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Specifications of Free Verse Writing in Lesja Ukrajinka's Heritage

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Abstract- The article gives an analysis of several poems taken from Lesja Ukrajinka's nature philosophical verses written in the free form. What became the initials for this research was the nature of free verse, which would allow determining the specifications of generic and stylistic diffusion in works of a certain poet and observe formation of an individual vision of the world, thereby reflected in re-interpreted initials of folklore verse. The objectives of this work are to establish the formal and substantial features of free verse writing in the poetic works by Lesja Ukrajinka upon studying three most famous free verses ("Fragments from the Letter," "Ave Regina!", and "Spring in Winter"). Concisely, there was concluded that the formal and substantial conceits of Lesja's creativity, the choice of genre and versification order first, evidence her endeavor to return to initial artistic syncretism. Particularly, her free verse, upon combining the prosodic systems dominant in Modernist literary process in Ukraine, appears to be the successor of preliminary versification traditions (folk duma verse) and, at the same time, the founder of those new. It is the factor that defines the special imagery of free verse works, including various lexical massifs (exotic, colloquial, or dialect words), artistic and scientific terms, and composition of a verse as a narration with profound philosophical content.

Keywords: *versification, free verse, lesja ukrajinka's poetry, genre, image, motif, symbol.*

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Specifications of Free Verse Writing in Lesja Ukrajinka's Heritage

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Abstract- The article gives an analysis of several poems taken from Lesja Ukrajinka's nature philosophical verses written in the free form. What became the initials for this research was the nature of free verse, which would allow determining the specifications of generic and stylistic diffusion in works of a certain poet and observe formation of an individual vision of the world, thereby reflected in re-interpreted initials of folklore verse. The objectives of this work are to establish the formal and substantial features of free verse writing in the poetic works by Lesja Ukrajinka upon studying three most famous free verses ("Fragments from the Letter," "Ave Regina!", and "Spring in Winter"). Concisely, there was concluded that the formal and substantial conceits of Lesja's creativity, the choice of genre and versification order first, evidence her endeavor to return to initial artistic syncretism. Particularly, her free verse, upon combining the prosodic systems dominant in Modernist literary process in Ukraine, appears to be the successor of preliminary versification traditions (folk duma verse) and, at the same time, the founder of those new. It is the factor that defines the special imagery of free verse works, including various lexical massifs (exotic, colloquial, or dialect words), artistic and scientific terms, and composition of a verse as a narration with profound philosophical content.

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I. Introduction

Since one of the essential problems of poetics, which is the initials and the reasons of apparition of the free verse in a certain literature, is set up, it is subsequently followed with the question of the way it is supposed to transform within a poet's individual style, in other words – what would be its generic dimensions like? Upon turning to classical Ukrainian free verse, it is believed to be the complicated generic phenomenon from the very first moment of its emerging, synthesizing lyric, epic and dramatic genres with various means of other arts, like music, painting, or sculpture.

In fact, there was no poet in the world literature to write only free verses. On the contrary, whenever an author skilful enough in metric verses turns to those of free form, the latter would appear to be especially expressive on the background of traditionally shaped lyrics. Many scientists tended to confirm that Lesja Ukrajinka was the first to write the verse libres in Ukraine, or at least tried to establish a transition to them through versification experiments and translation activity (including her interpretations of Vedic hymns and Heinrich Heine's lyrics). That is why some of her poems are defined as 'vers libre imitations' ('verlibroid,' in Ukrainian), or the marginal forms between verses metric and free, rhymed and unrhymed.

There is an authoritative thought that Lesja Ukrajinka's verse combined the free verse itself and the 'deliberate' one (Kostenko 2006: 120-122); the latter is determined as the pseudo-hexameter using the lines of different length, but written mostly in three-foot meters (dactyl first of all). This combination would allow discussing the originality of Lesja's free verse, achieved by synthesizing the intonations of Ukrainian folk epic songs (dumas) and the versification experience of her contemporaries the French symbolists, who are still alleged to be the initiators of free-verse writing in West Europe (Tkačenko 2003: 371).

