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UKRAINIAN CONSTITUENT OF AMERICAN MULTICULTURALISM: ETHNIC AND CULTURAL ASPECTS

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Abstract: The paper deals with the features of the Ukrainian constituent of American multiculturalism of the second half of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century. Multicultural trends actively developing in the context of the American mainstream are characterized. The scientific research analyzes the literary activity of Ukrainian-American representatives of multicultural literature; it outlines the problems of writers' works of art from ethno-cultural point of view.

Keywords: multiculturalism, self-identity, heterogeneity, Ukrainian being, ethnicity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary American literature is represented by a great deal of trends, currents and ideas and it is in constant developing due to the emergence of new creative people. The aim of our research is to distinguish those writers whose literary activity enrich not only American literature but also directly or indirectly violate topics and problems of the Ukrainian people, paying attention of the whole world to Ukrainians. The tasks of the scientific research are to provide the definition of the term "multiculturalism" in American literature and analyze thematic features of the works of art of those writers who represent the Ukrainian constituent of American multiculturalism, explore the Ukrainian ethno-cultural phenomenon in the context of American culture.

Multinational US caused the phenomenon of multiculturalism that "detects structural functions of pluralism, and definitely has impact on national identity" [1, p. 301]. Barely recognizable at the beginning of its establishment, multiculturalism as a "principle, which creates cultural heterogeneity" [2, p. 72], is one of the main phenomena that represents a creative symbiosis of cultures of different ethnic groups and races. Thus "minority" literature "promotes the general tradition, makes it determine the values, strengthens its means to overcome our cultural chaos" [3, p. 265].

The main characteristic of multicultural fiction is the image of individuality, personality in time and space that has always been important in the world verbal art of the 20th century. And nowadays it is a priority of contemporary literary process.

Multicultural literature has many branches: African-American, Native American, Asian-American, Japanese-American, Latino, European and others. All these components of multiculturalism are widely represented. Ukrainian multiculturalism constituent is characterized by a small number of names that can be divided into two branches: those who are of Ukrainian ancestry and those who are not but

appeal to Ukrainian themes. The first group includes such writers as Askold Melnychuk, Irena Zabytko; the other one represents Claire Mesud, Jonathan Safran Foer, Alexander Godin, Benjamin Rosenblatt etc.

The central issues of the above writers' works of art is the self-identity of the individuals, trying to find a decent place in a foreign country and adopt to new conditions, establishment of national identity in the context of the dominant culture, discussing "moral and cultural conflict that emerges as a result of separating from the roots, the result of globalization, reflecting immigrants' illusions who hope to be born again" [4, p. 53].

2. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Askold Melnychuk and Irene Zabytko are those writers who highlight the problems of Ukrainian people in the USA and Ukraine as well. A. Melnychuk's and I. Zabytko's literary activity can not be attributed to the literature of Ukraine as they write in English. But writers' appealing to the Ukrainian theme supports the idea to speak of them as English assistants of Ukrainian literature.

Askold Melnychuk considers US to be his homeland, where the law dominates, the country that has given to him the opportunity for self-realization and creative research [6, p. 151].

Askold Melnychuk is an author of three novels ("What Is Told", 1994; *Ambassador of the Dead*, 2001; *The House of Widows*, 2006), a great deal of stories, poems, translations, literary and critical essays, Mac Ginnis' winner in the genre of fiction (1992), founding editor of the popular American literary magazine "AGNI" and so on. Many writer's works of art have been translated into Ukrainian (an essay "Roman coins, Scythian pottery" (1992), a short story "An Acorn of Light" (1997), the novel "What Is Told" (1996).

He studied at Antioch College (1972-1973), Rutgers University (1974-1976, B.A.), and Boston University (1977-1978, M.A.). His mother is from Peremyshl (her uncle was the vice-marshal for the Polish Seim in the twenties of the 20th century; her family name is Zahaikewycz). He began writing stories and poems in Ukrainian as a child, changed to English in high school (gymnasium), won prizes for them and published them in many magazines beginning with the *Village Voice* in 1974. He started editing Agni as a samizdat newspaper in high school and then turned it into a literary magazine later on.

