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Deconstruction of Interpretative Models of Lesya Ukrainka's *The Forest Song*

Abstract

The article explores a need to provide a permanent revision of the ways of reading classical texts. The fairy drama *The Forest Song* was written by Lesya Ukrainka, who is acclaimed as an outstanding dramatist of Ukrainian literature. This play has a vast bibliography and serves as a target of a variety of critical approaches. The point is, however, that the predominant position among them still belongs to the interpretative models generated by Lesya Ukrainka's contemporaries. This refers, first of all, to those who have hitherto interpreted *The Forest Song* within the following two frameworks: **neoromantic**, grounded in Polissyan folklore and the author's mythology, and **neoclassical**, launched by neoclassicists of the 1920s and based on the ties of Lesya Ukrainka's play with classical drama. The scholars overlook, though, a conflict between the two interpretations. Each model, employed with no regard for the other one, operates on certain elements of the text. The scholars neglect the need to correlate their work with the other, totally inverse, model (neoromanticism and neoclassicism are, at a fundamental level, as aesthetically opposed to each other as are romanticism and classicism). The article offers a new model for reading the text of Lesya Ukrainka through the lens of symbolism. This model allows us to account for the congruence of classical normativity and romantic liberty within a single text.

Keywords: Lesya Ukrainka, *The Forest Song*, neoromanticism, neoclassicism, symbolism.

Formulation of the problem. Interpretation of classical works of national literature that spans many decades or even centuries sooner or later conflicts with those versions of reading the text that arose in previous periods. Mere accumulation of new interpretations

without neglecting the usual, but false ones, does not contribute to the advancement of science.

As a rule, the first interpretive model is predominantly generated by the contemporaries of the author, who in this way gets integrated into the culture. This type of reception is one of the tenets of H.R. Jauss' theory of the horizon of expectations peculiar to the reader's epoch, time, and national culture¹. In the course of time, this model of reading and understanding (in a somewhat modified shape) has asserted itself in the horizon of expectations of the next generations of readers and critics. It is good when the horizons of understandings of the author and his or her contemporaries are consistent. But what if the author's horizon of expectations prevails considerably over that of his or her perspicacious contemporaries? This type of author is precisely the one we are focused on in this research. The generic interpretive model in this case will coordinate the two conflicting horizons by inevitably simplifying and reducing the horizon of the author.

Theoretical and methodological principles of research. Deconstruction is a specific methodology, which was formed in the 1960s and 1970s. First of all, it is deconstructionism in the version of Jacques Derrida whose essence is in the intellectual opposition to structuralism, but the spread of deconstructionism as an effective methodology is not accidentally associated with Paul de Man and his work *Allegory of Reading*. His way of reading the texts of Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust was a clear deconstruction of the models that were formed by his contemporaries.

The tremendous up-growth of post-structuralism in Western-European scholarship of the second half of the twentieth century caused a sweeping deconstruction of the most conventional and stereotypical models of reading classical literature. In Ukrainian literary criticism, deconstruction was relegated primarily to the removal of the most conspicuous ideologemes. This process, however, was

¹ H.R. Jauss, *Dosvid estetychnoho spryiniattia i literaturna hermenevtyka*, Kyiv 2011.

based on the oscillation between one extreme and the other: from adherence to socialism to adherence to nationalism or from atheism to Christianity.

Deconstruction starts when one is able to discern not only the quotations which confirm the existing background assumption but also those which contravene it. Then arises a simple need to reconcile the contrarities or, at least, to substantiate them.

The purpose of the following article is to show the conflict of widespread interpretative models, the neo-romantic and neo-classical, with the dramatic art of Lesya Ukrainka, in particular the drama *The Forest Song* (1911), and to propose a symbolist reading as one capable of removing the conflict of interpretations.

During over one hundred years of studies of Lesya Ukrainka's literary legacy, the interpretive models became firmly established and solidified. The status of a literary classic got these models hardwired in popular consciousness (a secondary school curriculum provides for the popular nature of the interpretive model) and turned militant.

