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## SHAPING MODERN UKRAINIAN IDENTITY: DEMIURGIC ACTIVITIES OF UKRAINIAN WRITERS

**B a c k g r o u n d .** *The creative activity of Ukrainian word artists was an important component of the creation of Ukrainian national identity during the 20th and early 21st centuries. The goal of this article is to investigate the dynamics and main stimuli of the creative efforts of Ukrainian cultural figures in its connection with socio-political development (especially in part of the national identity formation process) of Ukraine before and after 1991.*

**M e t h o d s .** *The following methods were used: content- and discourse analysis, historical-comparative analysis.*

**R e s u l t s .** *Due to Ukraine's long stay as a part of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires, the Ukrainian language factor acquired exceptional importance for the formation of Ukrainian identity. No less significant was the existence of Ukrainian and Ukrainian-language translated literature as a basis for the creation of a full-blooded Ukrainian spiritual and intellectual space, without which the formation of a sovereign nation is impossible. The creativity of Ukrainian artists after 1991 is considered as a reminiscence of the demiurgic efforts of the Ukrainian revival of the 20s and 30s of the XX century. Both periods became exceptionally productive thanks to the personal efforts of Ukrainian artists, aimed at overcoming the "lethargic state" of Ukrainian culture in pre-revolutionary times (before 1917) and during the years of the Soviet regime after the short revival.*

*The article examines those directions of Ukrainian cultural development that ensured the vitality and fruitfulness of Ukrainian culture through the destruction of taboos imposed from the outside, prescriptions of an alien cultural canon and ideological teachings; introduction of author's language innovations in artistic and translated texts; translation of works of a wide variety of genres and styles. In the same context, the importance of the work of diaspora artists is emphasized. Special attention is paid to the activities of foreign creators, whose work enriched Ukrainian cultural oecumen with the best intellectual achievements of world importance; as well as those creators who made the Ukrainian cultural product accessible to a foreign audience through the creation of anthologies, including bilingual ones.*

*The peculiarities of the demiurgic activity of modern Ukrainian artists in wartime after the beginning of Russia's large-scale military aggression against Ukraine are also taken under consideration.*

**C o n c l u s i o n s .** *The socio-political processes of the country an influential factor and a stimulus for the individual creative activity of Ukrainian writers, cultural figures and intellectuals. The nature of their creative activity closely correlates with the process of formation of Ukrainian national identity.*

**K e y w o r d s :** *demiurge, creative activity, creator, Ukrainian national identity, Ukrainian culture, Ukrainian literature, Ukrainian diaspora.*

### Background

The XX century became an exceptionally important period for processes of shaping of modern Ukrainian identity. During this time it went through transformations of its status – from a "non-existence" in prerevolutionary discourse of Russian Empire to a "quasi-existence" in the discourse of the Soviet Empire, and after 1991 Ukrainian identity reached the point when it was equalized with an identity of the "subject of the state sovereignty."

The goal of this article is to investigate the dynamics and main stimuli of the creative efforts of Ukrainian writers, cultural figures and intellectuals in its connection with socio-political development (especially in part of the national identity formation process) of Ukraine before and after 1991.

### Methods

To achieve the pointed goal, the methods of content and discourse analysis as well as historical and comparative analysis were used.

### Results

The language factor played a leading role in these transformations. Since the language was traditionally perceived as the most striking feature of ethno-national separateness (individuality) of the nation it became a center point for crystalizing of the notion of the nation as such. It is a well-known fact that when "it comes to national

identity and self-determination, then in the most safety way they can be proved by linguistic arguments since it is precisely language which is given to every individual in its perception as an inseparable part of his/her self and as a tool for categorization of the surrounding world according to criteria own/alien" (Berezovenko, 2013, c. 332).

In this context it looks clear why Russian Empire used to put such an enormous amount of efforts (134 bans on the Ukrainian language over 400 years (Virchenko, 2011, pp. 4-28) to prohibit the usage of the Ukrainian language. The fact itself of its existence was in such a contradiction with existential needs of the Russian Empire that no wonder it tried hard through the prohibition of the Ukrainian language to destroy Ukrainian identity, Ukraine's subjectivity. These political tasks were not removed from the political agenda of Russian Empire up to its disintegration in 1917, they remained fully relevant during the Soviet rule as well, and they are still not less important for the current Russian regime, which pursuing them in the most barbaric way – through the unprovoked full-scaled military aggression started on February 24, 2022.

