

CULTURE AND CULTURAL STUDIES AT THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND AMERICAN STUDIES AT SOFIA UNIVERSITY

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Unlike the teaching of literature or linguistics at the Department, the teaching of culture and cultural studies does not boast a long history. Even so, a survey of the current BA and MA programmes shows that over the past three decades the teaching of culture and cultural studies managed to carve out a space of its own in the literature and linguistics curricula. There are over 40 course titles, each with a range of topics with various concerns, which introduce students to the diverse cultures of English speaking countries, some of them drawing attention to the host society as well as to a number of its objectives at various levels and from a number of perspectives.

Thinking back over time, the teaching of culture had its first experience in the teaching of *Stranoznaniye* (from the German *Landeskunde*, or, regional and cultural studies, in English) (Collins German-English Dictionary). The discipline was introduced in 1978 to first-year students of foreign-language departments at Sofia University in order to help broaden their knowledge about the country whose language and literature they had come to study. This was a highly welcomed addition to the curriculum since teachers had been pointing out for quite some time that students needed not only to learn the respective language but also to acquire general knowledge about the country where it was spoken and whose literature was being studied as part of the curriculum.

Enthusiasm prevailed since in some departments the teaching of the new subsidiary was assigned to young people who were just starting their academic career and of whom I was one. Expectations ran high both on departmental level and among the future teachers. As far as teaching went, there were hardly any basic sources worth mentioning,

either in terms of materials or of methodology. One was free to experiment and learn from one's mistakes since the new discipline was not considered a separate field but a kind of booster training assisting students in overcoming problems in their literature classes. The bottom line was sufficiently clear: students should be given information about the geography, history, culture, art and the political structure of the respective country, so that they would better understand literary texts. The variety of the fields involved was a daunting one but hope prevailed that things would somehow take their best course.

One should also mention that since the 1968/69 academic year the Department had been partnering with the Department of Russian and Slavonic Studies at the University of Leeds, England for a yearly student exchange. It tried to meet an objective identical with that of the new discipline but for obvious reasons it could benefit only the best students.

The 1989 political transformations which swept across Eastern Europe, Bulgaria included, created a cumulative impact over the Department. It received new infrastructural facilities, such as the library project, launched with the generous support of the British Council, as well as the subsequent and equally substantial aid of the US Embassy. Each made a generous donation of books, video and computer equipment, subscription to journals and newspapers. In addition to these, more book donations later came from the American Cultural Centre, as well as from the British Council Library itself when it closed down in 2009. Similarly, the Irish Embassy made a valuable contribution of resources on Irish literature and culture.

Moreover, visiting British and American colleagues ran a number of crash courses to share their expertise with both students and teachers. British colleagues included, among others, Paul Simpson in critical linguistics, Martin Montgomery in media studies, Mica Nava in gender studies. Colleagues from the USA taught women's studies and were a powerful group that included, among others, Professors Francine Frank, Judith Barlow, Iliana Semmler, Wendy Barker.

The new atmosphere of optimism, the supply of books, teaching materials and library facilities inevitably contributed to the transformation of the existing course in British regional and cultural studies into a new

course on British Society and Culture (1992). Its teaching was pioneered and further developed by Tatyana Stoicheva and Maria Pipeva, who were later joined by Ivelina Kazakova and after Stoicheva's retirement, by Irina Kyulanova. The first course on American Culture was entitled *Cultural History of the US* and was introduced by Kornelia Slavova. Its teaching team included also Alexandra Glavanakova, Ralitsa Muharska and later, Daniela Naydeva.

A spate of courses mushroomed over the next fifteen years, a process that is still ongoing. In addition to the usual linguistic or literary orientation, some colleagues also opened their teaching and research interests towards the field of translation, increasingly viewed to be of utmost importance for students at the department since many were likely to find employment in that area. Those members of staff who were keen to build their academic careers in that field had, over the years, to make ever more complex decisions what to teach and how to teach it: whether culture in its diverse meanings as "a whole way of life," an artistic or intellectual creativity, or cultural studies, as the specifics of each approach required. Apart from that, making a choice also meant that teaching should also take into consideration the fact that most students would have to be inducted into the use of *English for Special Purposes*, or develop skills in the variety of academic and professional genres that became required formats for their written work. Such needs have been catered for in the courses conducted by several colleagues; their groundwork deserves special mention.

