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**PERCEPTION OF ANCIENT MOTIFS
IN THE WORKS OF UKRAINIAN NEOCLASSICISTS**

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The article analyses the specifics of the perception of ancient motifs and images in the literary heritage of Ukrainian neoclassicists of the early 20th century, M. Zerov and M. Rylsky in particular. The poetry of Neo-Classicism representatives is considered in cultural and literary aspects. The article proves that in spite of the common for neoclassicists attraction to *kalokagathia* as an aesthetic ideal of an ancient culture, which included the harmony of senses of a rational sphere, physical and spiritual roots, high culture of thinking and the discipline of poetic speech, the aesthetic platform of Zerov and Rylsky does not come down to the principles of “pure classicism”, the interpretation of classical forms and principles as universal and unchanging norms.

Keywords: aesthetic ideal, ancient motifs, images, symbols, transformation, Ukrainian neoclassicists.

**РЕЦЕПЦИЯ АНТИЧНЫХ МОТИВОВ
В ТВОРЧЕСТВЕ УКРАИНСКИХ НЕОКЛАССИКОВ**

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В статье проанализирована специфика рецепции античных мотивов и образов в литературном наследии украинских неоклассиков начала XX века, в частности, Н. Зерова и М. Рыльского. Творчество представителей неоклассицизма рассматривается в культурологическом и литературоведческом аспектах. В работе доказано, что, несмотря на общее для неоклассиков тяготение к калокагатии как эстетическому идеалу античной культуры, который предусматривал гармонию чувств рациональной сферы, телесного и духовного начал, высокой культуры мышления и дисциплины поэтической речи, эстетическая платформа Н. Зерова и

М. Рыльского не сводится к принципам «чистого классицизма», трактовке классических форм и принципов как универсальных и неизменных норм.

Ключевые слова: эстетический идеал, античные мотивы, образы, символы, трансформация, украинские неоклассики.

The works of Ukrainian neoclassicists as the representatives of the era of “Executed Renaissance”, who left an invaluable heritage and made a tremendous contribution to the enrichment of not only Ukrainian but also world literature, have repeatedly become the subject of scholars’ research. These works mostly concerned certain aspects of poetic vocabulary and poetic thinking of M. Zerov, M. Rytsky, P. Phylypovych, Y. Klen, M. Dray-Khmara.

The researchers [2; 3; 4] raised the questions related to the originality of the artistic language and lingua-creativity of neoclassicists; they considered verbal images, analysed the functioning of idioms in poets’ language, highlighted the specifics of euphony and poetic syntax of the works.

The purpose of this research is to analyse the specifics of the perception and transformation of ancient motifs and images in the literary heritage of Ukrainian neoclassicists of the early 20th century, in particular Mykola Zerov and Maksym Rytsky. The main research methods are contextual and comparative analysis of the works.

The 20th century passed under the theme of modernism. It was the time of innovation, the search time. Different trends were emerging on the literary arena: futurists, constructivists, symbolists, acmeists, imaginists, expressionists, neoclassicists, “proletarian” and “newly-rural” poets.

However, critics considered only avant-garde search, search for new forms, new means of expression to be modern. And it sometimes was limited to primitivism. As a result, there is a long series of poems devoid of musicality, colouring, “good syntax and good vocabulary”.

And that's why in 1922 the following appeared:

Wonderful plasticity and sharp contour

Perfect style, iron track –

Here is your path, poetry [5, c. 66] (all translations by authors of this paper).

When the pages of Soviet periodicals were replete with the slogans such as “Let's throw Pushkin off the ship of modernity”, a small group of Ukrainian poets (M. Zerov, M. Rylsky, M. Dray-Khmara, P. Phylypovych, O. Bourgardt) got united first around the journal “Knygar” (“Bookman”), and later around the publishing house “Slovo” (“The Word”), which published the collections “The Earth and The Wind” by P. Phylypovych and “The Blue Distance” by M. Rylsky, later “Kamena” by M. Zerov, “Through the Storm and Snow” by M. Rylsky and “Space” by P. Phylypovych. These poets cut themselves off from the primitive pieces of the then culture, they sought to imitate the art of the past epochs, referred to classical models in their own works, in particular to the ancient motifs, themes, stories and images.