Two Russian revolutions – 1905–1907 and 1917 – brought about the appearance of the Ukrainian Word in the public cultural space. Specifically, when in 1904 "in order to revise the acting decrees restricting the rights of

**inorodtsy**" (Shevelov, 1987, p. 44) the Head of the Committee of Ministers of the Russian Empire Sergey Vitte was authorized to execute such revision. For this purpose there was a Commission of the Academy of Sciences formed. The latter one released a note "On the abolition of restrictions on the Little Russian printed word" (authors: Eugeniy Korsh and Alexey Shakhmatov) which was supported by the Russian Academy of Sciences (Shevelov, 1987, p. 44). Even with the recession of the revolution of 1905–1907 when the restrictions of the Ukrainian word started to be applied again the February revolution of 1917 restored the liberation process of the public usage of the Ukrainian language. This confirmed the right of the Ukrainian nation to its subjectivity with all consequences this fact presupposes.

Over all as of the beginning of the XX century Ukrainian people existed in the power fields of two empires – Romanov's and Habsburg's – which have made political and language development of Ukraine inconsistent and uneven.

If in the borders of the liberal Austrian Empire Ukrainian identity was supported by functioning of Ukrainian schools and scientific organizations, by Ukrainian presence in the Parliament, then within Russian Empire only the revolutions of 1905–1907 and 1917 have pushed the regime to abolish numerous restrictions of the Ukrainian language and to recognize its existence officially.

After October 1917 Revolution the processes of establishing of national and state identity and closely linked to them purposeful policy of cultural and language building started to unfold vigorously. The period of Ukrainian Renaissance (1920–1930s) is rightfully called as a "golden decade" of the Ukrainian linguistic thought. These years were not just a period of the recovering of language, its standardization and codification, but it was also time when the linguistic tools for intellectual onward through massive development of terminology, lexicography and establishing of full-bodied scholarly discourse were taking place. The center of this activity became an Institute of the Ukrainian Scientific Language established in 1921, directed by unique philologist Ahatanhel Kryms'ky. This institution created ruffly 40 terminological dictionaries (out of which only 15 were published) (Tyschenko, 2019, p. 51).

In this light the existence of the Ukrainian diaspora should not be undermined. The Ukrainians who emigrated from Ukraine during XIX–XX centuries established overseas numerous centers of cultural, scientific and political life (for example – Shevchenko Scientific Society (in many countries of Europe, America, and Australia) (Lev, 1972) or Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences (Yevtuch, 2019, p. 548–550). Until the fall of the USSR certain cultural forms were not just preserved but also developed in diaspora. Here the unengaged political and scientific thinking existed in plural forms. For example, the usage of Kharkiv 1928 Orthography was cultivated along with Ukrainian orthographies of 1946 and 1960. In emigration Yuri Shevelov has created his principal for the shaping of state and national identity of Ukraine fundamental linguistic works – *A Prehistory of Slavs: The Historical Phonology of Common Slavic* (1965) and *A Historical Phonology of the Ukrainian Language* (1979). These works played a key role in solving a scientific "problem of the origin of the Ukrainian language" which Shevelov himself considered as a "central theme and problem of his scholarly life" (Shevelov, 2001, p. 278). In general, he believed that he did no less for his realm (that is Ukrainian language, literature, and culture) than Hrushevskyi did for the history of Ukraine. He wrote about this: "I do think without false

modesty that in my field I have done no less than Hrushevskyi in his" (Shevelov, 1983).

Ukrainian identity of a Soviet type was a product of the policy, which Shevelov defined as a "silky Russification". In essence it was a legitimization of selected reduced forms of a national self-expression. Practically it meant the following: 1) absence of national elite, 2) insufficient functioning of the national language, 3) lack or absence of the urban forms of culture. Any manifestation of national identity of Ukrainians that potentially could push them to realize their "will to power" and consequently to act in the direction of making the *desirable* happened were purposefully oppressed by Soviet authorities.

Therefore, the declaration of the independence of Ukraine became a trigger of the fulfillment with a real content of all functions of the state, of the affirming of its real sovereignty. In other words, it initiated the departure from the image and from the role of the "younger brother/sister" of "great Russian people". In the realm of culture it meant, first of all, the overcoming of Social Realistic canons, genre, stylistic, and linguistic inferiority, caused by the reduced modus of the existence of the nation and national culture.

