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THE DISINHERITED DRAMATIST ON THE RECEPTION OF VYNNYČENKO'S PLAYS IN GERMANY

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The article researches into the connection of Volodymyr Vynnyčenko's dramaturgic creative work and the German-speaking cultural space on the rich archival material. It proves that the plays by the Ukrainian author organically fitted in German expressionists' literary-artistic searches, were often performed on the stages of Berlin, Munich, Nuremberg, as well as of Vienna and Salzburg, their reception by Western European critics and viewers is analysed. Simultaneously, it points out that such reception of the Ukrainian author's creative work also depended on Volodymyr Vynnyčenko's very personality, who was first and foremost known in the West as a politician and social activist of Ukraine.

Key words: *V. Vynnyčenko, dramaturgy, theatre, reception, expressionism, Germany, Austria.*

The repertory of the German and Austrian theater of the 1920s was rich in the diversity of plays performed. Although repudiated by most dramatists, naturalism lived on in the plays of Gerhart Hauptmann (1862-1946), whose then contemporary dramatic works were crafted in the neoromantic manner, and in the powerful and highly original dramas of Frank Wedekind (1864-1919). Neoclassicism continued to survive principally in Paul Ernst's stylistically austere tragedies; symbolism made its inroads onto the German stage through the lyrical dramas of Hugo von Hofmannsthal (1847-1929), while *fin-de-siècle* impressionism was perceptible in the psychological plays of Arthur Schnitzler (1862-1931). The most vigorous style of the time, however, was expressionism. It was the *Sturm-und-Drang* movement of the twentieth century which, with its dynamic search for the "new man," dominated the German stage in the plays of Georg Kaiser (1878-1945), Ernst Barlach (1870-1938), Ernst Toller (1893-1939), Franz Werfel (1890-1945), and many others.

Also of great importance was Carl Sternheim (1878-1942), “the modern-day German Molière” (as he liked to think of himself), whose plays mark a transition from impressionism to expressionism.

Among the non-German playwrights staged in Germany were the Norwegian Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), whose naturalistic, analytical drama had a tremendous impact on the German theater; the Swede August Strindberg (1849-1912), whose plays were a constant source of inspiration (and imitation) for German expressionists, and the Belgian Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949), who profoundly influenced the symbolist theater in Germany. To be sure, the classical theater of France, England, and other Western European countries continued to occupy an important position on the German stage.

The growth and development of the German theater in the 1920s bore the stamp of the genius of Max Reinhardt (1873-1943), whose lavish productions were characterized by original, exciting techniques, including new stage-lighting effects that bore the influence of film. At that time, too, the repertory was diversified enough to include plays representing different esthetic, social, and political views. It should be mentioned here that the “Epic Theater” of Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) who at that time moved to Berlin to become the dramatic consultant at Max Reinhardt’s Deutsches Theater, has its origins in that decade.

A vibrant, sparkling intellectual atmosphere prevailed in the German theater of that time: it inspired experimentation, a search for stylistic innovation, and for new spiritual horizons. That exciting period, which also witnessed the rise of a renewed social, political, and religious commitment, ceased to be a force in German cultural life when the Nazi subjugation of the German *Geist* reduced the German theater to a bombastic but also lackluster “blood-and-soil” spectacle.

The *Zeitgeist* of the theater in the 1920s enables us to appreciate more fully the success of Volodymyr Vynnyčenko’s plays on the German stage. On the one hand, it was, as we have said, an age of experimentation; hence the conditions were favorable to the introduction of a new playwright. On the other hand, it should also be quite plain that, despite some important personal contacts, it must have been very difficult for Vynnyčenko to break into the German repertory. As far as the Western European theater was concerned, he was a nonentity, he came from a country whose drama was completely unknown in Germany, and the competition at that time was fierce. The inclusion of his plays in the German repertory can therefore be viewed as irrefutable testimony to the dramatic merit of his work. In the present article we attempt to assess his success on the German stage by focusing on the reception of his plays in Germany, particularly on the reception of his two most famous dramas — *Brexnja* (The Lie) and *Čorna pantera i bilyj vedmid’* (The Black Panther and the White Bear).

