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ECOCRITICAL CHALLENGES OF UKRAINIAN LITERARY STUDIES

The paper represents how Ukrainian literature strives to combine democratization with the persistent memory of post-Soviet approaches to solving social problems. One aspect of this transitional process is the society's effort to overcome typical social indifference on the part of Ukrainian citizens and cultivate a more active sense of civic responsibility and engagement among the public. The paper deals with the stages of ecocritical writings within the Ukrainian literary studies as well as represents Ukrainian researchers and scholars who initiated ecocritical movement within the Ukrainian context.

Key words: ecocriticism, ecocritical narration, eco-consciousness, ecological ethics, ecocritical imperatives.

Describing the relationship between nature and Ukrainian culture requires distinguishing between the two major parts of Ukraine's bilateral character. This includes the physical environment and its ethnic traditions – this can be termed as the eco-ethnic complex. Eco-ethnic factors have given rise to the conflict between industrialization in Ukraine's territories and historically and ethnically rooted nature-oriented spirituality. The tensions between industrialization and nature adoration are the essence of the contemporary environmental predicament in Ukraine [9, p. 63]. "Ethnic-nature" relations impact the specific ethnic character that is regarded as a set of social and psychological features (feelings, values, psychological intentions, emotions, etc.) that are determined by social, economic, historical as well as geographical factors concerning how society functions and can appear in culture, traditions, and customs.

The distinct features of Ukrainian ethnic character include individualism, executiveness, introversion, tolerance, and emotional abundance, the complex combination of which influences the formation of Ukrainians' eco-consciousness as well as the further development of the country's economy and industrial activity [9, p. 63].

The contemporary ecological situation in Ukraine represents the dynamics of ecological culture formation of the Ukrainian society. Ukrainian ecological culture certainly includes substantial knowledge about nature, as is evident in the agricultural system; the reliance on the seasonal calendar even in urban settings in the twenty-first century; nature's impact on folk art and folk medicine; and poetic images in Ukrainian folklore. These are only a few examples of how various kinds of ecological knowledge systems continue to permeate Ukrainian culture, even as the society confronts challenges of industrialization and economic development.

Ukrainian culture has always been greatly influenced by its natural environment. Its folk wisdom has preserved and transmitted a careful attitude toward nature, based on a practical, rational understanding of how best to use natural resources. The Ukrainian people have not traditionally resisted nature, on the contrary they have always had emotional attachment to the natural world and a respectful attitude toward nature, regarding it as being of equal, or even superior, status. Despite the Ukrainian worldview's changes in recent decades, Ukrainian culture is characterized by its tight, unbreakable links with nature throughout history [6, p. 42].

Ukraine's ecological culture has shifted its trajectory of development from an agricultural focus to a technological focus. This development parallels a transition from the nature-centered beliefs of Slavic heathens through the theologically-centered principles of Christianity and anthropocentric attitudes toward nature. This was typical of Ukraine when it was of the totalitarian Soviet state, but now it has turned towards a newly restored nature-centered ecological ethics. The recent formation of ecological ethics is based on a new awareness of the Earth as a crucial life-support system, up-to-date science, and contemporary religious beliefs as well as other cultural components including economic demands.

In thinking about the development of Ukrainians' new ecological consciousness, it is necessary to pay special attention to the economic causes of both contemporary ecological crises and environmental policy formation. The rise of consumption in the anthropogenic environment is based not on the environmental resources but on human needs and wishes.

The ethical aspects of human attitudes toward nature in the Ukrainian cultural tradition determine the moral principles of human-nature relations in the Ukrainian worldview. Ukrainian ancestors comprehended a sophisticated system of environmental values. A fundamental love and adoration toward nature is a central feature of the Ukrainian mentality. Widely shared Slavic religious beliefs emphasized a non-dualistic understanding of the relationships between humans and the non-human world and stressed the equal value of all living creatures. Adopting Christianity and Western European philosophical ideas promoted the sense of humans' dominant role in human-nature relations in what has come to be contemporary Ukraine. Christianity, with its clearly defined anthropocentric perspective, justified dualistic principles of human-nature relations and stressed environmental exploitation as one purposes. Due to the new, more ecologically sensitive Christian philosophy, environmental adoration has begun to be substituted for the more rational, exploitative approach towards nature. At the same time, Christianity, as practiced in Eastern Europe, has called for responsibility not only in interpersonal relations but also in human relationships toward all natural phenomena [2, p. 202].

