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Course Syllabus: *National Identity and National Literature*

Specialty: *Comparative Literature: Criteria for National Literature*

Eliot: “Kultur mirrors the *self-consciousness of a nation* which had to seek constantly out and constitute its boundaries anew ... and again and again had to ask itself: What is really our identity?”

CL has a large scope of research such as comparison between literature and art types (music, cinema, dance, painting, sculpture), between humanities (philosophy, religion studies, social sciences, history, linguistics), literary disciplines (parameters and aesthetics of literature, literary text-chronicle-myth), between national literatures, between authors, between literary works, parallels in literary-cultural traditions and types, parallels of the same national literature from different historical periods (diachronic) and different national literatures from the same historical period (synchrony). This subject *assumes influence of social transformations and historical events on literature and culture such as common and various points in literary-cultural types on an example of Islamic civilization and Christian rules* (hagiography, fable, didactic genre; forbidden items/glorifying symbols: wine in Islamic doctrine and in poetry and forbidden image and icon); literary trends in different national literatures (Enlightenment, Socialist Realism, Feminism, Modernity, Post-Modernity, etc.), factors which defines these trends, dichotomies and correlates in literary works (woman/men, fathers/new generation, city/village, duty/desire, violence or freedom of behavior within ethic norms framework, fact/fiction, justice/betrayal, etc.), folklore- literary text -fan-fiction- hypertext, national and supranational (archetype plots, symbols, situations and their adaptations in different cultures, art types and by authors), balance “literature/edebiyat”, literature-chronicle-hagiography, literature/visual culture (play, movie,) changing borders of “nationality” criteria and literary canons.

Main subject of Comparative Literature – national literature undergo to changes with social transformations. First, “*national*” because of changing borders of contemporary nations, second, because of diversifying ways of “*literature*” itself. If the second part is mostly related with changing technologies of doing literature – narrative, talk stories (folklore/literature or written text); declaration of verses from primitive to sophisticated poems (lyric); showing performance (drama, play); writing texts (individually with rare distribution area and with inventing of printing machine multiple copied books, which allowed to reach wider audience); audio/visual writing

(reading electronic and digital devices), Internet distribution, which allows instant distribution, etc.

Focuses on of the Azerbaijani literature, this course supposes questions of contemporary transition period and seeking parallels from the past of various people's literature transition periods, particularly Medieval period, which shaped many contemporary nations' identity and culture. Any modern nation anyhow faced a question of definition of national identification in various cycles of development, especially in transition periods of history what means changing borders. Along with nation transformation contexts, national cultural heritage also undergoes to division among new entities, splitted from previous national entity. *National literature* is a part of national cultural heritage and national identification because of nation is made up of also socio-cultural components. This is one of the basic terms and also subject of "History of national literature" university course. National Literatures are the subject of comparative Literature [and culture], explaining specifications and universalities between them.

In the last two decades, actuality of nation's definition became obvious, especially in context of collapse of some multinational states like USSR and some East European countries (Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia). Central matter in this issue is a question about national identity and about belongingness to a national culture and literature.

Throughout history, many nations, languages, and cultures have *crossed* paths and diverged into distinctive new entities, influenced through confluence. For instance, Arabic cultures of people accepted Islam, growing into an Islamic-Arabic tradition. Moreover, the socialist ideology was integrated into a new country of nations, which became the Soviet Union. The manner in which other nations assimilated into this practice exemplifies the function of convergence.

Other ethnicities *run parallel*, but never touch, as in the independent development of the ancient Egyptian and Aztec civilizations.

Last historical connection of the people in Soviet Union or Yugoslavia illustrates the *divergence of one culture* into another of people with common genetic roots, such as how the Slavic culture ultimately became unique in Russia, the Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. Similar too is how the Turkic culture diverged to become the Turkish, Azeri, Uzbek, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Gagauz, etc. national cultures.

Each of these precedents brought change and modernization to different degrees during various historical periods, and appear in disparate contexts and zones of influence. Accordingly, the *dominant factors of each have determined a new orientation* and method of cultural development. The determining factor becomes the context. These changes affect

traditional canonical elements of the culture, which then appear through a new sphere of influence and result in both successes and failures.

As a consequence of these socio-historical processes, literatures and cultures quite often intermingle and cross-fertilize each other. Belonging to one national environment and but being in no less close contact to other national environments is an experience which can be obviously observed during historical changes. The concrete national environment with an existing heritage rotates inside the borders, changed in a various degree during each new epoch and undergoes changes. Literature of concrete period became a mirror of changes of the society; the new elements of the nation's life forms new universality, at the same time keeping national features.