Volodymyr Vynnyčenko was the only Ukrainian playwright whose plays were successfully staged in the theaters of Western Europe for a consid-

erable period of time. In the 1920s, Vynnyčenko became famous as a dramatist all over Europe, and especially in Germany. His *Brexnja* enjoyed great popularity in such cities as Leipzig (where it made its debut in the spring of 1921 at the Schauspielhaus), Berlin, Nuremberg, and Munich, as well as in Vienna, Zürich, and Amsterdam, where it was performed in German translation. In addition to *Brexnja*, other plays by Vynnyčenko, such as *Čorna pantera i bilyj vedmid'*, *Hrix* (The Sin), and *Zakon* (The Law), were also staged; the last, however, was performed mainly in Russian translation in the émigré Russian theater in Berlin.

Much of the success of *Brexnja* can be attributed to the German actor-director Friedrich Kayssler (1874-1945), who was at that time the director of the Volksbühne in Berlin. His adaptation of *Brexnja* to the German stage made the play more accessible to the German public.* As a result of his efforts, it was staged with considerable success in 1922, and went through sixty performances in Berlin alone. Kayssler not only directed the play, but also played the leading character. In addition, he published a brief and favorable interpretation of the play in the theater periodical *Die Rampe*, where he focused on its quintessential moral and ethical aspects. “The special charm of the play,” Kayssler wrote, “consists in the manner in which, during a quiet mundane struggle which a group of simple people wages in a half-unconscious and half-conscious manner, one single will [that of Natalia, the heroine of the play] transcends itself; a will which has determined to give of itself and which perishes for the good of others because of this determination.”† According to his interpretation, Natalia was destined to perform good deeds and therefore to die. At the same time, Kayssler indicated that the play was not marred by pathos or overblown sentimentality which could easily develop from the situation of Natalia's self-sacrifice, and in this he saw another strong point of the drama.

Kayssler also wrote that the heart of the play is in the words: “The lie can become the truth under certain circumstances,” pointing out that this is neither quibbling nor wordplay, much less an attempt on Vynnyčenko's part to justify lies. Kayssler maintained that the main theme of the play is human goodness and self-sacrifice, and that the lie is but a means of achieving these virtues. According to Kayssler, this play could have just as well been titled “Goodness” (*Die Güte*)‡

In the conclusion of his interpretation, Kayssler went almost too far in idealizing the play and especially Natalia's noble character traits. He saw hidden under the surface of the text the most tender of human feelings which,

* In Berlin, *Brexnja* (*Die Lüge* in German translation) made its debut at the Volksbühne on November 1, 1922.

† See “*Die Lüge*. Von Wolodymyr Wynnytschenko. Übertragen von Gustav Specht” (Potsdam, 1923), p. 27.

‡ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

although rooted in everyday life, transcends the level of everyday existence. Vynnyčenko's characters, according to Kayssler, are transformed by the strong will and goodness of Natalia from a chance group of people into a close-knit community which becomes a symbol of humanity (*Menschheit*). The dramatist shows how the inadequacy of human communication—of language—leads to lies in the conventional sense. But that which convention would call a lie is here nothing but pure humanity (*reines Menschentum*). The only crucial matter in the play is the “consciousness of inner truth,” that inner drive to do good which informs the character of Natalia: all else is of secondary importance.

Let us parenthetically remark that this interpretation stands in sharp contrast to those advanced by most Ukrainian critics. The émigré Bohdan Romanenčuk, for example, asserts that “Natalia does everything without love, she acts calculatingly, from narrow materialistic, egoistical reasons. Everything that she does and says is a lie, and lies fill her life, because she pretends to be better than she is.”^{*} Similarly, the Soviet critic Jevhen Šabliovs'kyj interprets the play, and Natalia's actions, as “a call to cast aside all obligations” and a “rationalization for lying and deceit.” He adds that “the author openly propagates a ‘new morality,’ which, to be sure, obliterates the differences between truth and falsehood.”[†] We have already seen Kayssler's completely opposite view on the play as endowed with a profoundly moral ethos. What needs adding here is that *Brexnja* was staged in Germany in accordance with Kayssler's interpretation.