If to hypothetically categorize the free verse itself into two groups – the simplex (the verse form with relative domination of the certain meter, say iambic) and the complex (the verse form with alternation of meters), Lesja Ukrajinka's verse would finally be defined as the simplex three-foot form with changeable anacrusis (Kostenko 2006: 125) enriched with elements of dolnik – a line of three-syllable meter with one to three syllables omitted from a separate foot.

What remains a matter of discussion for philologists up to nowadays is expedience of a rhyme in a free verse. Evidently, the authentic vers libre does not seem to be oriented at the alteration of stresses and rhymes; nevertheless, their occasional apparition would not break its harmonic structure (Sydorenko 1980: 44). The rhyme in a free verse could appear elsewhere – either at the ends of the adjacent lines or within them. It is present at the majority of Lesja Ukrajinka's free verses like "Ave regina!", "Zorja poeziji: Improvizacija" (*The Star of the Poetry: Improvisation*), "Vesna zymova" (*Spring in Winter*) (Naumenko 2010: 60); however, due to significantly lengthy lines, the consonant words get moved deep into the verse to compose the internal rhyme.

Therefore, the objectives of this work are to establish the formal and substantial features of free verse writing in the poetic works by Lesja Ukrajinka, regarding the specifications of verse form, intonations, imagery, range of topics, lyrical and ironic tonality of the poems.

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II. Lyric and Epic Initials of Lesja Ukrajinka's Free Verse

a) *"Fragments of a Letter": transformation of a hexametrical stylization into authentic free verse form*

Having worked over the translations of ancient Egyptian poems and Vedic hymns, Lesja Ukrayinka definitely elaborated her own style of free versification identified by the following features: using the various three-syllable feet, first of all dactyl and anapest, artistic synthesis and intertextuality (Naumenko 2010: 74). Lesja's free verse works – either with the certain generic markers, like "Uryvky z lysta" (*Fragments of a Letter*), "Melodiji, č. 12" (*Melodies, Part 12*), "Zorja poeziji: Improvizacija", or without them, like "Vesna zymova", "Ave Regina!", "Zavždy ternovyj vinec'…" (*The Crown of Thorns Will Always Be…*) – are characterized by the interactions of lyric, epic, and dramatic initials on the ground of philosophical outlook, mostly the binary opposition 'freedom / slavery.'

Upon observing Lesja Ukrajinka's mature lyrics, it can be evident that all aforementioned elements are present in probably the most famous of her free verses, "Uryvky z lysta" (*Fragments of a Letter, 1897*), included into the cycle "Kryms'ki vidhuky" (*Crimean Echoes*). As the textologists evidenced, this poem had got its title because of the significant eliminations from the initial text (Mirošnyšenko 2001: 91; Vyšnevs'ka 1976: 137). On the other hand, this means should be classified as 'non-finito' figure, which would furthermore permit us to claim the genre of a fragment as a typical form of Modernist free verse. Consequently, the image of a speaker in "Fragments…" appears to be not only the author's alter ego, but also an expresser of an idea of liberated creation.

It is the very first lines that comprise Lesja's understanding of a free verse nature:

My friend! Be not taken aback by the verses so lazy:
Rhymes, the daughters of sleepless nights, are leaving me now,
And meters, like billows so fanciful,
Go break over the every wee stone[1].

(*Товаришу мій! Не здивуйте з лінивого вірша:*
Рифми, дочки безсонних ночей, покидають мене,
Розмір, наче химерная хвиля,
Розбивається раптом об кожну малу перешкоду… (Ukrajinka 1975b: 157)

At this point, it is expedient to discuss not only the metaphoric content of the free verse, but also the role of literary terms as the constituents of a metaphorical complex.

