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The Issues of “Europe” or “West” in the Discourse of the Artistic Ukrainian Movement

Abstract: The article raises the issue of European principles in both Ukrainian literature and culture. Particular attention is paid to criticism of the interwar period and Dmitry Dontsov, the editor of *The Bulletin* and the ideologist of volitional nationalism. It analyses in detail critical remarks and theses by Y. Kosach concerning the “separation” of Ukrainian literature from Europe and the “gap” between humanism and the Ukrainian literary tradition caused by D. Dontsov and *The Bulletin*.

The influence of D. Dontsov’s Eurocentric ideas on Y. Kosach’s critical literary essay “On Guard of the Nation” is identified and interpreted. It is proved that D. Dontsov’s essential principles: nationalism, idealism, voluntarism, and heroism became the basis for Y. Kosach’s essay. Based on the matching nature of the fundamental concepts of D. Dontsov and Y. Kosach in the essay “On Guard of the Nation”, it was discovered that the views of both thinkers on the specific Ukrainian quality of

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being European, and on the problem of Europeanism were generally identical. In the essay "On Guard of the Nation", Y. Kosach distinguished heroism, activist psychology, and chivalry as the primordial and leading motives of Ukrainian literary works. In the report "The Crisis of Contemporary Ukrainian Literature", the words that used to be almost sacred for Y. Kosach of Dontsov's era – "Gothic", "literary imperialism", "heroic, dynamic literature", "true Occidentalism", "traditional Europeanism" – sounded with a great deal of sarcasm and negation.

Keywords: AUM, discussion, Yurii Kosach, report, essay, Dmitry Dontsov, *The Bulletin*, literature of the interwar period, Western Ukraine, emigration, fundamental beliefs, polemical rebukes.

Without doubt, the Artistic Ukrainian Movement is one of the most interesting and dynamic episodes in the history of Ukrainian literature. So many problems raised at the AUM congresses and conferences and so many books printed in just three years of its existence! However, the AUM was also the field of fierce confrontation with aesthetic concepts, worldview tendencies and figures of the previous literary era.

D. Dontsov's "Letter to U. Samchuk, the AUM Chairman", dated 21 July, 1947 actually represents his reaction to Yurii Kosach's report, "The Crisis of Contemporary Ukrainian Literature", delivered at the First Congress of the AUM (21–22 December 1945, Aschaffenburg) and published under the title "Free Ukrainian Literature" in the 1946 Collection of the AUM¹. Although important issues of further development of Ukrainian literature were raised at the Congress, including its development in the diaspora, Y. Kosach's report began the discussion striving to reconsider the unique page of literary life during the interwar period in Western Ukraine and in emigration. Since D. Dontsov was indicated to be "the main culprit" of the "dark and deaf era", both directly and covertly, it was evident that the latter had to respond to the accusations. Samchuk was the best target for such an address, due to several reasons. Firstly, as

¹ Y. Kosach, *Vilna ukrainska literatura*, [in:] MUR, Zb. II, Miunkhen; Karlsfeld, 1946.

he was the AUM Chairman, he had to bear the blame for such accusations – at least, as Dontsov believed, for failing to respond to unfair criticism. Secondly, the editor of *The Bulletin* addressed U. Samchuk as a like-minded person and one of *The Bulletin* authors of the recent past. Thirdly, Dontsov himself emphasized the lack of his own platform to speak from.

In a letter to U. Samchuk, *The Bulletin* editor substantiated the main ideals of his publication and refuted Kosach's rebukes for:

- "usurpation of literary life leadership" during the interwar period by "The Bulletin" (i.e. by its editor);
- "the pernicious influence of *The Bulletin* on contemporary literature";
- separation from the Ukrainian traditions of writing;
- the error of focusing on the ideal of a person who "believes and acts" instead of the ideal of a person who "doubts and seeks";
- "misinterpreting" the mission of literature.

However, the most unexpected thing was the accusations against *The Bulletin* separating Ukrainian literature from Europe. After all, Y. Kosach himself, especially in the 1930s, was heavily influenced by D. Dontsov's ideas. This is eloquently evidenced by his critical literary essay "On Guard of the Nation", which was published in 1935–1936 in the Parisian newspaper *Ukrainian Word*, but has never come off the press as a separate publication. Recently, this work with has been printed with a circulation of 300 copies, which, of course, has not made it widely known even among experts. Therefore, attempt can be made at a cursory analysis of this work in the context of the problem under discussion.