Kayssler's interpretation cannot be arbitrarily dismissed as an attempt to make the play more palatable to the German audiences, because it emerges directly from the text itself. As early as the first act, Natalia's feelings evolve in a certain definite direction; she displays a sense of responsibility, of compassion, and of love. Here is her *confession de foi*: “To tell the truth, I married Andrij out of pride, out of an abstract love for humanity ... I knew that Andrij had great mathematical abilities, and through him I wanted to give to mankind these new values... But when I first saw his father, I wanted to kneel before him, to wash his feet, and to dry them with my hair.”[‡] In addition to the obvious allusion to Mary Magdalene, we find here a definitely oriented evolution of Natalia's love—from the abstract love of mankind to the concrete love for a single human being, the father of her husband. She is now on the road to an authentic love of mankind, which is possible only through the love of individual human beings. And this, it appears, is that *reins Menschen-*

^{*} *Azbukovnyk* (Philadelphia: “Kyiv,” 1973), 2:116

[†] For his comments on Vynnyčenko, see *Radjans'ke literaturoznavstvo* (September, 1970), p. 44; excerpted by this writer in English in: Vasa D. Mihailovich, et al., eds., *Modern Slavic Literatures* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1976), 2:528-529.

[‡] Wolodymyr Wynnytschenko, *Die Lüge. Drama in drei Akten*. Einzig autorisierte Übersetzung aus dem Ukrainischen von Gustav Specht (Potsdam: Gustav KJepenheuer Verlag, 1922), p. 10.

tum postulated by Kayssler. Love for fellow human beings is her main character trait; the happiness of a human being is her *sumum bonum*, everything else is secondary and derivative. Later in the same dialogue, she states: “People . . . really do not need either truth or lies, they need happiness, do you understand me? Happiness. . . . And if a lie can provide happiness then — long live the Lie.”*

In addition to Kayssler’s work on the play both on and off stage, the success of *Brexnja* in Germany was enhanced by a good translation by the German writer Gustav Specht (1885-1956). This translation, titled *Die Lüge*, was authorized by Vynnyčenko himself; the author and the translator closely collaborated on it.

The success of a play on the stage depends, by and large, on the skill of the actors; in Vynnyčenko’s *Brexnja*, the rendition of the part of Natalia is particularly important. The role was made famous in Italy by the grand lady of the Italian stage, Emma Gramatica;[†] in Germany, no actress of such stature acted in Vynnyčenko’s plays. According to the theater reviews, the best Natalia was the Berlin actress Helene Fehdmer (1872-1939) who, significantly enough, also excelled as the lead in Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler*.

Finally, Vynnyčenko as a dramatist enjoyed favorable advance publicity in German theatrical publications. In addition to Kayssler and other Germans who wrote on Vynnyčenko’s dramaturgy, the Ukrainian scholar Vasyl Simovyč published an article on the Ukrainian theater in the *Mitteilungen der Leipziger Schauspielgemeinde* extolling Vynnyčenko’s plays. Some germane passages are offered here in translation: “Volodymyr Vynnyčenko is the most successful contemporary Ukrainian dramatist. Imprisoned several times by the Czarist regime for his revolutionary activities, he likes to treat various problems of the revolution in his work. . . . For example, his drama *Miž dvox syl* (Between Two Powers) is set during the first Bolshevik invasion of Ukraine, and the plays *Dysharmonija* (Disharmony), *Velykyj Motox* (The Great Moloch), and *Bazar* (Bazaar) deal with the lives of revolutionaries. Here . . . Vynnyčenko reveals his *Weltanschauung* and touches on the various conflicts inherent in life. This is particularly true of his two most frequently performed dramas, *Brexnja* and *Čorna pantera i bilyj vedmid’*. Of importance also are Vynnyčenko’s comedies, which exploit the small absurdities in the

* *Ibid.*, p. 11. Regarding Vynnyčenko’s thoughts on happiness during his work on the German version of *Brexnja*, see entries in his diary: Volodymyr Vynnyčenko, *Ščodennyk* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1983), vol. I, p. 70; also cf. Eugene Lashchuk’s article in this volume. The diary provides much information on the issues discussed in this article, together with Vynnyčenko’s own terse, laconic and incisive comments and reactions. See appropriate entries throughout vol. II, especially pp. 25-300.