The ecologically-centered tendency of Ukrainian literary studies as a separate tendency asserted itself in the 1970s and 1980s under the name "ecological aesthetics" (*Tatiana Fedortsova, Maksym Rylskiy, Volodymyr Pokrovskiy, Vadym Romanenko, Anatoliy Sydelkovskiy*) [3, p. 17]. The field was a part of aesthetic studies, devoted to researching relations between humans and nature and the biosphere. This occurred during a period of deep ecological crisis due to 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. This was a period when acute ecological problems typical throughout the territory of the Soviet Union became prevalent in Ukraine. For instance, Government-sponsored projects changed the course of rivers in Siberia, polluted Lake Baikal and produced human-made seas with the objective of building new hydroelectric plants. The new ecological aesthetics was aimed, by contrast, at the development of reasonable behavioral norms, which could regulate "human-nature" relations in their ecological, cultural, social, and aesthetic aspects in order to keep the balance between the environment and cultural values. This vision of ecological problems greatly influenced the aesthetic views of the environment in Ukraine.

Literature and film played major roles in the process of supporting the evolution of a new ecological culture in Ukraine. For instance, literary critics have identified a recurring motif in Ukrainian fiction that focuses specifically on human-made seas and their destructive consequences and effects. Instances of early literary interventions that offer resistance to ecological catastrophes in the region are the novella *The Poem about the Sea* (1956) by Oleksandr Dovzhenko (Олександр Довженко, *Поема про море*), the novel *Birds Leaving Their Nests* (1965) by Ivan Chendey (Іван Чендея, *Птахи залишають гнізда*), and the novella *Farewell to Matyora* (1976) by Valentin Rasputin (Валентин Распутін, *Прощання з Матьорою*) to name a few.

Oleksandr Dovzhenko's *The Poem about the Sea* was regarded as one of the author's great works, a narrative about "the labor and the beauty" as well as "the ethnos's souls" [9, p. 33]. Critics refer to it as proof of the author's "great magnitude of romanticism" [4, p. 96]. Later fiction by Oleksandr Dovzhenko as well as works by Ivan Chendey and Valentin Rasputin have been regarded as a fictional treatments of human stories connected with the urgent ecological

problems of those times. The most resonant fiction of that period was a novel called *The Cathedral* (1967) by Oles Honchar (*Собор*), where the writer emphasized the long-standing problem of negligent attitudes toward the Samara cathedral – one of the most unique and exquisite cultural memorials in Ukrainian culture. The concern with environmental degradation and negligent treatment of cultural monuments went together and represented a new mid-twentieth-century Ukrainian struggle to restore both cultural phenomena that had been undermined by the Soviet system and the natural environment that had been trashed by Soviet-era industrialization.

The reaction of critics (Ukrainian as well as foreign) to these works of fiction began to pay attention to the ecological features of Ukrainian literature as well as its new problems, themes, and even terminology. The subject of ”Human-Nature” has always been and still is among the main problems of Ukrainian literature.

While speaking about the early background of ecological criticism in Ukrainian literary studies, it is necessary to mention the works by Euvgen Malanyuk, 1897–1968 (*Malanyuk Euvgen. Ukrainian Literature in the Contemporary Vision. Literary Heralds. Vol. 7 (1932). P. 626–633 – Маланюк Євген. Українська література в світлі сучасності. Літературно-науковий вісник, 1932. Кн. 7. С. 626–633*), Yuriy Lypa, 1900-1944 (*Lypa Yuriy. Assignment of Ukraine, N.Y., 1933 – Липа Юрій. Призначення України, Нью-Йорк, 1933*), Dmytro Chyzhevsky, 1894–1977 (*Chyzhevsky Dmytro. A History of Ukrainian Literature, N.Y., 1975 – Чижевський Дмитро. Історія української літератури, Нью-Йорк, 1975*), who spoke about the geographical factor as the main “coordinator” of Ukrainian thinking, way of living, world perception as well as ecological culture, which is based on Slavic traditions, religion and morality and which corresponds to the “biological rhythms” of Ukrainian nature. These works did not mention “ecological approach” towards narration analysis, but they formed the background for its further development in Ukrainian literary studies. Later Ukrainian fiction works were analysed in the aspect of researching the close relations “human-nature” as well as “human-earth”. The national specificity of ecological approach towards fiction works analysis was implemented in researching issues on environmental protection in its multilevel representations (including issues on harm and crime against nature, nature protections for further generations, escapism ideas, etc) which forms the ecological culture of a character. Among the first works, mentioning about ecological approach towards Ukraininan literature, stands “*The Image of “Earth” in Ukrainian and Canadian Literature*”, 1996 *(“Міфологема землі в канадській та українській літературі”*, 1996) by Natalia Ovcharenko, one of the contemporary Ukrainian literary scholars. For Ukrainian literary traditions ”earth” is not only soil, “’earth” is life, hope, joy, wealth, as said Natalia Ovcharenko along with other literary critics of Ukrainian literature.