The teaching of a foreign culture faces a similar problem. It will not say much to students when they come across a particular situation unless they are given examples illustrating the functions of culture, especially back in time, as we try to imagine them now. Examples include 19th-century Bulgarians' contacts with British culture and technology in the construction by a British company of the Russe – Varna Railway or the first contacts of Bulgarians with American missionaries and each side's expectations. Some help with Empire ideology is offered by authors and characters students will be familiar with, such as Conan Doyle and his Sherlock Holmes's stories and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. By way of illustration one can also refer to Britain's strong defence of the Ottoman Empire in the 1870s culminating in Prime Minister

Disraeli's downplaying the Turkish atrocities in the April uprising (1876) and Britain's subsequent colonization of Cyprus (1878) as a token of Turkish gratitude.

Right now each individual discipline demonstrates the different aspects and emphases chosen by its teacher(s), thus contributing to the variety which is a defining feature of the Department's curriculum. This is to be expected when we think of the complexity of culture as a concept as well as the abundance of fields it can apply to, if we are to follow Raymond Williams' definition back in 1958. Culture in his formulations includes the known meanings and directions, which its members are trained to; the new observations and meanings, which are offered and tested; ... the ordinary processes of human societies and human minds, and ... through them the nature of culture: ...always both traditional and creative...; both the most ordinary common meanings and the finest individual meanings. (Williams in Barker and Jane 2016, 46–47)

We use the word culture in these two senses: to mean a whole way of life--the common meanings; to mean the arts and learning--the special processes of discovery and creative effort. Some writers reserve the word for one or other of these senses; I insist on both, and on the significance of their conjunction. The questions I ask about our culture are questions about deep personal meanings. Culture is ordinary, in every society and in every mind. (*ibid.*)

Williams' insights into the meanings of culture draw attention not just to the close connection between culture and the development of modern British society over the years, but more importantly, to the potential of culture to introduce changes both in societies' and individuals' lives.

Some forty years later (1997) Stuart Hall in his definition of cultural studies as a discursive formation broadened still further Williams' concept of culture as "a way of life." Cultural studies, he states, is

...a cluster (or *formation*) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic, social activity or institutional site in society. (Hall, in Barker and Jane 2016, 6)

Hall's 1997 elaboration spreads the fan of culture still further, applying it (with Foucault) to forms of knowledge, social activities and institutions, each one to be thoroughly mapped by language in its developmental and institutionalizing functions.

Perhaps one of the greatest benefits of colleagues' interest in the teaching of culture and cultural studies is that it brings together teachers who are otherwise orientated academically to linguistics, literature or translation. Their interest in culture and its functioning enables them to cross the boundary of the more traditional literary or linguistic approach and to venture into interdisciplinary research in the expectation of a valuable experience from different viewpoints upon their mainstream discipline. Moreover, the joining of forces while teaching disciplines from the BA and MA programmes makes it easier to attract to the classes students whose preference may be for either linguistics or literature and to encourage them to also try the study of culture. Students' knowledge about the English language or literature may take on a deeper meaning when they get involved in discussions on the current and past position of societies and cultures in which English became the official language as part of those countries' imperial legacy alongside their various replicas of English institutions as part and parcel of modern development.

The aim of this paper is to introduce the Department's current programmes of culture and cultural studies in both the BA and the MA degree.

THE BA PROGRAMME

The BA Programme includes 2 required and 16 elective courses. One can roughly classify them as:

1. Elective introductory courses which familiarize first-year students with communication skills in English and academic culture.
2. The earliest required courses, one on Britain and one on the USA, together with the elective courses which amplify or complement the former with courses about countries which formerly were part of the British Empire.
3. Courses with a broader international focus.
4. Courses which show the role of culture in translation.

1. The first such elective course, *Specialized Text Writing* (Sem. 1)¹, was taught by Ralitsa Muharska until her retirement. She inducted students to the creation of academic texts (reviews, letters of recommendation, letters of intent, as well as institutional support applications, among others, with a final assignment requiring the writing of an individual application to an international institution for a grant or scholarship.

At present it is Dr Emilia Slavova's *English for Professional Communication: Oral Presentations* elective course (Sem. 1) which equips students with practice-oriented academic skills: delivering an oral presentation, collecting and organizing information, expressing opinions during discussions in class, quoting and using sources in term papers and oral presentations, as well as overcoming stage fright.

In its sequel, *English for Social Interaction* elective course (Sem. 2), which similarly helps students use English in different situations, Dr Slavova uses short stories, poems, articles, videos, and role plays based on them to cover a range of sociocultural and sociolinguistic topics such as introductions, social networking, politeness, regional and social varieties of English, standard and non-standard language, political discourse, manipulation through language, gendered language and so on.