[†] See Domenico A. Di Marco’s article “A Note on Emma Gramatica and Volodymyr Vynnyčenko”//*Studies in Ukrainian Literature*. – Clifton, NJ: The Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the USA., Vol. XVI 1984-1985, # 41-42. – p. 377-384.

lives and the psyche of the Ukrainian people. These plays are especially captivating and amusing, and they enjoy great popularity in Ukraine. Vynnyčenko's fame, however, is not confined to his native Ukraine. His plays have been performed in the capitals of Russia, St. Petersburg and Moscow, and *Brexnja* has enjoyed great success on the Czech stage. Recently, a Belgian theater acquired the right to translate that play, and both *Brexnja* and *Čorna pantera i bilyj vedmid'* have been translated into German by Gustav Specht. . . . Vynnyčenko's *oeuvre* is an important phase in the development of the Ukrainian theater after the Revolution.”*

It is interesting that although *Brexnja* enjoyed a long run on the German stage, critical reception of it was not, on the whole, enthusiastic. *Brexnja* was criticized for its imitation of Ibsen, Strindberg, Wedekind, Sudermann, and a number of other Western European playwrights, for its outdated treatment of psychological problems, for its lack of action, etc. Yet the irrefutable fact remains that the play did well, the theater-going public liked it, and Vynnyčenko's fame spread all over Europe. Perhaps the most objective and thorough analysis of *Brexnja* next to Kayssler's, but quite different from it, was offered by the German critic Fritz Mack in the *Leipziger Neueste Nachrichten*,[†] after the play had its debut in Leipzig. Mack called Vynnyčenko “a writer who knows Russian literature as well as the literature of Western peoples”, and used to his advantage Sardou, Henri Bernstein, Sudermann, Ibsen, and Strindberg. Mack provided a concise critical synopsis of the play: “Natalia Pavlovna deceives her sick and weak husband with a young student. When she assures the student that she loves him, he demands that she follow him. Natalia declines out of consideration for her husband, whom she does not want to abandon. She counters the ethical objections of her lover with sophistic arguments: man needs neither truth nor deception, just happiness. If lies can produce this, then lies are fine! In fact, Natalia acts according to this questionable principle. She deceives her husband, to whom she feigns faithfulness, and she deceives the student, to whom she feigns love. In truth, her only interest in the student is his youth and his strength. Finally, she even deceives Ivan, her husband's assistant, who proclaims his love for her when she tells him that she has always loved him. Ivan, to be sure, has justified suspicions about this surprising admission. Shortly before, he had spied on Natalia and her lover from behind a door and had even stolen letters written to her by the student. In order to be able to believe in her love, he demands (Rosmer in reverse) that Natalia either throw herself from the fourth floor or take cyanide. He supports this delightful demand by threatening to read the stolen letters to

* See Wasyl Simowytsch. “Über das ukrainische Theater,” *Mitteilungen der Leipziger Schampielgemeinde*, 13, June 3, 1921.

† Issue of June 4, 1921. Another, even more favorable, review was written by Hans Ratonek in the *Leipziger Zeitung*, June 4-5, 1921.

her family. At this point, the image of Ivan is momentarily inflated in the mind's eye of the audience: he returns the stolen letters to Natalia. Just like Melitta Wrangel, the woman from the sea [Mack probably refers to Ellida Wangel, the heroine of Ibsen's play *The Lady from the Sea*], she is supposed to decide freely. However, one can hardly hold it against her that no real confidence is inspired in her by such a noble turn of events. One can understand her decision in the final act to poison herself when one takes her naive husband into account, to whom she cautiously pays some attention, who simply tells her that he would rather see her dead than deceiving him".

Mack also sees Natalia as the key figure of the play, a woman whose character is irresistibly attractive to the audience:

"All the creative talent of this writer has been expended on the figure of Natalia. This red-blooded human being with unflagging primitive instincts is anchored in an environment in which she can develop only in this way. One is really drawn to this woman, hungry for life and happiness, who knows how to generate the joy she needs to live by lying, by producing the appearance of truth from the strength of a naive egoism, which has not been destroyed by civilizing processes. Natalia lies not only to find happiness, but to keep misery and discomfort out of the lives of her lovers. This is the deep tragedy of a human being, who rises to such greatness as a victim that precisely this sacrifice becomes the crowning lie of her life: it is supposed to maintain the image of her purity in her husband's mind and at the same time provide Ivan with proof of her love for him. Ivan appears to me to be the least successfully drawn character in the play. The beginnings of the development of a devious character remain petrified. Her husband, the student, the father, the minor figures, however, display poetic vision."

