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Articles (Thematic Block)

Anastassiya Andrianova

Mavka as Willow. An Ecofeminist Analysis of Lesja Ukrajinka's *Forest Song*

Scholars have commented on the role of nature and humanity in Lesja Ukrajinka's *Lisova pisnja* ('*Forest Song*', 1911) (Horbolis 2011; Odarčenko 1994; Ohnjeva 2007; Turhan 2000)[1]. The acclaimed fairy-drama has been compared to Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, of which there are many ecocritical readings (Odarčenko 1994: 133; e.g., Watson 2011). *Lisova pisnja* (henceforth LP) can, indeed, be read as an eco-parable on the devastating effects of deforestation on wild flora and fauna, as it stages the repercussions of human encroachment upon the forest environment. Lukaš, the male protagonist, makes *sopilky* ('pipes') out of various trees indigenous to the Volyn' Polissja where the play is set, and with the help of his uncle Lev, a friend of the forest, he builds a hut and introduces agriculture to a wild habitat. Mavka, a forest fairy, intervenes when he tries to cut a birch to taste its sap, in the star-crossed lovers' first encounter; she later cuts her own arm rather than reap the rye as she shares a sororal bond with Rusalka Pol'ova ('Field Sprite') who inhabits it. In an ironic reversal, Mavka's human rival takes the bloodied scythe, demonstrating to Lukaš (and his mother) that she is a better match; the two flirt while reaping and binding sheaves of rye – that is, killing nature for human consumption. Even after Mavka is spurned by Lukaš, who prefers the more practical widow Kylyna, she persists in helping her beloved. But when Kylyna arranges for the revered ancient oak to be felled, she seals her family's fate. In the end, Mavka transforms into a willow tree that is set on fire and so rejoins nature's cycle. Odarčenko describes LP as "somber, deeply tragic" (Odarčenko 1994: 134)[2]. Yet the denouement seems less so in light of the broader benefit that expelling meddling humans (Lukaš's mother, Kylyna, and her offspring) brings to the forest ecosystem. The closing tableau of Lukaš dying, while leaning against the arboreal Mavka, is bittersweet given the continuation of nature despite both human and nonhuman loss.

Horbolis provides a helpful overview of the emerging field of Ukrainian ecocritical scholarship along with an analysis of LP from an ecocritical perspective, thus confirming

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[1] Cundy's translation of LP cited here is easily accessible online through the *University of Toronto's Electronic Library of Ukrainian Literature* (<http://sites.utoronto.ca/elul/Main-Eng.html>); the play is also available to anglophone readers in Tkacz and Phipps's newer translation featured in the 2008 bilingual anthology edited by Luchuk (2008).

[2] Here and afterwards, unless otherwise indicated, the translation is mine (A.A.).

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Anastassiya Andrianova (North Dakota State University) – anastassiya.andriano@ndsu.edu
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the relevance of Lesja Ukrajinka's work to literary ecocriticism; plays like LP, she argues, lend themselves to an ecocritical reading because they depict "nature's self-sufficiency and human dependence on it" (Horbolis 2011: 6). Unlike Odarčenko, who views the human and natural worlds as antagonistic in Lesja Ukrajinka's drama, Horbolis calls attention to interspecies collaboration (Odarčenko 1994; Horbolis 2011). On the other hand, by focusing on the interrelated depictions of women and nature, an ecofeminist approach reveals the androcentric projection of patriarchy onto the natural world, absent from Horbolis' reading which ignores gender and the materiality of the forest.

After introducing key ecocritical and ecofeminist concepts, this paper discusses the state of ecocriticism in Ukraine. While recognizing many previous contributions to understanding the role of nature and women in LP, the paper offers a pioneering ecofeminist analysis that revises traditional readings of nature by combining them with an awareness of anthropogenic degradation and androcentrism, which is largely responsible for this degradation; it aims to enrich our understanding of the drama by highlighting the deforestation of the Volyn' Polissja at the time of Lesja Ukrajinka's writing and the ecological devastation facing the region today. The paper confirms Lesja Ukrajinka's environmentalism and feminism while, at the same time, exposing the ways in which she represents the nonhuman forest world as mimicking and perniciously reinforcing human gender hierarchies.

1. *Key Ecocritical and Ecofeminist Concepts*

In Glotfelty's seminal definition, ecocriticism is "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty 1996: xviii). According to Buell, "an individual text must be thought of as environmentally embedded at every stage from its germination to its reception"; Buell's notion of the "environmental unconscious" suggests that a text's "environmentality" is "always both partial and greater than one notices at first look" (Buell 2005: 84). Place is a key concept for ecocriticism because it "gestures in at least three directions at once – toward environmental materiality, toward social perception or construction, and toward individual affect or bond" (Buell 2005: 62-3). Regardless of individual differences, "all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it". As a critical approach to reading literature, "it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman [...] expand[ing] the notion of 'the world' to include the entire ecosphere" (Glotfelty 1996: xix).