In the Soviet times, the reader was forced to follow the one and only model of understanding, the model prudently dovetailed to the reigning ideology. Over the past decades, there have been a few established approaches to Lesya Ukrainka's poetry and prose. All of them are derived from the following assumption: "Lesya Ukrainka is a singer of the »Predawn Lights«, "The Prometheus' Daughter", who, in spite of great problems with her health, dedicated her life to the liberation of Ukrainian people from the yoke of oppressors. Within the framework of this approach, there are a few other ancillary models of interpretation meant for a narrow circle of more critically-minded readers. We can distinguish at least six interpretive models pertaining to the horizons of understanding in the minds of Lesya Ukrainka's contemporaries: 1) romanticism, 2) folklorism/*narodnik* (populist) doctrine, 3) traditionalism/neoclassicism, 4) children's literature, 5) *narodnik* doctrine/socialism, 6) atheism. All the interpretive models, when operating on the material of the drama, produce controversial results.

As an illustration, mention should be made of two pioneering monographs on Ukrainian modernism: T. Hundorova's² and S. Pavlychko's³. The two scholars claim that Lesya Ukrainka and Olha Kobylianska are the founders of Ukrainian modernism. This statement tuned the reader's mind to a new interpretive model and set the reader's optics, so to speak, on a different vision. The models exploited for a long period of time, however, become stereotypes and spread over new territories. Today, nobody can deny that Lesya Ukrainka belongs to modernism: this fact alone is a token of a status value.

On the other hand, the term 'neoromanticism' (Lesya Ukrainka used this word as a synonym of modernism and made a distinction between the notions of 'romanticism' and 'neoromanticism') was the most acceptable for the post-Soviet scholars. They apparently believed that neoromanticism and modernism were almost semantically identical or that neoromanticism could be easily replaced by romanticism. As a result, a new promising model intended to provide an adequate reading of Lesya Ukrainka's drama was dissolved in a number of established and customary approaches without changing anything in the interpretation of specific texts and in the reception of Lesya Ukrainka's poetics.

To say that *The Forest Song* is a modernist work is easy. It is more difficult to demonstrate how a modernist type of creative activity works and to guard the latter against the literary tendencies dominant at Lesya Ukrainka's time, i.e. romanticism (with the prefix 'neo') and realism. A romanticist, a realist, and a modernist proceed in their writing from different aesthetic motivations and world outlooks. The romantic writers and poets stress the importance of the emotional, irrational sphere of their interior life and their search for a divine inspiration to be able to rise above daily routine. A realist is acutely interested in the state of the world and pursues the quest for a wise mode of human existence. For a modernist, a creative

² T.I. Hundorova, *ProIavlennia slova. Dyskursiia rannoho ukrainskoho modernizmu*, second ed., Kyiv 2009.

³ S. Pavlychko, *Teoriia literatury*, Kyiv 2002, pp. 29–104.

process starts with his or her willingness to develop self-awareness and self-expression. Each individual is unique, but to express his/her emotions, feelings, and thoughts within the framework of culture (with its concern with universal myths, stereotypes, and traditions) is very hard. Only some are able to subjugate the universal to the individual. During the period of modernism, a unique human self has become a value.

Lesya Ukrainka's modernism is unprecedented. True, it contains a plethora of more or less conventional components borrowed from human culture (intertextual density of Lesya Ukrainka's works is staggering indeed), but all these constituents have fused to form a whole in the process of reflection and self-reflection inherent in the process of creative writing.

Unlike her contemporaries, Lesya Ukrainka has written a poetic drama. At times, the poet in her (as if hesitating) tried again and again to write a few prosaic works (predominantly prosaic was the draft of *The Forest Song*). Samples of Lesya Ukrainka's prose demonstrate the author's exceptional skills in building dialogues. And yet, Lesya Ukrainka did choose to write prose in verse.