In the conclusion of his article, Mack reiterates and summarizes his qualified admiration for the play: "In general, it is a strange mixture of poetry and theater; the most refined materials clash with the crassly theatrical. . . . Very superficial effects alternate with moments of poetic inspiration. All in all, the poetic predominates; Vynnyčenko has obviously learned something about atmosphere from the Russians. It is a work well worth getting to know."

On the basis of the various reviews and articles, we can conclude that *Brexnja* was Vynnyčenko's most successful play in Germany. His other plays did not fare so well. The reviews of *Čorna pantera i bilyj vedmid'* from 1922, for example, convey the impression that it should not have been staged. The majority of the reviews were negative. In addition, some critics did not limit their criticism to the play, but also attacked the author's person and the sound of his name, and even his native country. The very title of the play brought forth either merriment or outright scorn. It was labeled "kitschy," "corny," and "symbimbolic" (a sarcastic play on the word symbolic). One critic began his disquisition as follows: "This title sounds like an Indian story. We think of

James Fenimore Cooper, of Indian chiefs, of tomahawks, of scalps, etc.”* Speaking of the author, a more charitable critic stated that Volodymyr Vynnyčenko was a Ukrainian writer and statesman with “innumerable y’s in his name,”† and another reported that he was the prime minister (*Ministerpräsident*) of his country who, in addition to politics, also had “an unfortunate penchant for the theater.”‡ A less charitable critic began his review with an account of an anecdote: during the performance, some members of the audience, in order to divert themselves somewhat, told each other stories about Vynnyčenko, one of them being that he was exiled from his country for having written this play. The author of the review concluded that every anecdote contains some truth, and this particular one was no exception.§ Still another critic began his review by stating that the management of the Berlin theater, where the play was staged, wanted to prove that “even a Ukrainian is able to imitate the dramatic literature of recent decades.” He continued: “Apparently we [the Germans] are doomed to see nothing but foreign plays on our stages; hence, why not a Ukrainian one once in a while?” He concluded his review by reporting that the words of one of the minor characters of the play, “Why have we come here?” brought a hearty applause from the audience who asked themselves the same question.** In addition to the comment about the dramatist’s nationality, quoted above, there were many more slurs directed against Ukraine. One reviewer wrote that Ukraine was “a rather dark section of Europe,” and another concluded his review by expressing the pious wish: “Hopefully, Ukraine will soon start delivering grain once again.”

Not all criticism of the play stemmed from the German *Übermensch* syndrome. Some reviewers were quite objective, and their comments contribute to a better understanding of Vynnyčenko’s dramaturgy. To provide an example of this more balanced and constructive criticism, we offer excerpts from a review published under the initials A.Wi., in the *Deutsche Zeitung* of July 14, 1922. While pointing out the shortcomings of Vynnyčenko’s dramaturgy, especially what he considers to be borrowings from Western dramatists, the reviewer does provide some positive and encouraging comments: “The Ukrainian author of *Čorna pantera i bilyj vedmid*’ should not believe

* J. Kn., “*Der weisse Bär und die schwarze Pamherkatze*. Uraufführung in der Tribune,” *Boersen Zeitung* (Berlin), July 14, 1922. The animals in the German title were, as a rule, reversed.

† E.M., “*Der weisse Bär und die schwarze Pantherkatze*,” *Berliner Morgenpost*, July 16, 1922.

‡ A.M., “Wynnytschenkos *Pantherkatze*,” *Vossische Zeitung* (Berlin), July 14, 1922.

§ K.H.B., “Psychologies in der Tribune. *Der weisse Bär und die schwarze Pantherkatze*,” *Das deutsche Abendblatt*, July 14, 1922.

