



**THE “WHITE AND BLACK” MOTIF IN
UKRAINIAN LITERATURE AND ART OF
THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY**

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ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the dualistic motif of «white and black» as one of the most productive in Ukrainian literature, fine arts and cinema of the early twentieth century. An attempt is made to interpret this motif in the works of Ukrainian film directors, artists, and writers. It is proposed to interpret the motif of «white and black» as a manifestation of ambivalence and intermedia potential of the artistic search of an individual artist and significant for the cultural atmosphere of the time. The contrast between the darkness of the past and the bright future becomes the central object of black-and-white Ukrainian silent cinema (D. Vertov, O. Dovzhenko). This idea is realized in the suprematic compositions of K. Malevich in 1915, the works of graphic artists (M. Zhuk), the texts of writers (V. Vynnychenko, M. Zhuk, P. Tychna). It was found that the peculiarity of the symbolism of white and black in the drama of V. Vynnychenko and the panel of M. Zhuk is the inverted semantics of the visual series. White for V. Vynnychenko, his hero, and M. Zhuk becomes the quintessence of the cold, pure, eternal. Instead, black symbolizes life on earth, the joy of creativity, a warm heart and warmth of soul, self-sacrifice and love. V. Vynnychenko in his drama brings this idea to the extreme: white and black become sacred symbols of non-existence / death and being / life, because the child’s life was placed on the altar of art. The

dynamics of the comparison of white and black in P. Tychyna's poetry is rooted in the deeply archaic layers of the worldview of the Ukrainian people, and therefore, it is projected on the traditional archetypal matrix of perception of good and evil. In the work of K. Malevich, as a representative of the avant-garde trend in fine arts, the motif of white and black is realized through the prism of revolutionary foreboding, through the absolutization of the contrast between two worlds, new and old, symbolizes the rupture of civilizations and times. It is established that the motif of «white and black» enriches not only individual works, but also the entire systemic space of Ukrainian culture of the early twentieth century, which is characterized by the search for new means of expression and ethical guidelines, experiment, syntheticity, contrast.

Key words: intermediality; «white and black»; V. Vynnychenko; K. Malevich; M. Zhuk; Ukrainian artistic avant-garde.

АНОТАЦІЯ

Мотив «білого і чорного» в українській літературі і мистецтві початку XX століття

У статті аналізується дуалістичний мотив «білого і чорного» як один з найпродуктивніших в українській літературі, образотворчому та кіномистецтві початку XX ст. Здійснюється спроба інтерпретації цього мотиву в роботах українських кінорежисерів, художників, письменників. Пропонується трактувати мотив «білого і чорного» як прояв амбівалентності та інтермедійного потенціалу художнього пошуку окремого митця та знаковий для культурної атмосфери часу. Контраст між темрявою минулого та світлим майбутнім стає центральним об'єктом чорно-білого українського німого кіно (Д. Вертов, О. Довженко). Ця ідея реалізується у супрематичних композиціях К. Малевича 1915 р., роботах художників-графіків (М. Жука), текстах письменників (В. Винниченка, М. Жука, П. Тичини). З'ясовано, що особливістю символіки білого і чорного в драмі В. Винниченка та панно М. Жука є перевернута семантика зорового ряду. Біле для В. Винниченка, його героя, і М. Жука стає квінтесенцією холодного, чистого, вічного. Натомість чорний символізує життя на землі, радість творчості, гаряче серце і тепло душі, самопожертву і любов. В. Винниченко у своїй драматургії доводить цю ідею до екстремуму: біле і чорне стають сакральними символами небуття / смерті і буття / життя, бо життя дитини було покладено на вітвар

мистецтва. Динаміка зіставлення білого і чорного в поезії П. Тичини вкорінена в глибоко архаїчних пластах світогляду українського народу, а отже проектується на традиційну архетипну матрицю сприйняття добра і зла. У творчості К. Малевича, як представника авангардного напрямку у образотворчому мистецтві, мотив білого і чорного реалізується крізь призму революційного передчуття, через абсолютизацію контрасту між двома світами, новим та старим, символізує розрив цивілізацій і часів. Встановлено, що мотив «білого і чорного» збагачує не лише окремі твори, а й увесь системний простір української культури початку ХХ ст., якому притаманний пошук нових виражальних засобів та етичних орієнтирів, експеримент, синтетичність, контрастність.

Ключові слова: інтермедіальність; «біле і чорне»; В. Винниченко; К. Малевич; М. Жук; український мистецький авангард.