The essay "On Guard of the Nation", which Y. Kosach certainly chooses not to mention while struggling against Dontsov's era in his speech at the AUM Congress, relies entirely on the ideas and theses of *The Bulletin* editor, in particular, on those set out in the works *Grounds of Our Policy*, *Modern Russophilism*, *Russia or Europe* and so forth. Based on D. Dontsov's concept of the occidental foundations of Ukrainian culture, social, political and religious life ("Probably, because of our permanent contact with the East we have picked up something that we should detest but we have remained to be Western in the basic principles of our culture: in our social life (lack of "measure", a taste for co-operation), political life (the apprehension of political freedom inherited from the history), spiritual life (development of individuality, legal psychology), and

last but not least, in religious life.”² Y. Kosach took to expand and personally prove, with examples from the history of Ukrainian literature, Dontsov’s idea about the peculiar Ukrainian quality of being European: “We have completeness of those traditions that only a historical nation remains committed to.”³ Y. Kosach showed the occidental basis of the Ukrainian mentality and socio-cultural life of the nation, from the days of Kievan Rus until the 1930s, having concluded that Ukraine saw its darkest days when separated from the West for various reasons and risking its dependency on the East. Thus, Y. Kosach considered the Middle Ages to be the greatest imperial period being exemplary for further life of the nation, with its “creative work, social equilibrium, economic expansion, cultural and artistic light.”⁴ Kosach distinguished heroism, activist psychology, and chivalry element as the primordial and leading motives of Ukrainian writing (“Poetry is the birth right. It is a manifestation of the divine beginning of the nation, it is a soft wind of the eternal human spirit ascending to the sky. Poetry with elements of chivalry and heroism is a national poetry, therefore the highest, purest chord in the symphony of people’s inner powers. Ukrainian poetry was heroic from its first beginnings, and it is its primordial, leading motive. Therefore, the slender shadows of its two forefathers – our noble and serene troubadours, Boyan and Mytusa – will hover over the past and future of Ukrainian poetry.”⁵ Y. Kosach did not spare metaphors when talking about the imperial period of Ukrainian history. He was barely able to cope with his emotions that he poured on paper in exquisite comparisons and epithets, raising the scale of exaggeration every time: “Ukraine is a country more united, happier, more powerful, more prominent and cultured than France...”

Adam of Bremen refers to Kiev as “a rival of Byzantium”. This is not “a poor gull” that “raised her children at the beaten track”, not a wild field for Polish princes, not Peter and Catherine’s Little Russia, not Shelmenko the Valet’s homeland, not the notorious Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic... This is neither the steppe Hellas, “with abundance in everything”, a sleepy land of Gogol’s farmers, or the romantic haydamak-coloured Scotland of Hugo, Pushkin,

² D. Dontsov, *Pidstavy nashoi polityky*, New-York 1957, Vyd. 2-e., p. 85.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁴ Y. Kosach, *Na varti natsii*, „Studii z ukrainistyky”, K. 2017, Vyp. XXII, p. 88.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

and Goschinsky. It is the Third Rome, the Imperium Ucrainum, a European horizon with a keen vision encompassing the four sides of the world – with intention to grow, to conquer, to possess, to shine.”⁶

In the report, the words that used to be almost sacred for Y. Kosach of Dmitry Dontsov's era – “Gothic”, “literary imperialism”, “heroic, energetic literature”, “true Occidentalism”, “traditionalist Europeanism” – were now used with a great deal of sarcasm and negation: “in the language used by supporters of this attractive ‘Gothic’ doctrine, it was dubbed, in a gently and dreamily manner, a ‘literary imperialism’, a ‘true Occidentalism’, it was dubbed a ‘heroic, energetic literature’ and God knows what other names they used to refer to this systematic “nabijanie w butelka” or cheating a humble Rusyn, this ‘traditionalist Europeanism’ which, in abuse of all necessary names, altering P. Chaadayev, Joseph de Mestre, M. Barres, S. Moras, A. Masis, and many others in its own way, was an ordinary and low-quality journalistic charlatanism. D. Dontsov, a talented and even brilliant publicist, had concentrated all the main directions of the era's literary life at his side, and it became as harmful for our literature as the talent of this publicist could be useful in attaining outstanding benefits, if properly used elsewhere.”⁷