** Otto Gysae. “Ukrainisches Theater. Wynnytschenko: *Der weisse Bär und die schwarze Pantherkatze*,” *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung* (Berlin), July 14, 1922. Almost identical sentiments were expressed by Leo Rein in the *12 Uhr Mitiags-Zeitung* of the same date; however, Rein also stated that the play could not be denied a certain “colorfulness” (*Farbigkeit*).

that this demonstration of talent makes him an accomplished dramatist. . . . In general, his work lacks the brimstone, the searing breath, the theatrical élan requisite to any play which seeks to endow its characters and themes with significance. There are successful moments in Volodymyr Vynnyčenko's work, but they pale in the trappings of the total production and in embarrassing pauses and repetitions. The better aspects of the play have, in fact, been borrowed from famous predecessors; one is continually reminded of Strindberg and Ibsen, but mostly of Wedekind.”*

The critic also chastises Vynnyčenko for presenting characters who lack “internal drive or self-motivation, who simply accept fate as unalterable,” and therefore are puppets governed by external forces. At the same time, he sees several “redeeming qualities” in Vynnyčenko's work and intimations of potential significant dramatic achievement:

“He [Vynnyčenko] attempts to capture all conceivable theatrical themes in a single format, hoping that something will eventuate from the collage. He has taken the ivory-tower motif from Ibsen, together with that of the tragedy of the artist ruined by his own creativity. [This motif, frequent in Ibsen, culminates in his last important play *When We Dead Awaken*.] Such an artist sins mortally by making his woman the victim of his work, destroying her love life and, thereby, causing her death. Also attributable to this Northern sorcerer is the tarantella dance of Nora's doubt [reference to the conclusion of *A Doll's House*] and the positioning of a man between two women which, as in Gerhart Hauptmann's *Gabriel Schilling's Flight*, both entices and devastates him. These women also have traits characteristic of Strindberg and Wedekind: the black panther is a Lulu-figure from *Castle Wetterstein*, but made playfully bourgeois. Because she is modeled after Gabriel Schilling's wife, Eveline, she too is rendered very unfeline; the “snow flake” is a Hanna, a Strindbergian vampire-type. These women, nevertheless, are depicted with some care. One can see that their author loves them; their womanhood, therefore, has a certain degree of warmth. The men are another story. They dangle from these women like big zeros. The hero, the white bear, whose struggle for artistic freedom is unbelievable ... is a used-up dishrag, who in the second act knows what he wanted in the first and in the fourth is blocked by what he himself produced in the third. We may accept the hero's victimization of his dying child with his art—which, incidentally, is totally unnecessary— but when he becomes a pimp for his faithful wife, as in the *Castle Wetterstein* model, simply to be able to complete his painting, which actually idealizes her as a Madonna, pfui!—that is too much. This “madness” is not even attributable to demonic

* A.P., “Wynnytschenko: *Der weisse Bär und die schwarze Pantherkatze*”, *Tägliche Rundschau* (Berlin), July 14, 1922.

greatness but simply to weakness, to an inability to come to terms either with art or with life.”*

From the evidence presented above, it should be plain that *Brexnja* enjoyed greater popularity on the German stage than *Čorna pantera i bilyj vedmid’*. The reasons for this are diverse. It would appear that the German translation of the former play was far superior to that of the latter, although both were translated by the same man—Gustav Specht.[†] In addition, the very title of the play, “Black Panther and White Bear,” as we have seen, seems to have had a prejudicial effect on the critics. Also *Brexnja* has a much better constructed plot, a more attractively developed heroine, less emotionalism and pathos, and more realism than *Čorna pantera i bilyj vedmid’*. Finally, as in the case of *Brexnja*, the Germans apparently expected a Ukrainian playwright to dwell on rustic themes and motifs from his native land, and not to examine, in the manner of Ibsen, the depth of the human soul. This reasoning becomes repeatedly apparent in the reviews; and it is quite obviously expressed in the 1921 adaptation of the play to the screen.

In order to satisfy the backers, actors, and directors involved in the production of the motion picture, Vynnyčenko not so much rewrote the play as wrote a completely new script for the film in line with the taste of the German critics. According to the available sources,[‡] the film was indeed quite different from the play. Vynnyčenko transferred the action from a French to a Ukrainian setting, added a number of characters to allow for folk scenes in a Ukrainian village, thus ensuring local color, and he radically changed the ending. In the original dramatic version, the main characters die; in the film, they return to their native village where, in the rustic surrounding of the Ukrainian landscape, they seek a new life. Vynnyčenko apparently based the script on the dramatic version that was performed in the Russian theater of Berlin, responding to the requests of his business associates and friends, among them

* Additional German reviews of Vynnyčenko’s plays are listed and provided with succinct Ukrainian summaries in the unpublished Vynnyčenko bibliography. See *Volodymyr Vynnyčenko: Anotovana bibliografija* compiled by Vadym Stelmashenko, New York, 1985. The author gratefully acknowledges the use of this excellent, meticulously compiled work.