Literary studies have been criticized for having a limited humanistic vision and anthropocentric bias, which long precluded the discipline from addressing the broader environmental crisis; responding to this, Love urged scholars to redirect their attention from "ego-consciousness" to "eco-consciousness" which embraces the nonhuman (Love 1990: 205-6). For Glotfelty, *eco-* "implies interdependent communities, integrated systems, and strong connections among constituent parts" (Glotfelty 1996: xx). As a branch of the environmental humanities, recent literary ecocriticism has stressed the need to understand

"the multiple forms of ecodegradation that afflict planet Earth today"; ecocritics claim that "the outside-the-box thought experiments of literature and other media can offer unique resources for activating concern and creative thinking about the planet's environmental future" (Buell *et al.* 2011: 418). Heise, for example, notes environmental nonfiction's reliance on the themes and narrative strategies of speculative fiction, arguing that "the Anthropocene itself can be understood as a science fiction trope" (Heise 2016: 18). Underscoring the importance of public engagement in conservation, she insists that "biodiversity, endangered species, and extinction are primarily cultural issues, questions of what we value and what stories we tell" (Heise 2016: 5).

Combining commitment to the environment with an awareness of how patriarchal forces have in the past and continue to shape both nature and women, ecofeminism is "a theoretical discourse whose theme is the link between the oppression of women and the domination of nature" (Glotfelty 1996: xxiv). This includes the material link between the exploitation of women and natural resources (Buell *et al.* 2011: 425). Gaard describes the ideological underpinnings of ecofeminism as follows: "the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature"; accordingly, "no attempt to liberate women [...] will be successful without an equal attempt to liberate nature" (Gaard 1993: 1). Building on Chodorow and Gilligan's work on gender, Gaard argues that women's "interconnected self" privileges "an ethic of responsibilities or care", in contrast to the male "disconnected sense of self" that lies "most assuredly at the roots of the current ecological crisis (not to mention being the root cause of all oppression, which is based on difference)". Ecofeminists identify "the self / other opposition" and the nature / culture dualism with hierarchy, exposing how "feminizing nature and naturalizing or animalizing women has served as justification for the domination of women, animals, and the earth"; therefore, rather than difference, they emphasize "the fundamental interconnectedness of all life" (Gaard 1993: 2-3, 5).

Whereas ecocriticism targets anthropocentrism, ecofeminism sees anthropocentrism as a symptom of a more pervasive and destructive androcentrism:

> The realization that the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western Man's attitude toward women and tribal cultures or, in Ariel Salleh's words, that there is a parallel in men's thinking between their "right" to exploit nature, on the one hand, and the use they make of women, on the other (Birkeland 1993: 18).

Birkeland calls this "Man's ecocidal behavior" (Birkeland 1993: 19). Human and nonhuman liberations are interconnected and mandate "changing from a morality based on 'power over' to one based on reciprocity and responsibility ('power to')", so as to expose the assumptions that perpetuate patriarchy and challenge the sexist conception of masculinity, which rejects and denigrates the "feminine" (Birkeland 1993: 19). Applying political and activist perspectives like Gaard's to texts, literary ecocritics expose phallocentric biases while recovering marginalized voices. The relationship between aesthetically- and ideolog-

ically-motivated eco-critique, as between theory and praxis, particularly theory's capacity to change material practices, continues to be debated by feminists and ecocritics alike (e.g., Estok's essay in Gaard *et al.* 2013).

As Gaard notes in *Ecofeminism Revisited* (2011), since the publication of *Ecofeminism* (1993), feminist critics in environmental humanities have variously reframed their scholarship as "global feminist environmental justice", "material feminisms", "queer ecology", or "feminist environmentalism", in part to reflect intersectional developments in postcolonial, animal, queer, feminist, and gender studies (Gaard *et al.* 2013: 2-3). Gaard, Estok, and Oppermann's *International Perspectives in Feminist Ecocriticism* (2013) places feminist ecocritique into global and posthuman contexts, demonstrating its ongoing relevance in an age of ecological crisis (Gaard *et al.* 2013). Notable, however, is the absence of Eastern and Central European representation in this volume.

Informed by Gaard and Murphy's guiding questions for ecofeminist literary criticism (Gaard, Murphy 1998: 7), the following analysis of Lesja Ukrajinka's LP:

a) makes visible the projection of patriarchal structure onto the natural world under the guise of "harmony", by examining how the authority of male figures, such as Lisovyk (Forest Elf) or "*Toi ščo v skali sydyt*" ('He Who Dwells in Rock'), shapes Mavka's forest culture;
b) explores the connections among humans, nonhuman forest spirits, and animals, with the differences and loyalties not always aligned along species lines; and
c) offers a more comprehensive reading of gender and nature, by introducing the material contexts of deforestation (due to migration and population growth and, more recently, amber mining) to intervene in the current discourse on climate crisis.

