way of self-expression. Food itself as well as the art of food-making and the act of eating are fascinating points of analysis not only in thematic terms as they are a crucial background against which the issues of memory, identity, and belonging are played out, but also in structural terms, as food memories and recipes govern the formal composition of the text.

All in all, the time of my fellowship resulted in writing two chapters that will constitute part of a monograph devoted to the analysis of queerness and intersectionality in Ukrainian-Canadian literature. Yet, to give a full overview of Bociurkiw's work in my upcoming study, I need to proceed with writing a chapter that would discuss Bociurkiw's novel. Therefore, the completion of my project requires further work in this respect as well as continuing my readings of queer/lesbian works by other authors from Canada and the U.S. in order to appropriately contextualize Bociurkiw's writings in the canon and tradition of queer/lesbian writing in North America. Once this is accomplished, I will be able to proceed with the second part of my project, namely a discussion of chosen works by Ukrainian authors.

During my research stay as a Junior Fellow at the Krupp Kolleg, I have gained new academic experience; it was my first fellowship, which will remain a memorable time for me. I am very thankful to Professor Dr. Bärbel Friedrich, the Academic Director of the Alfried Krupp Wissenschaftskolleg



Abb. 1: Die ukrainisch-kanadische Regisseurin Marusya Bociurkiw stand im Mittelpunkt der Studien von Dr. Weronika Suchacka.

Greifswald, and to Dr. Christian Suhm, the Academic Manager of the Krupp Kolleg, but also to the Stiftung Alfred Krupp Kolleg Greifswald, for giving me this wonderful opportunity to be one of the fellows of the Krupp Kolleg in the academic year 2014–2015. My work on the project during my research stay was productive particularly thanks to the exchange of scholarly ideas with other fellows, whom I had the honour to meet at the Kolleg and from whom I have learned a lot. All of the inspiring conversations that I had a chance to engage in with my colleagues, as well as their insightful comments, advice, and support that I have received have made me realize even more so the value to which I would like to stay strongly committed, namely the importance of academic networking and cooperation. For all this, but also for all the kindness and friendliness that I have met with, I will remain thankful to all and each of the fellows: Dr.

Elena Alessiato, Professor Dr. Bernd Blöbaum, Professor Dr. Martin Carrier, Professor Dr. Johannes Grave, Professor Dr. Tatjana Hörnle, Professor Dr. Stefan Huster, PD Dr. Jonathan W. Mueller, Dr. Charlton Payne, Professor Dr. Silke Schicktanz, Professor Dr. Johann Anselm Steiger, and PD Dr. Bettina Walde.

I consider my fellowship at the Krupp Kolleg a formative influence in my scholarly development for a number of reasons. Besides proceeding with my work on the project, I also gained another teaching experience by giving a seminar at the University of Greifswald (Department of Anglophone Literature/Culture). What is more, during my stay at the Krupp Kolleg, I was honoured by the Polish Association for Canadian Studies with an invitation to become a co-editor of the upcoming volume of *TransCanadiana*, a peer-reviewed journal of the Association, but I also finalized my work on a contribution to *Unbound: Ukrainian Canadians Writing Home*, an anthology of works by contemporary Ukrainian-Canadian authors (including Marusya Bociurkiw), whose editors, Dr. Lisa Grekul and Dr. Lindy Ledohowski, invited me to write a preface to this volume. Additionally, I had the opportunity of being involved in a variety of academic events that were organized at the Krupp Kolleg over the year. The infinite number of lectures, workshops, readings, and conferences that I had a chance to participate in allowed me to familiarize myself with academic discourse within fields of studies other than my own, and to get acquainted with international scholars of various disciplines. For a scholar who comes from Poland but gained her higher education in Germany, it was particularly rewarding to see how lively the interaction and cooperation between Polish and German academia is, and how strongly and enthusiastically it is supported by the Krupp Kolleg. Thanks to the events like the festival of Polish culture

PolenmARkt or the Polish Summer School *Polonicum*, I have met a number of most prominent representatives of Polish culture, literature and scholarship. My participation in the events at the Krupp Kolleg also meant being actively engaged in the organization of the Ukrainian Summer School *Ukrainicum*, during which I also had a chance to conduct a seminar on the topic of my specialization within Canadian literature, i.e. contemporary Ukrainian-Canadian writing. It was one of the most gratifying experiences of teaching that I have had so far; the enthusiasm of and the insightful comments made by the students who attended the course were highly constructive for my didactics. I will particularly remember our final session, in which Marusya Bociurkiw also took part. It was quite rewarding for me as a teacher to observe how our previous discussions led the students into making their own observations, and how they incorporated and presented them in this final class and in their interaction with the author. We were able to invite Marusya Bociurkiw to our last seminar session because she was one of the guest speakers during the *Ukrainicum*. Her participation in the summer school was connected with a screening of her latest documentary *This Is Gay Propaganda: LGBT Rights and the War in Ukraine* (2015), which was a part of the program scheduled for

the *Ukrainicum*. After the screening and the discussion of the film that I had the honour of moderating, I also had a chance to interview the writer/director, and the material that comes out of this interview is another useful source for my study of Bociurkiw's works.

Over my fellowship time, I have also had a chance to observe the enthusiasm and work commitment of Dr. Christian Suhm and his team including Dr. Rainer Cramm, Robert Lehmann, Anna Lena Klatt, Christin Klaus, Katja Kottwitz, Siri Hummel, and all the students working at the Krupp Kolleg. Their co-operation as well as passion that they put into their work is not only impressive but also instructive about what it takes to create a scholarly institute so vibrant and successful. To all of the people mentioned above, but also to Dr. Freia Steinmetz, the Commercial Manager of the Krupp Kolleg, the administration office team, as well as Frau Mielke and Herr Rienow, I would like to express my grateful thanks for creating a welcoming atmosphere, perfectly comfortable living conditions and working environment, but also for organizing highly enjoyable social and cultural events as well as most thought-provoking academic programme, which altogether make a fellowship stay at the Krupp Kolleg a truly unique experience.

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