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The development of children's literature in Ukraine in the XX-XXI centuries

Abstract:

After Ukraine's independence in 1991 Ukrainian children got wider access to the translations of the works of prominent world writers for children. The classic literature of the world, aiming to mediate the children's feelings for beauty and literary aesthetic, became an integral part of the Ukrainian educational system. Thanks to the increase of famous children's books written in modern Ukraine, Ukraine is now experiencing the growth of a new generation of more intelligent and capable citizens free from communism ideology, able to integrate and positively contribute to the modern multicultural world.

However "children and war" is now again among the painful topics in modern Ukrainian society but not new in history and literature. There are no wars, initiated by Ukrainians. The Famine of Ukrainians in the East of Ukraine by Russians, the Second World War, physical genocide of Ukrainian families and their children for the whole century even also just for the Ukrainian language saved Pain and Distrust in the generation memory of Ukrainians.

But the aim of this survey of the Ukrainian literature for children and youth is to show the developing processes in the society on the basics of the main ideas, topics, directions and values during the XX-XXI centuries, beginning since the end of the XIX century by such prominent writer like Ivan Franko.

Keywords: Ukrainian children's literature, Ukrainian literature for children and youth, values.

The aim of my survey of the Ukrainian literature for children and youth is to show the developmental processes in it within the historical (colonial and post-colonial) context, to explicit the difference of literature paradigms under historical circumstances, for instance,

Soviet ideology, to compare trends in depicting a child and childhood in Ukrainian and Western European literature for children and youth of the same period, as well as to emphasize the change of direction in modern literary works for children and youth in Ukraine.

The Soviet-era came into the history of Ukrainian children's literature as the period of long-lasting dependence on the ideology of communism. The children's literature back then played a role in forming the cult of Soviet childhood¹.

Ukrainian children literature of the XX-XXI centuries has been reviewed in the past by Emilia Ohar who analyzed the sources collected by Olexander Ivanchenko². These sources include literature published by the most popular publishing companies in Ukraine. For example, every year the publishing house "Veselka" (Kyiv) publishes near 240-250 book titles with a total number of copies being over 40 million. For many years they published children novels and stories translated from 49 languages used on the territory of the Soviet Union and from 42 other world languages. The books from "Veselka" were exported into 128 countries of the world and were presented during prestigious book fairs in Moscow, Frankfurt-am-Main, Chicago and other similar events.

The ideological trends of internationalization and breaking cultural borders in the culture and literature in the Soviet Union including Soviet Ukraine were somewhat similar to those in North America and the European Union after the Second World War. There was, however, the difference. While the Soviets tried to create the "cult of soviet childhood", the rest of the world was trying to create another utopian model – "world children's republic". Emer O'Sullivan explains internationalization as the process of developing the media-industry products (including literature products like

¹ E. Ohar, *Kontraversiiniistadianskoho dyskursu* [w:] eadem, *Dytiacha knyha v ukrainskomu sotsiuzi (dosvid perekhidnoi doby)*, Svit, Lviv 2012, s. 38-55.

² O. Ivanchenko, *Vydavnytstvo "Veselka": osoblyvosti funktsionuvannia y rozvytku (1934-2010 rr.)*, a dissertation abstract, Taras Shevchenko National University Press, Kyiv 2011.

stories, novels, poems, etc.) that abase borders between American and European worlds.³ This process includes translation and adaptation for a wider international audience of the work which focuses on people or events of a specific nation or country. In terms of children's literature reintegration, we can speak today about the two most influential groups, "western region" with the exchange between English, German, French, Dutch and Scandinavian languages, and "eastern region" with the exchange between the Slavic languages (especially Russian), Hungarian, German (GDR) exchange.

Literature researcher Raisa Movchan in one of her articles titled "Literature for children and youth in the system of Ukrainian literature history in XX century"⁴ provides the following information. In the 1920s the translations into the Ukrainian language of the literary works of Rudyard Kipling, Mark Twain, Karel Hloucha, Ernest Thompson Seton, Jules Gabriel Verne became available for the first time. They were printed in Lviv publishing-house "The world of the child". Lviv at that time was not part of Soviet Ukraine. The Ukrainian translations of Andersen's and Brothers Grimms' fairy-tales reached the Ukrainian children only in the second half of the 1930s. The prominent works of the world literature were more available in the Russian translations, reflecting the communist strategy of promoting the Russian language while often oppressing other languages used on the territory of the Soviet Union, especially Ukrainian.

