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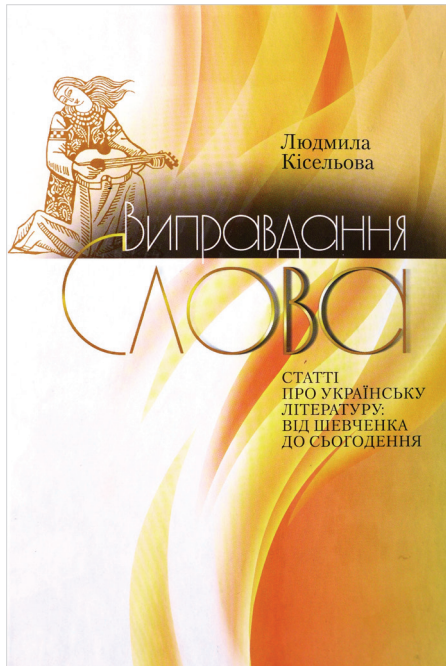
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Liudmyla Kiseliova

*The Vindication of the Word.
Essays on Ukrainian Literature:
From Shevchenko to the Present*

[*Vypravdannia Slova. Statti pro ukrainsku literaturu: vid Shevchenka do siohodennia*].

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Reviewed by Hanna Hnedkova

An enthusiastic researcher of Ukrainian and Russian literatures, Liudmyla Kiseliova has a gift to inspire Kyiv-Mohyla Academy students and her readers. The essays in her *The Vindication of the Word* may be read successively or in random sequence. For instance, I became familiar with the essay about Tychyna, Svidzinskyi and Osmachka long before the book was published, as it had been published in the collected articles *Humanity in Time* [*Liudyna v chasi*]. Still, I strongly recommend to read the book essay by essay, since all of them are united both by the problem of logodicy and by the development of the author's thought.

This development — “from Shevchenko to the present,” and in fact way deeper, from folklore to the present, — moves *ad fontes* as well as forward, to the future. An inner dynamics of this book might be seen as *anabasis*. This word is derived from the Ancient Greek verb *αναβαίνειν*, which means both “to embark” and “to return.” It refers us, in particular, to the title of Xenophon's book and to its description of the history of ten thousand Greece hoplites who were wandering through the Persian Empire in search of their native land. Liudmyla Kiseliova characterises Ukrainian society as post-genocidal: historical stresses have ruined the structure of its knowledge about the past, “its body has been violently deformed and torn to pieces, and the parts ‘cut’ in different periods now cannot safely grow back together” (p. 217). The purpose of the author's intellectual journey is thus to recognize and to accept the historical Ukrainian “distress experience.”

Serving foreign “Persian tsars” makes one forget about one's own national identity. Modern Ukrainian readers do not know the path to it because they have forgotten how to hear the call of the Word of national “cultural demiurges.” The research emerges from the particular “need for memory” (p. 217), which is necessary for us in order to be able to learn the “foreign” without losing our “own,” and which is indispensable if arrogance is not substituted for national pride.

The first section of the book returns to Taras Shevchenko's Word, to the word of this “Ukrainian Psalm Singer” (p. 21), its biblical meaning,— and the Word is again “on the look

out” [*na storozhi*] for the people. In the second section, Kiseliova highlights the methods, which Tychyna, Svidzynskyi and Osmachka use to affirm “the monomyth of the saving, life-giving Word” (p. 63). Hence, the crucial feature of Pavlo Tychyna’s poetical **logodicy** is considered to be the “icon-like” word, the poet’s ability to apprehend the world as “divine unity” and nature as an icon of God. The interaction between the literary word and folkloric semantic structures, which is characteristic for Ukrainian literary modernism, is successfully illustrated by the example of Volodymyr Svidzynskyi’s poetry. The profound analysis of Todos Osmachka’s poem “The Poet” reflects on how the mythological nature of the word simultaneously reveals itself on both the “sacred” and the “profane” levels of the text.

The author walks this path along with her readers and sometimes stops in order not to lead them in the wrong way. “Is such a symbolism distinctive for the early Tychyna’s lyrics?” — Liudmyla Kiseliova asks herself while pondering over the messianism in “The Sun Clarinets” [“Soniachni klarnety”]. And she concludes that, unlike the Russian poets of the Silver Age, Pavlo Tychyna does not equate the Poet with the Messiah.

The Greeks’ return home was hard, and not everyone had the strength to finish it. The one thing which *The Vindication of the Word* may not manage to do is to attract and hold each and every reader’s attention till the last page. Throughout the book, an intensive intellectual dialogue with readers and even nurturing of their “semiotic eyesight” (p. 117) is being carried on. Some sections are not easy enough as they demand special devotion and enthusiasm on the part of the readers. They are expected to assimilate the author’s careful attentiveness towards the text, which she compares to an icon (p. 83), an Easter egg (p. 97), or to knitting, where any stitch, if dropped, can infringe the overall picture (p. 121). Moreover, *The Vindication of the Word* is itself such a text, which needs “close reading,” as it uses lots of hidden citations, symbolical epigraphs, etc. The author’s word here addresses the readers and waits for their response: many ideas are explained in an outline and deserve further reflection, which the author does not provide but only hints at by providing dots.

A bright example of the above-mentioned devotion is given by the scholar in the third section, which I consider the most fascinating in the book. This section, an ethnographical investigation and a literary analysis of “Kalynivka songs,” was motivated by a personal reason: “I was lucky: the pinches of vivid Ukrainian folklore, inherited from my grandfather and grandmother, conserved their actual paremiology of the Poltava village Berezova Rudka of the 1920s” (p. 151). The author revives the secret data and explains the significance of the songs’ material, which was belittled by the Soviet government. Finally, Kiseliova shows how motifs of the bloody cross and of starving persisted in the Ukrainian modernists’ creative work.

This Ukrainian *anabasis* restores an essential for Liudmyla Kiseliova concept of *ethos* of the Ukrainian identity in identity discourse analysis. The notion of *ethos* refers to those structures in the collective consciousness where the feeling of the continuity of the nation’s cultural, historical and spiritual development is rooted. The final section of the book is dedicated to Myroslav Dochynets’ *Vichnyk* and analyses how this work uses the “pillars” of *ethos* (p. 213). Kiseliova interprets Dochynets’ strategy as “a process of identification, as a constant dialog with others, a constant acquisition of self-identity at a new level” (p. 199) to escape from the danger of depersonalization.

The Vindication of the Word represents an effort to overcome the contemporary Ukrainian's indifference towards Tradition. The Greeks noticed a precious blue patch ascending on the horizon and shouted: "*The sea! The sea!*" What did they feel at the time? Why did this single word mean so much to them? Indeed, we will never understand it if we continue to wander in the land of the non-vindicated Word.