† See *Der weisse Bär und die schwarze Pantherkaize*. Schauspiel in 4 Akten von Wolodymyr Wynnyschenko. Einzig autorisierte Übersetzung aus dem Ukrainischen von Gustav Specht (Potsdam, Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, [1922]), 69 pp. It would be interesting and productive to compare the German translations with the Ukrainian originals. Such a study might yield additional insight into Vynnyčenko’s dramaturgy. In this connection it should be added that the influence of German thinkers and dramatists on Vynnyčenko’s dramaturgy needs to be explored and analyzed.

‡ The journal *Illusiriener Film-Kurier* (Berlin), Nr. 73 1921, offers the following information about the film: “*Die schwarze Pantherin*. Nach dem Drama *Das Pantherweib* [note change in title] von Wolodymyr Wynnyschenko. Für den Film bearbeitet von Hans Janowitz und Dr. Johannes Guter.” It also lists all the *dramatis personae* and the actors who played their parts, provides all other credits, includes 19 stills from the film, and contains a summary of the script in the form of scene synopses.

the Russian actress Elena Polevickaja (1881-1973), who played the heroine in both the stage version and the film. The directors of the film, Hans Janowitz and Johannes Guter, even hired a special consultant (Viktor Aden) for Ukrainian themes and motifs, to make certain that the process of “Ukrainianization” had been fully achieved.

To be sure, Vynnyčenko was not happy with this “revisionism” but he was too astute a businessman to pass up the opportunity.* In any case, the making of the film further validates our notion that the German critics simply were not ready to accept a work by a Ukrainian dramatist that did not deal with Slavic themes and motifs. Vynnyčenko’s spiritual kinship with Ibsen, Sudermann, Wedekind, and other Western European dramatists and thinkers disturbed them. They probably wanted someone who would reveal something about the “Slavic soul” and generate a Ukrainian (Russian, for most Germans) “atmosphere,” or tell them something about the Russian Revolution. That is the reason why some of the critics attempted to define the Ukrainian dramatist in the context of the Russian theatrical tradition. Most important, however, they expected from Vynnyčenko a typical *Heimatkunst* product, dealing with the life of Ukrainian peasants; instead, they were confronted with the psychological problems of an artist living in Paris. All this evidently did not bother the audiences who continued to enjoy Vynnyčenko’s plays. The prejudiced opinion of the German critics notwithstanding, Vynnyčenko presented his plots and characters with considerable force and ingenuity; his plays were, and still are, eminently suited for the stage.

In the context of the development of the Ukrainian theater, as well as in the context of Vynnyčenko’s own development as a dramatist, the German critiques of *Čorna pantera i bilyj vedmid’* were paradoxically ironic. Not only were the Germans totally ignorant of the author's cultural tradition, which is obviously quite distinct from that of their Russian models, but they also failed to appreciate the revolutionary moral undertones and the subtle psychological nuances of Vynnyčenko’s plays.

Vynnyčenko’s drama, as the Ukrainian scholar Oleksandr Doroškevyč pointed out, “led the Ukrainian theater from its primitive ethnographic base to the world of the neo-realistic theater of Hauptmann, Ibsen, and Chekhov and

* In his diary we find repeated indications of his dissatisfaction with the work on the film. The entry of February 28, 1921, for example, records: “A heated conversation with Specht regarding the film ‘Black Panther’”; another conversation with the makers of the film took place on March 6, 1921. (See *Ščodennyk*, 2:28, 29). The fact that Vynnyčenko had a flair for business is attested to by his various planned ventures mentioned in his diary and in his letters. He thought to establish a film company as well as his own theatrical company, and he knew how to assert his rights with publishers and translators and, when needed, knew how to use the law as a last resort. (See *Ščodennyk*, 2:25-64 and 2:151). His business acumen is also revealed in his attempt to sell the “Black Panther” to an American film company. (See *Ščodennyk*, 2:218-219).

endowed it with its own important ideological content.”* The German critics were unable to see that unique “ideological content” of Vynnyčenko’s plays, expecting him to provide ethnographic depiction of life in Ukraine or, as some of them put it, in Russia, and thus to return Ukrainian dramaturgy to its “ethnographic base.”