Next, we discuss the most representative Ukrainian children's writers active during the time from the end of the XIX century until the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991. We focus on those of them who are viewed as successful writers for children and have none or minimum effect of soviet ideology and propaganda on their work.

The Ukrainians novelists Leonid Hlibov, Marko Vovchok, Yuriy Fedkovych, Ivan Nechuy-Levytsky, Olena Pchilka, Ivan Franko, Borys

³ E. O'Sullivan, *Kinderliterarische Komparatistik*, Winter, Heidelberg 2000, s. 15.

⁴ R. Movchan, *Literatura dlia ditei ta yunatstva v systemi istorii ukrainskoi literatury XX stolittia*, „Literatura. Dity. Chas: Visnyk Tsentru doslidzhennia literatury dlia ditei ta yunatstva”, No 1, Navchalna knyha – Bohdan, Ternopil 2011, s. 12-17.

Hrinchenko, Maria Hrinchenko (Zahirnya), and later also the early modernists Mykhailo Kotsiubynsky, Lesya Ukrainka, Volodymyr Vynnychenko, Oleksandr Oles, Mykola Vorony, Spyrydon Cherkasenko, were the adult writers that started writing for children later in their career during the second half of XIXth century. The characteristics of the style of their writing for children include the detailed and realistic descriptions of story elements and folk pragmatism. Examples of literary work written using this style we can find in stories M. Kotsiubynskyi 'Yalynka', 'Kharytia', 'Malenkyi hirshnyk', all novels written by B. Hninchenko and 'Malenkyi Horban' by S. Cherkasenko.

At the end of the XIX century and the beginning of the XX century, the next important tendency in Ukrainian children's literature can be recognized. Authors are more inclined to breaking stereotypes, introducing new themes and characters. This is especially seen in the works of V. Vynnychenko (cycles "Namysto", "Kumedija z Kostem", "Fedjko-Chalamydyk", "Babusyn podarunok") or Ivan Franko (fairy-tales "Koly she zviriv hovoryly" (tr.: "When the animals could talk")), and the world-wide known poem "Lys Mykyta"⁵.

Among those writers, Ivan Franko is one of the most famous Ukrainian writers who wrote for both adults and children. He was the first one who tuned his writing with the cultural and social background of young readers even when working on the adaptation of fairy-tales from all over the world, published or never published. This special tuning is evident in all his work on retelling native Ukrainian folklore stories, adaptations of "Narodnyje russkije skazki" by Alexander Afanasyev, "Sagen und Märchen der Südslawen" by Friedrich Kraus, "Kinder- und Hausmärchen" by the Brothers Grimm, "Griechische und albanesische Märchen" by Ioan Georg von Hann, Teodor Benfejer "Pantschatantra. Fünf Bücher indischer Fabeln, Märchen und Erzählungen" and Ludwig Fritze "Pantschantra",

⁵ I. Franko, *Lys Mykita* [in:] B. Kümmerling-Meibauer, *Klassiker der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur: ein internationales Lexikon*, Bd. 1, J. B. Metzler, Stuttgart 1999, s. 365-367.

textbook „der Lebensklugheit in Erzählungen und Sprüchen“, also “Tuhfat ikwam ussafa” in French translation by Harns de Tassi „Les animaux en discussion avec l’homme“ and other.⁶ In one of his published collection of stories, he made the following comment: “For those who want to know the origin of my fairy-tales I can tell the origin or source. But every fairy-tale I rewrote fundamentally, adapting it to the taste, understanding, and surroundings of our children, our readers”⁷. This approach made him international classic and canonic children's writer of Ukraine. His collection “Koly she zviru hovoryly” was published in English translations in the magazine “The Ukrainian Canadian” in 1947-1983 and reached also an English-German young reader thanks to the Ukrainians Diaspora. Having a very good world reputation as a writer, being the star of Ukrainian bohemia of these times, Ivan Franko managed to bring the Ukrainian children's literature up from the underground. And he did it through the contributions to not only the pedagogical “school canon”⁸ but also to the international children's literature canon as discussed in the work of Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer⁹. An example here is his excellent adaptation of brother Grimm stories that are often perceived as more realistic and attractive for contemporary international readers. Nowadays we also see his work is being successfully used in creating new literary products for children. For example, very talented young Ukrainian illustrators Romana Romanynshyn and Andriy Lesiv produced and published a picture book for children of the age 3+ based on the story “Ripka” written by Ivan Franko in 1891. This picture book won awards and was included in