He was writing his first novel "What Is Told" while working all kinds of odd jobs, from washing dishes to running a Xerox machine to teaching at Boston University. It took more than ten years. He began writing it around 1980 and it was published in 1994. The next novel he wrote while teaching and even had some time just to write and edit thanks to a grant.

After graduation in 1979 Askold Melnychuk started travelling across Europe the places his parents had emigrated (a more detailed description of his travels he has represented in two recent novels) before. The writer visited Berchtesgaden, where his parents had lived for five years in the camps for immigrants [8, p. 54]. In 1945 the parents lived in Przemyśl in the house, which was located in front of the fascist Gestapo. As Melnychuk states, his relatives, not wanting to "take part in the twentieth century ... volkerwanderungen had left Ukraine, occupied by the Poles and Hungarians, for Germany, occupied by the Americans and Russians, and from there to the United States, "occupied" by Poles, Russians and Germans as well as Italians, Irish, African Americans, Jews and others "[8, 10]. The boy was brought up with an understanding of the reasons for fleeing their parents abroad from the country where "people were punished for the right to speak freely in their native language." As the writer says himself, his father always told him, "This is America. Here you can finally say what you want ... although no one is listening. Yet we can speak "[8, p. 57].

All his mature life Askold Melnychuk has been in search of his own identity by asking the question: how to find a balance between the two manifestations of self-determination: the origin and state of mind? What do we have to do with the lives of our ancestors in the country, which has never been seen? The writer himself tries to explain the state of his life, his inner reflection: "A part of the self

grows resigned to accepting one's role as an inheritor, a historically defined and socially certified participant. But another, deeper part – dimly conscious of the longing for an escape route, and of the possibility of making “the leap from cultural necessity to freedom” – wants to shrug off the yoke, and move unfettered in a world not barbed with names and words which constrict the self or tear at the soul. Is it possible to keep from being trapped in the context of other people's categories and language?” [9, 11].

“What Is Told” is not only the writer's first novel but also the first English-language work of art about Ukraine in the USA. The novel deals with the story of an Ukrainian family of Zabobons from the years of their staying in Ukraine to the moving of the family abroad. There are two storylines. In the first storyline the author focuses on the story of national identity, embodied in the actions of the main characters before their emigration, and the search of their identity in a foreign country after the migration. The second storyline is full of legends about Zabobons family from pagan times to the adoption of Christianity.

In the novel “What Is Told” the writer raises the problem what it means to be Ukrainian in a foreign country. The author convinces that a man never completely cuts off the roots of his native land and “being Ukrainian is therefore another way of solitude” [7, p. 72]. The author proves even in exile one should not forget the native traditions and customs. The heroes of the novel repeatedly ask themselves questions to return home, and every time they consciously reply: never. Because they know that in a foreign country there is some possibility of existence, and in their native country they could be destroyed physically, morally and spiritually.

Askold Melnyczuk's second novel, “Ambassador of the Dead,” is a “finely written, ambitious tour de force. With its publication, American literature has a definitive expression of the post-war Ukrainian emigration in the United States. The children of that emigration, who are creatively pushing the boundaries of what it means to be both American and Ukrainian, now have an emblem to push onto friends who “just don't get it” [16].

The second novel “The Ambassador of the Dead” (2001) is exciting and well-framed. One Sunday morning, Nick Blut, a successful Boston physician, is home in bed when he receives a phone call from Ada Kruk, the mother of a boyhood friend who tries to tell him about an important event or person. That person is her son Alex, who dies in the next room from bleeding, and we learn about it at the end of the novel. Ada summons Nick back to his old Ukrainian-American New Jersey neighbourhood, where something unspeakable has just happened – exactly what no one is willing to say. The novel describes important events before and after two Ukrainian families' (the Bluds and Kruks) emigrating to the United States: famine in 1933, World War II, emigration through DP's camps in the United States and their living abroad. It represents complex themes and issues: war and peace, love, the sense of existence and identity, and above all – man's place in society.