After independence the activities of Ukrainian intelligentsia – scientists, writers, publishers – appears as a reminiscence of the 1920s–30s. Conquering the "lethargy condition" of the Ukrainian cultural and political processes of the Soviet times and pursuing the national renaissance through the renaissance of the full-bodied functioning of the national culture, Ukrainian creators crossed the borders of the role of the "corps de ballet" of the power and started to be a power itself, which changes World in the accessible for it way, namely – through the creating of the cultural space in models and dimensions which are univocal with the newest impulses of the most progressive contemporary cultures. In fact, the Ukrainian creative writers are becoming *creators – demiurges*<sup>1</sup>, who do not "create in the World," but who "create the World" while removing limitations of the alien canons, overcoming restrictions and prescriptions of alien political regimes which had been defined the ways of the existence of Ukraine before independence.

As the consistent and conscious activity the demiurgy was manifested in creative activities of Yuri Andrukhovych, Victor Neborak and Olexander Irvanets. Well before the independence (in 1985) they "institutionalized" their activities through the founding of a celebrating poetry group "Bu-Ba-Bu" (they even "distributed" the "positions" there: *Patriarch*, *Procurator*, *Pidscarbiy*). Through Burlesque – Baboonery – Buffoonery this "poetical institution" (no matter to what extend this institutionalization was carnival) it positioned itself as the entity that is capable to resist, stand against the seriousness, gravity, of the official Soviet discourse. And it did. In the mirror of writings of these "peripheral" – from the imperial point of view – writers (yet it was so called *Stanislav Phenomenon*) the different, non-peripheral, Ukrainian identity appeared. The heroes of the writings of these authors are depicted as real Masters of not only their *native tongue* (which appeared to be not a rural, but great, sharp, and modern) as well as of their homeland and at the same time they are absolutely organically inscribed in the landscape of Europe, they

<sup>1</sup> The self-assessment of the Ukrainian writers' creativity after 1991 as being designed to create a "nominative-content space" of individual creators in a "demiurgical way" and to avoid wrapping the home-land literature in a "neopopulist shroud" was presented in two prefaces to *Small Ukrainian Encyclopedia of Current Literature*, 1998: "The Return of Demiurges" by Volodymyr Yeshkeliv and "The Return of Literature?" by Yuri Andrukhovych.

express original thoughts in different foreign languages in front of deeply interested Europeans etc.

The book *Mala Ukrainska Entsyklopedia Aktualnoi Literatury "Povernennia Demiurhiv"* (1998) became a manifest, formulated by its editors Yuri Andrukchovych and Volodymyr Yeshkeliv on behalf of all Ukrainian creators, that declared in absolutely alien for the Socialistic Realism canon the mocking way of achieving the desirable for all writers of new, free Ukraine's goal, namely – "to convert the *current* cultural situation into the *free future* one." Deriving from the postulate "The Text – it is Me!" the authors declared the creation of the Selves, of Ukraine, of the World in texts, and through texts, and beyond texts, as a mode of the existence of independent Ukrainian Spirit and – broader – of independent Ukraine. In such a way the creative writers are equalizing themselves with the Creator since they create, organize *Ukraine-Text*, leaving behind the canons and taboos of Russian-Soviet existence of Ukraine.

The creators-demiurges of new Ukraine revise canonical perceptions, rethink both: the creative heritage as well as the personality of the symbolic figures for Ukraine, removing from their images layers of the Social Realistic "polish" and developing its own unengaged look on Taras Shevchenko (*Shevchenko, jakoho ne znayemo* by Hryhorii Hrabovych (1996), *Pop-Shevchenko: variatsii na temu Shevchenka v suchasnij ukraїnskij literaturi* by Tamara Hundorova (2011); Ivan Franko (*Franko – ne kameniar* by Tamara Hundorova (1996); Lesia Ukrainka (*Notre Dame d'Ukraine. Ukrainka v konflikti mifolohij* by Oksana Zabuzhko (2007) etc.

But the canon is being transformed demiurgically not only through the revision of "the established," but also through the inclusion into the cultural circulation of those creative pieces that once were excluded (for example, the works of Vasyl Stus) and through their well-grounded studying.