The negation only applied to D. Dontsov, while Kosach treated the rest of the “tragic optimists” (Ye. Malaniuk, Y. Lipa, L. Mosendz, Y. Daragan, O. Lyaturinska, O. Teliga, O. Olzhych) as exceptions. Moreover, when the essayist wrote about Y. Lipa or O. Olzhych in the same period (the 1940s), his concept of “gothic” was developing as before – in the same direction as pursued by *The Bulletin* – but it never followed the path of denying the importance of the interwar period dominated by D. Dontsov. For example, in the article “Oleh Olzhych” published in the *Chronicle of a Political Prisoner*,⁸ Y. Kosach provided quite a serious substantiation for his thesis that O. Olzhych was a man of Gothic origin and his poems were “the formulas of his ideals, expressed in the style of ancient art, with an iron conciseness, it is his service to race, myth, blood, land, a service by word.”⁹ Y. Kosach assured that “Olzhych is a person

⁶ Ibid., p. 83.

⁷ Y. Kosach, *Vilna ukrainska literatura*, [in:] MUR., Zb. II, Miunkhen; Karlsfeld 1946.

⁸ Idem, *Oleh Olzhych. Litopys politviaznia*, „Miunkhen” 1946, Ch. 1, p. 13–16.

⁹ Ibid., p. 15.

with a medieval worldview. The Holy Grail is Olzhych's theme. His Grail is Volodymyr's Trident and serving it in spiritual purity, discernment, faithfulness, and also in the joy of life, the joy of the times as 'severe as a wolf', even in the joy of death 'in the grey overcoat, by a grenade'! This is a timeless, thousand-year-long service."¹⁰ At the same time, the author emphasized that medievalism and Gothic for Olzhych "is not a romantic costume ball in a kind of V. Hugo style, but he treats Gothic as a source of world outlook, as a spiritual environment."¹¹

In the report "The Crisis of Contemporary Ukrainian Literature", Y. Kosach shifted the focus. While he followed D. Dontsov trying to prove the distinct Ukrainian quality of being European in his essay "On Guard of the Nation" with the example of Ukrainian literature, in this report he only spoke about "our literature so young in terms of being European" and sarcastically commented on the Gothic Europe discovered anew by *The Bulletin*: "What about Europe? There can only be one Europe; the one advertised in the same monthly publication, where there would be no place for the two most prominent Ukrainians-Europeans, M. Drahomanov and M. Hrushevsky, and according to one of the ideologists of the day (R. Endyk), Europe is only Gothic, only "vertically arranged" – therefore, the medieval one if we put it mildly – with all the medieval features: scholastic dogmatism, intolerance and bigotry..."¹³

Y. Kosach was cunning, he was well aware of what kind of Europe was meant – whether it was in D. Dontsov's, or M. Khvylovyi's works, or in his own essay "On Guard of the Nation" or the report "The Crisis of Contemporary Ukrainian Literature". Although S. Pavlychko, analysing the problem of Eurocentrism in the AUM reports, noted that "Kosach repeated the word 'Europe' as a magic spell not knowing how incompatible his Europes were, and how chaotic his list of these Europes was,"¹³ but it was also obvious that Y. Kosach, like D. Dontsov, conceived Europe as a spiritual unity, "the invisible – the eternal, the continent of burning ambition, the sacred land, the

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 16.

¹² Y. Kosach, *Vilna ukraïnska literatura*, [in:] MUR, Zb. II, Miunkhen; Karlsfeld 1946.

¹³ S. Pavlychko, *Dyskurs modernizmu v ukraïnskii literaturi: Monohrafiia*, Lybid 1997, p. 265.

fortress of spirit.”¹⁴ Kosach outlined all European (Faustian) culture – where the Ukrainian culture naturally belongs – in just the same way as D. Dontsov, “supporting O. Spengler’s definition of a ‘culture of will’.”¹⁵

