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The Novels by Valentine Chemerys in the Ukrainian historical prose: Problems and Poetics

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Abstract. The article presents an analytical review of literary materials about Valentine Chemerys and his literary creative activities. Some biographical data, memoirs of scientists and the writer's contemporaries are given. The historical novel *Olbia* by V. Chemerys is analyzed. The author pays attention to the peculiarities of its form and content, clarifies the importance of the interpretation of historical events mentioned in the works. The peculiarities of the creative individuality of the writer are specified.

Keywords: *historical prose, historical novel, literary work, the Scythians, Scythia, Olbia, individual style*

Statement of the problem. Historical subject matters take one of the leading positions in Ukrainian literature. "Functioning of historical prose can be considered a logically completed peculiar interpretation of the past of the people. It has historical roots in folklore, hagiographical literature, chronicles, historical chronicles and other kinds of the genre in which history is presented as subject of the literary interpretation" [10, p. 15]. Literary studies on the subject are presented in the scientific heritage of Ukrainian scientists of the second half of the XXth century S. Andrusiv, E. Baran, R. Bagriy, N. Bernadska, A. Gulyak, M. Ilnytsky, N. Kopystyanska, M. Syrotiuk, V. Chumak and others.

Historical prose, its genre and style specifics, genesis and evolution have been studied properly by history of literature, comprehended by literary theory, but many of its aspects have not been studied well enough yet. "The key notions for realistic epic have been the following ones: "truth", "true", "veracity", "objectivity", "lifelikeness", "practical way of thinking" [5, p. 12]. "The basis of the artistic and realistic studios was the principle of cause-effect relationships, because, as I. Franko emphasized, "neither in nature nor in life there is anything accidental... everything has their reasons, everything is worth studying and evaluating". He revealed the essence of the realistic narrative, which is based on the principle of determinism. Epic is to emphasize "analysis of the impacts, of these dark forces that every second push a person in his life", "contemplation of thousands of fine details through which, like water over the rocks, human life flows, from which, like from blocks of atoms, human actions and deeds, both large and small are made" [2, p. 182]. I. Franko meant also a conscious position of the novelist with his own breadth of outlook and method of large-scale narration, who can analyze social processes, structurize a highly complex composition of the work rationally, disclose events and deeds of the characters, without interfering in them, highlight inconsistencies of human destiny to the environment, show unrealized human intentions.

Relevance of the article is determined by the general state of the current spiritual renaissance of Ukraine, which creates favorable conditions for searching for the new and modernization of the known approaches to scientific study of literary phenomena and specific literary achievements of the writers. Undoubtedly, historical novels by V. Chemerys are of great interest as historical and literary components, as ideological and aesthetic ones, and also as self-sufficient ones, as well as in the context of the Ukrainian literature of the XXth – early XXIst centuries.

Analysis of the recent researches and publications. Systemic comprehension of the genre specifics and typol-

ogy of the historical novel are given in the studies of L. Alexandrova, S. Andrusiv, I. Varfolomeev, N. Bernadska, A. Gulyak, V. Donchyk, M. Ilnytsky, B. Melnychuk, E. Nakhlik, M. Syrotiuk, B. Chumak. Modern literary studies, being independent from non-scientific interests, equipped with new methodological principles which are adequate to understanding the essence of the novel as a genre concept and its variants, and historical novel in particular, try to analyze it as objectively as possible. At the turn of the XX – XXI centuries there appeared theses and monographs by S. Andrusiv, E. Baran, M. Belichenko, T. Bovsunivska, B. Valnyuk, K. Hanyukova, A. Gulyak, A. Eremenko, D. Peshorda, S. Pidoprigora, V. Polishchuk, L. Romashchenko, I. Rusnak, V. Sikorska, L. Tarnashynska, Z. Shevchuk, I. Shynkar, N. Yankova, in which the search for ideologically unbiased understanding of the past can be seen, the genesis and genre features of the historical prose are revealed, peculiarities of the historical prose of the well-known writers are highlighted – P. Kulish, I. Nechuy-Levytsky, M. Starytskyi, O. Sokolovsky, O. Levytsky, B. Lepky, U. Samchuk, P. Zahrebelny, R. Ivanychuk, R. Fedoriv, Y. Mushketyk, Val. Shevchuk and others.