M. Zerov was not the discoverer of antiquity in Ukrainian culture. T. Shevchenko, S. Rudansky, P. Kulish, L. Ukrainka and others referred to the ancient themes, motifs and images. They used not only the plots but also by language means tried to build, according to I. Franko, “the golden bridge of understanding and empathy between us and the distant people, past generations”.

As it is known, Horatius was the first to translate the Eolian song into the Italian mode. Zerov set the same task – to bring Roman poetry to the Ukrainian land, so that Lucretius and Catullus, Virgil and Horatius, Juvenal and Ovid could “speak” beautiful Ukrainian language.

When Ukrainian neoclassicists spoke, they did not declaim ideological and aesthetic manifestos. According to Zagul, Ukrainian neoclassicists, in contrast to the Russian ones, were distinguished by greater creative conservatism: if the latter put Pushkin as a role model, the first were oriented towards Greco-Roman antiquity and French Parnassians (the first edition of Ukrainian neoclassicism was “The Anthology of

Roman Poetry" by Zerov, 1920), strictly adhered to canonical classical forms.

Ukrainian neoclassicists set the task of creating a “great style of Ukrainian literature” based on Greco-Roman antiquity and European Parnassians; hence there is a cult of strict classical forms (sonnet, octave, Alexandrine verse, elegiac distich). Zerov was often ranked, of course carefully, as “canonist”. Indeed, he was the only strict neoclassicist; as a theorist who encouraged to go back “to the roots” (it was the title of the collection of his literary-critical articles), and as a poet and translator, however, it is known that Rylsky categorically disagreed to refer Zerov to the archaists and conservatives. The poet saw a protest in his canonism against the “old-fashionedness and sentimentality of the old epigonous generations, on the one hand, and on the other – the reaction to all kinds of left-wing “isms”, widely-spread in the 20s.

According to Lotman, the symbol never belongs to one particular synchronous aspect of culture – it always penetrates into this aspect vertically, coming from the past and going into the future [7, c. 191]. The memory of the symbol is always older than the memory of its non-symbolic textual setting. Being the important mechanisms of culture’s memory, symbols carry texts, plot schemes and other semiotic units from one aspect of culture to another. Constant sets of symbols which penetrate into the diachrony of culture, to a large extent, perform the function of the mechanisms of unity: maintaining the culture’s memory about itself, they do not let it disintegrate into isolated chronological layers. The unity of the basic set of dominant symbols and their duration in cultural life largely determine national and local boundaries of cultures. Consequently, the symbol is a mediator between different spheres of semiosis, as well as between semiotic and non-semiotic reality. Equally it is a mediator between the text synchrony and culture’s memory.

According to researchers [6; 8] in the floral kingdom, it is extremely difficult to find any other plant which symbolism would be as contradictory as a Lily.

In mythology Lily has an ambivalent semantics. Lily (especially white Lily) is associated with purity and innocence. According to folk beliefs, the one who breaks Lily

takes the virginity of a girl. On the other hand, Lily is associated with death and the afterlife world: for instance, Persephone was abducted by Hades to the underworld at the moment when she was collecting Lilies and violets. Based on the chthonic semantics of Lily, it is possible to trace its relations with fertility (according to the Greek myth, Lily comes from drops of Hera's milk).

The scientific Latin name of Lily, adopted in the international nomenclature, is also associated with the myth. According to the legend, it came out from the body of a beautiful nymph, who died because of love and jealousy for imperturbable Hercules. Hence the scientific name of the flower *Nymphaea*.