Ms Ivelina Kazakova's *Images of Britishness* elective course (Sem. 1) paves the ground for the British Society and Culture required in the subsequent semester by means of familiarizing students with selected aspects of British culture: the country of Britain, the British character and values, manners and etiquette, the English sense of humour, etc.

2. *British Society and Culture* (Sem. 2) grew upon the first experimental required course. Currently it is taught by Assoc. Prof. Dr Maria Pipeva, Dr Irina Kyulanova and Ms Ivelina Kazakova. The course introduces students to characteristic British developments (industrialism, capitalism, imperialism) and the way these remodelled society and individual lives in the course of the 19th and the 20th century, assisted by the spreading of the new middle-class ethos as well as the emergence of new aspects of knowledge about the world and the self. Today's Britain is represented through a variety of materials (printed and media texts, documentaries

¹The abbreviation "Sem." followed by a figure in brackets after each title indicates the semester in which it is taught.

and feature films about the educational system, the media, popular culture, and, recently, Brexit). Classes such as those on youth culture, nationalism, gender, or the Welfare State develop intercultural awareness while encouraging students to consider related developments in modern Bulgarian society.

Ms Kazakova's *British Popular Culture* elective (Sem. 3) further expands students' familiarity with the British way of life and its cultural manifestations. Students explore other important aspects of modern life in Britain, concentrating on popular culture in relation to national identity, the monarchy and the aristocracy, tabloids, street art and rock music. The discussions of cultural texts and practices work towards the development of critical skills in evaluating information.

In the required course on *US Society and Culture* (Sem. 6), Prof. Kornelia Slavova and Ms Daniela Naydeva introduce the cultural history approach to explore key documents in the history of American statecraft (e.g. *The Declaration of Independence*, *The Constitution*, etc.). To these they add journalist, political, and literary texts to chart history of ideas, cultural processes and major trends and events such as the Jazz Age, Transcendentalism, American exceptionalism, among others.

Prof. Slavova's elective course *American Popular Culture* (Sem. 7) makes a useful addition to the *US Society and Culture* required course. Here American cultural practices are further explored in relation to issues of cultural difference, stereotypes, and representation of otherness by focusing on examples from pop culture such as jeans culture, social media, Westerns, pop music as well as the processes of globalization and Americanization. The major categories of human difference such as race, ethnicity, class, gender, region and religion are explored both as shaping and being shaped by American multicultural society.

Teaching **the cultures of societies whose territories were for various lengths of time regarded as British Imperial possessions** increases students' competence in cultural matters from the relevant society's point of view.

One of these is the elective course on *Irish Culture* (Sem. 6), taught by Dr Jonathan McCreedy. Dr McCreedy combines literary texts and media materials to demonstrate the ways in which they represent key aspects of Irish history and culture: religion, the Famine, the Irish

Literary Renaissance, the Catholic Church, the Troubles in Northern Ireland between the 1960s and the 1990s, Loyalist and Republican traditions, and sport. In addition, students have a class in Irish English as they can hear it spoken in Ireland today.

The courses on **Canada** and **Australia** reveal a different picture as each of these grew from a former British colony of settlement to its present-day rank among the countries with the largest economies and the highest quality of life.

Assoc. Prof. Dr Alexandra Glavanakova and Dr Galina Avramova's elective *Canada: Culture, Society, Politics* (Sem. 5) is conceptualized as an introduction into the socio-political and cultural life of Canada as one of the most ethnically diverse and multicultural countries. Topics include the existing integration model of migration and the politics of bilingualism and multiculturalism, Quebecers' nationalist aspirations are not forgotten, either. The course also presents the history of Bulgarian immigration to Canada.

A follow-up to the Canada course is Dr Galina Avramova's elective *Multiculturalism in Canadian Literature* (Sem. 7). She shows how ideas of multiculturalism and transculturalism, developed by Charles Taylor and Smaro Kamboureli, among others, encouraged the growth of Canadian literary genres. Special attention is given to the history and genre development of Canadian literatures, as well as to prominent writers (Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, Alice Munro, Rohinton Mistry, M.G. Vassanji, and Thomas King). Classes are devoted to the analysis of texts of the indigenous and regional literatures, women's writing and multiethnic literature. Students gain knowledge of Canada's culture through its identity-formation and nation-building role in an era of globalization and multiethnicity.