INTRODUCTION

The turn of the century in the European culture was marked by a radical rethinking of the aesthetic categories and tasks of traditional art, the collision of differently vectored directions and trends, dynamism, the desire for a radical renewal of canons, and artistic eclecticism. Ukrainian modernism (from the French word *'moderne'* – modern, contemporary) in its specific universal and nationally oriented manifestations (according to M. Nayenko – neo-romanticism, symbolism, expressionism, neo-classicism, avant-gardism, futurism, constructivism) (Nayenko, 2008) appeared as a contradictory and complex set of artistic phenomena that were often mutually integrated both at the stylistic level, showing the author's strategic readiness for a creative experiment, and at the micro levels: plot and themes, motifs and artistic means. One of the most productive motifs of Ukrainian literature and art of the early twentieth century is *the distinctly dualistic motif of "white and black" as a symptomatic manifestation of the inconsistency, ambivalence and intermedia potentiality of the author's artistic search and the atmosphere / spirit of the time.*

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to R. Movchan, Ukrainian literature "of the 1920s makes a wider and more free use of various visual forms and corresponding visual and expressive means

than, say, realism, even more so – it modifies their functional features” (Movchan, 2018: 88). The explorer associates this tendency with the rejection of total mimeticism, the fixation on conditional forms, and the syncretism of Ukrainian art of the early twentieth century as a whole. Verbal-visual and genre-and-stylistic manifestations of Ukrainian literature of this period were studied on the basis of the works by Y. Yanovsky (R. Movchan), P. Tychina (G. Klochek, Yu. Kuznetsov), A. Dovzhenko (A. Punina, T. Sverbilova), M. Zhuk (V. Velichko, L. Sokolyuk), V. Vynnychenko (G. Sivachenko, L. Pochinok), and many other Ukrainian writers and artists of the early twentieth century. Rich visual-semantic expressive means, ‘cinematographicity’ of Ukrainian prose of the 1920-30s, the use of the silent cinema stylistics and the principles of film editing to create an artistic portrait, and structuring the narration have become today the subject of discussion in connection with the intensification of intermedial studies in Ukraine (N. Bilyk, T. Gundorova, O. Dubinina, R. Movchan, O. Punina, G. Sivachenko, E. Tsikhovska, T. Sverbilova, and others). The term ‘intermediality’ is most often interpreted as a relationship between different media (Müller 1996) or a ‘heteromedial’ relationship between different semiotic complexes (Wolf 2005), as well as a method of interdisciplinary analysis. In this case, any artistic or literary work is regarded as a synthesis of “many conscious leitmotifs and unconscious archetypes. This mixture provides for the search and identification of the fundamental principles, which is exactly the task of the intermedia analysis,” as E. Tsikhovska notes (Tsikhovska, 2014: 57).

THE AIM OF THE PAPER is to study the motif of «white and black» in individual works of Ukrainian literature and art of the early twentieth century, and to prove the activity of its functioning and the inexhaustible potential of semantic differences from the interdisciplinary perspectives in the systemic dialogue of that time.

METHODOLOGY

We use the concept of intermediality as an adequate tool for the analysis of inter-artistic interactions. If we regard the media as channels of artistic communications between the languages of different forms of art (Sivachenko, 2018: 447), the motif of “white and black” in Ukrainian literature and art of the early twentieth century should be interpreted as one of the dominant media of the visual

order. For more information on the terminological foundations and classifications of intermediality in Ukrainian literary criticism, see: (Tsikhovska, 2014); and on the interaction of media in avant-garde art and literature, see: (Gundorova, 2018).

RESULTS

Following the chronological principle, the palm of primacy in the actualization of this motif in the polyartistic space of Ukrainian culture of the early twentieth century should be given to cinema and painting. The development of a kinoscope (motion picture camera) by a Ukrainian mechanical engineer I. Timchenko in 1893, and the demonstration of his films at the Odessa Hotel «France», the Kharkiv film shows by A. Fedetsky in 1896, the appearance of silent movies (Edison, 1894) and cinematograph (O. Lumiere and L. Lumiere, 1895) in general legitimized the processuality of the visual arts. This resulted in the penetration of the principles of organizing temporal arts into spatial ones, thus influencing the visual practices of surrealism, Dadaism, futurism, etc. Filmmaking, which occurred almost simultaneously in Western Europe and the Russian Empire, after the First World War, was focused on the avant-garde modus in the fine arts and photography, and later in literature and other artistic fields.