Firstly, since Lesja's speaker preliminarily called her future poem '*the verses so lazy*,' she would imply that there should be needed a great mental work to find a non-trivial collocation of words and thereinafter to compensate the absence of a certain meter and exact rhymes.

Secondly, defining the *meters* 'a fanciful billow' would apparently mean that the alternation of stressed and unstressed *syllables*, as well as the graphic structure of *lines*, should bear the resemblance to the movement of sea waves.

Finally yet importantly, 'the every wee stone' would symbolize the need to omit or to add some syllables in order to keep up to the exact meter. Here in "Fragments," the sequence of long and short lines additionally imitates the fickleness of the sea, which can be proved by the following quotation:

It's wild, and it's weird, no rhyme and no reason it knows,
'Twas yesterday when it so playfully splashed
In spite of the weather so calm;
Now it is rolling the waves to the shores so gently,
Though the wind very fiercely is driving the clouds through mountains…

(*Дике, химерне воно, ні ладу, ні закону не знає:*
Вчора грало-шуміло воно
При ясній, спокійній годині,
Сьогодні вже тихо й лагідно до берега шле свої хвилі,
Хоч вітер по горах шалено жене сиві хмари… (Ukrajinka 1975b: 157)

After a lyrical prelude, the speaker appeals to her addressee – assumingly a poet – to answer to his lyrical message, though unknown from the text but named "as powerful just as if armored in steel," with merely 'a fable,' as she herself tells humbly. Nevertheless, the further narration sounds neither like a fable nor a tale, but more probably like a parable about a flower grown through the stones, as the symbol of invincibility. The archetypal image of a road is represented in gradation of floral motifs:

Neither the laurels delighting the poets,
Nor even the splendid magnolias are seen,
Nor cypresses slender, all covered with ivy,
Nor canopies raised by the sycamore trees...

(*Ось уже й лаврів, поетами люблених,*
Пишних магнолій не видко,
Ані стрункіх кипарисів, густо повитих плющем,
Ані платанів розкішних наметів… (Ukrajinka 1975b: 158)

Here an anaphoric negation ('neither… nor', in Ukrainian 'ані… ані') can be regarded as the marker of the speaker's ironic outlook on typical images of subtropical, particularly Crimean, landscapes (*the laurels delighting the poets*), given the epithets and similes related to them (like *splendid magnolias,*

[1] Here and afterwards the translation of Lesja Ukrajinka's verses is mine. NN.

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cypresses slender, canopies of the sycamore trees). Instead, the symbols of Ukrainian folk songs, for instance 'beaten tracks,' 'vineyards so lush,' 'cover the ground like a carpet' etc. are gaining more esthetic strength. Hexametrical lines thereafter imparted an epic intonation to the entire poem:

Neither the laurels […] nor even the splendid magnolias are seen […]
But the birches as well […] have been left so far behind us […]
Only the thorns and the thistles and wormwood were our fellow travelers,
But soon they have, too, disappeared.

(*Ось уже й лаврів… пишних магнолій не видко…*
Але й вони [берези] вже зостались далеко за нами…
Тільки терни, будяки та полин товаришили нам у дорозі,
Потім не стало і їх (Ukrajinka 1975b: 158)

Firstly, to show the contrast between the waterfront landscapes and the stony desert, Lesja's speaker used the extraordinary image '*the way to Nirvana, the Realm of Almighty Death'*. In fact, the adepts of Buddhism are sure that Nirvana is about to reach through the array of sufferings and reincarnations (Knappert 1995: 86). Upon projecting this postulate at "Fragments of a Letter," we would find the time-and-space conceit of a passage through the mountains adjacent to sufferings, and from thence elucidate the reincarnation symbolized by

a flower, so big and benign, that's opened its petals to heaven,
and dewdrops were diamonds gleaming on the bottom of it.

(*…квітка велика, хороша, [що] свіжі пелюстки розкрила,*
І краплі роси самоцвітом блищали на дні (Ukrajinka 1975b: 158)

Hence, we can see the image of a jewel recurred from the beginning (in a description of the sea waves) to signify the speaker's gladness:

The flower hath broken through stones, which were so victorious
To greatly oppress all the powerful oaks
And the obstinate thorns.