The classicism of Ancient Greek mode of writing would have been archaic for the reader's ear. Why did Lesya Ukrainka still adhere to this old-fashioned tradition? True, the associations with the Ancient Greek Classicism are obvious in the poet's drama works of the mature period. For example, a lot of Lesya Ukrainka's works conform to the rule of three units (this rule, by the way, was actually a target for jeers in the poet's times); this is true for *In the House of Labor*, *In the Land of Slavery*; *In the Field of Blood*; *Johanna Husa's Wife*; *Lawyer Martian*.

This tradition is felt foremost in versed speech, including such literary phenomena as agan, gnomes, and stichomythia (described by M. Zerov as early as in 1920). Why did Lesya Ukrainka refuse to stick to a more natural and common type of drama communication "tested" earlier (in 1896) in *The Azure Rose*?

Ukrainian romanticism and, later, neo-romanticism were tightly connected with folklore. The latter took root in Ukrainian literature

during the nineteenth century and was firmly blended with certain artistic modes.

The dominating styles of theatre at the end of the century were melodramatic, operetta, and ethnographic. Folklore was commonly associated with provincialism and rural peasantry regarded by some intellectuals as a barrier to the modernisation of Ukrainian culture. Lesya Ukrainka was certainly conscious of this cultural atmosphere. And yet, it was Ukrainian folklore that “hit the spot” in *The Forest Song*. The question arises: why did Lesya Ukrainka try to bring together a folklore-based theme and an artificially looking verse associated with classicism?

I presume the main function of the versed prose of *The Forest Song* is to suppress or to reduce the excessive folkloristic overtones of the content and form established in Ukrainian romanticism. In other words, the poet intended to join the two extremes in order to coordinate them and reveal and foreground something else, a very essential facet of the text. What was it?

The high proportion of folklore-related elements in the drama (particularly in view of their absence in the other works of the poet) is stupendous. L. Skupeiko needed a large sized monograph⁴ to explore the ties of the drama with folklore. Figuratively speaking, the avalanche bridled in the poet’s mind through the whole life (it took Lesya Ukrainka a considerable amount of time to collect the folkloristic material and to study it as something attractive and appealing) broke through and brought to the foreground everything that was dear to the poetic heart. Almost each monologue contains an allusion to a folk motif or genre. One gets the impression that Lesya Ukrainka has accumulated all treasures of Ukrainian national folklore.

We may even say that there is an excess of folklore in *The Forest Song*. The drama is literally a guidebook about Ukrainian folk themes, genres, and images, including those related to language. The readers, however, do not respond to this aspect of the play as “noise”.

⁴ L.I. Skupeiko, *Mifopoetyka “Lisovoi pisni” Lesi Ukrainky*, Kyiv 2006.

The opposite is true, the story is received as though it belonged to the genre of folklore, while the latter remained totally unidentified. Numerous folklore allusions are shifted to the background and have a powerful impact on the implicit information. This is evidenced by the parts the author did not include in the final version of the play. One of them is a talk between Uncle Lev and Kutz (the forest devil); the final text contains only a few separate cues related to a deal with the inhabitants of the forest. This scene resonates with a number of folk stories about an encounter of the Uncle with the Devil: who will outsmart who? The abridged scene of the play testifies to the fact that Lesya Ukrainka was intentionally, consciously “hiding” the obvious folklore allusions. She actually made every effort to reshape each excessively folklore-loaded episode or scene.

The Forest Song, therefore, is, on the one hand, a kind of folklore guidebook and, on the other, a text with deliberately masked (hidden) sources.