Seven poems from M. Rilsky's early collections are devoted to white water Lily ("Water Lilies", "Laughed at by myself", "There, Somewhere Deep at the Bottom", "The Voice of Poison", etc.). Moreover, the image of the flower reflects a range of meanings:

The personification of purity, faith, striving for ideal:

There, somewhere deep at the bottom,

At the bottom of my heart

There are fair lilies,

Fair lilies.

There we stood, eyes full of tears,

Sinful and weak,

But every single heart

Hides white lilies inside.

("There, Somewhere Deep at the Bottom...")

I am looking for a white lily, –

But all the lilies are in the dirt!

("Laughed at by myself")

silence and serenity:

In the deep backwater,

*Far away from a man
Morphetic lilies are blooming,
And there's peace around.
The embodiment of tainted love:
I love the poison hidden in the lily,
I love you, because you stray from love,
You are the only one for me;
("The Voice of Poison")
You are the princess from my fairytale,
Charmed, silver, bitter.
Foreigner! Witch! Lily!
("Foreigner")*

The image of a Rose is not less popular in neoclassical poetry. In Rylsky's every poem the Rose has a new image: whether it is a wreath for the death of the poet, or scalding tears, which the author hopes would blossom with "earthly roses", or a diadem for his beloved one – "heavenly roses", or a bloody rose in the hands of Harlequin, or "flaming flowers" of Aphrodite. The flower acquires the traits of the general name – Poet, Avenger, Beloved, Goddess.

*With flaming pen eternity is writing
This never-ending story,
The wing is gently swinging
The roses petals, brooding.
("With flaming pen")*

Ancient Greeks wore the flower on the head and on the chest as a symbol of mourning, the transience and the shortness of our life, which fades as a fragrant rose. Even there was a proverb: "If you passed by a rose, do not look for it anymore".

That is why it is no coincidence that this motif appeared in Rylsky's poems:

Desdemona in white dresses

*Is standing high above, –
She wears the nicest crown
Of roses and of evening dawns.
("The Blue Distance")
I pinned to your chest
Roses black and divine...
("Black Roses")*

In ancient mythology, this beautiful flower was dedicated to the goddess of love and beauty Aphrodite (Venus). According to one of the Greek myths, they even came to this world at the same time: when Aphrodite rose from the sea foam, the puffs of foam on the breast, shoulders and hips of the charming goddess, turned into magnificent white roses.

The origin of the red rose is also associated with Aphrodite. Once, the goddess was in a hurry to help her dying beloved Adonis, fatally wounded by the fangs of a huge boar while hunting. Anxious Aphrodite did not notice sharp stones and thorns that tormented her tender legs, and where the blood drops of the most beautiful of the goddesses fell, the red roses grew. The noun *rosa* is derived from ancient Greek *rhodon* "a rose, a dog rose", which in turn is connected with Celtic adjective *rhodd* "red" [1].

In the religion of ancient Greeks, where roses were an integral part of the cult of Aphrodite, the priestesses vested the altars of her temples with these beautiful flowers, and the temples themselves were surrounded by fragrant rosaries. On Rhodes, where there was one of the most beautiful temples of Aphrodite, the image of the divine flower was stamped on the coins.

The bride wore the wreath made of roses, tied up with myrtle. The doors of her house were decorated with roses, and the marriage bed was covered with rose petals. The above-mentioned myrtle was called the conjugal myrtle by Romans (*Myrtus coniugalis*).

Fragrant roses adorned our marriage bed,

The image of Cypris blesses it from the corner.

We will deliver honey-sweet fig to the goddess,

Dark, strong grapes and young pigeons.

The sun will set over the sea, the roses will be intoxicating,

My hands will reach for your hands, my lips will look for your insatiable lips...

Oh dear goddess, give us strength to be beautiful in love

And father a child in this magical night [9].

This poem became a masterpiece of Rylsky's love lyrics, which received various responses on the pages of "Chervony Shlyakh" ("The Red Road"), among which there was a review by Sosiura: "With its simplicity and power it resembles the best examples of ancient poetry, the author picked even the classical coloring, and the hexameter here only crowns the harmony". These were the words of gratitude for "spouses' prayer".