2. *Ecocriticism in Contemporary Ukrainian Studies*

Ecocritical theory was brought into Ukrainian literary studies only recently. Ukrainian researchers were introduced to ecocriticism, along with several other methodologies, in a 2008 Ukrainian translation of Barry's *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (1995) (Horbolis 2011: 5)[3]. Although the terminological apparatus and critical debates about culture / nature and human / nonhuman relations are not yet fully adapted in the Ukrainian context, an ecocritical approach is relevant to Ukrainian literature (Horbolis 2011: 5-6). The works of several Ukrainian critics (Kostomarov, Čyževs'kyj, Malanjuk, Lypa, Vaščenko, Janiv, Mirčuk) demonstrate what Horbolis sees as important ecocritical elements even though these works do not explicitly mention an "ecological approach": in these works, "the geographical factor is represented as one of the coordinators of lifestyle, thought, worldview, the ecological culture of Ukrainian people, their immer-

[3] Barry admits in the introduction to his monograph that he does not attempt to be comprehensive; the diverse field of ecocriticism is reduced to a single chapter of 20 pages.

sion in the ancestral tradition, and religious morals, all of which are fundamentally related to natural biorhythms" (Horbolis 2011: 6; cf. Sukhenko 2015: 36). A nationally-oriented ecocritical approach must therefore begin with identifying and interpreting ancient beliefs about preserving nature, including beliefs that harming nature goes against ancestral traditions, and ethical ideas that emphasize the value of all living beings (Horbolis 2011: 6). Thus, Horbolis proposes an ecocriticism that valorizes ancient beliefs, is retrospective, rather than forward-looking and engaged in environmental advocacy, and is primarily textual, rather than political.

Sukhenko, on the other hand, stresses the role of contemporary Ukrainian literary studies in directing public attention toward ecological issues at a time when environmental protection is sorely needed (Sukhenko 2015: 33). Sukhenko traces the origins of Ukrainian 'ecological aesthetics', a separate branch of eco-centered literary criticism, to the 1970s and 1980s[4], a period of environmental crisis in the Soviet Union precipitated by "the dynamic growth of the country's industrial zones and the destructive use of natural resources, which was an extreme threat to human life as well as a way of demolishing cultural memory" (Sukhenko 2015: 35). Writing four years after Horbolis, she recognizes that "the ecocritical movement in Ukraine is at its dawning point" (Sukhenko 2015: 36). While ecocritical theory may be a recent addition, Ukraine's cultural tradition was "deeply attached to the natural world"; however, the adoption of Christianity, with its anthropocentric attitudes, and intercultural encounters with Western Europe brought "more detached and destructively materialist attitudes toward nature" (Sukhenko 2015: 33). Sukhenko attributes "Ukraine's bilateral character" to "the conflict between industrialization in Ukraine's territories and historically and ethnically rooted nature-oriented spirituality" – in other words, between antiquity's pagan nature-worship and modernity's technologically-oriented demands (Sukhenko 2015: 34). Contemporary ecological ethics requires reigniting Slavic nature-centered beliefs, which "emphasized a non-dualistic understanding of the relationships between humans and the non-human world and stressed the equal value of all living creatures", which runs contrary to "the sense of humans' dominant role in human-nature relations in what has come to be contemporary Ukraine" (Sukhenko 2015: 34-35).

Whereas Sukhenko's approach recognizes the urgent need for environmental discourse to intervene in public policy, Horbolis' falls under what in the West has been called "first-wave ecocriticism", meant to reconnect humans with the natural world by reactivating "a primordial link between human and nonhuman", as compared to "second-wave ecocritics", who advocate for a "social ecocriticism", a more inclusive field to accommodate both "natural" and urban environments (Buell 2005: 23). This partly explains Horbolis' uncritical acceptance of nature's "harmony" in LP, which she ties retrospectively to Ukraine's mythological worldview, along with her failure to consider the text's gendered and material aspects, including its environmental embeddedness in a history of deforestation and eco-degradation.

[4] In fact, ecological discussions may be traced to the late 1960s and Oles' Hončar's novel *Sobor* (*The Cathedral*, 1968): see Pavlyshyn 1988.

3. *Ecofeminism in* Lisova pisnja

The longing for an imagined past of indigenous ecological interconnectivity, mentioned by Sukhenko and Horbolis, can inform an eco-reading of LP. The play, as Lesja Ukrajinka wrote in an often-quoted letter to her mother in early 1912, was inspired by her childhood memories of Mavka, one of many mythic creatures native to Polissja (Ohnjeva 2007: 109). Lesja Ukrajinka "was simply reminded of our forests and longed for them" (Odarčenko 1994: 133). Polissja, Ukraine's 'forest belt', was experiencing deforestation at the turn of the 20th century. The trees most prominent in the drama, willows and birches, are typical of Polissja's lowland swamps (Stech *et al.* 2001). Humans and nonhumans join in the preservation of the ancient oak, the second most common tree in the region, which is later felled by Kylyna, Mavka's foil. The oak is chosen for good reason: sacred to the Slavs, it traditionally symbolizes light, life, and eternal being; oak leaves are often incorporated into folk textile ornamentation to signify good health and long life, serving as an *obereh* (amulet) to protect its bearer from misfortune.