The Ukrainian demonology absorbed by the romantics and transplanted onto a literary tradition reflects mostly the pre-Christian beliefs framed by devoutness. The folk demonology knows a lot of creatures dwelling in the world of nature (in the woods, swamps, ponds, mountains, hills). The majority of them (but by far not all) are endowed with the ability to assume a human appearance and, by means of a magic spell, to seduce a person of the opposite gender. If and when those creatures do not pretend, they are either absolutely heinous (in the “real life” form) or possess an obvious defect in their appearance. This defect is a sign of their belonging with the evil spirits. Generally speaking, a lot of literary stories about witches, devils, and mermaids contain an episode of unmasking those creatures through a manifestation of certain blatant characteristic of their appearance. One may find a variety of extended and shortened lists of features and attributes helping to identify a witch.

The Forest Song is densely populated with water and forest spirits and nymphs. This aspect of the play makes it different not only from the folklore-based but also from the literary Ukrainian tradition. But what makes this work really special is the fact that the appearance

of the magic creatures does not carry any signs of their belonging to evil spirits. All these creatures look like human beings. Their only distinguishing markers are the clothes. The entrance of each new character is preceded by a stage direction, i.e. by an instruction on how this character has to be clad. For instance, He Who Rends the Dikes is

a youth, very blond with blue eyes, who makes expansive motions as though he was swimming. His clothing is constantly changing in color from turbid yellow to clear blue, and at times he emits blue, and at times he emits swift golden sparks⁵.

Tiny pale infants wear “scanty white shirts”⁶. Water goblin is

a very ancient gray old man with long hair and a long white beard. He is covered with a mass of weeds hanging down to his gurdle⁷.

Mavka is dressed “in a bright green garment, and her black hair, hanging loose, has a greenish sheen”⁸. Will-o-the-Wisp is “a handsome youth dressed in red, with a shock of reddish hair blown about by wind”⁹. All the characters have certain similarities in their clothing of special colours; they all have a human-like appearance that reflects their peculiar character traits. Even Kutz, a young devil, who had imperceptible small horns in the draft, is characterised in the finished version of the play as “youthful imp, like manikin”.

The endearment suffixes (in the original Ukrainian text) and the emphasis on the age characteristics devalue the negative image of the devil common to folk legends. All the supernatural beings (except Starvelings) are outwardly as attractive as human beings.

⁵ L. Ukrainka, *Lisova pisnia*, [in:] *Zibrannia tvoriv u 12 tomakh, eadem*, t. 5: *Dramatychni tvory (1896–1906)*, 1976, p. 202; English translations after: L. Ukrainka, *The Forest Song*, transl. by P. Cundi, <https://www.l-ukrainka.name/en/Dramas/LisovaPisnja.html> [17.09.2019].

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 202.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 206.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 213.

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 223.

The directions in *The Forest Song* contain a fairly detailed description of their clothing. For example, Uncle Lev “is dressed in coarse hempen cloth, over which he wears a very light-grey smock; his high boots are made of bast; in his hand he carries a fishing net; a knife is stuck in his belt; and on a broad strap across his shoulders he carries a basket made of woven felt”¹⁰. Lukash is

a very young man, sturdy, black-browed, handsome, with a still childish look in his eyes. He is dressed in hempen cloth but of fine weave. His shirt, hanging outside and belted, is embroidered in white, with an open collar, fastened with red knots at both collar and cuffs. His belt is of red leather and on his head is a straw hat. A knife is stuck in his belt and there is a small pouch hanging from it on a string¹¹.

Kilina is

a full-faced young widow who is wearing a red kerchief with fringes, a dark red shirt with narrow and regular pleating, and a similarly pleated apron, garnished with white, blue and yellow braid sewn on it. Her chemise is heavily embroidered in red and blue, a necklace with many trinkets, attached jingles around her white, chubby neck. Her bodice is tightly laced around her plump torso, and this makes her figure appear all the more opulent¹².

The human characters of the play demonstrate Lesya Ukrainka’s perfect awareness of people’s everyday life and household chores – the poet is representing them with ethnological accuracy. The differentiation between two clusters of characters with respect to their garments is symbolic: the people wear clothes, the supernatural creatures wear attire.