⁶ H. Sabat, *Ivan Franko i dytiacha literatura: Teoretychni problemy funkcionuvannia ta retseptsii kazok pro tvaryn, Literatura. Dity. Chas: Visnyk Tsentru doslidzhennia literatury dlia ditei ta yunatstva*, No 4, Diatlyk M., Rivne 2013, s. 133.

⁷ I. Franko, *Koly shche zviru hovoryly. Kazky dlia ditei [w:] eadem, Zibrannia tvoriv u 50-ty tomakh*, t. 20, Naukova dumka, Kyiv, s. 75.

⁸ B. Kümmerling-Meibauer, *Integration und Ausgrenzung: Wandel in der Bewertung von Kinderliteratur [w:] Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, Kinderliteratur, Kanonbildung und literarische Wertung*, Stuttgart 2003, s. 271.

⁹ Ibidem.

the Selection of International Children's and Youth Literature "The White Ravens 2013".

Next, we focus on the period after the era of Ivan Franko, Mykhailo Kotsiubynsky, Lesya Ukrainka, Marko Chermeshyna. In the 1920s the new political reality influenced the development of Ukrainian literature. We distinguish the literature of Ukrainian emigrants who didn't accept the soviet ideology from the literature of the writers who worked in soviet Ukraine and had to adjust to the communism realities. The known authors contributing to the literature of Ukrainian emigrants are Vynnychenko, Cherkasenko, Oles, Lepky. In what follows we focus on the writers from Soviet Ukraine.

The main topics of most soviet poems and novels for children between the 1920s and the 1960s were the celebration of Lenin's ideology and praising the prosperous and great soviet system with happy soviet children, even if many children were not happy at all and lived in the harsh conditions. Sometimes these literary works with propaganda were written in poor style and could not be well understood, yet, everyone had to know how to recite them by heart.¹⁰ So, the main allowed topics at that time were patriotism, social humanism, favouring common needs over individual needs, a friendship between soviet nations, glorifying the work focused on building communism, etc. The literary works were hardly realistic due to the need to include these ideological norms. We talk about the state of children's literature, where the main focus is not esthetic values but the ideological stamps, false pathos and falsification of reality. Examples here are novels by Natalia Zabala, Oksana Ivanenko, Dmytro Cherednychenko and poetries for children written by Pavlo Tychyna, Maksym Rylsky, Volodymyr Sosiura.

But there was another part of Ukrainian children's literature of these times written outside Soviet Ukraine. This written in exile work

¹⁰ M. Vardanian, *Kotseptsiiia adresata zbirky opovidan V. Vynnychenka «Namysto» u konteksti literatury dlia ditei i yunatstva» 20-kh rr. XX st., Literatura. Dity. Chas: Visnyk Tsentru doslidzhennia literatury dlia ditei ta yunatstva*, vyp. 4, Diatlyk M., Rivne 2013.

is actually recognized and accepted as the modern “school canon” today. In this part of Ukrainian literature, we can see the different paradigm and a rather realistic view of the Ukrainian child and the surrounding reality. For example, all child characters in Volodymyr Vynnychenko novels for children in the collection “Namysto”¹¹ are part of dynamic plots which include adventures, social communications, psychological challenges, facing and resolving conflicts, including conflicts between generations. His novels include serious psychological analysis and description of the real Ukrainian social environment. They are good reads for both children and adults. Indeed, for the benefit of younger readers the texts are written in suitable clear language, often using short laconic sentences, providing a clear description of the environment and problems children were where facing these times. For adult readers, the novels bring the benefit of better understanding the children's reasoning and behaviour, and their need for the love and attention of their parents. This trend in Ukrainian literature is well summarized by the following words of Maria Nikolajeva: “...not as literature addressed to children, but as a sort of storytelling therapy for frustrated adults that had left their lovely homes, their gardens, their parents, their good friends, flowing away from the Soviet regime and missing the motherland during their whole life, hoping to come back one day but not have a real chance to get back”¹².