Another author who supports Ukrainians with the literary activity abroad is Zabytko Irene (b. 1954, Chicago), “bilingual Ukrainian American” who grew up in the Ukrainian suburb of Chicago, graduated from the school of St. Nicholas there. The writer has travelled to Ukraine many times to teach English as a second language and to visit friends and family who live in Chernobyl. She has got her MFA at Vermont College and now lives and works as a freelance writer in Florida [14, 15].

Zabytko Irena is the author of two novels “The Sky Unwashed” (2000) and “When Luba Leaves Home” (2003). Her first novel was selected for the Barnes & Noble Discover Great New Writers program, and was chosen by the New England Booksellers Association as one of the best books of 2000. “The Sky Unwashed” is a tale of Chernobyl tragedy, which occurred in 1986, the Ukrainian family life before and after the explosion at the nuclear power plant [14]. Her second book is about the story of the growth of the young heroine in the American environment.

Inspired by true events, the novel “The Sky Unwashed” tells how and why one of the main heroines Marusia defies the Soviet government's permanent evacuation of her deeply contaminated village and returns to live out her days in the only home she's ever known. Alone in the deserted town, she struggles up into the church bell tower to ring the bells twice every day just in case someone else has returned. In the end, five old women (the village babysi) band together for survival and to confront the

Soviet officials responsible for their fate. And, in the midst of desolation, a tenacious hold on life chimes forth. Poignant and truthful and triumphant, this timeless story is about ordinary people who do more than simply "survive" [14].

The novel "When Luba Leaves Home" represents Luba who lives with her parents in a Chicago neighborhood full of others like themselves – immigrants from Ukraine. Her parents want only two things: to enjoy a new life in America and to hold on to the traditions and customs from their "old" country, Ukraine. They want these things for Luba, too. Luba wants only the first part of their wish. She wants to leave her neighborhood behind. It's 1968, and protesting American students have taken to the city streets. Thinking that it's time she breaks step with her heritage and gets into step with her peers, Luba registers as Linda on the first day at her commuter college. Then she buys a second-hand car to drive into a future far from her parent's Wheat Street home. The car must, however, first carry her father to his doctor's appointments, a Ukrainian celebrity to her featured appearances, a dying neighbor home from work, and her lifelong buddies to school and back. Somewhere along the way, Linda takes a backseat and Luba takes the wheel, finding a new road to a destination somewhere between Ukraine and America. In this novel award-winning author Irene Zabytko creates a bright new voice to tell the classic story of how the children of America's melting pot grow up strong enough to carry their double identities [15].

It should be noted that there are those American writers by non-Ukrainian origin that have touched Ukrainian issues: Jonathan Safran Foer and Claire Messud. Foer has introduced the theme of the humanity and mutual aid (during the Holocaust, when the Ukrainians saved Jews from death). Claire Mesud attracted the world's attention to the subject of adaptation of immigrants (Ukrainian Canadians) in a foreign country.

Jonathan Safran Foer (born in 1977) is an American writer of Jewish origin. He lives in Brooklyn, NY, with his wife, novelist Nicole Krauss, and their son, Sasha. The future writer was born in Washington, DC, studied in one of the elite schools of Georgetown, and then he studied philosophy and literature at Princeton University.

Jonathan Foer is an author of two novels "Everything Is Illuminated" (2002) and "Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close" (2005). The writer has visited Ukraine in 1999 to clarify certain life circumstances of his grandfather, a Jew who was saved from the Nazis by Ukrainians during World War II. The trip was an inspiration and a real basis for a debut novel "Everything Is Illuminated" thanks to which the author received several prestigious awards. The first novel was filmed in 2005 by director Lew Schreiber, with Elijah Wood in the lead role.