The documentary black-and-white footage that astounded the audience at the first film shows expanded the horizons of knowledge and the boundaries of art, paving the way for *Le Grand Muet* (the Great Mute – silent cinema), as its most popular form, to the pedestal of people's love. The monochrome cinema stylistics of the early twentieth century was inspired, first of all, by the radical idea of destroying the old world and building a new one, which resulted in the turbulent revolutionary events in eastern Europe, and also by new technical inventions of the industrialization era. Businessman Dmytro Kharitonov (1886 – 1946) was one of the first to start investing in the development of Ukrainian film production, the opening of cinema theaters in Kharkiv, Kyiv and Odesa, as well as in the shooting of Ukrainian films. The first film with the financial assistance of Dmytro Kharitonov – the Ukrainian vaudeville comedy *How They Were Courting, or Three Loves in Sacks*, based on the story by Nikolai Gogol Christmas Eve – was shot in 1909 by a Kharkiv director and actor Oleksiy Oleksiyenko, who also performed all roles in this film (sexton, Choub, Mayor, and Solokha). The name of Kharitonov is also associated with the fate of the



famous Poltava native Vera Kholodnaya (1893 – 1919), a star of the silent movie era.

The contrast between the past and the present, as two dialectically indivisible poles, and the rapid changes in the life of humankind and the Ukrainian people become the main subject and object of the Ukrainian Soviet white and black (in Louis Delluc terminology) – avant-garde cinema. Dziga Vertov (1895 – 1954) and Oleksandr Dovzhenko (1894 – 1956) are considered its main representatives. These directors represent two moduses of Ukrainian avant-garde cinema: urbanistic and rustic. Vertov's major film *Man with a Movie Camera* was shot in 1929, after the director had been fired from *Sovkino*¹ and moved to Ukraine. Dziga Vertov (born David Kaufman) lived and worked in Ukraine for more than three years. From the shots taken in Kyiv, Odesa, and Kharkiv, Vertov forms a single image of an absolute city – perfect, mechanized, and dynamic. David's brother, Mikhail Kaufman, acted in this film as both the cameraman and its hero. The film became one of the three documentaries of the European avant-garde cinema that poeticize the fashionable urban aesthetics. It is worth recalling Paris in *Rien que les heures* (1926) by Alberto Cavalcanti, Berlin in Walter Rutmann's *Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927), and the third was the perfect black-and-white city in Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (Hosejko 2001). In this city, billboards, posters, newspapers, and signs in Ukrainian and Russian coexist and blend with each other, couples register their marriages and get divorced, and the ubiquitous cine-eye records the entries in Ukrainian in the office books. This is a symbolic urban space, a utopian city that conditionally represents the end of the old and the beginning of a new lifestyle. Such was the ideological lining of cinematic symbolism, but for the director the main task was a little different. The author focuses on camera capabilities, the heroic actions of the cameraman, and experimental frame-by-frame editing, which are intended to create unusual visual effects, and to poeticize the everyday life of the modern city, and its accelerated pulse rate.

The achievements of the Ukrainian avant-garde cinema art are associated with the activities of the All-Ukrainian Photo and Cinema Administration (VUFKU), then the name of the Odesa Film Studios. It was here that the classic of the Ukrainian theater Les Kurbas and the director and writer Oleksandr Dovzhenko began their syncretic experiments. The latter, in particular, developed the original concept of shot-sketch and shot-poster, thus synthesizing painting art and cinema art, and initiated the genre

¹ Soviet cinematographic organization and film company

of movie-essay in Ukrainian literature. In his film *Zvenigora* in 1928 (and two years later, in the film *Earth*), O. Dovzhenko combines the avant-garde cinema stylistics with poetization of Ukrainian history and mythology, and the farmers' work, and actualizes and metaphorizes the patriarchal-rustic toposes. This film became the first part of a movie trilogy. In 1958, the film *Earth*, the next after *Arsenal*, was recognized as one of the 12 best films in the history of cinema (Sverbilova, 2018: 493).

No less important line of the development of Ukrainian cinema in the early twentieth century is the close conglomeration with literature and theater, the filming of theatrical productions based on the plays of the classics of Ukrainian literature Ivan Kotlyarevsky and Taras Shevchenko (screen versions by directors Danylo Sakhnenko and Oleksa Oleksiyenko). At the premises of the Ukrainfilm Film Studios they started to shoot the films *Lies*, *The Black Panther* (based on the play by Volodymyr Vynnychenko), as well as the movies *Wind from the North*, *Karmelyuk*, *Black Council*, and others.