How these circumstances affect the culture and, in particular, literature nowadays became one of the essential questions of literary and cultural studies.

This course examines how these factors affect contours of national literature.

With respect to Azerbaijan this research mainly concentrated on **Azerbaijani Literature as factor of national identity in focus of post-soviet reality**

The aim is to concern carefully to culture, which forms and saves through centuries. Mutual understanding and dialogue of cultures and literatures, preservation of cultural diversities within one national literature is possible through study *literature in different context*, aspects and analysis of the factors, bringing to the changes. This course will focus on considering literature as one of the form of culture, accumulating moral, ethical, aesthetic (socio-cultural), historical consciousness and memories of the nation. This objective suppose some *research questions*:

What is a nation, in general?

How were contours of national literature throughout history formed?

How ethnos goes toward national literature?

To examine the definition of national literature we are focusing on problems of Criteria of National Literature, trying to determine this *notion throughout various points* of language, state, religious, ethnic etc. belonging.

Methodology

The course addresses problem what are the *criteria or canons of a national literature*, in particular, with reference to the Azerbaijani literature, trying to definite this notion throughout next *interdisciplinary points*:

- What is national identity and thereafter what is national culture; National literature as a softer point for definition of national identity?

- language in which the literary text was created (in context of bilingualism and multilingualism)
- the national origin or belonging of the author
- state boundaries; in this case, which periods' boundaries must be preferable, considered as a starting point, if it is remembered that these borders were through history and still are flexible
- cultural space (wine as a symbol in Islamic poetry; family and gender attitudes in epics, myths; archetype plots as Leily and Mecnun; hagiography of Islam and Christianity; lishniye lyudi, yurodiviye in Russian Literature, oblomovshina, rakhmetovshina, plot types in Socialist Realism - building new state, symbol types in Sufism)
- Compare *post-soviet transition* with *related periods* because of the obvious national identity issues
- To use Academic Writing Principles and free discussion block

Different cultures crosses in different periods of history, keeping their previous traditions alive, yet coexisting with new realities, shaping new contours of their national identity and their culture. This is one of the main reasons, why now most nations are made up of different ethnicities, which sometimes still oppose each other (state boundaries factor).

History abounds with similar *formations of diverse ethnos into one unity* - tribes, ethnos grow out through historical development becoming nations, which ethnic content also from time to time changes their borders.

Innovations and old tendencies in national literature and culture

Throughout history, each national literature has adopted new styles in response to changing historical context and cultural factors.

Contours of the nation's literature and culture, as well as the nations themselves, are defined not only by the *modern* dominant factors and conditions of the world literary process (horizontal level), but also by how they developed from significant or somehow imperceptible traces of the *previous* dominant factors (diachronic level). In each formation of a new ethnos, its parts infiltrate the literature and culture with its traditions, not always being distributed to the entire nation.

Intermingled cultures, religions, and outlooks, coexisting with modern traditions, have led to new contours within modern national cultures, forming a certain unity within diversity, and ultimately forming a new unity with new cultural type, which penetrates into all spheres - ideology, religion, sociology, art, language.

Various **dominant factors, which determine various types of cultures and literatures** include genetic-patrimonial, historical-social, cultural, regional-geographic, philosophic-religious-ideological universalities. What kind of dominants, appreciable historical and cultural changes, or collateral influences generated responding aspects of

innovation in literary types and the criteria and conception of national literature? This direction of research helps to find methodological considerations for innovations in literary and cultural types, and examines why in any culture it is frequently impossible to separate "own" from "another's".

National identity is related with idea of definition of "self" and "others", and assumes combination of both **biological** (patrimonial, ethnic) and **social** (religious, confessional, state) borders¹. If biological-ethnic factors are relatively constant, but social factors are more than flexible: this concerns not only the new confessions within one religion, but also to changing religions, as well as changing frontiers of states. Nation" is a group of people who share an *ethnic and state belonging*, as well as aspects *of culture as language, religion, society rules, cuisine, dance*. All of these social aspects assume shared past, separate current identity or vice versa.