Above trends in the Ukrainian children's literature prevailed up till the new “Khrushchev thaw” phenomenon started in the sixties when the literature and art, in general, were not as much restricted by soviet censorship as before and could focus on some new directions and topics. In the 1960s, the following new and very interesting writers in Ukraine started writing for children: Vsevolod Nestayko,

¹¹ V. Vynnychenko, *Namysto: opovidannia* [tekst], uporiad. Y. Y. Broiak, Veselka, Kyiv 1989, 380 s.

¹² M. Nikolajeva, *Growing up. The dilemma of children's literature* [in:] *Childrens literature as communication: the ChilPA Project*, edited by Roger D. Sell, Volume 2, Amsterdam; Philadelphia 2002, p. 112.

Viktor Blyznets, Yevhen Hutsalo, Vasyl Symoneko, Mykola Vingranovsky, Lina Kostenko, Dmytro Pavlychko, Hryhir Tiutiunyk, Valeriy Shevchuk, Yaroslav Stelmakhand many others. In their works, we can find the attempts to understand the child's soul and the uniqueness of childhood and adolescence. In style and genre, the children's literature trends are similar to adult's ones except in the children's literature the trend of adopting the style without multiple references to communism ideological elements is more pronounced. The new trend is more about "maintaining a myth of a happy and innocent childhood, apparently fueled by writers' nostalgic memories and bitter insights into the impossibility of returning to the childhood"¹³. This concept of a happy childhood in Ukraine was not, in fact, reflecting the real circumstances for soviet children living in harsh conditions of soviet reality. Interesting that this false happy childhood assertion sub-trend seems to be present in the Ukrainian children's literature even nowadays.

If we look now at the development of children's literature, for example, in Germany during the same time, we can see that all the trends and changes in the style of writing for children were made by the adult writers for whom the reason for writing included the need for the self-therapy because they were frustrated during the childhood by some family or social traumas. This is especially relevant for writers who were children during the Second World War. Indeed, German writers of that period often include psychological analysis of events typical for their childhood, for example, bad parents – good child scenario, social and cultural conflicts. They proclaim the emancipation of children while leaving the parents' motivations and behaviour analysis out of the story. This may have some negative effect on the reader child who can make rather inaccurate conclusions on the importance of a good child-parent relationship and social life for a happy childhood.

The same post-war generation of Ukrainian children's writers, on the other hand, adopted a different trend. They wrote rather funny

¹³ Ibidem, p. 113.

and lovely stories to make the children happy even if real life was not so easy. They were trying to analyze the mistakes from their childhood in a more positive light, showing the better possibilities to stay happy in life despite all the social and generation troubles, and encourage the reader child to be a strong character and find the good way to move towards better future.

It should be noted that the above-discussed distinction between the Ukrainian trend (depicting child life in a rather positive happy way) and the European trend (focusing more on psychological analysis of rather difficult childhood) is not sharp or obvious. Both trends were present in Ukrainian and the rest of Europe literary works.

In summary, the children's literature in this period covered many different topics and genres and contributed to many pedagogical and multidisciplinary investigations. It was the time of "growing up" of children's literature. This resulted in an expansion of the children's literature in volume, style, and topic selection. Ukrainian writers publish new fairy-tales, adventure novels, stories about school and the everyday life of children. The work written in this period became part of the modern "school canon" in the pedagogical educational system in Ukraine.