G. Sivachenko argues that the philosophical and aesthetic foundations in the works of Volodymyr Vynnychenko (1889 – 1951), Ukrainian writer, artist, and political figure of the time of the UPR², were formed under the influence of German expressionism (in painting and cinema versions) and became an organic part of the writer's artistic palette: "The artistic techniques produced by expressionism turned out to be surprisingly adequate to the frame of reference of the Ukrainian author himself, who was forced to go abroad for good, where he essentially became an expatriate writer, in many respects departing from the national tradition and, at the same time, enriching it with new aesthetic discoveries adequate to the then European culture" (Sivachenko, 2018: 467 – 468).

The action of V. Vynnychenko's drama *Black Panther and White Bear*, written in 1911, takes place in Paris at the time of La Belle Époque, the times of the triumph of French cabaret, theater, cinema, and painting. It is devoted to the theme of the artist and the role of art in his life, as well as to various conflicts (artist and conscience, genius and boundaries of permissibility, love and self-sacrifice, man and woman, ideal and real, life and death, etc.). The problem of good and evil has numerous manifestations in V. Vynnychenko's drama *Black Panther and White Bear*, its visual polarization can be traced already in the title of the work: the names of the heroes of the drama

² UPR – Ukrainian People's Republic, an independent state that existed in 1917-1921 in the territory of modern central, southern and eastern Ukraine, with Kyiv as its capital city.

with their declared black-and-white gamut evoke a reader's sense of inner opposition, binarity of worldview, and multifold conflicts, which is subsequently confirmed by both the storyline and the way of confrontation between the key characters of the play. The antithesis of white and black is manifested at the level of color symbolism as well as at the level of problematics and character formation, and is realized as the dominant idea of the work. The gradual development of this idea occurs, starting from the portrait characteristics of the central characters – artist Korniy Kanevich and his wife Rita Kanevich. He (White Bear) is «big, a little clumsy, sluggish, has long rich white hair like a mane»; she (Black Panther) is “very thin, willowy, dressed in black, her face has sharp features and developed jaws; a passionate face, almost wild and rugged, but sweet” (Vynnychenko, 1991: 273). According to L. Pochinok, «the traditional coloristic association of *good/white – evil/black* in the drama *Black Panther and White Bear* is consciously and experimentally addressed by the author, immediately creating the effect of paradoxicality of action that intrigues the reader and deepens the philosophical nature of the already extravagant play» (Pochinok, 2012). Another white and black couple in the play, the “dazzling-white” Snowflake and the dark-skinned young man Migueles, only confirm the author's reverse interpretation of the habitual semantic perception of the symbolism of white and black, because Snowflake looks and behaves like a “woman of easy virtue” usually condemned in society. Despite her accentuated “whiteness” (white as a symbol of purity), she tries to seduce another person's husband, her words and actions are immoral from the viewpoint of commonly accepted social norms and values: family, marital fidelity, parental duty, and the like. By contrast, Black Panther, who is an almost brutal biological embodiment of the material principle, the maternal instinct, the traditional relationship between a man and a woman in the bohemian circles, where the life of the artist and his wife revolves, appears to be understood and supported practically only by Migueles.

Is this the only way (as extravagant paradoxicality) to interpret the symbolic white/black balance in V. Vynnychenko's play? Given the «infinite semantic perspective» (Averintsev, 2007: 183) of the symbol and its dialogueness, as well as the philosophical and aesthetic orientations of the author, one should obviously take into account the multi-layeredness, the polyvalence of the immanent structure of this balance. *The visual symbolism of white and black unfolds in semantically loaded, enhanced through dialogical speech, oppositional-paired images – spatial, sensory,*

gender, archetypal. The idea of serving pure (white) high art is opposed in the play to the needs of earthly (black) real life. The writer constantly emphasizes the coldness of the “white” protagonists (the natural environment for white polar bears is known to be the cold northern climate and snow), and the high temperature and emotionality of the “black” ones (panthers live, as a rule, in tropical forests, and the homeland of the hot-tempered Migueles is a South European country – Spain).

The conflict between the spiritual and material values (the artist’s desire to finish the painting – a future masterpiece, and the need to sell urgently the unfinished canvas to earn money for the treatment of his sick son) is projected onto the level of binary opposition – male / female (White Bear and Black Panther). The juxtapositions within this oppositional pair: a woman-muse / a woman-mother ((“cold and sharp, like in the tundra of Siberia” Snowflake (Vynnychenko, 1991: 279) and passionate “hot” Rita)), as well as a man-artist / a man – “strong shoulder” – the head of the family (Korniy and Migueles), also work in contrast, including the use of plastic techniques, and achromatic visual accents. Let us not forget that the text was written on the expectation of its theatrical embodiment, hence, not only with a view to the internal reaction of the recipient-reader, but also to the instantaneous emotion and feeling of the spectator – both a witness of and a participant in the image creation. The symbolism of white and black, therefore, is intended to emphasize at all levels of perception «the other side of the same essence – going of the image beyond its boundaries, and the presence of a certain meaning, intimately merged with the image but not identical to it» (Averintsev, 2007: 180). Meant here is the so-called «mirror effect» when what is being portrayed is presented to the recipient through its own reverse image: what appeared (or wished to appear) as white is actually black and vice versa.

