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## UKRAINIAN FUTURISM OF THE 20TH CENTURY: THE VIEW OF WESTERN UKRAINISTS

**Summary.** A comprehensive study of literary works of Ukrainian abroad is just beginning. The article is devoted to a problem that is relevant for modern literary studies – the study of the works of Western Ukrainian scholars. The object of this investigation is the voluminous work of Western literary critics of Ukraine, which is related to the history of Ukrainian literature of the 20th century. It was a stimulus for the literary studies of Yu. Lavrinenko, Yu. Sherekh, Yu. Lutskyi, O. Ilnytskyi, H. Grabovych, M. Shkandryi, M. Pavlyshyn and others. First of all, we mean the Ukrainian renaissance of the 20s. Ukrainian literature of the 1920s and 1930s, with the light hand of Yu. Lavrinenko, the author of the anthology called «the shot dead revival», became a priority research topic for American Ukrainian scholars. The special attention of Western scholars is focused on the figure and work of M. Khvylovy, on the VAPLITE organization, the literary discussion of 1925–1928, the avant-garde of the twenties of the last century.

The article emphasizes that the experience of Western Ukrainian studies is not sufficiently studied in the mainland science of literature. The author tries to objectively assess the contribution of the Canadian literary critic Oleh Ilnytskyi to the understanding of the specifics of Ukrainian futurism, since the Canadian literary critic was one of the first to give him the opportunity to realize himself in his history, theory and works. O. Ilnytskyi belongs to those diaspora Ukrainians, thanks to whom «a new look at Soviet literature» was created. Ukrainian futurism debuted at a time when Ukrainian society was asking itself the question of what the new national cultural norm should be. Working on his scientific research, O. Ilnytskyi set himself the goal of giving Ukrainian futurism a chance to define itself in its history, theory and works; to fit it into the context of the European avant-garde and to record, at least in general, some of the most prominent ideological and artistic features that compare it to its contemporaries and immediate predecessors.

**Key words:** Oleg Ilnytskyi, futurism, Ukrainian studies, specificity, literary phenomenon.

**Statement of the problem.** A comprehensive study of literary works of Ukrainian abroad is just beginning. The object of this research is the voluminous work of Western literary critics-Ukrainians, which is related to the history of Ukrainian literature of the 20th century.

**Analysis of recent research.** It was a stimulus for the literary studies of Yu. Lavrinenko [1], Yu. Sherekh [2], Yu. Lutskyi [3], O. Ilnytskyi [4], H. Grabovych [5], M. Shkandrya [6], M. Pavlyshyn [7] and others. First of all, we mean the Ukrainian renaissance of the 20s. As you know, a large mass of literary material of this period was removed from all literary histories published after the 30th year, and the works of prominent writers of this period,

repressed by the Stalinist regime, were removed to the so-called special funds. Of course, it was impossible to study their work in Soviet literary studies, and their names and works existed only as examples of bourgeois-national ideology in literature. Therefore, the Ukrainian literature of the 20s and 30s, with the light hand of Y. Lavrinenko, the author of the anthology called «the shot dead revival», became a priority topic of research for American Ukrainian scholars. The special attention of Western scholars is focused on the figure and work of M. Khvylovy, on the VAPLITE organization, the literary discussion of 1925–1928, the avant-garde of the twenties of the last century.

**The purpose** of the article is to objectively assess the contribution of the Canadian literary critic O. Ilnytskyi to the understanding of the specifics of Ukrainian futurism, since the Canadian literary critic was one of the first to give him the opportunity to realize himself in his history, theory and works.

**Presentation of the main material of the research.** O. Ilnytskyi belongs to those diaspora Ukrainians, thanks to whom a «new view of Soviet literature» was created [8, p. 51]. In his research, the literary critic mainly studies the literary process of the 20s and 30s in Ukraine. «Ukrainian Futurism (1914–1930)» is a doctoral dissertation (1979–1983) by O. Ilnytskyi, written under the supervision of Professor J. Grabovych. This work, subsequently significantly revised and expanded, became the basis of the book with the same name. The theme of the work «Ukrainian Futurism (1914–1930)» is the history of a little-known avant-garde that appeared in fiction. The scientific investigation of the Canadian literary critic, which is the object of this study, is devoted to a detailed analysis of the artistic breakthrough made by M. Semenko, G. Shkurupii, O. Slisarenko, L. Kurbas, and others. and thanks to which, for the first time in several centuries, Ukrainian culture found itself at the forefront of European artistic life.

Ukrainian futurism debuted at a time when Ukrainian society was asking itself the question of what the new national cultural norm should be. «The main principle of the new culture was the rejection of populism and provincialism (the brand of Ukrainian colonialism in the empire) and the recognition of Europe – primarily in its traditionalist and classical version – as the primary cultural model» [9, p. 12]. It is clear that the intelligentsia of those times reacted with alarm to the sudden emergence of a radical artistic movement that rejected tradition – together with the father of new Ukrainian literature T. Shevchenko – and the idea of «national» art, while at the same time being fascinated by the charms of everything exotic, exceptional and new. The Ukrainian «virtuous» society immediately attacked futurism as a foreign encroachment on the national and wanted to get rid of it in the name of good taste

and high art. M. Shkandrii recalls that «the futurists appeared as Martians, not connected to any country, nationality and, in general, to this planet... As beings devoid of spinal cords, algebraic formula, endowed, by the will of the demiurge, with human faces, two-dimensional shadows, eternal abstractions» [11, p. 143].