Already in the *Prologue*, Lesja Ukrajinka draws attention to the "dense and hoary primeval forest in Volhynia", the heart of which is "dotted with willows and one very old oak", a place "wild and mysterious but not gloomy, filled with the tender, pensive beauty of Polissye, the wooded part of the province of Volhynia" (FS: 169-170)[5]. An ecocritical look at Polissja's history helps explain the urgency with which Mavka intervenes in Lukaš's attempt to cut the birch. From 1856 to 1914, the population of Polissja increased by 180 percent due to natural growth and the migration of various native and foreign people, who purchased partitioned estates; nearly one-third of the forest was cleared for farming (Stech *et al.* 2001). "As a result of deforestation, mostly in the second half of the 19th century, and the growth of swamps, forests now occupy scarcely one-third of the land area" (Stech *et al.* 2001). Currently, the region is facing an environmental crisis precipitated by amber mining, its illegal extraction estimated at 300 tons annually (112 Agency 2018).

Turhan notes that the forest in Lesja Ukrajinka's drama "must be conserved, not conquered" (Turhan 2000, cited in Horbolis 2011: 7). Horbolis provides a more detailed discussion, homing in on "the problem of organic connectivity between humanity and nature" and "the question of nature conservation" (Horbolis 2011: 7). LP, she says, depicts two worlds: "the world of people, burdened by mundane problems and the world of nature, which is free and harmoniously ordered" (Horbolis 2011: 7), as indicated by their representative perspectives:

LUKAŠ

I never knew that trees could talk like that.
I thought they were but speechless growing things.

[5] "Старезний, густий, предковічний ліс на Волині. Посеред лісу простора галява з плакучою березою і з великим престарим дубом. [...] Містина вся дика, таємнича, але не понура,–повна ніжної, задумливої поліської краси" (LP: 439).

MAVKA
In all the forest there is nothing mute (FS: 185)[6].

The latter is "a world of harmony, where the cult of freedom prevails" (Horbolis 2011: 7).

The two worlds, Horbolis suggests, need not be in conflict as they have much in common: "they can live in harmony, complement each other, in accordance with accepted moral and ethical standards, adhering to ancient traditions" (Horbolis 2011: 8). Thus Horbolis idealizes what is, actually, a more complex and, in many ways, *not* beautiful (super) natural world, where imps like the malicious Kuc', Rusalka (water nymph), and Lost Babes (poterčata) must be checked by Lisovyk lest they harm all the humans they encounter. While this enchanted forest may not be "red in tooth and claw", it is hardly innocent: at Rusalka's prodding, the Lost Babes try to drown Lukaš in the mire, Vodjanyk (Water Goblin) nearly overturns Lev's boat (as nature revolts even against those who respect it), and Perelesnyk ("Will-o'-the-Wisp", *ignis fatuus*) sets Kylyna's hut on fire, not to mention Lisovyk's dreadful transformation of Lukaš into a werewolf. In the Prologue, which Horbolis gives as an early example of how "forest dwellers preserve the wealth of their cathedral, constantly tending to its beauty" (Horbolis 2011: 7), "*Toj, ščo hrebli rve*" ('He Who Rends the Dikes') boasts about destroying human attempts at controlling "wild waters": "All the villages are quaking // As the dikes and dams I'm breaking" (FS: 170)[7]. This boyish spirit also "rends" the lake ecosystem, scaring indigenous wildlife, thrashing weeds and reeds, startling birds, and disrupting the willows' root systems (FS: 174).

Besides being inhabited by supernatural figures, the forest is also personified: for example, "the rustling of leaves [...], a sound as though someone were sighing in his sleep" (FS: 211)[8]. From an ecofeminist perspective, such anthropomorphism reveals, on the one hand, the veneration of nature and, on the other, an anthropocentric projection of human traits onto a nonhuman environment (some characters, however, like "*Toj, ščo hrebli rve*", are more elemental than others). Such projection includes the replication of the patriarchal authority of older male figures: Lev, Lisovyk, and Vodjanyk. Rusalka calls the latter her "father" or "parent" (*bat'ko*) and Lisovyk, her grandfather (*didus'*); Lisovyk, in turn, calls Mavka "daughter" (*dočka*) (LP: 451, 449, 451). In his domineering attitude toward Rusalka in the Prologue, Vodjanyk anticipates that of Lisovyk toward Mavka; beckoning her to stay away from "*Toj, ščo hrebli rve*", Vodjanyk couches his paternalism in caring terms: "I do this for your sake // That vagabond would simply ruin you" (FS: 177[9]. In fact, Mavka is weary of being controlled by her "grandfather dear" as much as Rusalka is by Vodjanyk; Lisovyk's response is a stern warning:

[6] "Лукаш. А я й не знав, що в них така розмова, // я думав дерево німе, та й годі. // Мавка. Німого в лісі в нас нема нічого" (LP: 455).