The archetypal graphic code in this drama permeates every motif, forming integral conceptual links both at the micro-levels (plot-compositional, image-semantic, artistic-stylistic), and at the macro-level (here we can talk about the cross-art artistic synthesis in the European art of the turn of the century; the total nature of the subject of artist and art in Ukrainian culture of the early twentieth century; the ambivalent worldview and the search by the Ukrainian intelligentsia for a universal social idea; the blurred, distorted essence of the concepts of “good” and “evil” in the



theory and practice of the revolutionary movements of the time³, etc.).

Regarding Ukrainian poetry as perhaps the most representative sphere of various inter-artistic interactions, the works of Mikhail Semenko (1892 – 1937) is indicative here. Non-objectivity and combinations of planes in Semenko's «supre-poetry» (Malevich, 2016: 15), his experimental «poetry painting» and «auditory poetry» (Literary Dictionary, 2006: 704), in terms of their intermedial strategies, resonate with the early works of Pavlo Tychina (1891 – 1967). The name of the latter is associated with the techniques of synesthesia, the so-called «vivid musicality» as the sign and the marker of purely Tychinian symbolism. In his collection of poems, *Clarinets of the Sun* (1918), he proposed a kind of worldview-aesthetic concept expressed through poetic means (assonance, alliteration, epithets, metaphors). According to M. Nayenko, the philosophy behind this concept is to “contrast the light with darkness”, and its purpose is to identify the phenomenon of man, who “appears in two contrasting substances: man – as the happiness of unity with the world, and man – as a threat to this unity” (Nayenko, 2008: 713). Synthetic interconditionality of color, sound, and emotion is saturated with typically Tychina's symbols of the sun, pigeons, fire, and music. Consequently, the conceptual opposition of white and black is embodied in the symbolic contrasting images, which the whole collection abounds in: light and darkness, singing and silence, the «sunny eyes» of joy and the «black chord» of sorrow. For example, in the poem *She Looked Clear* (1918) separation from his beloved girl causes in the soul of the lyrical hero a wave of plastic and musical associations, built on the technique of antithesis:

She looked at me *clearly* – *the violins started to sing!* -
She hugged me for the last time – in my soul. –
The forest *was silent in sorrow, in a black chord.*
The violins started to sing in my soul!
I knew, I knew: forever – the rays like eyelashes! –
I will see no more – of the sunny eyes. –
I will forever be alone, in a black chord.
The rays like eyelashes of the sunny eyes! (Tychina, 2011: 134)

One of the most complex works in the author's legacy, but also one of the most interesting for interpretation remains to be the poem *Golden Clamor* (1917). The key

³ The position and activity of V. Vynnychenko as one of the ideologists and leaders of the UPR government are still assessed ambiguously; he is accused of being close to the communist philosophy and betraying national interests. For more on this subject see (Jas 2003: 510).

to unraveling the ideological and artistic content of the poem may be turning attention to the synthetic nature of the work, the author's intermedial strategy aimed at the interaction of artistic codes of systems of different nature. The result is a complex structured narrative, in which the image-symbolic and semantic layers are formed by visual associations and strata:

Black bird,

Black bird croaks.

And all around –

Cripples.

In hours of *joy and laughter*

Who put them on their knees?

Who said they should be offered a hand,

What insane god – in the hours of joy and laughter? (Tychina, 2011: 334-335).

Further as the text goes:

I am the unquenchable Beautiful Fire,

The Eternal Spirit.

So greet us with *the sun, pigeons*.

I am a strong people! – with the sun, pigeons.

Greet us with our native songs!