People dwell in villages and *khatas* (peasant houses), whereas the supernatural creatures inhabit woods and streams or ponds. The former work and have a complicated network of mutual relations (mostly conflicting), the latter live in luxury, thrive, and, while acting their parts, easily shirk problems. The realm of human beings can

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 210.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 254.

look festive and attractive, though, at times, it can also fall into decay. The world of the forest inhabitants, however, is always aesthetically appealing. The world of the creatures above or beyond what is natural or explainable by natural laws correlates with the upper layer of the society (or those who live a bohemian life).

In a lot of research concerned with Lesya Ukrainka's *The Forest Song* (particularly in scholarly works of the literary critics from the Ukrainian Diaspora) romantic and neo-Classical interpretive models are dissonant. Moreover, there are disagreements among the proponents of each of the above-mentioned models of interpretation. This can be seen in their approaches to scenography. Their way of thinking is approximately like this: the author is lavish with stage directions. Her descriptions of the layout of the acting space are detailed and voluminous. For neoromanticism they are too prosaic, while for neoclassicism they are superfluous and somewhat irrelevant.

If we assume, however, that each enacted detail of everyday mode of life and household belongs to the language of symbols, then all the controversies will vanish.

Symbolism is the quality encompassing the whole play: from minute details to the cardinal events. Symbolism provides an interpretive model that can explicate each element of the play, reveal its significant organic function, and ascertain all intentions of the text.

Three acts of the play are three parts of the story with a lot of events happening between them. Relocation of Lukash's family to the forest, the construction of the house, Mavka's help, and her striving to get integrated into Lukash's family – all these events are left outside of the artistic representation. There is a spatio-temporal gap between the first and the second acts. We are conscious that something happened between the two acts, but we can only guess what it was. Forest Elf's punishment of Lukash, his metamorphosis into a ghou, his being in the body of the beast, and Mavka's self-sacrificial act to rescue her beloved (the latter episode would look effective on stage, but it would be much too folkloric) are not shown in the play. We can infer that the three events from Mavka's and Lukash's lives provide a generalised image of a great deal of material

life. As a result, the action of the play has a marked universalising function.

The following three episodes chosen to be represented on stage take on a symbolic meaning in the context of the characters' lives: spring ("very early spring" in the Prologue), late summer, and early autumn and winter. The first act symbolises young years, the second – adolescence, the third – maturity. The first act symbolises the blossoming of love, the second act represents the test of love by reality and unfaithfulness, and the third – penitence and liberation at the expense of a sacrifice. The algorithm of the events corresponds to Northrop Frye's phases of the seasonal cycle.

General symbolism, in order to accomplish its goal, has to be revealed through the scenic language of symbols.

Let's analyse the stage directions located between the acts. The first act is closed with Mavka's addressing the spring night: "What destiny awaits me – grief or song?". Then follows a stage direction:

The moon sinks behind the dark mass of the forest. The darkness velvety black, envelops the glade. Nothing is now visible, except the dying coals of the fire, but by the fireflies which she is still wearing in her hair. Mavka can be traced as she wanders among the trees. Her headdress at times shines out as a complete cirlet, then again in separate sparklings until it is completely lost in the gloom. A deep midnight silence falls, broken only occasionally by the rustling of leaves in the forest, a sound as though someone sighing in his sleep¹³.

This poetic picture of the spring night is reproduced by means of a few devices targeted at producing an impressionistic effect by creating a poetic correlative to a particular mood. There are no picturesque stylistic devices here. The picture of the night contains only symbolic details: "dark", "velvety black" night. In the background, there are two types of sparklings: those emitted by the "coals of fire" and by the headdress of fireflies Lukash was adorning Mavka with. The fire is both realistic, signifying the warmth of human presence,

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 243.

and unreal, fantastic, being a token of something extraordinary. This mystical vision of a unity of light and darkness is supplemented with elaborate sound imagery: a mysterious rustling-sighing against the backdrop of midnight silence. This is actually a response to Mavka's question ("What destiny awaits me?"): grief and song (i.e. happiness) will come together, like darkness and light. The headdress of love is shining as a complete circlet, in separate sparklings, and then is completely lost in the gloom. An accurate selection of the details from the natural environment allows the author to generate a typically symbolic picture as a vivid illustration of the philosophy of two worlds. Mavka is between the worlds. Lukash will also be in the same situation shortly. The other characters are within their own world, defending it.