[7] "[...] всі гребельки зриваю, // всі гатки, всі запруди" (LP: 439).

[8] "[...] тільки часом легкий шелест чується в гаю, мов зітхання у сні" (LP: 485).

[9] "Чудна ти, дочко! Я ж про тебе дбаю. // Таж він тебе занапастив би тільки" (LP: 447).

> [...] while I
> Respect your freedom. Go! sport with the wind,
> Play all you like with wild Will-o'-the-Wisp;
> Allure all spirits to yourself, be they
> Of water, forest, mountain, field, or air;
> But keep afar from human pathways, child;
> You'll find no freedom there, but woes instead,
> To clog your steps and weigh you down. [...] (FS: 183)[10].

Lisovyk claims he is "used to respecting freedom" as he directs Mavka to "play" and "amuse herself" with supernatural males, but to shun human ones (LP: 453). When Mavka no longer wishes to cavort with humans, belatedly heeding his advice, it is he who helps her shed sorely acquired human garb for the festive robes of a Forest Queen, suggesting that women's empowerment requires the help of older males and hinges upon obeying their directives. An ecofeminist reading thus exposes a tension that a purely ecocritical one like Horbolis' might otherwise miss. Gruen reminds us that "[t]here is no natural hierarchy; human hierarchy is projected on to nature and then used to justify social domination" (Gruen 1993: 80). This is less a challenge to Lesja Ukrajinka's feminism than a confirmation of patriarchy's pervasive reach.

Further, Uncle Lev's familial relationship is marked by his very name (*djad'ko*). In the gendering of authority, it is noteworthy that of the three, Lev is avuncular rather than paternal: the celibate uncle who queers the superimposition of a heteronormative family structure upon the world of nature. It is his position, adjacent to Lukaš and his mother, but not part of their nuclear family, that makes Lev a unique figure in human / nonhuman relations, allowing him to develop loyalties to both while maintaining perspective. Lev cautiously encourages Lukaš's relationship with Mavka, for example, but defends her adamantly to Lukaš's mother; he helps the family build a hut, but fights to keep the old oak from being felled. In a 'first-wave' ecocritical fashion that does not acknowledge the character's social embeddedness, Horbolis describes Lev's conservation approach as harking back to a time "when people still saw themselves as part of the world's organic whole and the preservation of the environment was a vital necessity" (Horbolis 2011: 9). Lev's attitude of "ecological competency" stems from "the primal unity with nature" which has been "[p]reserved in [his] subconscious" and "deepens the spiritual connection between the character and the oak. Uncle Lev is part of nature; he loves it" (Horbolis 2011: 9). Horbolis compares the depiction of nature in the drama to a "big family, where established laws and norms rule and control relationships" (Horbolis 2011: 8). Indeed, the willow is Mavka's mother, the meadow – her father, the birch – her sister. Yet as a projection of a narrow

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10 "Ні, дитинко, // я не держу тебе. То Водяник // в драговині цупкій привик од віка // усе живе засмоктувати. Я // звик волю шанувати. Грайся з вітром, // жартуй із Перелесником, як хочеш, // всю силу лісову і водяну, // гірську й повітряну приваб до себе, // але минай людські стежки, дитино, // бо там не ходить воля [...]" (LP: 453).

bourgeois notion of family, the complex world of LP's supernatural forest turns out to be an anthropo- and androcentric fantasy related to Polissja's material existence in name only, the play's anthropomorphic characterization in tension with the Prologue's environmentally grounded description.

Other male characters exemplify predatorial masculinist traits in their pursuit of female forest spirits, even at the detriment of others and their surroundings. "*Toj, ščo hrebli rve*" is willing to disrupt the ecosystem, churning out all the water, just to find Rusalka, "*tu vrodu*" ('that beauty'), compelling poterčata to plead with him to control his savage behavior; this toxicity is, however, partly dispelled by Rusalka's playful coquettishness (LP: 440, 442). Perelesnyk, a handsome youth in crimson clothing with flowing hair and glowing eyes, enters the scene, as per the stage directions, wanting to embrace Mavka, efforts which she both physically and verbally defies; she rejects his insinuations about her seeking him out in the oak grove (LP: 463-65). While in the earlier scenes Perelesnyk acts as an archetypal seducer, it is also he who saves her from being axed by Kylyna, once she has transformed into a willow, by embracing and thus setting the tree on fire; this fire rapidly spreads to and engulfs Lukaš's hut (LP: 533).