In this light it is appropriate to ask whether Vynnyčenko’s plays were in their own way not too *avant-garde* for the provincial German theater critics of the early 1920s. Recently, a Ukrainian émigré scholar placed Vynnyčenko’s dramaturgy quite convincingly within the framework of existentialism, linking it specifically with Sartre’s thought.† Thus Vynnyčenko can be viewed as one of the first dramatists to introduce existentialism to the German stage. It should also be pointed out that Vynnyčenko’s anti-bourgeois concept of morality, his principle of “honesty with oneself,” as well as his notion of happiness, harmonize with some of the credenda current in the 1960s and are, to a degree at least, quite relevant even in the 1980s.

An examination of the reception of Vynnyčenko’s plays in Germany offers, first of all, additional insight into Vynnyčenko as a man and a dramatist, and invites some interesting speculations about the tastes and attitudes of the German theater critics of the 1920s.‡ It demonstrates, among other things, that the self-proclaimed cosmopolitanism of the German theater critics was, in fact, a petty provincialism, and that their attitudes toward Slavic artists were unbearably patronizing. It also provides as with an appreciation of the difficulties involved in transplanting a Ukrainian play to the German stage—difficulties which (we have reason to suspect) are still very much extant today. Finally, this study should shed some light on the complex relationships and conflicts that invariably arise when two cultures interact, be it on or off stage.

More than any other dramatist of his time, Vynnyčenko was constrained and limited by the prevailing political circumstances. Driven from his native

* *Pidrucnvyk istoriji ukraïjins’koji literatury*, 5th ed. (Kharkiv: “Knyhosopilka,” 1930), pp. 226-227.

† See Larissa M. L. Onyshkevych. “Existentialism in Modern Ukrainian Drama.” PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1973, pp. 52-62, and 140-141. Also see “Roboty i antyroboty: *Sonjašna mašina* V. Vynnyčenka i *R.U.R.* K. Čapeka,” *Sučasnist’*, 4 (136), 1972, pp. 60-73 and her article in this volume.

‡ Other plays of Vynnyčenko performed on the German stage were *Zakon* (*Das Gesetz* in German translation) and *Hrix* (*Die Sünde*). The former was scheduled to be staged in Max Reinhardt’s Deutsches Theater, but apparently no satisfactory agreement could be concluded between the management and the author (see *Ščodennyk*, 2:145). It was, however, successfully staged in Riga, both in the Russian and the German theaters of that city (see *Rigauer Rundschau*, December 11, 1922, and *Ščodennvyk*, 2:177-178), despite some unpleasantness with the German translator (see *Ščodennvyk*, 2:44). *Hrix* was advertised in German newspapers following the success of *Brexnja* in Leipzig as a coming attraction. However, information on its performance on the German stage was not available to me.

Ukraine by Russian imperialism only to find himself ultimately in a Europe convulsed by economic depression and fascism, scorned by the Ukrainian nationalists who shunned him for his leftist views, and anathemized by the communists for his decadence and “bourgeois nationalism,” Vynnychenko was a disinherited artist—a man with plays for which there was no stage.

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ДРАМАТУРГ, ПОЗБАВЛЕНИЙ СПАДЩИНИ. ПРО РЕЦЕПЦІЮ П'ЄС В. ВИННИЧЕНКА У НІМЕЧЧИНІ

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У статті на багатому архівному матеріалі досліджено зв'язок драматургічної творчості Володимира Винниченка і німецькомовного культурного простору. Доведено, що п'єси українського автора органічно вписувалися в літературно-мистецькі пошуки німецьких експресіоністів, час – то виставлялися на сценах Берліна, Мюнхена, Нюрберга, а також Відня та Зальцбурга, проаналізовано рецепцію їх західноєвропейськими критиками та глядачами. Водночас вказано, що таке сприйняття творчості українського автора також йшло від самої особистості Володимира Винниченка, якого на Заході передовсім знали як політика та громадського діяча України.

Ключові слова: *В. Винниченко, драматургія, театр, рецепція, експресіонізм, Німеччина, Австрія.*