The poem is characterized by the following: the ancient Greek coloring and the ancient meter – hexameter; the mythological Aphrodite (Cypris), whose beloved birds were the pigeons, and the flowers – roses; and objective realities related to the life of ancient Greeks – Hellenes "honey sweet figs", "young doves" (as an object of religious sacrifice), "strong vine". Solemn, hymnal mode is clearly felt.

In Rome the rose had a completely different meaning. In Greece it was the symbol of love and beauty for the gods, and the sign of fun and profound sorrow for people, meanwhile the Romans originally considered it to be the attribute of strict morals or the reward for outstanding deeds – a flower of greatness, and with the fall of Rome, it became a sign of luxury and debauchery.

"Every year the women's laugh and a weary rose..." – Rylsky wrote (ibid).

In vino veritas ("In wine there is truth") – the Latin expression says. Indeed, a person under the influence of wine is sometimes more likely to unlock his secrets. And since during the fall of Rome it was dangerous to share your own thoughts, the ancient Romans used to hang the rose over the table during banquets as a symbol of silence, meaning what is said under the rose (sub rosa) during the feast should be kept in secret

whatever it was.

A more comprehensive list of the symbolic meanings of the rose includes: beauty, perfection, elegance, joy, love, pleasure, glory, splendor, luxury, bliss, scent, pride, wisdom, secret, mystery, silence.

One of the most famous poems by M. Rylsky is “Rose and Grapes”, in which the canon of harmonious human existence is approved:

The happiness of a man has two equal wings:

Roses and grapes, the beautiful and the wholesome.

(“Rose and Grapes”)

According to researchers, such a combination is a symbol of the unity of two important aspects of human life: the pleasure from nature’s beauty, art and creative work for the benefit of people [7, c. 247]. This image is perceived as an inspirational song about the beauty of human existence, the beauty of art and nature, the creative work that is not forced, but by the heart’s call it brings moral satisfaction, and makes people’s lives purposeful.

The poems by Sappho, the poet from the island of Lesbos, who dedicated her odes to Aphrodite, are known in various translations and imitations. In the poetic heritage of M. Rylsky, there is also a place for “Sappho to Aphrodite”. However, this image is significantly different, for example, from the translation by V. Ivanov: “Iridescent-throned Aphrodite, deathless child of Zeus, wile-weaver!” This is a classic example of a prayer appeal to the goddess of love by the Russian poet-symbolist, while Rylsky wrote it as a song about sweet charms, a song full of passionate love and rage of feelings:

Don’t weave

a golden net for me,

You, the one who

Has risen from the sea!

(“Don’t weave...”)

Of course, in Sappho's poem there is neither all-embracing golden net, nor nightingales, that laugh almost like in Oles' translation, nor the young heart on the languorous bed. Everything is easily woven into the ancient era by the Ukrainian poet. As a simple refresher, Sappho's poems were called the embodiment of woman's tenderness, spiritual wealth and perfection. The Greek poet could completely give herself up to feelings, sensitively perceived the smallest phenomena of nature, and therefore, she constantly turned to it, merging together in joy and in misery. And so did M. Rylsky:

*Deliver gifts to the gods! Deliver sweetest honey,
That smells buckwheat and gentle rains...
And golden carps from clear waters,
And pigeon couple, abiding Aphrodite,
And beasts from deepest burrows, and hawks from the sky,
And young thirsty lips.*
("Deliver gifts to the gods")

Epicurean motifs are observed in the early works of Rylsky, when the joy of life pleasures is perceived as the highest good: "Days are passing, the summer is passing, but why do we grieve for them? A clear glass is filled with Wine, red and intoxicating!" After all, "life is truly wise on earth!" – the poet would say. "Clear honey", "old wines", when the table is served by Lais from Corinth, the youngest of the hetaerae, and Cynthia, according to the ancient Greek mythology the patron saint of animals and hunting. Even the winter morning looks like "the soul of a Parnassian singer", because it has in itself, as if hidden in crystal "The breath of water, and the sorrow of frozen grass, and everything from which the hearts change".