A very different masculine force, "*Toj ščo v skali sydyt'*" ("He Who Dwells in Rock") is described as emerging "from under the earth [...] a dark, bulky, awe-inspiring shape" (FS: 236). He orders Perelesnyk to surrender Mavka: "Render to me what is mine" (FS: 236)[11]. Although Perelesnyk at first arrogantly questions his authority, once Maryšče (the Phantom) makes himself known, the fiery spirit vanishes in fear. Further, that "*Toj ščo v skali sydyt'*" possesses tremendous power is implied in Lisovyk's disbelief that Mavka is allowed to leave his dark abode at the start of Act III; Mavka insists that she escaped because she had to undo the consequences of Lisovyk's criminal vengeance against Lukaš, suggesting that love and forgiveness can defy death (LP: 515-16). Lesja Ukrajinka presents here a mysterious infernal power on a par with Hades, but also less anthropomorphized: he has a speaking voice, a black tunic, with which he covers Mavka, and arms, into which she falls with a scream, but no other features (LP: 514). Only a handful of heroes are allowed to come back from the Greek Underworld, making Mavka's return exceptional and perhaps akin to that of Persephone, who is similarly identified with nature. Still, although Maryšče is neuter, the masculine "*Toj*" suggests a possessive powerful male figure, who both verbally demands Mavka's body and physically carries her, a victim, in his arms into the earth[12]. When she reemerges, Mavka is fundamentally changed: Lisovyk and Kuc' ask to confirm her identity, and she herself admits to being overwhelmed by 'a winter sleep' ("*Zymovyj son*") (LP: 515, 518, 523).

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[11] "[...] з -під землі з'являється темне, широке, страшне Марище"; "Віддай мені моє. Пусти її" (LP: 518).

[12] For a feminist analysis of patriarchal co-option by another 'stone' figure in Ukrajinka's *Kaminnyj hospodar*, see Aheieva 1999.

Yet, not all the agents of patriarchy are male. When Lukaš's mother orders Mavka to make herself useful by cutting the rye, threatening to replace her with "a daughter-in-law [who can] help", she effectively pits Mavka against her biological kin, her 'sister' Rusalka Pol'ova. Mavka responds to the latter's appeal to blood (both the literal shedding of blood by cutting and their symbolic bond as forest folk) by admitting that she is "no longer free" to oblige: "I'd gladly do as you have prayed, // But I'm no longer free, this duty I daren't shirk" (FS: 221)[13]. By this time Mavka has already changed her dress upon the mother's request, who found Mavka's indigenous look, "richly decked with flowers and her hair hanging loose", "rubbish" and "[n]ot practical at all for working in" (FS: 213)[14]. Mavka agrees to change into her dead daughter's clothes, a symbolic death to her own identity as a free spirit. When she first enters the scene, Mavka is wearing "a bright green garment", and her hair is described as "black" with "a greenish sheen", "hanging loose"; she gives up this lush vernal attire and flowing hair (a mark of freedom) by donning a poorly fitting, mended shirt with a faded apron, more suitable for a beggar than a bride, and arranges her hair in ethnic style: "a blouse of coarse material, poorly made and patched in places, a scanty skirt and a faded apron", with her hair "now smoothly combed and made into two plaits which are wound around her head" (FS: 181, 215)[15]. Along with the political resonance of giving up liberties to assimilate, these seemingly innocent acts (social decorum, agriculture) amount to the woman's subjectification and the instrumentalization of nature for resources. Even before being prodded, Mavka contributed to the household by bringing wood to build the hut and helping milk the cows, sow the fields, and plant the flowers. Kylyna, Mavka's foil, combines both vectors of oppression: she arrives fully dressed in traditional Ukrainian garb suited for a married woman or *molodycja*, with head covered ("wearing a red kerchief with fringes, a dark red skirt with narrow and regular pleating, and a similarly pleated apron [...] Her bodice is tightly laced around her plump torso"), and proceeds to reap the rye "furiously" moments after Mavka's refusal (FS: 222-23)[16]. The pleats on her clothing, described as 'even' or 'straight' ("*rivno*"), and the bodice's 'tight' ("*tisno*") fit suggest constraint – which, in Kylyna's case, appears self-imposed; she fashions herself in a way that adheres to androcentric, heterosexist standards that appeal to Lukaš (and his mother), at

[13] "Рада б я волю вволити, // тільки ж сама я не маю вже волі" (LP: 496).

[14] "Мавка виходить з лісу пишно заквітчана, з розпущеними косами. [...] І що се за маняття на тобі? // Воно ж і невигідне при роботі. // Я маю дещо там з дочки-небіжки, // піди вберися" (LP: 481).

[15] "[...] Мавка, в яснозеленій одежі з розпущеними чорними, з зеленим полиском, косами"; "[...] на їй сорочка з десятки, скупо пошита і латана на плечах, вузька спідничина з набиванки і полинялий фартух з димки, волосся гладко зачесане у дві коси і заложене навколо голови" (LP: 451, 489).

[16] "[...] в червоній хустці з торочками, в бурячковій спідниці, дрібно та рівно зафалдованій; так само зафалдований і зелений фартух [...] міцна крайка тісно перетягає стан" (LP: 497).

least prior to his exposure to and internalization of a radically different worldview through the eyes and body of a werewolf.