The next act also opens with a description of nature:

Late summer. Here and there the dark, dull leaves of the tress are touched with autumn yellow. The lake has diminished in size, its beaches have broadened out; the reeds and rushes with their scanty leaves make a dry rustling¹⁴.

A house has been erected in the glade and a vegetable garden planted. There are also two fields, one of rye and one of wheat. Geese are swimming on the lake. Linen is drying on the shore; household utensils hang on bushes near the house. The grass in the glade has been mowed down. The cackle of poultry is heard among the trees, and in places cattle are browsing. Nearby a pipe is heard playing a lively dance tune. Unlike the mystical and romantic picture of the opening of the first act, the second act is simple and lifelike. The wild forest with a lake and the spring night are replaced by a live-in household and a crop-yielding summer. The lake is shallow and serves as a natural home for domestic geese rather than for Water Goblin and Water Nymph (a mermaid). The trimmed inhabitable household highlights the way people live here: they feel comfortable in this environment and are even prospering. The wild and thick forest has become a snug nook for the community. The whole scene has positive

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 243.

overtones. There is no atmosphere of duality whatsoever. There is no fusion of the ideal dream and anxiety (as compared to the picture of the night). Against the welcoming ambience as a background, one can hear a lively dance tune of a reedpipe. It is Lukash who seems to be playing the tune behind the scene. But how different his tune is! In the original, Ukrainian-language text, the pronunciation of the adjective 'lively' reminds a Ukrainian reader of the word meaning 'young woman', while the suffix in the Ukrainian word 'dance' (tune) evokes connotations having an almost imperceptible tinge of melancholy: the tunes of Lukash's reedpipe (those that struck a dear chord with Mavka) belong to a bygone time. Instead, the tune of a reedpipe has become the music for fun and entertainment.

The world of the community is structured. Will there be a place for Mavka in it? Here she enters in an uncharacteristic role of "a hired farm worker" or "a bold and brazen girl" (a derogatory name assigned to Mavka by Lukash's mother). Mavka is strenuously studying the rules and principles of the life of the community. She wants to be close to Lukash, the person she is in love with. Further events of the plot point toward a conclusion that the transition from one world to the other costs too much (human life).

The next scene of reaping with a sickle as the focal image is symbolic. The sickles in Mother's, Mavka's, and Kilina's hands are semantically different (Lukash, for example, refuses to take the sickle into his hands even for fun). The female instrument of labour in the mother's hands symbolises her acute dislike of Mavka as a potential daughter-in-law; it presages an intolerably challenging experience. The sickle in Mavka's hands is an ominous sign of an upcoming bloody sacrifice. The sickle in Kilina's hands, however, signifies the subjugation of Lukash to a female sexual force. Yet the sickle does not have the attributes of one of the ordinary stage props peculiar to an allegorical tale (it could have been, for example, an allegory of antagonistic relations between the women). The sickle remains a real-life tool of labour, absolutely motivated and relevant in the development of the plotline. Incidentally, Lesya Ukrainka was apprehensive of turning the staged version of *The Forest Song* into

a superficial and flamboyant show. Unfortunately, her apprehensions turned out prophetic: the directors of numerous productions in the Soviet times foregrounded allegory as the notable characteristic of the play (this approach is hitherto intact). This is the reason why the characters when on stage remind us of comic creatures of an amateur secondary school club or the guisers of a Christmas ritual in Ukraine. As a result, the tragedy becomes a farce. One should bear in mind that folklore employed as a receptive model converts the play into a sham, demotic, and flaunty performance. An allegory-oriented approach to *The Forest Song* destroys the most essential aspect of the play: the underlying tragedy of the author's personality. *The Forest Song* is a love story that absorbed and mirrored all vital and existential choices of Lesya Ukrainka.