This is also the desire for sensual pleasures: "*Kiss, enjoy your life, and over the well of life, / Bow down your flamy lips, / Merging beauty with thirst*".

Is that why love in Rylsky's poems becomes "drunken Bacchantes", "in the wreath of fire, in the fire of flowers", wrapped in grape leaves and ivy, with tambourine

and flute in her hands.

In ancient world bacchantes were not only the priestesses of Bacchus (Dionysus) – the god of grape harvest, winemaking, and ritual madness, but also the participants of bacchanalias, festivals that took place on March 17th to celebrate young men's majority and were accompanied by a secret cult.

Love – the drunken Bacchante –

Came to my lonely life,

Uninvited and strange.

(“Contrasts”)

“One needs to know how to love! There is always the way”, – appeared on the pages of the verse novel “Maryna” in 1933. This was known to Ovid, the author of “Metamorphoses”, where Philemon and Baucis became the symbols of inseparable couple, and “the art of love”. This was also known to Propertius and Catullus, who were thought to be the greatest lyricists of Rome.

Odi et amo. Auare id faciam, fortasse requiris,

Nescio, sed fieri sentio et excrucior.

(Ovid)

“I hate and love, and maybe you will ask me why? I do not know, but I feel it, and I suffer”. Catullus dedicated these words to his beloved, whose name he did not tell, but only the false name – Lesbia.

What parts and unites us?

Why are you so dear to me? Why are you so strange?

Why does love put borders between us?

I adore your kiss, I hate your laugh...

This poem “Odi et amo” by Rylsky from the collection “The Blue Distance” is so much alike Zerov's translation of “About my love” by Catullus (LXXXV): “...I feel this pain inside, and suffer, and endure”.

But “when your love is worthless, and trampled into dust...” it is impossible to

bring back the past. “It’s gone and already seems like a moment!”; “Laughed at by myself, / Fooled by the absurd life, / I feel pain and sorrow, / The untold regret cuts like a knife”. We read the following in Ovid’s “lamentations”:

Donec eris felix, multos numerabis amicos

Tempora si fueri nubila, solus eris.

It is interesting to trace the names of famous writers, poets, and orators who the early Rylsky referred to. These are the above-mentioned Publius Ovidius Naso, the author of “Amores” and “Metamorphoses”, who Rylsky calls simply by the nickname Naso; Sextus Propertius and Gaius Valerius Catullus; Quintus Horatius Flaccus, who became famous not only for odes, among which the famous “To Melpomene”, but also “Epistles Addressed to The Pisos”, which gained popularity in Europe in the 17th century – served as the canon to “L’Art poétique” by Boileau, whom Theophan Prokopovych referred to.

“Listen, listen everyone, / You, Horatia of a new time!” – said Rylsky in the “Declaration of duties of a poet and a citizen”, because only those who assessed their strength, their capabilities, their talent, are able “to create the unknown word”, “to send it to the world”. “Poetry must charm”, Horatius wrote, “And if you want to touch the others’ hearts – suffer on your own”.

The analysis of M. Zerov and M. Rylsky’s poems has found the consistent perception of classical themes, motifs, images, and symbols. The rehashes of ancient motifs by M. Rylsky are epicurean motifs and related descriptions of nature, passionate or unrequited love, hints at various mythical creatures, images of ancient gods and heroes.

In such a way M. Zerov and M. Rylsky developed Ukrainian poetic tradition, enriched Ukrainian poetry with the heritage of ancient literature. The creative works of neoclassicists is the result of the interaction of traditions and innovations, national tendencies with the borrowed and transformed experience of an ancient text perception in the world literature.

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