I am young! (Tychina, 2011: 336)

The dualistic nature of the symbolism of white (light, joyous, sunny, fiery, young life) and black (darkness, insanity, mutilation, death) is projected onto the level of philosophical generalizations, national myths, and events of historical significance to the Ukrainian people. The recurring images of the poem are paired, contrasting: «two black coffins, and one light»; «golden clamor», «Beautiful Fire», «pigeons and the sun» / «black bird», «black-winged flock»; «Beautiful Kyiv» / «two black coffins». The content of the poem, the laconic and at the same time extremely expressive pictures of the revolutionary era and eternity in it, and the concepts – vertical (heavenly-earthly, divine-otherworldly, sacred-profane) and horizontal (thousand-year history of the Ukrainian people – a historical turning point in the time of writing the poem) should be considered as a single artistic organism, to quote S. Averintsev, “through the mediation of semantic linkages”, and correlated “with the idea of the world entirety, with the completeness of the cosmic and human universe»

(Averintsev, 2007: 181).

Passion for plastic effects, and active use of coloristics by P. Tychina were not accidental. The poet was known to be a reasonably good artist; he studied drawing at the Chernihiv Theological Seminary under Mykhailo Zhuk, one of the founders of the Higher Art School in Ukraine – the National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture. As for M. Zhuk himself (1883 – 1964) – a poet, writer, translator, a vivid representative of the Ukrainian secession in painting, graphic arts, decorative and applied arts, who was on friendly terms with B. Lepkiy, I. Nechuy-Levytsky, M. Kotsiubynsky and many other Ukrainian writers, never in his life did he break ties with his former student P. Tychina. The romantic relationships of the young poet with the Konoval sisters, Inna and Polina, inspired Mykhailo Zhuk to create the secession-style panel *White and Black* (1912 – 1914). Figure 1.



Figure 1. *White and Black* (1912 – 1914). Mykhailo Zhuk

The style of Ukrainian secession in painting (M. Zhuk, O. Murashko, O. Bogomazov, O. Novakivsky, and others), unlike the Austrian one, in the opinion of I. Gorbachova, in general became more ascetic and graphic, “thus raising the level of conditionality to a high stage” (Gorbachova). In the works of M. Zhuk, art critics notice a synthetic combination of realism and ornamentality, the influence of one of the greatest secession masters Stanislaw Wyspianski, who was the teacher of the Ukrainian artist at the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow. L. Sokolyuk, an explorer of

the oeuvre of M. Zhuk, considering the master's poetic world inextricably linked with his paintings, emphasizes the organic symbolism of his works, the drift of iconic and personally significant motifs from poetry to canvas and vice versa (Sokolyuk, 2018). The motif of white and black in the artistic legacy of the artist can serve as an example of such a "drift".

In 1908, M. Zhuk wrote the poem *White and Black*, to which he invariably returned throughout the entire "Chernihiv period" – it is this poem that became the epigraph to the manuscript collection *Poems* written in 1909. Again, we see this poem in the collection *Songs of the Earth*, which was published in 1912 and which included the poetry of previous years.

I would like to be white and black:
To shine brightly in the night,
And stand like a giant of misery in the day –
Every heart hurts (Zhuk, 1910).

For Zhuk's lyrical hero, white is an unattainable ideal, a wonderful night dream, a fantastic daydream, as his «white world lives in a paradise of distant dreams» (Zhuk, 1912). Whereas black represents the world of imperfect reality, the earthly world, in which the poet himself is merely a «Slave of the Earth, its worn-out product» (Zhuk, 1912).

The symbolic mysteriousness the poet weaves into the dual nature of existence between the world of the ideal and the real, encoded in contrasting white with black, is reproduced in the largest panel of M. Zhuk *White and Black* (207 x 310 cm), which is now a part of T. Maximyuk's collection in Odessa, being actually a tetrptych conceived as a stained glass composition (Sokolyuk, 2015: 83). There are two angels in the focal point of the panel: black-winged and white-winged. In the first one, the viewers will recognize the young Pavlo Tychina, and in the second – his beloved Polina, who was strict with him and did not reciprocate the young poet's feeling. The black angel in the panel plays the reed pipe and resembles the ancient Orpheus, who with his magical inspired music was able to defeat death itself. Whereas the white angel is depicted as a young girl with her hands folded in prayer, with austere face and downcast eyes. The key opposition in illustrative aesthetics is enriched and further developed by semantic oppositions: male – female, hot emotion of inspiration – cold rationalism, poetry, and music of the «clarinetist» Tychina – and the prose of his life, the poet's ardent love – and the indifference of his beloved. These characters symbolize two

opposite worlds, and at the same time attest to the author's search for harmony in the combination of contrasts.

Around the same time, a cycle of new works by Kazimir Malevich (1879 – 1935) were put on display at the Zero-Ten exhibition in Petrograd, including his most famous painting, *Black Square on White Background*. Figure 2.

