

Jarosław Ławski

Faculty of Philological Studies "East-West"
University of Białystok

**SLAVIC STUDIES SCHOLARS IN ODESSA AGAIN:
THE INTERNATIONAL SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE
"ODESSA AND THE BLACK SEA
AS A LITERARY AND CULTURAL SPACE"**

The volume presented here is the fruit of a lively cooperation between researchers from Ukraine and Poland, as well as from other Slavic countries, concerning the history, culture and literature of the legend of one of the most beautiful harbour cities in the world: Odessa. Let us remind you that this cooperation started for good in 2013, before the dramatic historical events which hurt Ukraine, Odessa and Odessites. On September 12-13, 2013, the International Scientific Conference "Obraz Odessy w literaturach słowiańskich" ("The Image of Odessa in Slavic literatures") took place in Odessa. It gathered a large group of researchers from Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Bulgaria, but above all from Poland.

The result of the Conference is a huge trilingual collection of studies – the first of its kind dedicated to Odessa – entitled *Odessa w literaturach słowiańskich. Studia. (Odessa in Slavic Literatures: Studies)*. It has thousand pages of a large format. 60 researchers participated in the project, while 30 articles were written by Polish researchers.

It is not without significance, however, that the post-conference volume from 2013 was released only in 2016. At that time, important events took place in the history of Ukraine, such as Revolution of Dignity, Maidan, the annexation of Crimea, the War in Donbass, geostrategic tensions throughout Central and Eastern Europe, and above all the real threat of Russia's invasion in the south of Ukraine and the creation of the so-called Novorossiia (New Russia). Under these semi-war conditions, with the war "behind our back", scientific research not only in Odessa is done differently, in tension, and without comfort. Therefore, the edition of this volume should be considered a success.

An even more impressive event is the establishment of a whole series of scientific conferences "Odessa and the Black Sea. Polish-Ukrainian cultural and

literary relationships" led by Prof. Natalia Malitina (Odessa, Rzeszów) and Prof. Jarosław Ławski (Białystok).

It was within this cycle that the idea of organizing the 2nd International Scientific Conference "Odessa i Morze Czarne jako przestrzeń literacka i kulturowa. Idee – konteksty – interpretacje" ("Odessa and the Black Sea as a Literary and Cultural Space: Ideas – Contexts – Interpretations") was taken up. It was held in Odessa on September 15-16, 2016. During the session, the volume *Odessa w literaturach słowiańskich. Studia (Odessa in Slavic literatures: Studies, Białystok – Odessa 2016)* was promoted. Again, the meeting was hosted by the Odessa Literary Museum, located in the very center of the city, in the Gagarin Palace near the Odessa Opera House, and it was organized by the Odessa I. I. Mechnikov National University and the Faculty of Philological Studies "East – West", the University of Białystok.

The guests on the day of the inauguration (September 15, at 10.00 a.m., Gagarin Palace) were greeted by: Rector of the Odessa University, Prof. Igor Koval, both chairpersons of the Organizing Committee: Prof. Natalia Maliutina and Prof. Jarosław Ławski, Dean of the Faculty of Philology of the Odessa University, Prof. Evgen Czernoivanenko, Director of the Literary Museum, Tetiana Liptuga, and Director of Łukasz Górnicki's Library in Podlasie, Jolanta Gadek (The Library cooperates with the University Library in Odessa).

50 researchers from Poland, Ukraine, Russia, Bulgaria and Switzerland took part in the Conference. Undoubtedly, the ongoing war in Donbass influenced the fact that researchers from Poland appeared in smaller numbers than four years earlier. Despite the war, Odessa has been experiencing a real tourist boom since 2015 – all tourists who would earlier visit the Crimea now come to Odessa. However, the strength of the media image of the war is so great in Poland and the West that a trip to Odessa is considered a risky act. In 2016, only 11 researchers from Poland participated in the conference in Odessa. The greater recognition should be given to all those who have shown the status of scientific cooperation with their neighbour suffering the war oppression, thus performing an act of solidarity of no small importance.

One-day, extremely intense proceedings – mainly in sections – ended with a ceremonial meeting in the gardens of the Literary Museum. The guests visited the city of Odessa with a guide, and on September 16 they went on a trip to the famous Akkerman, renowned with the names of Mickiewicz and Pushkin, and they visited the Odessa Opera (for the performance of Rossini's *The Marriage of Figaro*).

The great Odessa evenings around Deribasivska Street will definitely stay in our living memory. It is here, where thousands of people on warm September nights "occupied" countless cafes and restaurants, while listening to music, street musicians, and enjoying the atmosphere of freedom. It was an unforgettable experience of Odessa, its essence as a meeting place for everyone with eve-

ryone, a global city, a harbour through which the world permeates Ukraine, and Ukraine permeates the world.

We hope that the Conference has met its scientific goal. Undoubtedly, this has happened – it has also fulfilled another purpose: it has connected even more closely the community of Slavic studies researchers from Ukraine and Poland. As we know, it was continued with the 3rd International Conference, this time taking place in Poland, entitled „Muzyka i opera w polsko-ukraińskim dialogu literackim i kulturalnym” (“Music and Opera in the Polish-Ukrainian Literary and Cultural Dialogue”, Białystok, May, 4-5, 2017).

We present this volume to you with the hope that it is a momentous voice about the superiority of creative peace over the devastating element of war, of dialogue over dispute, and of science over thoughtlessness. Odessa – a mythical city of the world culture – has yet much to tell, not only to Poles and Ukrainians, Jews or Bulgarians. Above all, it seems to be a symbolic space – heavily experienced by the barbarity of history – which calls for reflection on the meaning of our existence on the shore of a great Sea. Let us choose, among its colours, blue rather than black, and hope, rather than despair. We need to express confidence that history will allow for Odessa conferences to take place in subsequent years, not marked by anxiety or war.

Jarosław Ławski
EtK, January 27, 2017