Trying to conceptualize Ukrainian futurism, we realize that the very name of the movement does not exhaust its essence. Working on his scientific research, O. Ilnytskyi set himself the goal of giving Ukrainian futurism a chance to define itself in its history, theory and works; to fit it into the context of the European and Russian avant-gardes and to record, at least in general, some of the most prominent ideological and artistic features that compare it to its contemporaries and immediate predecessors. According to the scientist, Ukrainian futurism is a heterogeneous avant-garde movement on a broad basis. However, «it is not about style or mannerism, but about a certain understanding of art» [4, p. 377]. His «aesthetics» are novelty and the ability to surprise. Against the background of a wider context, the movement is part of the 20th century reaction to naturalism, realism and representational art of the entire 20th century. Ukrainian futurism, formalistic in nature, is fully aware of its own techniques and methods. He replaced the metaphysics of modernism with rationalism. Ukrainian futurists believed that they would be able to combine art and life.

According to the Canadian scientist, Ukrainian futurism was not so much researched as it was involved in comparisons. Comparative studios invariably identified it as «anemic» and called it a timid echo of some much more original, more perfect proto-movement. Focusing on the title, critics noticed almost nothing in it that was not indicated by someone else's source» [6, p. 365].

The diverse and at first glance contradictory literary practice of Ukrainian futurism, as the literary critic asserts, owes its consistency and unity to one important «foundation» – experiment, that is, it is about the «inevitable capture of novelty». Contrary to the requirements of the time and again due to cultural and political circumstances that led to the downplaying or even masking of the main principle, the movement was still guided by it. Even in 1930, Mykhailo Semenko insisted: «...we say that it is necessary to take care not only of today, but also of tomorrow, and this requires certain tests and experiments, that is, in practice – successful and unsuccessful experiments» [4, p. 251].

The Canadian scientist summarizes the importance of Ukrainian futurism as follows: firstly, it was one of the main historical events without which one cannot comprehend and understand the most important periods of Ukrainian culture in the 1910s and 1920s; secondly, he is an original literary phenomenon that has left behind a work of unsurpassed value and attractiveness. O. Ilnytskyi's research shows that Ukrainian futurism was not insignificant, uncommon (especially by the standards of the avant-garde), and unpatriotic. Before us is one of the most important movements of its time – and any history of literature that neglects its ideology and aesthetic positions gives an incomplete and distorted picture of the literary process.

History testifies to his energy, determination and indomitable spirit. He overcame opponents from almost every stratum of Ukrainian society and constantly demonstrated his independence, acting as an exceptional force in the fight against cultural stagnation. In 1914, Semenko was ahead of his time, touching on many problems that arose during the great literary debate: among them, the question of artistic quality and the humming («sincere») nature of Ukrainian

literature was particularly important. For this, he deserves the same respect as the members of VAPLITE. Like them, Semenko's organizations helped to combat the influence of such vulgar literary groups as «Plow» and VUSPP. Being avant-garde, that is, always «ahead», futurism naturally had a limited number of potential supporters, but its influence, according to O. Ilnytskyi, on the cultural arena was greater than critics admit. Futurists were surprisingly successful in recruiting followers and converting writers to their cause. The push they gave spread, of course, even without their participation. It was thanks to radicalism that Futurism helped pave the way for other innovative writers and contributed significantly to maintaining the spirit of constant discovery, which was so felt in the Ukrainian culture of that time. Without a doubt, he influenced the general atmosphere and accelerated the flowering of free verse and experimental prose. The creativity of the writers Y. Smolich, M. Johansen and Y. Yanovsky cannot be considered without paying attention to the ideas of «left» prose. Even the poems of such a poet as P. Tychyna («Chernigiv») cannot be evaluated without mentioning futurism. The interest at that time in the genres of reportage and travelogues should also not be separated from similar development trends in M. Semenko's movement.

During the life of M. Semenko, there was only one occasion when a critic tried to evaluate and rethink his poetic work relatively calmly and impartially. This was done in 1925 by the scientist B. Yakubovsky after the publication of Semenko's «Kobzar» – selected from 1910–1922. Unlike his predecessors, B. Yakubovsky saw in him a «first-rate revolutionary poet», «a real artist», «a real lyricist» [4; 263]. He emphasized that Ukrainian literary criticism is unable to properly evaluate either the poet or his direction. Seeking to «understand and explain» Semenko, B. Yakubovsky emphasized the unique historical role played by the poet's poetic work in Ukrainian literature and attached great importance to his formalistic fascination. One of the reasons why science was not successful in «understanding» and «explaining» M. Semenko is that, contrary to the unequivocal image of M. Semenko, the works he wrote could be reduced to a simple classification and definition.