For example, the prominent Ukrainian children's writer of this period Vsevolod Nestayko explains his motivation and writing style as follows. "I became the children's writer. Why for children? – Because I wished to be back into childhood – but different childhood than I had: Funny, full of adventures, games, entertainments. This different childhood scenario is, therefore, often present in my fairy-tales and adventures novels"¹⁴. His most popular trilogy "Toreadory z Vasjukivky"¹⁵ is the first modern Ukrainian adventure story. It is still being read and appreciated by millions of young readers. This work is about

¹⁴ T. Vorobets, *Khudozhnia svoieridnist trylohii Vsevoloda Nestaika «Tereadory z Vasiukivky»*, *Literatura. Dity. Chas: Visnyk Tsentru doslidzhennia literatury dlia ditei ta yunatstva*, Vyp. 2, Navchalna knyha – Bohdan, Ternopil 2012, s. 70-77.

¹⁵ V. Nestaiko, *Toreadory z Vasiukivky*, Veselka, Kyiv 1973.

the everyday adventures of happy children, it avoids any focus on or even mentioning of the grey and sad aspects of real life in the Soviet system. This type of writing is characterized by Maria Nikolajeva as “a symbolic depiction of a maturation process so that it is not a strict accurate reflection of existing reality. The content that was written and marketed for children and young people focuses on a particular phase in a childhood-to-adulthood transition, with ethos ranging from an ideal harmony (Arcadia, Paradise, Utopia, idyll), with different degrees of departure from it, to some mission that may either succeed or fail”¹⁶. Indeed, Vsevolod Nestayko succeeded in creating the “primal harmony” of the virtual “idyll” of childhood, which is something children of Ukraine actually needed and still need. Interesting that communist authorities of Ukraine blamed author for creating “anti-pedagogic” influence on the soviet children.¹⁷ However, after the proclamation of the independence of Ukraine in 1991, he became a fully appreciated writer of classic children’s literature. His trilogy has been adapted by the author to reflect new social realities of Ukrainian children in the multicultural world and was later re-edited by the Ukrainian publishing house “ABABAHALAMAHA”. The final edition of the trilogy has 461 pages and includes integrated genres like epistolary (written letters, notices), songs that reflect Ukrainian history, legends that help the reader to better understand the original mentality and religious background of characters. Prominent German literature investigator Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer¹⁸ recognizes the following most important aspects of the contribution of Vsevolod Nestayko to the modern canon of Ukrainian children’s literature: internationality, a mix of genres, and development and widening of the existing traditional canon. These are the three aspects of the “processed canon”¹⁹. The

¹⁶ M. Nikolajeva, op. cit., p. 112.

¹⁷ V. Kostiuhenko, *Literaturnymy stezhkamy. Narys ukrainskoi literatury dlia ditei XX stolittia*, K. I. S., Kyiv 2009, s. 201.

¹⁸ B. Kümmerling-Meibauer, *Kinderliteratur, Kanonbildung und literarische Wertung*, Stuttgart 2003.

¹⁹ Ibidem, s. 277.

trilogy "Toreadory z Vasjukivky" written in an excellent style for children of age 10 and higher, obtained many national and international awards and prizes.

Comparing the historical development of children's literature in Ukraine and Western Europe, one can recognize the limited impact on Ukrainian literature of the typical story-telling trends established in Western Europe at the beginning of the XIX century. This was changed after Ukraine's independence in 1991 when Ukrainian children get wider access to the translations of the works of prominent world writers for children, including the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, Wilhelm Hauff. The classic literature of the world, aiming to mediate the children's feeling for beauty and literary aesthetic²⁰, became an integral part of the Ukrainian education system. Thanks to the increased access to the world's famous children's books from all over the world started in the young country almost 50 years later than in Europe and America, Ukraine is now experiencing the growth of a new generation of more intelligent and capable citizens free from communism ideology, able to integrate and positively contribute to the modern multicultural world.