Literary works by V. Chemerys became the object of the study in the works by V. Kyrylyuk [4], S. Martynova [8], L. Romanchuk [13], L. Romashchenko [14], V. Savchenko [15], S. Siverska, V. Chepiha [21] D. Yanko and others. But V. Chemerys's historical novels haven't become objects of either active discussion or deep research. There are only some reviews, comments, articles etc.

The aim of the article is to study literary creative activities of Valentine Chemerys in the context of Ukrainian historical prose. The following tasks are to be solved: to trace the trends in the development of the historical novel of the XXth – XXIst centuries, peculiarities of literary interpretations of the national past in it: it is represented not only well-known novels, but also the works by V. Chemerys which are not widely-known and ignored by critics. Due to this the overall view of literary process is expanding, understanding of the form-and-plot features of the historical prose of this period is deepened.

The horizons of historical Romance philology in the Ukrainian literary process of the XXth – early XXIst centuries lie within a wide time frame, from the prehistoric era to the emergence of Kievan Rus and modern events that are influenced by the past. The search of writers are focused not only on the subjects and new ideas, but on the genre of the historical novel as well. Personal perception of the historical past in the XXth – early XXIst centuries is inextricably linked to personal genre and style concept that contributes to highlighting of past events.

"A novel, in the classic sense, having gone through modifications from the classical works, the medieval ones..., has proved that genre is a historical category" [5, p. 11]. Y. Kovaliv claims that principles of the definition of the novel, its type, nature and functions within realism as a specifically historical trend, have changed. "Considerable length of the work enabled prose writers to investigate the nature and type of the character thoroughly and to give a comprehensive description of the history and milestones of people's life and its sense. There has been a shift from the narration about one character to the narration about many people living in a certain historical period of time" [5, p. 11].

It has been determined that "historical novel, combining the high and the low, historical authenticity and conjecture, signs of historiography and literature itself requires special ways and technologies of its studying – specific reflection about the facts, their modification, literary transformation and interpretation, specific figurative synthesizing, as well as taking into account its temporal, spatial, national and cultural, customary and legal characteristics, ethnic mentality of the presentation etc." [3,p.56].

The modern Ukrainian literary process is unimaginable without the figure of Valentine Chemerys. Among the prominent figures who have become objects of his literary studies are Oktavian Augustus, Virgil, Horace, Dmitry Hunya, Petro Doroshenko, Alexander the Great (the King of Macedonia), Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim, Publius Ovidius Naso, Yakiv Ostryanytsya, Pavlyuk, Ivan Sulyma, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, Cicero.

V. Chemerys is the author of many novels, including eight historical ones: Olbia (All Ukrainian Arkadiyev Literary Prize 2009), Scandal in the Imperial Family, Death of Ateius (D. Yavornytsky Literary prize), Epirus Witch or Olympiad – the Queen of Macedonia, Marina – the Queen of Moscow. For the novels on the history of Ukraine Fortress on the Borysphen and Warrant for Love, the author was awarded the International Prize of the Ukrainian Cossacks "Lytsarske Pero", 2008 [12, p. 2]. In 2009 he was awarded the I. Mazepa Literary Prize for the historical novel about Hetman Petro Doroshenko With No Right to Return [11, p. 2].

V. Chemerys has been interested in History since his school years. Moreover, the writer got interested in the history of Scythia. "Scythian epoch is, perhaps, the most interesting and the most brilliant period of the ancient history of Ukraine, associated with the name of the people who inhabited the vast expanses of the Black Sea seaside in the North for centuries and had a great influence on the development of states in Eastern Europe, Central and Western Asia, Southern Siberia" said S. Olhovskiy [9, p. 4]. "In his nine-volume History Herodotus outlined the history of the Greek-Persian Wars, which takes up almost half of the volume. Due to the campaign of the Persian King Darius I Hystaspes to Scythia, he first gave a systematic description of Scythians' life and setup" [9, p. 5].

V. Chemerys firmly believes that the Scythians were one of those peoples that greatly enriched the history of our country. "Look: Scythian carts that were creaking with wooden, metal rimmed wheels 2,5 thousand years ago across the steppes of Ukraine is an exact copy of future carts, called Tchoomak's carts, so Tchoomak's ox-carts are an exact copy of the Scythian ones. So, the con-

nection is evident. ... And take embroidered towels – they seem to be Ukrainian, authentic, Ukrainian thousand times. And in fact they are traced back to Scythia, Scythian applications". These words of the famous specialist in Scythia' history E. Chernenko are often cited by V. Chemerys [8, p. 138].