(*Камінь пробила вона [квітка], той камінь, що все переміг,*
Що задавив і могутні дуби,
І терни непокірні (Ukrajinka 1975b: 158)

The final lines of the entire poem contain the parallel nomination for the flower – Saxifraga (the official Latin name of the plant, borrowed by English language with a slight change, 'Saxifrage') and its Ukrainian analogue that is spelt like this, 'Lomykamin'. Textologists explored that there was one more line to close the lyrical narration, "*Whether this flower* ***hath grown*** *on your wall, my sworn brother?*", by which words Lesja would wish her imprisoned comrade to remain strong despite everything.

Furthermore, the poetess changed the noticed line to make it sound, "*Whether this flower* ***would grow*** *on your wall, my sworn brother?*" This correction would evidence that the addressee's spirit was as powerful as the miraculous flower (Mirošnyčenko 2001: 91). Lastly, as we can see, the closing line has been omitted from the final text; however, this elimination might be motivated by the purpose to transform the image of a flower into an archetype of human inflexibility:

Academicians bestowed it a name Saxifraga,
We the poets have better to call it a 'Stone-Break'
And worship it higher than luxuriant laurels.

(*Квітку ту вчені люди зовуть Saxifraga,*
Нам, поетам, годиться назвати її Ломикамінь
І шанувать її більше від пишного лавра (Ukrajinka 1975b: 159)

b) Lesja Ukrajinka's interpretation of the 'freedom' motif in a free verse form

The sophisticated (meditative, syntactic and symbolic) structure of a free verse represented in "Fragments of a Letter,", actually a hexameter with the different number of feet per line and the alternating anacrusis, is recognized by the majority of scientists under the terminological conceit of 'Lesja Ukrajinka's verse' (See Kostenko 2006: 125).

That is why it became possible to observe the analogical artistic means, together with Biblical and Ancient Greek allusions, in Lesja Ukrajinka's *vers libre* "Ave regina!":

You impious Muse! Oh where have you brought me, you say!..
My folly was what you have taken yourself for an actor
To play the enamored roles just to please you…
In vain had I wanted to hang up my harp
On those weeping boughs of a willow forlorn
And thence bring a pledge that no-one'd ever hear
The slavery cantos of mine.

(*Безжальная музо! куди ти мене завела?..*
Моє божевілля взяла ти собі за актора,
Щоб грало закохані ролі тобі на потіху…
Даремне хотіла я арфу свою почепити
На вітах плакучих сумної верби
І дати велику присягу, що в світі ніхто не почує
Невольничі пісні мої… (Ukrajinka 1975a: 127)

In these lines, the motifs of 136th psalm ("By the Rivers of Babylon"), having been included into the hexametrical lyrical narration, help make up the image of an enchained artist (or 'the poet during the siege', an authentic Lesja's conceit), yearning to get freedom. The emotional tenseness of the poem is expressed in sharp antitheses (human feelings are daringly compared to

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jewels) and Neo-Romantic irony in showing 'the gifts of the Muse':

So, where are your donations, my Queen?..
Here they are, these rich gifts: tears for the precious pearls,
Human recognition for chilly crystal,
And sadness to vest me in heavy black velvet,
It's only the ruby of blood to soothe the mourning for sorrow…
So rejoice, Your Excellence, the captive is greeting you!

(*…Де ж твої подарунки, царице?*
Ось вони, пишні дари: сльози – коштовнії перли,
Людське признання – холодний кришталь,
Смуток мене одягає чорним важким оксамитом,
Тільки й скрашає жалобу жалю кривавий рубін…
Радуйся, ясна царице, бранка вітає тебе! (Ukrajinka 1975a: 128)

Talking about the free-verse interpretations of the conceit of inseparability between everyday life and the life of nature, as well as between creation and freedom, we can turn to Lesja Ukrajinka's work "Vesna zymova" (*Spring in Winter*) that belongs to the cycle "Crimean Echoes," together with "Fragments of a Letter":

Matted in silvery gloss is the snow on the rooftops,
Banisters high to the balconies hide in the shadows:
Among them, the cypresses look like turrets of castles.
Weighty and wide, the magnolias' leaves
Appear like minted in silver.