Contemporary history with disintegration of the USSR and other post-Soviet countries has also led to new wars in Balkan, Karabakh, putting away disputes on dividing of remained inheritance, concerning "nationality" of some cultural heritage (as Persian writing authors), or musical instrument (tar, kyaman between Iranians, Azerbaijanis, Pakistanis, Armenians - as seen, who share regional and religious) and others.

This matter becomes especially sensitive, when concerns "*nationality*" of literature, which also involves the language factor. If at the beginning of transition the focus of these debates was regarding collapsed countries of European socialist system, later it has also involved established countries too, being a subject for comparison.

Contemporary transition period for both "new" and "already existed" nation turns up to analyze cultural parallel cycles from "self" and "others" history, even historically they are not exactly coincide.

National identification - category connected with idea of definitions between «me» and "others" and assumes a combination biological (patrimonial-ethnic) and social (religious, confessional, state, etc.) factors. If biological-ethnic is the factor rather stable than social factors, borders of social aspects in national identification are flexible and subject of examination during different periods of history: appear new faiths and religions, which divide people into new entities, gain an influence confessions among the same religions; countries changes dominating religion (as in Persia, Azerbaijan, India, Japan - many of the followers of Zoroastrians accepted Islam, or Induis people share within one country Buddhism and Confucius, etc.); confessions split common ethnos as, for example, Slavic, into Pravoslavs and Catholics; borders of states expose to change, calling in question national attribution of some artifacts of shared past.

¹ PETER MANDLER Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge

Questions «since what historical moment to consider as a bench-mark point of national identity, «what of composing factors of identification to consider as priority» remain a corner stone of these disputes. Yet remained dissolved inheritance from the previous periods disputes concerning "nationality" of some literary works (some written in Persian of the medieval period), or some musical instruments (tar, kyaman between ancient and current nations as Sumerians, Iranians, Azerbaijanis, Pakistanis, Armenians), etc. Contemporary history of transition period with disintegration of the USSR and the East European countries has led to new territorial and "cultural" wars in the territories of a former communist block, such as Balkan, Karabakh, Abkhazian, Ossetia conflict for establishment of «the historical right», justice to possess both territory and some artifacts. Question especially scrupulous when it concerns "nationality" of literary works, because of involvement also the language factor. Though has passed about twenty years, discussions on this theme still proceed, and not only rather Postcolonial Studies where in the western researches began to carry and the Post-Soviet countries.

If at the outset of transition period in focus of this debate there were «new countries», appeared in the ruins of collapsed countries, but after twenty years the question quite reasonably mentions also history of development of the "established" cultures and literatures. For everyone, both "new", and "stable" for contemporary people, the present becomes a starting point for the analysis for past, history and inseparable cultural parallels from history of other people - combination of diachronic (historical vertical of one nation) and synchronic method (synchronization of parallels from the same period for other "established" people), research which take into account various cycles of development which not necessarily coincide with historical cycles of other people.

What is national identity and what are criteria for definition of cultural nationality?

- Comparison in **historical synchronization** : history of *different people from the same period* (on an example of Medieval Period)
- Comparison in **diachronic level** : history of the same nation from previous developing cycles

Apart from national identity, CL course focuses on *canons and criteria of national literature, starting points of national literature (epic, religious book, hagiography text, written text, text from common ethnic period as common Slav, common Turkic, etc., text in own language, text, created at the contemporary state territory or abode of the nation)*; theory of dichotomies: *epic, historical genre and literary fiction*; theory of dominants or factors, defining literary types; *changing borders of literature - literary text/hypertext*; *gender as a part of CL*; *concurrency and distinctions in common themes and motifs of world literature – archetypes theory*; *cultural space of the text* . These topics allow to discover individuality and common aspects of national literatures, but also from different historical periods, to discover shared past.

Another section of this course is focused on research of history depiction in an old and renewal context. The main problem in new historical reality is related with borders between truth and fiction from the following positions:

- Where are the margins between reality and opportunity, between historical truth and art fiction?
- Is it enough facts in history as a science becoming habitual, why stereotyped, which from time to time called in suspicion?
- What is the history? The fact or its perception? How does time express and recontextualize the history?

Historical genre in an old and new context includes elements of mythical legends, the epos and the chronicles in fiction. One of the traditions in the world literature is use of religious motives, symbols and images in fiction. Here are tremendous examples from chronics, myths, modern genres of contemporary literature: "The Iliad" and "The Odyssey" by Homer; motives, moved from antique Greek literature into Roman literature, "Aeneis" by Virgule, which genres, speaking in modern terms, is possible to name "historical"; invariants of Devil; plots about Jesus' punishment and life of Muslim prophet Muhammad both in the western and eastern literature and cinema, etc.