In the elective *Australia: Society, Culture, Literature* (Sem. 7) Prof. Madeleine Danova introduces aspects of the history, culture and politics of colonized and modern Australia as they are represented in literary texts. The topics deal with Aboriginal cultures, the European settlement, the emergence of the Australian nation within the context of the Pacific region's postcolonial development, Australia's modern state structure and immigration policy, the problems of ethnicity and race and, last but not least, the relations with the former metropolis.

3. Dr Emilia Slavova's elective *Intercultural Communication* in the third year consists of two parts. Part One, *Intercultural Communication* (Sem. 5) is more theoretical and lecture-based. Part Two, *Intercultural Communication Skills* (Sem. 6), is more interactive, focusing on hands-on training, class discussions and project work. In the latter, students are divided into groups, each group bringing together Bulgarian and international students to work on a common project which is subsequently presented to the rest of the class. By far the most interesting titles are the ones in which the students describe a cultural aspect of their own country, for example gender roles in Japan and in Bulgaria, or the way a student sees someone else's country.

The experimental Intercultural Communication course *Transcultural Dialogues: the USA and Bulgaria in the early 21st c.* (Sem. 7) was introduced in the 2017-2018 academic year by Assoc. Prof. Dr Alexandra Glavanakova as a joint course for students of the Department of English and American Studies in Sofia and the John V. Roach Honours College at the Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, USA. The course aims to explore the possibility of exchanging ideas and sharing experiences which will be interpreted in the context of globalization and the resulting problems of cultural diversity. Students are stimulated to compare their cultures but also and on a wider scale, to explore diversity in the world through diversity in the transatlantic classroom. The use of video conferencing technology, Skype and the Share Point platform highlight the role of technological development in transcultural dialogues. The design of the course allows students to sharpen their communication, reading and critical skills, improve the Bulgarian students' knowledge about the USA and vice versa, as well as to broaden knowledge about the world and its problems. Topics include aspects of youth life, culture and media consumption, gender, ethnicity and migration issues, social tensions and violence, the current representation of each country's representation in the culture of the other one. In the 2018-2019 academic year the course also incorporated students from the Lucian Blaga University at Sibiu, Romania.

Dr Irena Dimova's elective *English as an International Language* (Sem. 7) turns to the historical, political, economic and cultural conditions which led to the acceptance of English as an international language.

She traces the contacts of English with local languages and cultures, the development of its diverse forms alongside the standardization and codification of the language's latest varieties, the status and the identity of speakers of different varieties of English, the uses of English as a *lingua franca* in the context of international communication. The discussions of English as it is spoken in Britain, North America, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, in addition to its varieties as a second official language in Asian and African countries, bring to the fore the sheer complexity of Englishes across the globe, as well as the need of fresh approaches to its teaching.

An adjunct to the curriculum framework and aiming to further raise the students' awareness of the world today and tomorrow is the voluntary course *Science Fiction* (Sem. 2), currently taught by part-time teachers and professionals Dr Alexander Popov and Vladimir Poleganov. The course is a variant of the earlier course *Narratives of the Future: Science Fiction*, taught by Ralitsa Muharska until her retirement. In its new guise the field is treated as independent of and distinct from other types of literary fiction, with its own origin, material realities, writers' personalities and practices. The course helps students see how historical processes led to the emergence of science fiction, early 20th century pulp-magazines, the late 1930s paperback revolution, the emergence and growth of fan groups, specialized journals and annual festivals. Text analyses suggest how shared themes, approaches and stylistic devices build science fiction's alternative worlds.

4. Assoc. Prof. Dr Maria Pipeva's elective course *Discourse and Translation* (Sem. 4) offers the first insights into the complex problems of translation as social action. The course involves work with various types of texts (newspapers, political, scientific and economic commentaries, ads, reviews, public speeches) so that students gain skills in applying the norms of discursiveness, equivalence, adequacy, adaptation, in choice of translation strategies.

Assoc. Prof. Dr Pipeva's other elective, *Children's Literature: Criticism and Translation* (Sem. 7) aims to introduce students to the specifics of this genre, its study and translation. The cultural component is a central one within the interdisciplinary approach required to understand such a

complex and socially and ideologically laden genre. A central emphasis of the course is the impact of socio-cultural factors in the traditions of writing for children in English-speaking countries and in Bulgaria and the reception in Bulgaria of British and American literature for children. An important assumption underlying the course is that by integrating aspects of the conceptual framework of cultural studies with those of other academic fields students will develop awareness towards translation choices and solutions within the specified genre and will be able to evaluate those from a cross-cultural perspective.