The writer was searching for deep roots of his people, and alongside with it, for the answer to the question what is more important for history: the fortunes of nations, the events which make it (history), or the fate of one person, his/her feelings and thoughts?

The historical novel Olbia is one of the best works of V. Chemerys. At least high appraisal of critics and numerous letters from readers, received by the author, indicate this very clearly. This work of literature was written in 1969, "Approximately at the end of the hot summer of 1969, I, finally, completed – after many years of slow, and therefore pleasant work – my first historical novel Olbia [16, p. 12].

The fate of the novel is very similar to the fate of the protagonist – Olbia. It is also unforeseen and long-suffering, (the work was banned within 13 years), but still happy (later it was published several times and became part of the 30-volume library of masterpieces – Ukrainian historical novels), because if translated from ancient Greek, Olbia means "happy."

The novel describes a particular and important historic event – the war between the Scythians and a mighty army of the Persian King Darius, that took place at the end of the 6th century BC. The war backdrops the story of a short and tragic, full of hardships and adventures life of a young Greek girl Olbia. She was given away in marriage to the mighty and powerful leader of the Scythians – Tapur, for political reasons and by the will of her father – archon of the Greek colony Olbia.

"That's the right time for you to serve the motherland, daughter, if you get married to the Scythian. If you become wife of the nomads' ruler, you will help consolidate peace and commerce between us and the steppe people. For our city and police it's just happiness" [19, p. 27]. Nobody thinks about Olbia's happiness and future life with an unloved person; this way the author shows the collision of the personal and the social.

Being brought up in the traditions of ancient culture, she takes her marriage to a barbarian nomad as collapse of her life. "A Greek girl, who was given in to marriage by parents, was taken to a new family in a beautifully decorated, flowery chariot. But hardly had the bride entered the new house, when the chariot was burnt at the door. It was the sign that she had no way back, she would never return back, till the end of her life. From that moment she no longer existed for her parents, for relatives, for the whole world. Since the chariot had been burnt at the door, and the ash had been scattered by the wind ... " [19, p. 5].

"Her face is a little long, clean, soft, slightly swarthy, with thin eyebrows that rise on the forehead like two wings, with bright eyes, a beautiful mouth, with lips like painted ones... Beautiful, delicate, not burnt by the steppe wind" [19, p. 54]. That is how the Scythians saw Olbia for the first time, when she and Tapur arrived from her native city.

For the main characters of the novel their love is really unique and mysterious.

Olbia lived with her father only and she knew nothing about her mother. When she grew up, she tried to ask her father about her mother, but all her attempts were in vain. "You have no mother. And you have never had her. Just a woman gave you a birth once. That's all. She was the slave of her lust. She didn't exist! – There was a Hospitable Sea, and there was a dolphin, that brought you on its back out of the sea. That is it. And do not torment me" [19, p. 37]. Due to the fact that Olbia will get to Tapur, she will find her mother and get to know the truth about what happened a long time ago.

So, that is how quite a short life of Olbia ended up, so tragically and unexpectedly, as she had only lived about 20 years. The novel ends with the epilogue "Tapur shut the door forever", in which Olbia's funeral is described. "Goodbye, Olbia! Do come into my dreams more often. Tapur turned round and went out, shutting the heavy oak doors of Olbia's grave, with shrill squeaking. He closed them forever ... " [19, p. 408].

Strong love in the works of Valentine Chemerys always borders – by its excessiveness – with death. But, despite all this, it still wins. For, according to the author, only love is worth something in this world.

The energy of great love is so strong, that it remains in the world even after death of one of the lovers. Olbia will appear in Tapur's dreams; a huge tomb that is visible far into the desert has become a sign of boundless love.

Historical background for love relationships of the characters in his novels is organic for the writer's creative achievements. His literary instinct enables him to find an interesting angle of vision of humanistic constituency and optimal expression of the personality, full of psychological streams of life and fate, labour-struggles, aspirations and achievements.

That great ancient state appears before readers of the novel Olbia as a legendary and real, full of glory and valor, known and unknown, enigmatic and mysterious "Country of Horsemen with bows", as Scythia of warriors and farmers, kings and chiefs, sorcerers and healers, Scythia of heroes and wizards unsurpassed masterpieces that still amaze and impress humanity.

So, Valentine Chemerys is the first writer in Ukraine who dared to write a novel on the Scythian theme. "A fascinating plot, an adventure genre of the novel, an intricately composed fabula made the book very interesting, and enabled it to gain popularity among readers. And now any consideration of the Scythian period in the history of our land is not possible without Olbia by V. Chemerys" [8, p. 140].