Post-Soviet transition period is characterized with failure of many values with collapse of the country and many ideas of socialism and political icons figures of this period. There was a certain vacuum of expectation which occurs to all literatures at various times.

Filling vacuum of the *collapsed stereotypes in a society - both political, and the subsequent cultural* - at first cautiously, then as squall, in Post-Soviet period affirms direction already existing in the Western literature, called **deconstruction**. This in many respects superseded traditional conformist principles (commersment) concentrated in the art of socialist realism. Reflecting moods of a society, supporters of a new literary direction consider themselves having the right to dismantle previous political values, especially related with the Soviet past. Increasing moral-ethical standards of society became more convenient target in struggle against the political past, and against the political present.

This period engendered literary works, movies, plays, reflected these fundamental political changes, caused new literary-cultural trends. Inherent to socialist realism belief to bright future, for example, has been replaced with deconstructivism of idols. This process distributed penetrated also previous idols and icon figures.

Literature and culture, as well as the society in post-soviet Azerbaijan, was *divided* into supporters of traditional values and supporters of their destruction, having gemmated into the new literary *associations*.

With disintegration of the Soviet Union in literary space well as in society, there was a certain "waiting" under the burden of world empire collapse with its established ideology. However, after almost twenty years, at the outset XXI century, it became clear, that the same levers of formation of ideology can serve for the new arrangements, both political, and literary-cultural. In literature XXI of a century (second decade of post-sovietism) allocated two main features: **reconstruction** and **deconstruction** or postmodernism.

First of all this is **loyalty to traditions** of not only Soviet past, which consists layer in our literature. Obviously, literary works by Anar during the Soviet and Post-Soviet periods are whole different hypostatizes. **Another cultural tendency - deconstructivism** was usually embodied in literary works of Alatorans. **And the third is an intermediate link**, which is mainly presented in portal Kultura.az , which publishes authors "inveterate" classics of philosophy and culture as Rahman Badalov, Niyazi Mehty, and young authors who have their own position but without extreme negation, for instance Alekper Aliev. Besides this portal, there are other names. One, the master of Soviet literature Anar with the novel "Ar roq, rapa roq" (White ram, black ram), K.Abdullaev with the novel "Incomplete manuscript». Both novels are based on folklore motives and reflect moods of the Post-Soviet time with its uncertainty and confusion.

Last novel crystallize out tradition of *combination of epic and a historical plot*. First of all, the writer uses one plot and images «The Book of Grandfather Gorgud» in completely new interpretation, rearranging accents in appraisal and acts of the main heroes of the epos. He conjectured: may be, this fact was in other context or in other way? For example, why one of the main heroes of the epos Beyrek necessarily should be positive as accepted through centuries? How in refrain in the novel - epopee «Life of Clime Samgyn» M. Gorky: whether was the boy or not? And if yes, whether all events really were as depicted in epos, or this is subjective description of the narrator-chronicler, in this case - narrator and wise man - Grandfather Gorgud as one person? May wise man or usual chronicler leave to generations unreal events, but what was required, for example, according to his own reasons or according to the main khan of Oguzs' - Bayandur-khan? So, **first literary-historical deconstruction** is concerns to **reinterpretation one of the idols** -heroes of Oguzs tribes. On an example of his own people history the author tries to put abovementioned question.

In the novel unlike in the epic they are closely bounded in a single situation, concentrated in some kind of *court*. Deconstruction requires subjective moments, as *who orders chronicle* (it is

known that in the Middle Ages famous historical epopee by "Shahname" by Firdousi was written be request of Shah, this was tradition in the East, or in Christianity monks were ordered to write history, chronicles and reserve them at the monasteries). It is important that this court assumes not so much to reveal the true culprit, much for optimal choice of a target for punishment, rather victim to put an end to conflicts in Oguz society.

Since gaining independence after the collapsing of Soviet Union and later the socialist countries of East Europe at the beginning of 1990s the new countries have gone through dramatic social, cultural, economic and political transformations. This social and historical background requires to re-consider concepts of unity in diversity and dialog between cultures (UNESCO's programme), plural society and formation of plural cultural area, contemporary post-soviet studies new methods and perspectives , current debates and future prospects of national culture and national identity.