In their discussions of LP, both Odarčenko and Horbolis delineate the differences between the human and forest worlds; Horbolis aptly observes that the two worlds are interconnected, rather than painting them as antagonistic, though the examples she gives have more to do with appearances than shared labor or care (Odarčenko 1994; Horbolis 2011)[17]. One limitation of Horbolis' reading lies in its uncritical acceptance of social hierarchy superimposed on nature: she notes the importance of order established through laws and norms which "must be obeyed and observed for the natural world to operate, with each inhabitant fulfilling their function in ordering and preserving the environment"; humans are "guests" who disrupt this order (Horbolis 2011: 8-9). By building dams, they interfere with the free flow of water; by cutting down trees, they disturb the rich fauna that lives within. But the forest inhabitants are, at times, equally disruptive and destructive; many of them exhibit aggressive masculinist behaviors or participate in and perpetuate patriarchal authority that seems contrary to a freedom-loving wilderness.

The complexity of the forest world is matched by that of the human. Lev is not the only liminal character with ties to both; by the end Lukaš gets close to what ecofeminists call an "interconnected self", becoming a protean figure, having had human and animal embodiment and experience, and presumably better able to appreciate what Gaard describes as "the fundamental interconnectedness of all life" (Gaard 1993: 2-3). Absent from Horbolis' discussion, Lukaš's temporary transformation into a werewolf following his betrayal of Mavka is treated by Odarčenko as purely symbolic, related to the dramatic tension (Lukaš's choice) between high ideals (Mavka) and the baseness of materialistic life (Lukaš's mother, Kylyna) (Odarčenko 1994: 134). Odarčenko sees the hero's loss of human identity to become 'a werewolf, a madman' ("*vovkulakoju, boževil'nym*") as a failure, reading the betrayal as his abandoning "the highest sphere of human activity for the sake of primitive mundanity" (Odarčenko 1994: 134). There is some evidence of this in the text: Lisovyk dismissively refers to the morphed Lukaš as "nothing but a savage wolf" ("*vovkulaka dykyj*"); when Kylyna castigates her husband for leaving them to "grub here in the forest like the wolves" ("*jak vovkylaky*"), she draws a comparison that Lukaš would rather stifle (FS: 239, 248-9; LP: 516, 527). The implication is that Lukaš experiences something dreadful, but not meaningless. More than other tropes, figures of animals are associated in the "environmental imagination [...] with underlying tensions and stark contradictions: Animals are evolutionarily connected more closely to humans than other parts of nature, but they are also often represented as being separated from humans by a fundamental boundary" (Buell *et*

[17] Horbolis cites Mavka's observation that humans mate for life, like doves; Lukaš's decorating Mavka's hair with fireflies; and his mother's praising Mavka for planting beautiful flowers (Horbolis 2011: 8). Examples that foreground the forest's materiality include: Lisovyk allowing Lukaš to make his pipe out of dead trees and recognizing Lev's efforts to conserve the mighty oak. Even when he is indifferent to Mavka, Lukaš agrees to use 'dead wood'.

al. 2011: 430). An animal studies *cum* ecocritical reading suggests that by surrendering his humanity and channeling the beast[18] – who is part of the (super)natural forest the play celebrates – Lukaš is able to meaningfully reevaluate his relationship to Mavka and to nature. As he falls humbly at her feet when turned back to human form, Mavka says Lukaš "[s]ank down before me, like a maple [twisted] [translation amended]" – an arboreal simile that entangles the human with the nonhuman (FS: 240)[19].

Similarly, critics who treat Mavka as a symbol *only* run the risk of negating her corporeality and the materiality of the trees with which she is identified. Ohnjeva notes that Mavka assumes the traits of "the Great mother-goddess" and "the Cosmos"; the birch with which she is united, in turn, represents the tree of life, knowledge, and the world (Ohnjeva 2007: 115, 127, 122-23). By reorienting the reading toward transhistorical mythopoeia, such symbolic violence erases both Mavka's physical womanhood and the reality of Polissja's deforestation – which the current rereading has attempted to recover.

4. *Conclusion*

This paper is part of a broader effort to introduce feminist ecocriticism to the discussion of Ukrainian symbolist and modernist literature. By offering an ecofeminist analysis of LP, the specific goal is to revise traditional readings which, while focusing on femininity and nature, typically allegorize both and largely ignore the embodiedness of women and the materiality of the environments they inhabit. An ecofeminist analysis that addresses the construction of gender in conjunction with anthropogenic degradation offers, therefore, a new approach to Lesja Ukrajinka's well-documented feminism, demonstrating that even the poet's (post)romantic vision of the forest, with its vibrant supernatural culture, is not immune to the noxious reach of human gender hierarchies. Furthermore, such an analysis reveals the significant ways in which LP intervenes not only in the environmental concerns of its own day, but also in the climate crisis of the late 1960s-1980s, which inspired early ecological writing in Ukraine and is also reflected in the drama's many film adaptations, including Viktor Ivčenko's *Lisova pisnja* (1961), Jurij Illjenko's *Lesnaja pesnja. Mavka* (1980), and A. Gračëva's animated *Lesnaja pesn*' (1976). In fact, Lesja Ukrajinka's environmental message is all the more urgent given the devastation in Polissja today, the region ravaged by illegal amber mining.