(*Матовим сріблом біліють дахи на будинках,*
Тіні різкі вирізняють балкони, тонкі балюстради,
А кипариси між ними здаються високими вежами замків:
Листя магнолій широке, важке, нерухоме
Кованим сріблом здається… (Ukrajinka 1975c: 170)

According to textologists, this work was published in "Literaturno-naukovyj vistnyk" (*The Literary and Academic Herald*) with no division into separate lines, merely like a lyrical prose. The final variant evidences Lesja's intention to outline the keywords of a narration in order to accent the main idea of the verse, which is the opposition of a splendid Southern night and the speaker's Motherland seized with snow (Vyšnevska 1976: 148-149).

On the background of the speaker's reflections ("*Well, other mountains and streets were what I was thinking about…Who's sleeping in there, who's not? and who's burning the lights in the window?*"[2]), a Wendepunkt, or a climax point, emerges:

Suddenly have I recalled that austere and ominous building,
Those heavy locks on the gates, and the guards at the fence,
And beyond it were you, my comrade, caged in a cell.

(*Раптом чогось я згадала велику, сувору будову,*
Брами з важкими замками, сторожу й високу ограду,
А за оградою – вас, мій товаришу, в клітці тюремній
(Ukrajinka 1975c: 171)

Therefore, we should confirm that Ukrajinka's "Spring in Winter," due to its free and meantime hexametrical form, acquired not only lyrical, but also epic features, having thus become a specimen of a newly invented genre – a verse novella (See Naumenko 2010: 78-79).

III. Conclusion

In general, owing to the fact that the free verse was quite sporadic in early Ukrainian Modernism, it appears to be the most remarkable phenomenon for such studies. What was found noticeable in the free-verse works by Lesja Ukrajinka was, firstly, the combination of long lines, sometimes called 'versets.'

As the free verse at the end of the 19th century could not be distinctive from prose writing, the poetess analyzed preferred either to use lengthy end-stopped unrhymed lines or divide them into several verses with occasional rhymes – for instance, to create the intonation of listing (like in "Fragments of a Letter"). Another factor to display the author's aspiration to make her narrations sound epic was the three-foot meters (dactyl, amphibrach, and anapest) that imparted the Homeric resonance to the poems.

Furthermore, the formal factors discovered in the researched lyrical texts established the trend to outline their contextual similarity, which is selection of topics. Judging by the essence of plots and words to embody them, the free verses by Lesja Ukrajinka are profoundly philosophical, religious and reflective in content, but whenever the scenes of everyday life were depicted (*Vesna zymova*, for example), they would also become elements of contemporary archetypal picture of the world.

Finally, what would make the free verses by Lesja Ukrajinka outstanding in terms of literary form and sense is the splendiferous sensory (visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory) imagery. Particularly, the binary opposition 'freedom/slavery,' upon being topical for Ukraine of fin de siecle period in social and cultural aspects, has obtained its individual interpretations in Lesja's works investigated in this paper, with an archetype of Muse for the main symbol of liberated creativity (Ave Regina!).

Overall, the formal and substantial conceits ascertained in Lesja Ukrajinka's free-verse heritage would surely evidence the writer's successful attempt to synthesize various versification systems and artistic means in embodiment of philosophically complicated as

[2] Іншії гори згадались мені, вулиці й інші будинки… Хто там спить? хто не спить? в кого в вікні видко світло?.. (Ukrajinka 1975c: 170)

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well as seemingly simple everyday themes, which became intrinsic to Modernistic literature of entire Europe.

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