Nowadays ecocritical movement in Ukraine is at its dawning point. The first steps of implementing the ecocritical toolkit towards narration analysis within the Ukrainian literary studies were made by Oleksandr Kozlov (1937-2010), one of the brightest theorists of literary criticism in Ukraine. He spoke about ecocriticism movement at his lectures and numerous conference debates, but because of his disease he had no chance to have his articles on these issues published. Beside the author of this article, Ukrainian ecocriticism is among the academic interests of two Ukrainian literary scholars: Larysa Gorbolis with her *“Екологічна культура героїв у художньому потрактуванні українських письменників” (*2010) and *”Екокритичні виміри української літератури: доцільність і прийнятність застосування (на прикладі «Лісової пісні» Лесі Українки)” (*2011) as well as Mykola Tkachuk “*Людина і природа в українській літературі крізь призму екокритики” (*2011). These works demonstrate that ecocriticism within Ukrainian context is the crossroads of ecological aesthetics and literary studies, based on religious and social points. Nonetheless, this new attention to environmental and social restoration was not enough to transform Ukrainian society and overcome the negative effects of industrialization.

The process of adopting new eco-imperatives in the society is a multistaged one. First scientists, dealing with ecological and environmental issues, face the necessity of changing the situation. Then philosophers comprehend the situation as well as form the concepts of post-Chernobyl human’s attitude towards the environment. And finally politicians and non-governmental organizations have real possibility to influence the course of events and implement

real plants in order to provide not only democratic but also ecological development of the society. This situation can encourage the Ukrainians to implement the new ecological consciousness and form the ecological future of Ukraine, as *Anatoliy Tolstoukhov*, a Ukrainian politician and scholar, mentioned [8, p. 175].

Thus, it is quite early to state that Ukrainian literary studies can have the tendency to present well-formed ecocritical research, especially in comparison to the achievements of the North American literary criticism where the content of ecocriticism, its connections with the contemporary ecological thinking, and the methods of implementing the ecocritical toolkit in textual analysis are well developed. Ukrainian literary studies have reached the point of feeling the urgent need to push forward in the direction of ecocritical research, as Ukrainian ecological consciousness is now sufficient to offer both the background for this research and a major source of ethnic self-understanding, which will enable future Ukrainian artists, writers and scholars to make a unique contribution to the field. The history of Ukrainian society, as a Soviet state and as a region that became world famous as a nuclear disaster zone, may seem to defy the possibility of a viable ecologically sensitive society. However, as I have tried to suggest in my article, there is a deep, pre-Soviet tradition of environmental respect and concern among the Ukrainian people, and the excruciating disaster that took place at Chernobyl in 1986 has helped to bring forth the sense of traditional attachment to and concern for nature within this society. Far from being merely crushed – or irradiated – by this catastrophe, Ukrainians have used Chernobyl to trigger cultural self-awareness and renewed ecological attentiveness. Our literature proves that cultural identity and environmental consciousness go hand in hand.

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Розглянуто передумови та етапи становлення екокритичних досліджень в сучасному українському літературознавстві. Увага акцентується на національних особливостях екокритичної візії у контексті формування екокритичних імперативів сучасної української літератури. Розглядається специфіка впливу екоцентричного наративу на формування екологічної свідомості українського етносу. Уведено в обіг провідні ідеї екокритичного доробку сучасних українських літературознавців, які і репрезентують сферу та стан функціонування «екокритики» у сучасному українському контексті.

Ключові слова: екокритика, екокритичний наратив, екосвідомість, екологічна етика, екокритичні імперативи.

Рассмотрены предпосылки и этапы становления экокритических исследований в современном украинском литературоведении. Внимание акцентуется на национальных особенностях экокритической визии в контексте формирования экокритических императивов современной украинской литературы. Изучается специфика влияния экоцентричного наратива на формирование экологического сознания украинского этноса. Введены в оборот основные идеи экокритических работ современных украинских литературоведов, которые и представляют сферу функционирования «экокритики» в современном украинском контексте.

Ключевые слова: экокритика, экокритический нарратив, экосознание, экологическая этика, экокритические императивы.

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