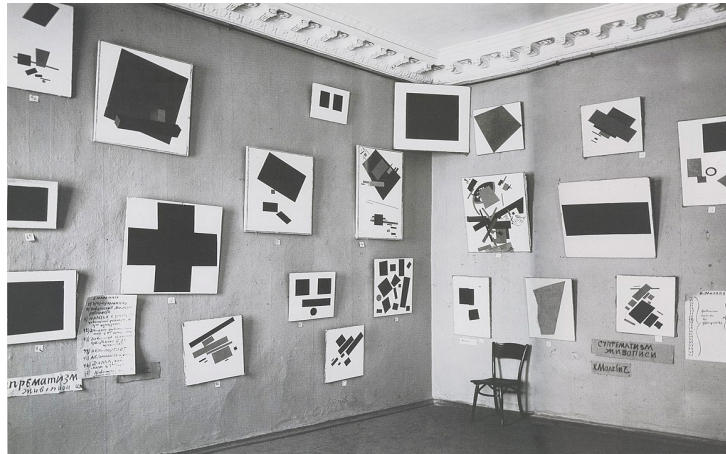


Figure 2. Zero-Ten exhibition in Petrograd. Kazimir Malevich.

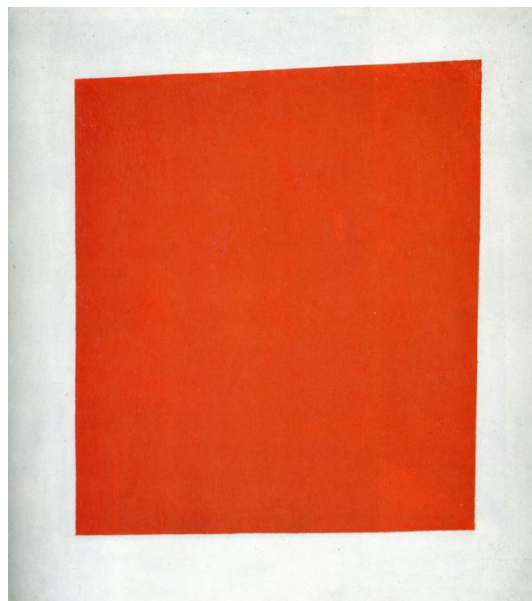
The non-objective fine art of the twentieth century (constructivism, futurism, cubo-futurism, and suprematism) proclaims contrast as one of its basic concepts. A native of the city of Kyiv, Ukrainian by his artistic training (he studied at the Kyiv Drawing School in the class of Ukrainian painter Mykola Pymonenko) and self-identity, Kazimir Malevich in 1915 exhibited a painting that shocked everyone with its ingenious simplicity and turned over the years into an icon of abstract art. Art explorers write about this period of his becoming an artist as the era of fascination with the concept of contrast, «pure» color and «pure» form, which resulted in *the philosophy of suprematism* based on three elements: square, circle, and interlaced planes (Malevich, 2016: 218). At the Kyiv exhibition in 1930, the same works were on display (*Black Cross, Black Circle, Black Square*, and others), created about fifteen years earlier. The background of each of these paintings is white. In his Kyiv lectures prepared for the KAI⁴ during 1928 – 1930, he writes about this time: “Painting sensations in cubism are present only in its first two stages, but coming to the fore in the third and fifth stages are not only the sensations of painting tone and color, but also the sensation of contrasts of the latter two, that is, the sensations themselves”

⁴ KAI (Kyiv Art Institute) – the name of the institution of higher art education in the UPR, functioned in the period 1924 – 1930, the successor of the Ukrainian Academy of Arts (founded in 1917) and one of the predecessors of the National Academy of Fine Arts and Architecture.

become elements of contrasts” (Malevich, 2016: 19). Challenging both tradition and innovative trends in the world’s fine arts, Malevich «offered humanity a new absolute, one that distinguishes human nature from the nature of other beings – the absolute of the concept,» wrote O. Savruk in the preface to the publication «Kazimir Malevich. The Kyiv period of 1928-1930.” (Malevich, 2016: 5).

Suprematism, as a new artistic style freed from all conventions and traditions of pictorial canons (the world as a clean, white page), materialized in a series of works: painterly geometric shapes on a white background. The non-objective figurativeness in Ukrainian avant-garde painting is regarded as an artistic movement that takes after the Ukrainian folk style in decorative and applied art, for example, black-red-white non-objective ornaments of traditional Ukrainian embroidery. And also as a manifestation of absolute freedom of spirit, when freedom is interpreted as the basis of Ukrainian national philosophy and the driving idea of the historical development of the nation. This opinion, in particular, is supported by the Polish art critic Andrzej Turtowski (Dzhulai, 2019). Ukrainian art critic Dmytro Gorbachov writes about the hybridity of the entire Ukrainian avant-garde, in which «folk and professional culture cross-pollinate each other» (Gorbachov, 2008: 11).