Today, Mykhailo Semenko is returning to literature, criticism restores him in the rights of a poet. In his scientific works, O. Ilnytskyi urges us to look at M. Semenko as an organic avant-garde. «I have no doubt that every attempt to understand his life and work outside this context will be a futile effort» [10, p. 41].

M. Semenko's avant-gardism can be proven not only by his seventeen-year dedication to this work, but also by his creativity itself. Between 1913 and 1936, he published at least thirty separate books of poetry. According to O. Ilnytskyi, this number of works, as well as the method of their publication, were for M. Semenko an integral part of his creative, avant-garde act. The content of his work was not to «play only good chords» [11, p. 42]. In his literary work, M. Semenko never pretended to be a complete futurist, he did not even aspire to it, because he believed that in this way he would limit his own freedom of creativity. He did not strive for a canon, but rather for a search. Critics expected futuristic aestheticism from him. For M. Semenko, practicing and improving even the "futuristic" style stood in the way of literary play and formal experiments. Let us emphasize that throughout his creative activity he was in constant literary progress: he demonstrated changes in the genre of strophe, rhyme, line, language, and intonation; even the psychological posture of the lyrical hero changes. This also explains the genre uniqueness of most of his works. We will find

in him «povel», visual poetry, sound poetry, so-called «found», or «ready-made» (found, ready-made) poetry (his famous «Monday, Tuesday...»), and much more. All this is tested, but not for long. Sometimes the test is unsuccessful, sometimes it reaches a high level of artistry, but he does not return to the tested. He is constantly looking for a new approach, storming the boundaries of what is allowed, achieved, defended both in his own work and in literature in general. Lyrics make up the largest part of his output, but they too are constantly changing and eventually discarded. His work is so diverse that «it is often difficult to recognize Semenko in Semenko» [10, p. 42].

**Conclusions.** M. Semenko is an avant-garde precisely because of his unusual approach to literature and literary creativity; O. Ilnytskyi believes that M. Semenko is an avant-gardist with his «sequential inconsistency». In order to understand him correctly, it is not enough to focus only on individual works, to understand the originality of his rhyme, syntax, language, etc., because M. Semenko was not a reformer or an innovator in the traditional sense of the word – it was a dialogue with creativity, with literature as such. According to O. Ilnytskyi, M. Semenko with his «process» denies traditional «great» literature and even the very title of «poet». In this way, he complicates the traditional connection that exists between the writer and the reader, who is obliged to navigate in completely new forms and styles.

Future researchers will probably someday note that Ukrainian literary studies went through three stages in the interpretation of futurism and the work of M. Semenko: the first – objections: (it is harmful and dangerous for Ukrainian culture); in the second stage, futurism still remained a negative phenomenon, but began the first attempts at rehabilitation of M. Semenko; finally, at the third stage, a complete understanding of futurism and the determination of its role in the leader's work was reached.

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#### Чобанюк М. М. Український футуризм ХХ століття: погляд західних українців

**Анотація.** Цілісне вивчення літературознавчого доробку українського зарубіжжя лише починається. Статтю присвячено актуальній для сучасного літературознавства проблемі – вивченню праць західних українців. Об'єкт цієї розвідки – об'ємний доробок західних літературознавців-українців, що пов'язаний з історією української літератури ХХ століття. Вона була стимулом літературознавчих досліджень Ю. Лаврінченка, Ю. Шереха, Ю. Луцького, О. Ільницького, Г. Грабовича, М. Шкандрія, М. Павлишина та інших. Передусім маємо на увазі український ренесанс 20-х років. Українська література 20–30-х років з легкої руки Ю. Лаврінченка – автора антології, що названа «розстріляним відродженням», стала для американських українців пріоритетною темою дослідження. Особлива увага західних науковців зосереджена на постаті та творчості М. Хвильового, на організації ВАПЛІТЕ, літературній дискусії 1925–1928 рр., авангарду двадцятих років минулого століття.

У статті акцентується, що досвід західного українознавства недостатньо вивчений у материковій науці про літературу. Автор намагається об'єктивно оцінити внесок канадського літературознавця Олега Ільницького в осмисленні специфіки українського футуризму, оскільки літературознавець з Канади одним із перших надав йому можливість самореалізуватися в його історії, теорії та творах. О. Ільницький належить до тих діаспорних українців, завдяки яким витворився «новий погляд на радянську літературу». Український футуризм дебютував тоді, коли українське суспільство ставило перед собою питання про те, якою повинна стати нова національна культурна норма. Працюючи над своїм науковим дослідженням, О. Ільницький поставив за мету дати українському футуризму шанс самоокреслитися в його історії, теорії та творах; вписати його у контекст європейського авангарду і зафіксувати, хоча б загально, деякі з найприкметніших ідеологічних та художніх ознак, що уподібнюють його до сучасників і найближчих попередників.

**Ключові слова:** Олег Ільницький, футуризм, українознавство, специфіка, літературне явище.