The central concepts of *The Forest Song* are 'Body' and 'Mind' ('Soul'). They are verbalised in different contexts of the play and find their full manifestation in a final dialogue between Mavka and Lukash.

Lukash/ I gave to you a soul? Your body destroyed! For you are but a phantom now, a shade! (He looks at her with unexpressible pain). Mavka/Ah, for that body do not sigh!¹⁵

Then follows a passionate monologue about the conversion of the matter intrinsic to all material and physical things. The motif of immortality resounds again in Mavka's words: "My end give life to something more robust"¹⁶. Real immortality is displayed after the triad "DEATH-TRANSFORMATION-THE END OF THE BODY" which evokes allusions not to folklore any longer but to the literature of Lesya Ukrainka's times. She was perfectly aware of the literature of symbolism and its underlying doctrine of death as passing to the other world and, thus, marking the beginning of a new life. This message served as a premise behind Lesya Ukrainka's full-length drama *The Azure Rose*. This work is a consistently symbolic text with

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 292.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

the imagery echoing M. Maeterlinck and J. Hauptman. The circle, therefore, is closed, yet on a different turn of the spiral.

Mavka has attained a soul and, along with it, the immortality of her selfhood. The tragic ending of the play is optimistically orchestrated.

Mavka's "Ah, for that body do not sigh" is the climax of the third act. Immortality achieved literally, as an eternal springtime regeneration of all living beings, is reassuring for the inhabitants of the forest. This is because they are driven in their lives by natural instincts and by their search for pleasure ("by a blind will of life", quoting A. Schopenhauer). The immortality of humankind has to be deserved by people and is granted to them for their journey, quest, and conscious choice. This is the reward for people's sacrifices and sufferings. This is what differentiates individuals from a society and makes them existentially alone. Then, an inward journey begins. In other words, the journey towards one's own unique soul, which abandons the body, submits it to Nature's eternal cycle, and becomes free from the material world. Love, therefore, is an essential condition to achieve immortality because genuine love brings about a clash between spirituality and corporeality; consequently, human beings are faced with a choice – a trial situation. The stronger the love, the more tragic the choice, the greater is the sacrifice and the more intense the suffering and, ultimately, the better are the chances to turn one's end into "something more robust".

The souls will achieve immortality then and coalesce into one whole after disposing of corporeality. Veritable love (eternal in the truest, not metaphorical, sense of the word) is the mortal love.

Conclusions. The neoromantic model for interpreting *The Forest Song* is based on folkloric borrowing and releases from the field of view its literary discourse, rooted as it is in antiquity and classicism. The aesthetics of freedom, emotionality, and naturalness resists rationalism with its numerous rules and limitations. A simple combination of these guides will result in nothing more than an unconvincing eclecticism. Summing up, the classicist and romantic interpretive models used alternatively and based on the identification

of the respective elements of Lesya Ukrainka's *The Forest Song* will misconstrue the meaning of the play and interrogate the efficiency of its poetics. The reason for this is that such an approach disregards the fusion of the opposites in the framework of modernist literary tradition.

The protagonist of *The Forest Song* is not borrowed from literature. Classicism cannot provide the poet with Mavka-type characters. Neither is the protagonist a product with romantic and folkloristic roots (folklore does not have Mavka-type characters either). The protagonist of *The Forest Song* is a personified self-expression, a symbolic image of the poet's perception of the world. Mavka is Lesya Ukrainka in her spiritual dimension. She is beautiful (though not without human flaws), tragic (as is the poet's life), and passionately and selflessly in love (similarly to the poet).

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