When accusing the literature developed “under the signs of ‘*The Bulletin*’s leopard’ in creating a gap between humanism and Ukrainian literary tradition (“While attaching the respectively prepared author of the ‘Word,’ Shevchenko and Lesia Ukrainka to the cohort of literary imperialists, literary ‘exclusionists’ could not add neither Franko nor Kotsyubynsky to this group – one was unfit at least because of his rationalism, and the other because of his humanity. Of course, the spirit of Ukrainian creativity could not be fitted into this framework, because neither our 19th century (Gogol – Shevchenko – Drahomanov) nor the 18th century (Skovoroda) or even the spirituality of the Kievan Rus age with its ethical ideal of Christianity did not fit in the Procrustean bed of literary imperialism, in spite of all possible efforts,”¹⁶ Y. Kosach evidently did not mean himself. At the moment, all the traditions he mentioned in the essay “On Guard of the Nation” can be critically reconsidered. For example, G. Skovoroda was regarded as a person “generally indifferent to tradition in his creative activity,” who “was indifferent to the great changes in Ukrainian life, to the tragedy of a nation that was falling into the abyss before his eyes.”¹⁷ The essayist summarized: “At that time when everything old was supposed to be turned upside down, the philosopher from the Slobozhan region preached to ‘be a just and peaceful citizen’, unknowingly preparing the ground for ideas of rustic era and the [Ukrainian-Russian] symbiosis, thus becoming the meek forerunner of Drahomanov and the present-day Tychyna.”¹⁸

Traditions of the 19th century are reviewed again in the essay “On Guard of the Nation” in accordance with *The Bulletin* and D. Dontsov’s concept of provinciality and criticism of M. Drahomanov: “Writers of the pre-Shevchenko period represent both the literary and the national decline, they appear as

¹⁴ Y. Kosach, *Do obnovy Zakhodu*, „Nashe zhyttia” 1947, Ch. 47 (79).

¹⁵ V. Kolkutina, *Literaturna eseistyka Dmytra Dontsova: natsiosofsko-hermenevtychni aspekty*, Lviv 2018, p. 13.

¹⁶ Y. Kosach, *Vilna ukrainska literatura*.

¹⁷ Idem, *Na varti natsii*, „Studii z ukrainistyky” 2017, Vyp. XXII, p. 182.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 183.

blacksmiths creating spiritual shackles for the will, energy and creative effort of the nation. Their defection and grovelling attitude was undoubtedly caused by losing the vision of the national myth, losing the mystical connection with the soil and tradition, which is the decisive factor for every great and true creativity; *civitas dei Ucraina*¹⁹, which was the spiritual space of Danylo Palomnyk, the author of Igor's song, Vyshensky, Rohatynets and others, now became only a backstreet of the all-conquering St. Petersburg for Ukrainian writers of the first half of the 19th century."²⁰

According to Y. Kosach, Shevchenko's great idea of the Ukrainian national revolution, the struggle for "a new and free family" dissolved "in the murky brook of moderate 'culture promotion', weak populism, enlightenment activities and finally sank in 'hromada-building' and 'universality' of M. Drahomanov, who embedded the Ukrainian idea into the framework of Proudhon's anarchy-socialism and his own concept of federated free unions."²¹

In fact, Y. Kosach's estimate of the role played by the 19th century in the history of Ukraine and Ukrainian literature did not differ from the estimates given by D. Dontsov, Y. Lypa, E. Malaniuk or O. Olzhych. Only his words became even more compressed and essayistic: "This was the coffin of Ukrainian writing, sealed additionally with the Ems Decree of 1876, the advance of Polish-Russian journalistic-literary clique, and the plague of Galician Rus-sophilism. Yet, one should not look for the failure of reviving Shevchenko's era among those external factors, although they were very active. The true cause of that failure lies particularly in the ideological crisis of our spiritual leaders, and in their loss of the Ukrainian State myth, which members of the St. Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood saw so clearly when led by Shevchenko and Kulish."²²

Following D. Dontsov²³, Y. Kosach referred to the 19th century as "the rustic age" of the Ukrainian literature, and did not spare understating epithets for its description: "It is an unfortunate and grey gap in the majestic progress of our

¹⁹ The State of God Ukraine.

²⁰ Y. Kosach, *Na varti natsii*, „Studii z ukrainistyky” 2017, Vyp. XXII, pp. 187–188.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ D. Dontsov, *Natsionalizm*, K. 2007.

literature through the centuries, with the brilliant renegade Gogol standing on one bank of this gap, and the solemn giant Shevchenko on the other. Between them, there is a bunch of peasants floating from one bank to another depending on the greater or lesser degree of their national power. As a consequence, this hesitation results in provincial writings, 'scribblings' of the sunny Arcadia, of the sweet Little Russia being a part of Russian imperial literature."²⁴

