

“Children’s and Youth Literature in Ukraine Between the Western and the Eastern Canon: Decanonization – Canonization” – Ukrainian Scholarly Seminar

On December 11th and 12th, 2014 in the headquarters of the Western Scientific Centre of National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine in Lviv a scholarly seminar “Children’s and Youth Literature in Ukraine Between the Western and the Eastern Canon: Decanonization – Canonization” was held. It was organized by Ukrainian Research Center of Children's and Youth Literature administered by Ulyana Baran.

Due to a very difficult financial situation of the Center and Ukraine itself, seminar’s participants – scholars of children’s literature from the universities spread all over the country came to Lviv at their own expense. Some of them traveled day and night, by bus and train, from Luhansk, from the Sea of Azov area and many other distant locations. Every one of them was determined to meet other specialists in the field not only to exchange their knowledge of children’s and youth literature but also in a broader matter – to discuss the future of Ukrainian culture, which, due to the war in the East of the country, needs to be especially protected, cherished and fostered.

Very interesting and thematically diversified lectures on various aspects of native and world literature for young readers were held by Ukrainian experts. One of them, for instance, was devoted to the analysis of the book by Kornel Makuszyński – “Koziołek Matołek”, which is an example of one of the first comic books for children, fostering cultural transmission and containing many references to national identity of the protagonist. On top of this, experts on children’s literature from abroad delivered their lectures via Skype, for example Prof. Bettina Kuemerling-Meibauer from Germany or Maria Nikolajeva from Great Britain. Lectures were followed by lively discussions. The program of the seminar is available for download.

The seminar was devoted also to setting the foundation for “All of Ukraine Reads to Kids” social campaign. A year ago Ukraine declared its willingness to join the “All of Europe Reads to Kids” program, initiated by our Foundation in 2011. After displaying presentations and sharing some video materials of the “ABCXXI – All of Poland Reads to Kids” Foundation, I had an opportunity to lecture on the power of reading to children and our Polish experiences, including research on the results of reading in kindergartens and schools. Ukrainian reading campaign will probably develop differently than Polish one since it has been initiated mainly by literary scholars and academics working with trainee teachers. It seems to be a very good way of reaching teachers and encouraging them to implement reading in schools. Our Foundation should probably cooperate more closely with Polish academia in the field of pedagogy and literature. Polish academics could convince teachers that reading to students on everyday basis is extremely beneficial and encourage them to incorporate reading to children to the curriculum. In the face of radical impoverishment of children’s language skills this extremely effective and costless, when it comes to equipment and trainings, method of improvement of students’ language and reading competencies ought to be widely practiced within our education system. If we could make it, it would be the best proof that sharing our own experiences could benefit us very much as well because we inspire one another.

Irena Koźmińska