We can admit that LP is anthropocentric at the same time as we celebrate its eco-consciousness; these are not mutually exclusive. As Boddice reminds us, humanist projects originate with humans but can avoid being biased against other species: "This is not anthropocentrism as chauvinism, or prejudice (i.e. not anthropocentr*ist*), but anthropocen-

[18] Lukaš's name puns on *lykos*, the ancient Greek for 'wolf', something Ukrajinka would have known as she read ancient Greek and loved Greek mythology (e.g., the *Odyssey*'s Autolycus).

[19] "[…] упав мені до ніг, мов ясень втятий…" (LP: 517). Cundy's 'felled' suggests human ruination rather than natural deformation.

trism as a non-optional starting point" (Boddice 2011: 12-13). Lesja Ukrajinka's fairy-drama opposes an "anthropocentr*ist*" worldview despite this "starting point". The early scene of thwarted tree-cutting to make a *sopilka* is bookended by Mavka's recognition of human / nonhuman symbiosis: Lukaš "gave to [her] a soul, as the sharp knife // Gives to the willow twig a tender voice" (FS: 259)[20]. The 'happy smile' ("*ščaslyvyj usmich*") on Lukaš' frozen lips in the final tableau, following the humans' expulsion and the destruction of the home he constructed from felled trees, implies reconciliation and humility before nature (LP: 539).

Still, it is worth underscoring how LP reinforces the historical connection between women, nature, and ethnos, rather than accepting it as an unmitigated celebration of all three. Already noted is the use of ethnic Ukrainian costume to designate constraint, which runs contrary to traditional readings of Lesja Ukrajinka's nationalism – the implication being, perhaps, that cultural heritage must be embraced, not forced (in Mavka's case), and worn for one's proud self rather than to secure a husband (as does Kylyna). The rhetorical comparisons of women to animals are similarly fraught. Mavka is, for example, compared to a squirrel when she rushes to save Lukaš from drowning; when trying to dissuade him from trusting her rival, she compares Kylyna to a 'sly' otter ("*lukava, jak vydra*") and a 'predatory' lynx ("*chyža, nače rys'*"), thus judging the human by denigrating the nonhuman (LP: 481, 502). The essentializing of animals, however time-honored, works against the broader theme of nonhuman empowerment, as, in the words of Gaard, "naturalizing or animalizing women has served as justification for the domination of women, animals, and the earth" (Gaard 1993: 5). Indeed, a further avenue for research might include the depiction of animals[21], which is "[o]ften intertwined with critical discussions of place" (Buell *et al.* 2011: 430), and the peculiar absence of animal characters, with animality relegated to rhetorical use. What might such a depiction mean for the displaced wildlife of Polissja, both at the time of Lesja Ukrajinka's writing and now?

Abbreviations

FS: L. Ukrainka, *Forest Song*, in: Ead., *Spirit of Flame: A Collection of the Works of Lesya Ukrainka*, transl. by P. Cundy, New York 1950, cfr. <http://sites.utoronto.ca/elul/English/Ukrainka/Ukrainka-Forest-Song.pdf> (latest access 2.2.21).

LP: L. Ukrajinka, *Lisova pisnja*, in: Ead., *Vybrane*, Kyjiv 1955, pp. 438-539.

[20] "[…] ти душу дав мені, як гострий ніж // дае вербовій тихій гілці голос" (LP: 538).

[21] As with ecocriticism, little work has been done in animal studies by Ukrainianists in the West or in Ukraine. For a recent collection, see Plach 2018.

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Abstract

Anastassiya Andrianova
Mavka as Willow. An Ecofeminist Analysis of Lesja Ukrajinka's Forest Song

Lesja Ukrajinka's *Lisova pisnja* (1911) can be read as an eco-parable about Mavka, the forest nymph who transforms into a willow tree in danger of being felled. This paper provides a pioneering ecofeminist analysis of *Lisova pisnja*; it revises traditional approaches to the depiction of nature in the drama by combining them with an awareness of anthropogenic environmental degradation (the deforestation of the Volyn' Polissja where it is set) and androcentrism, which is largely responsible for this degradation. After a brief review of key concepts in ecocriticism and ecofeminism, along with an overview of the state of eco-scholarship in Ukrainian studies and the scholarship on Lesja Ukrajinka within Ukrainian literary criticism, the paper analyzes the interrelated depiction of gender and nature, revealing Ukrajinka's environmentalism and feminism and, at the same time, the ways in which she represents the world of the forest as mimicking and perniciously reinforcing human gender hierarchies.

Keywords

Deforestation; Ecocriticism; Ecofeminism; Lesja Ukrajinka.