Did Y. Kosach mean himself as a critic when in his report he spoke about the works by V. Vynnychenko that were "banned with the same hatred" on both sides of the Zbruch River, bringing the writer "up to the point of breakdown and spiritual death"? Of course not. At the time, his criticism of V. Vynnychenko in "On Guard of the Nation" was not too friendly: "[...] Russian culture has taken this extraordinary talent from us and turned him into the Ukrainian epigone of Gorky, Andreyev and Artsybashev. Vynnychenko will try in vain to get out of the stinking marshlands of Russian influence that will degrade his will and brain, he will glimpse with bits of his former self, but after that his pen led by the hand of a Russian demon, a primordial killer of Ukrainian souls, will only paint vile creatures and pale worms disintegrating not only his body but the whole environment around him. It is his ideas of 'being honest to oneself' and 'balance' and immoral-utopian Communism will disperse Ukrainian courage and tenacity, it is because of him thousands of blind and lost Ukrainian souls will rot in an intelligentsia- neurasthenic nihilism. All that will overshadow the sparks of artistic power still burning in him – over the reality of the new Ukraine, in the days of the revolution and after that, Vynnychenko will stand as a horrendous vampire, who is damned by the Ukrainian spirit of revival now locked in the infamy of imprisonment which he helped to build. And that is why there is no place there for Vynnychenko, who failed to stand against Moscow."²⁴

In a word, all disputable issues of the interwar twenty-year' period, covered by Y. Kosach in his report "The Crisis of Contemporary Ukrainian Literature" at the first congress of AUM, also concerned himself as a writer, critic and essayist. Yet all of the accusations were aimed only at D. Dontsov.

²⁴ Y. Kosach, *Na varti natsii*, „Studii z ukrainistyky” 2017, Vyp. XXII, p. 227.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 243.

Y. Kosach considered the lack of discussion to be the greatest sin of the literary era spent under the banner of *The Bulletin*. However, starting the discussion-revision of D. Dontsov's concepts himself, he offered a doubtful procedure, where prejudice, fake, substitution of notions, distortion of facts, deliberate silencing of sensitive facts and reasons were a common thing. The AUM tacitly agreed to such rules. This is particularly evident in the article by Y. Sherekh-Shevelyov "Dontsov is burying Dontsov"²⁶, where similar non-philological approaches were applied.

Therefore, in his "Letter to U. Samchuk, the AUM Chairman" D. Dontsov asked a fair question: "Do you think this attack is in harmony with the basics of 'moral and ethical instruction' approved at the AUM meeting on May 9, which require 'loyalty, tolerance and respect for human beings and their personal beliefs?'"²⁷

O. Bahan, who studied *The Bulletin* art concept, believes that since their first speeches, members of the AUM criticized the literary tradition and aesthetic basics of *The Bulletin* school, that is, D. Dontsov's aesthetic doctrine, in order to "clear the way" for the new literary generation in exile. The scholar argues: "*The Bulletin* artistic concept – a volitional, dynamic neo-romanticism, to a large extent theoretically substantiated by D. Dontsov – was the brightest and the most authoritative phenomenon in the Ukrainian culture of the inter-war period in Western Ukraine and in emigration. Without overcoming and discrediting this authority (which did not fit into the post-war framework of ideological and aesthetic values and criteria), it was impossible to move on. So D. Dontsov and his ideas naturally became the main target for such criticism."²⁸

The analysis points to the general problem of constructive criticism, which was replaced repeatedly by the struggle against the previous literary generation and often swept away the competitors themselves, as it happened to D. Dontsov

²⁶ Y. Sherekh, *Dontsov khovaie Dontsova*, [in:] *Porohy i zaporizhzhia. Literatura. Mystetstvo. Ideolohii*, T. III, Kharkiv 1998.

²⁷ D. Dontsov, *Lyst do Holovy MURu U. Samchuka*, [in:] *Literaturna eseistyka*, Drohobych 2009, pp. 564–577.

²⁸ O. Bahan, *Dmytro Dontsov, visnykivstvo, natsionalizm: pytannia spadshchyny i spadkovosty*, [in:] *Literaturna eseistyka*, p. 673.

and Y. Kosach. Instead, both D. Dontsov and Y. Kosach are worth going down in the history of Ukrainian literature and in the history of Ukrainian philological and political thought as main revivers of true Ukrainian myths about the thousand-year-old nation, about the "princely-royal, Cossack-Rusyn Ukraine", and about its brave people, "glorious at sea and on land since ancient times", about the Ukrainian word that has always stood on guard of the nation.

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