In the first novel there are two storylines as in Melnyczuk's "What Is Told". The first one is devoted to the story of the Ukrainian town Trochymbrod, the second one is connected with the American Jonathan's search for the town where lives a woman who is directly involved in saving his relatives during the war years. We see some more typological parallels between novels of Askold Melnyczuk "What Is Told" and Jonathan Foer ""Everything Is Illuminated" in establishing a Ukrainian town of Rozdorizha, on the one hand, and the search for personal identity and decent place by Ukrainian immigrants on American soil, on the other. Analyzing these similarities between the works of American writers we can talk about contact-genetic relationships between authors. Obviously, much younger Foer has received some inspiration and ideas from Askold Melnyczuk, who has written his novel much earlier.

When speaking about Claire Messud, it should be noted that the writer's work of art represents original phenomenon in American literature, as the ancestry of the author has nothing to do with Ukrainian ethnicity. The future writer was born in 1966 in the US and she was the only American in her family. Her mother's nationality is Canadian, her father is a Frenchman of Algerian origin; her sister was born in France. Claire Messud herself grew in many countries such as Australia, Canada and the United States. The future writer graduated from Yale, went to the UK to continue to receive the education in Cambridge. Itinerant Messud's lifestyle is displayed in the works, where she touches the topic of emigration and identify ways to self-determination of the individual in a foreign country [12].

Her first novel "When the World Was Steady" was published in 1994. The epigraph to the story is: "Is it lack of imagination that makes us come to imagined places, not just stay at home". The main author's ideas are "continent, city, country, society, the choice is always small and never free. Neither here nor there ... nowhere. Should we stay home where it can be our home?" [10]. It should be noted that the plot of the novel usually revolves around the moment in which the main character, who kept on the road asks himself whether the house is a geographical phenomenon or it can rotate about new aspects of the personality.

The second piece is Claire Messud's semi-autobiographical novel "The Last Life" (1999). This is the story of a teenage girl, the daughter of an American mother and father by French-Algerian origin. The writer tries to explore the limits of self-knowledge and self-appealing to history and see where it all began, where the root causes of what is happening now.

2001 the writer published two closely related stories: "The Hunters" and "A Simple Tale". The second story contains the tale of the young Ukrainian Maria's years spent in Ukraine, and the mature period of the heroine in Canada [10]. The image of Mary is typologically similar to Slava Lastivka from Askold Melnychuk's novel "What Is Told". Claire Messud says that no high financial position compensates for spiritual poverty caused by loss of memory of man's homeland, his ethnic roots.

Claire Messud has published the novel "The Emperor's Children" (2006), which has embodied her dream to write, finally, about the Americans, not the immigrants, as it was before. The writer notes that she wanted to show a life not as it was but it would be. This novel can be called Claire Messud's life she hasn't lived yet [13].

Her works of art can be traced as elegant that it is so hard to find in contemporary American literature [13]. The writer seems to be living out of place and out of time. She is a writer without a homeland. In her works, the reader feels that he is in a train compartment and crosses many boundaries. And he wants to know exactly where to stop this train.

3. CONCLUSIONS

We can make a conclusion that the Ukrainian theme of homeland, life on exile, identity and self-identity brings together not only Ukrainian American writers (Askold Melnychuk, Irena Zabytko) but also those who are not Ukrainians by descent (Jonathan Foer, Claire Messud) but have seen Ukrainians who experienced many tragical events but kept heartiness and humanity.

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Стаття присвячена дослідженню характеристик української складової американського мультикультуралізму другої половини ХХ - початку ХХІ століття на тлі активного розвитку мультикультурних тенденцій у контексті американського мейнстріму. У дослідженні проаналізовано літературну діяльність україно-американських представників мультикультурної літератури; окреслено проблематику художніх творів даних письменників з етнокультурної точки зору.

Ключові слова: мультикультуралізм, самоідентичність, гетерогенність, українство, етнічність.