

TWELVE ESSAYS ON 20th CENTURY UKRAINIAN LITERARY STUDIES: A NEW BOOK BY IVANO-FRANKIVSK SCHOLAR STEPAN KHOROB¹

Much has been published on Ukrainian literature in recent years, both in Ukraine and abroad. This is chiefly the result of Ukrainian independence and the concomitant freedom of speech and press as well as the rediscovery of unjustly forgotten writers and the opportunities to apply the latest critical approaches in ideologically unbiased circumstances.

The new book by Ivano-Frankivsk scholar Stepan Khorob, embraces this approach, taking into account new methods and contemporary literary theory. Khorob explores the works of ten literary scholars: Leonid Biletsky, Volodymyr Birchak, Yuriy Boyko-Blokhin, Mykola Hnatyshak, Yaroslav Hordynsky, Ostap Hrytsay, Volodymyr Derzhavin, Mykola Yevshan, Bohdan Lepky and Mykhailo Rozdolsky. He not only examines the essential traits of their *modus operandi* as historians and literary critics, but also places their work within the *Zeitgeist* of the first decades of the twentieth century. His approach is modern and worthy of consideration. He reviews and reevaluates works published in the 1920s-1950s both in Ukraine and in the Ukrainian diaspora, and attempts to convey to the contemporary reader, especially to scholars, the continuity of the literary tradition which has come into being in Ukraine.

The main value of Khorob's work lies in the fact that it encourages the search for new names in the national sphere of literature and aids in the making of an objective scholarly assessment of Ukrainian literary works and authors. One cannot help but appreciate Khorob's integrity, scrupulousness, organization, and careful documentation. This long-awaited comprehensive and complex work is characterized by an appealing clarity, scholarly objectivity and an intense interest in Ukrainian national literature, be it Western Ukrainian or diasporic.

Khorob meticulously arranges this rich literary material into twelve essays on ten Ukrainian literary figures to compile the "portrait of the scholar." For this reason, the specific approach – be it ideological-aesthetic, historical-theoretical-literary and literary-critical – was carefully selected by the author for each essay. Those familiar with the author will recognize that he has maintained this approach throughout his scholarly career. As indicated in the "Foreword," each study is a portrait of a Ukrainian scholar, offering an objective insight into his creativity and the nature of his scholarly activity.

¹ Літературознавчі етюди: Дослідження про західноукраїнських та еміграційних учених першої половини XX століття (Literary Studies: Research on Western Ukrainian and Emigré Scholars of the First Half of the Twentieth Century, Ivano-Frankivsk, 2020)

As Khorob himself writes, he does not intend to create an all-encompassing interpretative system for all of literature, but rather individual portraits in a multifaceted toolkit for subjects of study by Western Ukrainian and emigré scholars. Thus, the first four essays – "Leonid Biletsky: a Historian of Ukrainian Literature," "Literary Aspirations of Volodymyr Birchak," "Essays that became History," and "Methodological Foundations of the History of Ukrainian Literature in the Thinking of Bohdan Lepky" – are about scholars who created concepts of history of Ukrainian national literature. The next three portraits – "From the History of Literature to Literary Criticism," "Literary Critic: Known and Unknown," and "Literary-Critical Concepts of Mykola Yevshan" – speak of researchers who have developed their own concepts of Ukrainian national literary-critical thought. The three sketches that follow – "Literary Concepts of Yuri Boyko-Blokhin in Studies of Taras Shevchenko's Work," "Research Features of the Scholarly Process of Volodymyr Derzhavin: Emigration Model of Creativity," and "Creativity of Volodymyr Derzhavin of the MUR Period" – introduce scholars with innovative Western European approaches in the analysis of Ukrainian literature. Finally, the two essays "Volodymyr Derzhavin's Concept of Translation" and "The Unknown Drama Theorist" refer to scholars with theoretical approaches to the study of various phenomena of both Ukrainian and foreign literature.

If we summarize the thoughts and impressions from each of the groups of studies, we can conclude that Leonid Biletsky associated the development of Ukrainian literature primarily with the development of folklore-historical, classicist, romantic and realistic elements, which together created an original style; Mykola Hnatyshak – with the formal and stylistic features of a number of writers in their harmonious combination of Christian (or universal) ethics with national ideas; Volodymyr Birchak – with a combination of artistic, religious-Christian and national-historical motifs, which throughout centuries had an impact on Ukrainian literature of Transcarpathia; and Bohdan Lepky – with the aesthetic essence of the very nature of art. Thus, Khorob logically associates each of these scholars to one or another within the framework of Ukrainian national literature: Leonid Biletsky with aesthetic and cultural approach; Mykola Hnatyshak – with structural approach; Volodymyr Birchak – with the biographical approach; and Bohdan Lepky – with the philological approach. Khorob does the same with the remaining scholars, placing their works into appropriate methodological categories: for example, linguistic in Yaroslav Hordynsky, comparative-typological in Ostap Hrytsay, and formally poetic in Nikolai Yevshan.

Stepan Khorob has deeply and skillfully created mini-portraits of Ukrainian literary critics for the general public, mostly for the first time. His work significantly expands our understanding of Ukrainian literary criticism in the first half of the twentieth century. The Ivano-Frankivsk scholar convincingly proves in each of the twelve essays that the individual historian, lite-

rary theorist and/or literary critic applied his own methodology of analysis to his subject matter adhering to ideological and aesthetic principles, in accordance with his Weltanschauung. In this way, Stepan Khorob clearly singles out the aesthetic quality and essence of the literary text as the one and only criterion for analysis. This new work is accessible to both lifelong scholars and lovers of Ukrainian literature and pleasantly impresses with its lucid presentation of rather complex literary material, tolerance of judgments, and skillful argumentation of positions and conclusions.

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