MA PROGRAMMES

The ***LANGUAGE AND CULTURE MA*** programme offers 3 required and 3 elective courses for the Linguistics component as well as 2 required and 11 elective courses for Literature and Culture. Each component gives prominence to current theoretical concepts and their functioning in society.

The linguistics programme includes courses in discourse analysis; the basic principles sociolinguistics uses as it approaches social factors; gender differences in communication; the implications of globalisation for language and culture; the problems politeness raises for intercultural difference and communication; and others.

Assoc. Prof. Dr Nelly Tincheva's required *Discourse Analysis* (Sem. 1) is a build-up on the BA Linguistics set of courses. It aims to take students' knowledge and analytical skills further by means of employing texts which demonstrate how communication and cognition relate to the bewildering variety and ubiquity of discourse. Students broaden their skills in critical discourse analysis and the writing of new texts.

Dr Irena Dimova's required *Language and Society* (Sem. 1) introduces students to sociolinguistics and its basic principles while manifesting the complex use of language in a linguistic community. The course places emphasis on the impact of social factors on the use of a language code, two- and multiple-language societies' language varieties and practices, language policies, identity construction and last but not

least, the place of language in education, the media and electronic communication.

Dr Dimova's elective *Gender Differences in Communication* (Sem. 2), as a complement to her required course *Language and Society*, traces the relationship between language and gender by means of key theoretical stances, methodological approaches and results obtained through empirical sociolinguistic studies. Special emphasis is laid on the differences between earlier approaches to language and gender, such as variationist sociolinguistics, deficit, dominance and difference theories, and the more recent social-constructionist stance. Examples of gender-identity-construction processes are taken also from computer-mediated communication.

The required course *Globalisation, Multiculturalism, Plurilingualism* (Sem. 2), taught by Dr Emilia Slavova, considers the implications of globalization on language and culture; the development of English as a global language; the proliferation of Englishes around the globe; the effects of new communication technologies on language; and the need to develop better cultural awareness and intercultural competence in the context of language-and-culture studies.

Dr Emilia Slavova's elective *Politeness across Cultures* (Sem. 3) adopts an interdisciplinary approach. Here the emphasis falls on different theoretical approaches to politeness, politeness in its sociocultural and historical context, as well as intercultural differences and potential communication problems. Practical applications of the study of politeness are discussed: in personal communication, in language teaching, in translation and interpreting, as well as in other areas where communication is crucial.

In her elective *Linguistic Anthropology* (Sem. 1), Assoc. Prof. Dr Alexandra Bagasheva broadens the scope of linguistics to achievements, problems and trends in anthropology based on linguistic research and cultural linguistics. Among her topics are: language in its biological, cultural and evolutionary aspects, language politics together with the cultural role of the media, as well as the media's direct impact upon language development.

Literature and Culture

The literature courses fall into several groups:

1. The introductory course in Literary and Cultural Analysis is followed by:

2. Courses in the relationship between ideologies and cultural production such as US Cold War culture; gender and popular culture in Eastern Europe and the West during the Cold War period; the complexity and range of expression of postmodern literature and culture; postcolonial theory and its radical shift in the interpretation of literature and culture; theories of identity in a world of globalisation and continual technical progress.

3. Courses emphasizing the cultural diversity of American drama on stage and screen; Ireland's history, culture and modern-day politics as these were represented by Irish authors.

4. Popular genres (the crime and detective thriller, women's romance) on page and screen; the evolution of the childhood image in Britain and the USA over the past 300 years.

5. Courses in translation and culture/cultural studies.

1. In the required course *Principles of Literary and Cultural Analysis* (Sem. 1), which is a literature-based component of the programme, Ms Daniela Naydeva initiates students into close reading and the use of key concepts as a means of interpreting context in literary and other texts. She attaches special importance to globalization, postcolonial theory and the dissolution of cultural borders. The course also introduces students to the concepts and keywords used in the analysis of culture. The lectures present major concepts and key names from the fields of literary and cultural studies, while the seminars give opportunity for discussion of the concepts and the practice of literary and cultural analysis as they are applied to different cultural products and works of art.