The image of Ukrainian text for which the "desirable characteristics" according to the Soviet canon requirements were: the modesty of desires, the charm of the rural leaving, and, of course – the prescribed innocence of characters and of the language they spoke, was liberated from such "qualities" by new Ukrainian writers. The long-lasting traditional taboos were destroyed, their relevancy for Ukraine was objected. This objection was incorporated in masterpieces' titles themselves. For example, Zabuzhko's novel was named *The Field Research in the Ukrainian Sex* [Poliovi doslidzhennia z ukraїnskoho seksu] (1997), Solomiya Pavlychko's book was named *Nationalism, Sexuality, Orientalism: the Complicated World of Ahatanhel Kryms'ky* [Natsionalizm, seksualnist', orientalism: skladnyj svit Ahatanhela Kryms'koho] (1999). By all means the Ukrainian writers-demiurges were trying hard in order to liberate Ukraine from simplistic, undemanding and, consequently, un-perspective existential models, which were imposed from the outside. The innocence of the Ukrainian texts was taken by writers-demiurges as a sign of the cultural fruitlessness. That is why the newest texts were stuffed with a substandard, often made up by authors themselves in order to compensate the lack of the proper verbal means. The latter ones were not produced in a natural way by the language system since Ukrainian was not functioning on a full scale as an urban communicative tool. The elements (words, phrases, plot schema, topics etc.) which are related to the bottom of the human's body, its sexuality, its fertility are being invented/introduced in the texts in order to take away Ukrainian Text from the boundaries of the frozen, unfertile Socialistic Realistic canon.

The demiurgic nature of Ukrainian intelligentsia's activities displayed not only in their texts, but also in the institutional reformation of the cultural realm of Post-Soviet Ukraine. In 1997 George Grabovych initiated the foundation of the monthly intellectual magazine and publishing house "Krytyka" that follows a model of "New York Review of Books". This magazine became a space for unengaged, free of prejudices thoughts exchange, a forum for the dialogue between the intellectuals and the Ukrainian-speaking community both: in and out of Ukraine. In essence the "Krytyka" 's texts "formed" a space, where the world is being thought in terms and categories which are relevant for the most sophisticated intellectual search of the present time. Through the publications of "Krytyka" the discursive practice of Ukraine is being saturated not only by brilliant ideas, but also by the brilliant names, such as: Noam Chomsky, Umberto Eco, Slavoy Zhizhek, Jerzy Giedroyc, Andreas Kappeler etc. In this way the symbolically valuable signs – which are the names of the world-wide prominent authors – started to be perceived by the audience as a part of their "own" cultural space. In this manner the Ukrainian cultural reality is being taken out of the paradigm of the subjugated, peripheral existence and being included into the world cultural process on the nominative-verbal level as well.

The similar tasks were solved by the publishing house "Osnovy," founded in 1992 by Solomiya Pavlychko. At the very beginning of the independence there were such original works and translations published which the Soviet type publishers would never accept for publishing at all. Thus the release of the novel of David G. Lawrence *The Lover of Lady Chatterley* in Solomiya Pavlychko's translation was perceived by the audience as a symbol of freedom and non-provinciality.

#### Discussion and conclusions

In general the realm of the translation became an important sphere where the barriers that kept Ukrainian culture (and consciousness) in provincial modus of existence were overcame. In this aspect the work of Michael Naydan appears exceptionally important. Through his translations, thanks to his efforts as an editor and a collector the understanding of Ukraine itself, of Ukrainian plots, images, genres is becoming a part of cultural dynamics of the English-speaking, predominantly American, world. Ukraine, mirrored in the palette of the selected writings of the bilingual poetry ontology *A Hundred Years of Youth*, edited by Olia Luchuk and Michael Naydan (2000) does not seem to be neither an echo of the "neighbor's" literature nor an embodiment of the permitted sentiments dictated from the outside. It is quite opposite. It transmits original emotions taken from everywhere – through the connection in kaleidoscopic plurality of "other realities". It is not for nothing that the ontology transmits not only the "snow-ball sound" (kalynove zvuchannia) of the Ukrainian poetry, but also provides a reader with a possibility to sense how the poetry develops, how it absorbs the sounds of other cultures, how it transforms scheme (from *surah* to *haiku*) of the creative assimilation of the distanced cultural ecumenes.

After 1991 the Ukrainian intellectuals, creative writers similarly to Ukrainian intelligentsia of times of the Ukrainian Renaissance of 1920s–1930s play a role of demiurges – active "re-animators" and "creators" of the spiritual and cultural development of Ukraine. They try to fulfill lacuna in cultural forms and compensate the lack of anything Ukraine needs by their personal efforts.

The demiurgy of artistic writers became an even brighter phenomenon during and after Maidans (of 2004 and 2013–2014). Before the Maidans and war, the activity of creators was largely filled with "creating life" in the text, saturating the national text with a life-giving national-creative enzyme, filling the text with the most demanding shades of colors and overtones of sounds that give the national culture uniqueness, full-bloodedness, vitality.

Maidan 2013–2014 and Russia's war against Ukraine which has started in 2014 changed the life of Ukraine and the lives of Ukrainian artists. Serhiy Zhdan evaluates first months of the war as a time when "the very thought of turning all of this into literature was repulsive..." (Zhdan, 2022); Yuri Andrukhovych describing his perception of the war in its beginning in a similar way: "for a certain time it was impossible to sit at home and continue writing" (Baranovska, 2022).