For such one young reader in Ukraine are writing also Galina Malyk and Zirka Menzatjuk. In their works (about Chornobyl "Zlochynyci z paralelnoho svitu" – "Criminals from the parallel world" in humoristic-sarcastic style by Galina Malyk or about the collapse of the Soviet Union from the perspective of a twelve-year-old girl from the West of Ukraine in the novel "Jak ja rujnuvala Imperiju" – "How I ruined the Empire"), – we can follow the modern combination of old literary tradition from Hryhir Tiutiunnyk, Volodymyr Rutkivskyi and humoristic and easiness from Vsevolod Nestayko. Memories of the war, disaster but still life gladness and eternal human values are the main intentions. But even in the newest science-fiction novels "Soulyary" and "Powder from dragons bones" written by a very young fantast for adolescence Volodymy Arenev we can find how gentle and philosophically he tries to show a fair of

²⁰ Ibidem, s. 271.

the new war by the adults from the generation of the Second World War and not acceptance of the disasters of the war by the children in modern Ukraine, who are playing in the war with the toy soldiers or even recognizing the new one.

A good example of how the new generation has grown up, how the democratic and free mental activity and life gladness of young Ukrainian people were broken again from the side of Russia (Maidan and the War of 2014) is the world-known picture book “The War that Changed Rondo” made by Ukrainian illustrators Romana Romanyshyn and Andriy Lesiv (Agrafka Studio, “Vydavnytstvo Staroho Leva”):

The town called Rondo was unique. The air was clear and transparent as if woven from the thinnest light. All of its unusual and gentle residents grew flowers, nourished gardens and parks, built peculiar houses, spoke to birds and plants, loved to sing, draw and write poetry. They all enjoyed living in Rondo. Still, the three friends Danko, Zirka and Fabian loved the town the most. Everyone in Rondo knew them. [...] Rondo was famous for its wonderful flowers. The pride and beauty of the town was a large greenhouse located on the central square. It contained a collection of rare flowers and plants from the furthest parts of the planet. The strangest of all was that these flowers could sing. Concerts often took place in the greenhouse. The top venue was a vocal performance of Mozart’s rondo [...] It was an ordinary day in Rondo. The residents rushed about with their usual business. Danko was heading to his friends, as he knew that Zirka just returned from her travels and had lots of new stories and drawings. The sun was shining, the flowers and birds were singing. Everything was as usual... Suddenly all became quiet. Then, a wary whisper spread around: the WAR is coming to our town.²¹

In their book Romana and Andij are idealistically showing at the end how it is possible with the lights and all-together to win the war:

The brighter the light and the louder the anthem, the quicker the War disappeared, along with the darkness and prickly black flowers. The whole town was singing the anthem until all the black flowers disappeared and the obscurity dissolved completely. This was a VICTORY! [...] The residents of Rondo

²¹ R. Romanyshyn, A. Lesiv, *Viina, shcho zminyly Rondo*, Vydavnytstvo Staroho leva, Lviv 2015, s. 2, 8-9, 11-13.

slowly rebuilt the town and reconstructed the greenhouse, where new flowers grew and now sing the anthem every morning just as before.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to renew everything. The transparent body of Danko still has a web of cracks near his heart, the edges of Zirka's wings remained burnt, and Fabian is limping on the pricked leg. The residents of the town changed. Each of them has sorrowful memories of the War that changed Rondo forever. Now, there are also many red poppies growing all around the town.²²

Poppy is an international symbol of commemorating the fallen during the war, beginning with 1914.

“Children and war” is now again the most painful topic in modern Ukrainian society but not new in our history and literature. There are not wars, initiated by Ukrainians. The Famine of Ukrainians in the East of Ukraine by Russians and oppressions of Ukrainians by Poles in West, the Second World War, physical genocide of Ukrainian families and their children for the whole century even also for the Ukrainian language till 1991 saved Pain and Distrust in the generation memory of Ukrainians. The war caused again by Russia: orphans, strangers, death, fear and untruth are the real feelings of the Ukrainians again and are becoming the new themes in the modern Ukrainian literature for children and youth.

But in conclusion, to say the development of global culture with an interlacing of various world economic systems which is followed and served by new media and other modern communicative and information technologies disorder of political borders, the growing voluntary mobility of individuals and also resettlements of the people caused by war, poverty or political repressions opens more and more widely space multicultural communication. It also provides a variety of subjects, the conflicts and brings to the origin of new cultural identities in each separate nation which interlacing realizes a modern international canon of children's literature based on the child-centric concept.

²² Ibidem, s. 31, 33-35.

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