2. Ms Naydeva's elective *Cold War Culture* (Sem. 1) offers a critical perspective to US culture between the 1940s and the 1990s, with a specific focus on the Cold War and its contemporaneous ideological frameworks as the factors determining the characteristics of the cultural

production of the period. A comparative perspective of the course draws attention to the parallel existence of dominant ideological paradigms and political processes in Western Europe and the Soviet bloc at the time and their impact on the respective cultures. Materials show, among others, the role of the CIA and espionage, high culture as a political message vs. everyday (“kitchen”) culture; wealth and conformity as common standards; consumerism; the permeation of religion through politics and popular culture; shifts in the social and cultural importance of sports, ideological aspects of political and mainstream advertising, etc.

Prof. Kornelia Slavova’s elective *Gender and Popular Culture: East/West* (Sem. 2) brings into focus comparisons between the cultures of Eastern Europe and of the West in broad terms, especially during the Cold War era. The impact of popular culture upon the concepts of femininity and masculinity demonstrates how they both are popular culture’s constructs. By discussing specific cases of consumption of popular culture under socialism and capitalism, students learn to analyse how diverse ideologies function on the terrain of pop culture aims.

Prof. Kornelia Slavova’s required *Postmodern Literature and Culture* (Sem. 2) addresses postmodern Anglophone practices in the post-industrial society and their expression in literature, film, art, lifestyle, fashion and politics through visual means and technologies, post-modern space/time or the reconstruction of history and identity.

Prof. Tatyana Stoicheva’s elective *Postcolonial Readings in English Literature* (Sem. 1) concerns the radical shift Postcolonial Theory made in the reading of modern Anglophone literatures owing to the reassessment of the role played by culture in the history of modernity to the present day. In the seminars students analyze short stories, poetry and essays mainly by English and Caribbean authors using some core theoretical concepts such as centre and periphery, othering, the West and the rest, power, representation.

The *Theories of Identity* elective (Sem. 3) is taught by Prof. Tatyana Stoicheva. She introduces students to some theoretical conceptualizations of identity, e.g. the construction of the subject and the problems of identity in a world of globalization and continual technological progress. Students discuss the construction of identity in literary texts, applying

sociological categories (gender, race, class, and nation) to the analysis to discover the role of ideology, discourse and psychoanalysis.

3. Prof. Kornelia Slavova's elective *Cultural Diversity in American Drama and Film* (Sem. 2) aims to show students how US pluralist drama at the turn of the 21st century lays bare class, race, ethnic, regional and gender relations. Students discuss the representation of social conflicts, the social and cultural context, as well as the reception of pluralist drama's stage and film versions.

With his elective on *Irish culture* (Sem. 2) Dr Jonathan McCreedy similarly elaborates on students' previous knowledge about Ireland's history, culture and modern-day politics, using a wide selection of authors who have written on subjects such as religion, the economy or the Troubles. James Joyce is given the place of honour when it comes to religion, sport, music and, certainly, Dublin.

4. Assoc. Prof. Dr Zelma Catalan teaches the elective *Popular Genres on Page and Screen* (Sem. 2). Students are familiarized with the organic relationship between "high" realist fiction and popular literary and cinematic genres, chiefly the crime and detective thriller and women's romance. Samples from Anglo-American novels and films are analyzed using the methodology of various disciplines: narrative analysis, film and adaptation theory, stylistic and discourse analysis. Special attention is paid to the sociological and political dimensions of popular genres.

Assoc. Prof. Dr Maria Pipeva's elective *British and American Images of Childhood* (Sem. 2) builds on her BA course on Children's Literature. MA students learn to see childhood as an indispensable unit in any society's culture as they trace the historical evolution of childhood images in Britain and the USA over the past 300 years.

5. The *Culture and Translation* elective (Sem. 1) is taught by Ms Iglia Vassileva, an established translator with a lifelong career to whom Bulgarian literature and culture owe the translations of numerous classical and modern English, Irish and American novels, including the translation of Joyce's *Ulysses*.

Students work with samples of archaized and poeticized texts in order to render different cultural contexts such as the thick description of interiors in 19th and 20th century fiction, or direct speech in 20th and 21st century fiction, trying to interpret translation as criticism and

criticism as translation.

Prof. Tatyana Stoicheva's elective *Comparative Literature, Translation and Culture* (Sem. 2) applies comparative theory and practice to the translation of Anglo-American and Bulgarian literatures and cultures. Students use texts and postcolonial epistemology to analyse the West's dominance in the translation of other literatures, as well as to highlight the intimate connection between translation, ideology and reception. Pre-1989 translations of Anglophone authors are seen as exemplars of the ideological combat between socialism and capitalism; post-1989 translations of works by Bulgarian writers who settled in the West tend to show pre-1989 life at home in line with the West's fixed expectations.