The gripping and dynamic historical novel – Epirus Witch or Olympiad – the Queen of Macedonia tells about life-changing events – wars, conspiracies, coups, captures of cities and the whole states, treacherous murders, about the struggle for power that was led on the lands of Macedonia and other Balkan states, Greece, Asia Minor during the reign of Philip II (382-336 years BC) and after his death.

The book by Valentine Chemerys *Generals of the Empire* contains two pieces of work: the historical novel *With No Right to Return*, written in 2002 and the narrative *Line of Mannerheim*, written in 2003. Two seemingly different personalities meet under the same cover: Ukrainian Hetman Petro Dorofiyovych Doroshenko who lived in

the 17th century, and the Finnish national hero Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim, who was born two centuries later. But if you look closely, you can see that Ukrainian and Finnish heroes have a lot of things in common: they both served the Russian Empire for some time, they both achieved high ranks. However, both Doroshenko and Mannerheim passionately loved their homeland and, for her sake, they defied the empire.

The historical novel *With No Right to Return* is full of various philosophical maxims, quotations, proverbs and sayings. The novel contains poetic lines, elements of correspondence, stories and memories, fragments from folk songs, which confirm the original formal and technical organization of the work.

The novel *Fortress on the Borisphen* by V. Chemerys shows quite a short period of time in Ukrainian history. This period is quite short but very important as it was the portent of the Great Liberation War headed by Bohdan Khmelnytsky. The events begin in the summer of 1635, when the Cossacks, led by Hetman Ivan Sulyma ruined Kodatsk fortress on the Dnieper, and end with Kumeykivsk battle, in which Ukrainians defended their land and honor with dignity from the Polish gentry and only the betrayal prevented them from gaining the victory.

The historical novel *Fortress on the Borisphen* by V. Chemerys reveals national traits of Ukrainian people, contributes to understanding of the importance of the spiritual consciousness of the nation, typical and distinctive features of one's "self", good and evil, spiritual and physical energy, which our distant predecessors possessed. In his novel the author highlights the feelings of the unity of Ukrainians' aspirations to material and spiritual achievements, to freedom and nationhood, shows the connection of times, things that generations have in common, succession of liberation traditions.

V. Chemerys is one of those writers who do not forget about the reader. All his works are marked with intrigue, full of "amusing pieces", unexpected course of events and so on. V. Savchenko calls him "the most productive prose writer of Pridneprovye and one of the most productive in Ukraine" [15].

Writer's love for the history of his native land is boundless. He tells with pride and pain about the dramatic and tragic, romantic and full of heroism and self-sacrifice events of its centuries-old existence. V. Chepiga said that "it is easy and ... difficult to write about V. Chemerys. It is easy because there is what to write about, it is difficult because he writes a great deal, digs, as they say, deeply, turning fertile layers, sows his creative grain into the field, which gives a good literary crop" [21, p. 152]. Valentine Chemerys seems to know every word that deserves attention, that is written either yesterday or today. He has undeniable taste, phenomenal memory and analytical mind. He stands out by "the depth of study of factual material" [21, p. 154] and sophisticated stylistics. Dozens of historical figures opened by V. Chemerys are defined by the word of the expert. He is a person with broad interests; he is interested in everything – from ancient history to the present day vital problems.

Literary creative activities of V. Chemerys offer modern researchers wide interpretational possibilities. His literary works, and historical prose in particular, have not been studied properly yet. The analysis of the novels by

V. Chemerys proves that their poetics is characterized by romanticizing of the heroic epoch, restraint, avoidance of sentimentality, presenting the heroic deeds as ordinary

ones, revealing the author's attitude to the events and behavior of the characters, deep psychological insight.

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Король Л.П. Романистика Валентина Чемериса в контексте украинской исторической прозы: проблематика и поэтика

Аннотация. В статье представлен аналитический обзор литературоведческих материалов, посвященных творчеству Валентина Чемериса. Приводятся некоторые биографические данные, воспоминания ученых и современников писателя. Анализируется исторический роман В. Чемериса “Ольвия”. Автор обращает внимание на его формосмысловые особенности, выясняет значение интерпретации исторических событий в произведениях. Определены особенности творческой индивидуальности писателя.

Ключевые слова: *историческая проза, исторический роман, литературное произведение, скифы, Скифия, Ольвия, индивидуальный стиль*