Malevich’s approach to contrast as a basic artistic concept, which allows visualizing the most complex symbolism, is also indicated by the painting *Red Square: Painterly Realism of a Peasant Woman in Two Dimensions* (1915). Figure 3.



The paradoxical title of the painting motivates art critics to try to find answers to these questions in the national identity of the artist and the anxious foreboding of the

artist – prophet, when the theme of the peasant tragedy in Ukraine during World War I, collectivization, dispossession of rich peasants, famine-genocide (which events the artist witnessed) calls for its organic embodiment on canvas. The embodiment that was immanent both in his personality, mentality and worldview, as well as in the artistic principles that he professed during this period and to which he remained faithful to the end.

DISCUSSION

This palette – both literary and artistic – can be further complemented, since this subject cannot be exhausted within the limits of one article. However, the systemic nature of the inter-artistic dialogue of the early twentieth century and the intermedial discourse of Ukrainian culture of that period as a whole seem to be obvious. Outside this discourse, in our opinion, it is not worth exploring individual phenomena of Ukrainian culture. The ambivalence of the white and black motif in the Ukrainian cultural landscape and its scientific exploration remains one of the real opportunities to comprehend the stability of the above discourse. Potential methodological vectors of analysis - study of artistic and literary artifacts of the day in the stream of geopoetics and spatial rotation, emphasis on the European aspect of Ukrainian identity in the dilemmas «Ukraine – Europe» and «Ukraine – USSR», problematization and denial of common myths and distortions about the national cultural heritage in historical and cultural studies.

CONCLUSION

The coverage in the literature of works of other forms of art and the portrayal of representatives of the art community became a ubiquitous phenomenon in the early twentieth century. Similarly, artists and directors turned to literary works and the images of writers. Avant-garde Ukrainian cinema visualized and actualized the black and white stylistics of the new era in the minds of a broad public audience, since cinema as a mass art occupied the largest segment of the socio-cultural space. The specificity of Vynnychenko's interpretation of the symbolism of white and black in his drama, as well as in the secession panel of M. Zhuk, is the reverse semantics, where the semantic accents contradict the expected semantic load of the visual imagery (white and black as the good and the evil). At the same time, such semantics seems quite natural from the point of view of the artist, whose sensory system responds

to colors and their shades in a different, more sensitive way. The white color for the artist (Vynnychenko and his hero, as well as M. Zhuk) becomes the quintessence of the cold, pure, eternal - the materialized idea of serving pure art, the idea of the superiority of the artist's calling, divine providence, the idea of a cold universe, inexorable eternal judgment, and the like. Whereas black associates with the other pole on the achromatic palette and temperature scale of the sensations, symbolizing earthly life, joy of creativity, fiery heart and warmth of the soul capable of compassion, self-sacrifice and love. Vynnychenko in his drama brings this concept to the absolute: black and white become the signs of life and death, the archaic sacred symbols of being and nothingness, because the life of an innocent child was laid on the sacrificial stone of art. As regards the poetry of Pavlo Tychina, the dynamics of contrasting white and black in his poems is rooted in the deeply archaic layers of worldview, and thus projected onto the traditionally popular, archetypal matrix of perception as the good and the evil. While in the works of Malevich, as a representative of the avant-garde trend of the world fine arts, the motif of white and black is realized through the prism of a revolutionary perception of the world, through the absolutization of the contrast between the two worlds, new and old, symbolizing the breakdown of civilizations and times.

Thus, the «white and black» motif enriches not only individual works, but also the entire systemic space of Ukrainian culture of the early twentieth century. Such polystylistics, as a rule, generates special artistic effects, polyphony of artistic codes, and a wide range of semantic associations. This saturates a work of art or literary text with deep content, encourages heterogeneity of interpretations, and opens up many opportunities for the recipients of the next generations. After all, the path to verification of what we understand today as the complex of Ukrainian culture of the 1920-30s passes through a meticulous detailed analysis of individual phenomena, motifs, and artifacts. It is exactly these elements that make up its (culture) heterogeneous, but undoubtedly nationally distinctive (in synchrony) and historically intrinsically valuable (in diachrony) artistic and literary integrity.

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