Students also debate whether Bulgarian authors and their texts should be translated and accepted on their own terms.

The MA PROGRAMME entitled *COMMUNICATION: LANGUAGE, LITERATURE, MEDIA* makes a valuable contribution to teaching with its approach to culture as the acquisition of new skills which build a new awareness of the world around us. In it culture and cultural studies are addressed from a number of perspectives. Its 11 courses fall into three groups:

Courses on the use of digital technologies and the development of communication skills, the ever greater computerization of the world and the digitalization of the media, literature and the theatre;

Courses revolving round the role of international communication, the politicization of American popular culture, ethnic identity in American literature and culture, as well as multiculturalism in Canadian culture and literature;

Film adaptations of classical American novels which show the transformation of the literary into other means of communication whereas the study of the letter highlights its different performance in literature and film.

1. In the required *New Technologies in Communication* (Sem. 2) Dr Iona Sarieva introduces innovative communication practice from the past ten years as part of the 21st century information revolution. Teaching brings together theory and practice to show that theory not only outlines

modification trends in social communicative practices but that it also creates, with new technologies, communication skills. Students' hands-on training includes several types of software for good communication (technologies of the Web 2.0(1) generation: 1. Blackboard, WebCT, Moodle, ICA2 digital educational platforms; 2. Endnote, RefWorks and Google Docs information-organizing software; 3. Facebook, MySpace, Del-icio-us, Flickr and YouTube social network and video sharing websites and software).

Prof. Madeleine Danova's *Mass Media Today* (Sem. 3), another required course in communication, throws a bridge between media in everyday use and their role and development in today's society. Topics include, on the one hand, public/private media and their regulating bodies, censorship, editorial standards, media ethics, democracy and the media, as well as problems arising from the use of the Internet. The course also devotes attention to cultural theories on the nature and role of the mass media in modern society (theories of "culture industry", "information society", and "global village"). E-delivered information is discussed as a new type of language predetermining diverse world models as the foundation of modern theories: Baudrillard's hyper-reality, Foucault's total surveillance and the Panopticon, Derrida's e-writing world, Lyotard's postmodern computerized world. Moreover, the course involves the development of prevalent skills in media analysis which are applied to the BBC, an example of British media, whereas American media are shown in a historical perspective, as well as in comparison with British ones.

Assoc. Prof. Alexandra Glavanakova's required *Global Conversations: Text in the Digital Age* (Sem. 3) turns to the change computer technologies, telecommunication networks and digital arts produce in literacy, the printed book and intellectual discourse. Subjected to critical analysis is the growth of digital culture from a set of ideologies and practices (new media theory, posthumanism and multimodality). In personal, academic, communal and global writing spaces students apply new concepts of textuality, reading and writing using words, images, graphics and sound. They discuss genre and rhetorical awareness while the multimodality of position writing helps strengthen their creative and composing abilities to give meaning, tell a story, provoke a reaction with sound, images,

animation, and other media, as well as to rethink conventional rhetorical concepts (authorship, audience, process, revision, and design) in digital contexts.

In her *Literature in the Digital Age* (Sem. 3) elective Assoc. Prof. Dr Glavanakova explores the revolutionary transition of fiction from print to cybertext on both formal and structural levels and the various methodological approaches to analyzing electronic literature. She identifies as cyberliterature predecessors a few experimenters among Postmodern American authors (Kurt Vonnegut, Raymond Federman), as well as key figures in the cyberpunk science fiction movement (William Gibson, Pat Cadigan). Topics include authorship and authorial status in the net, cyberliterature genre modifications (hypertext, multimedia, computer-generated texts), pedagogical applications of computer games and software. High importance is given to issues of immersion and interactivity in reader-reception.

Dr Kornelia Tancheva's elective *Theatre in the Age of the Internet* (Sem. 2) maps out the way digital technologies have affected theatrical performance, levelling out the differences between traditional and novel means of communication. Work in class with the Digital Performance Archive focuses upon a database used both in stage performance and for research into performance. Digital resources bring together theatrical productions and live-art installations incorporating e-media, live-broadcast performances on the Internet and Internet-based collaborations, as well as interactive drama and the MUDS, MOOs, IRC and Second Life performative "virtual environments".