The life itself became a "text" – more unexpected than the most stunning postmodernist text. The artists, who are very different in the nature of their work, left the artistic text behind as a space, where the personal potential of the creative individual is asserted, and, stepping out into the life itself, immersed themselves in its creation in the most direct way. The war turned them into "ambassadors of Bucha"<sup>1</sup> in words of Oksana Zabuzhko (Zabuzhko, 2022, 2022). They have become "volunteers of the information front," (Zabuzhko, 2022) who tell the world about the war by Zoom, Skype, YouTube, telephone etc. – all possible methods of modern global communication, creating a multilingual daily **Ukrainian, Own, Truthful** narrative about Ukraine after February 24, 2022. The war exposed the dominant of the creative activity of Ukrainian writers – and it revealed exactly that aspect of it, which we call *demiurgic* without any irony. That is, one that is primarily aimed at creating something that lies outside the scope of the needs of narrowly authorial self-realization. It recedes into the background. In the first place is what Ukraine urgently needs. It becomes a leading stimulus for Ukrainian creators today.

The socio-political processes of the country an influential factor and a stimulus for the individual creative activity of Ukrainian writers, cultural figures and intellectuals. The nature of their creative activity closely correlates with the process of formation of Ukrainian national identity. One can state that under the circumstances of the turbulency in society the socio-political factor is becoming the determining factor for the nature and direction of the activities of Ukrainian creators.

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<sup>1</sup> Bucha is a town on the outskirt of Kyiv which became a symbol for the cruel murders of Ukrainian civilians carried out by Russian army during the occupation of this town in February – March, 2022. Now the name of Bucha became a common name for the unmotivated cruelty.

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## ФОРМУВАННЯ СУЧАСНОЇ УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ: ДЕМІУРГІЙНА ДІЯЛЬНІСТЬ УКРАЇНСЬКИХ ПИСЬМЕННИКІВ

**Вступ.** Творчість українських митців слова була важливою складовою творення української національної ідентичності впродовж XX –початку ХХІ ст. Мета статті – дослідити динаміку й основні стимули творчої діяльності діячів української культури у її зв'язку із суспільно-політичним розвитком, особливо в частині процесу формування національної ідентичності, України до та після 1991 р.

**Методи.** Використано такі методи: контент- і дискурс-аналіз, історико-порівняльний аналіз.

**Результати.** Через тривале перебування України у складі Російської та Австро-Угорської імперій український мовний чинник набув виняткового значення для формування української ідентичності. Відповідно значимим фактором формування останньої був і розвиток української літератури (зокрема й україномовних перекладів) як основи для творення повнокровного українського духовно-інтелектуального простору, без якого неможливе становлення сувореної нації. Зокрема, творчість українських митців після 1991 р. розглядається як ремінісценція деміургійних зусиль українського відродження 20–30-х рр. ХХ ст.

Обидва періоди стали винятковою продуктивністю саме завдяки особистісним зусиллям українських митців, спрямованим на подолання "літературного стану" української культури у передреволюційні часи та в роки радянського режиму після розстріляного відродження. Розглядаються ті напрямки українського культурного розвитку, які забезпечували вітальність і плідність української культури через руйнування ззовні накинених табу, приписів непотомого культурного канону, чужорідних ідеологічних настанов; упровадження авторських мовних інновацій у художні та перекладні тексти; переклад творів найрізноманітнішої жанрової та стилівської належності. У цьому ж контексті підкреслюється важливість добробку митців діаспори. Особлива увага приділяється діяльності зарубіжних творців, унаслідок якої українська культурна ойкумена збагачується кращими інтелектуальними здобутками світового значення; а також тих творців, хто робить український культурний продукт доступним для іноземної аудиторії через створення антологій, зокрема двомовних. Розглянуто також особливості деміургійної діяльності сучасних українських митців у весняний час після початку широкомасштабної воєнної агресії Росії проти України.

**Висновки.** Соціо-політичні процеси країни є впливовим фактором і стимулом індивідуальної творчої активності українських письменників, культурних діячів та інтелектуалів. Характер їхньої творчої активності тісно корелює з процесом формування української національної ідентичності.

**Ключові слова:** деміург, українська культура, національна ідентичність, українська література, українська діаспора.

Автори заявляють про відсутність конфлікту інтересів. Спонсори не брали участі в розробленні дослідження; у зборі, аналізі чи інтерпретації даних; у написанні рукопису; в рішенні про публікацію результатів.

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