2. In her required *Intercultural Communication* (Sem. 2) Prof. Madeleine Danova focuses on the potential of communication to put different cultures in contact. She lectures on the principal theories in the study of intercultural communication and the fundamental areas of intercultural exchange. Students are expected to acquire comprehensive knowledge about the types of culture, as well as the anthropological, linguistic, psychological and value distinctions between cultures which facilitate or prevent communication. Methods of preventing intercultural conflicts and the characteristics of diverse human communities also come into focus.

Assoc. Prof. Dr Glavanakova's elective *American Popular Culture and Politics* (Sem. 3) employs a selection of TV programs, films, advertisements and digital cultural products to show popular culture as a highly politicized domain of social life. The social construction of its political meaning defines this culture as a contested ground, and the function of its products as forms of political control or political resistance. Using theories of media, culture and politics of exile, students discuss the representations of migration and expatriation; war and conflict; terrorism and frontier politics; alternatives to democracy; utopia and dystopia; the individual and the state. The globalization of popular culture in the perspective of the local is seen as enabling the appropriation and contestation of American culture (e.g. by Bulgarian hip-hop and chalgа music).

Prof. Madeleine Danova's elective *Race and Ethnicity in American Literature and Culture* (Sem. 2) examines the way "ethnicity" emerged and was repeatedly rediscovered in the autobiographical genre of 20th-century American literature. Growing ethnic diversity in American society has made the issues of ethnic boundaries, ethnic identity, hybridization and diaspora ever more complex and important to study.

The discussions in class include the current scope of the American identity as communicated in literary and scholarly texts and their past and present contribution to the construction of new ethnic identities. Special focus is given to the relationship between Self and Other, cultural stereotypes and their disruption, as well as to the role played by language in the formation of the American identity.

Dr Galina Avramova's elective *Canada: Culture and Literature* (Sem. 3) concentrates on the history and development of Canadian literature from a multicultural and transcultural perspective. The aim is to familiarize students with and develop critical skills in the discussion of the literature of the indigenous population, regional literature, women's writing and multiethnic literature. The corpus of texts contains samples from various fictional and dramatic genres (autobiographies, novels, short stories, plays). Francophone literature is another useful addition. The development of Canadian literature as immigrant literature is compared with that of American and British literatures.

3. In *The American Novel into Film* (Sem. 2) elective Prof. Madeleine Danova shows the use the film industry has been making since the 1940s of great American novels. Special attention is given to Henry James, regarded as the father of American Modernism and a frequent subject of literary comment. James's texts are of wide interest to film makers and this substantiates the comparisons that form the course content of the novels with their old and new film versions and the mechanisms and discourses of American mass culture today. The huge variety of interpretations is offered to the students as a demonstration of the transformation of the literary into new means of communication.

Dr Vesselin Budakov's elective *The Letter in Literature and Film* (Sem. 2) guides students through the history and development of epistolary culture (17th – late 20th centuries). The course approaches letter-writing in its socio-cultural and economic context: in the 18th and 19th centuries the genre was essential for a number of writers and travellers; it also became instrumental in the rise of the novel. The course puts the letter in the context of other genres and the postal services during the time when it reigned as a prime means of interpersonal communication, until the late 20th C. when its special status was challenged by e-communication. Students analyse literary works where the letter either dominates the narrative or manifests social dialogism. What also comes into focus is the representation of the epistolary in film.

The teaching of culture and cultural studies in both the BA and the MA curricula of the Department of English and American Studies developed in step with the University of Sofia's post-1989 policy for the introduction of new disciplines and innovative teaching.

The above survey presents the wide diversity of courses, all of which offer evidence of colleagues' efforts to enrich the curriculum and so to give students a better grasp of the trend towards integrating culture as a core component of the teaching of foreign languages, their literatures, theoretical linguistics and translation. What outside sceptics may assume, at first glance, to be culture's unwelcome intrusion into the firmly established privacy of the carved up fields, actually opens new vistas of unexplored relations and meanings. The latter are able to energize literature's and linguistics' potential for communication with

21st century learners and readers as part and parcel of critical issues those concerned may need to settle in their societies.

What remains to be done, however, is for teachers in culture and cultural studies at the Department to start a debate about their practices and problems in the field – something which, to my knowledge, has not ever taken place. Perhaps some kind of in-depth discussion of the state and content of current teaching and the possibility of coordination would provide greater coherence to the programmes in order to benefit both teachers and students.

References:

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Barker and Jane. 2016. *Cultural Studies. Theory and Practice*, 5th edition. London: Sage.