

Nadiia Boiko  
Shevchenko Institute of Literature  
nadia\_bojko@ukr.net  
ORCID: 0000-0002-3520-6696

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## “A View of Ineffable Charm...” The Black Sea in the Ukrainian Prose of the Late 19th Century

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The article analyses the image of the Black Sea in the prose works of Ukrainian writers of the last two decades of the 19th century. The sea is an important component of their creative biographies and a source of inspiration. It is also a part of their characters' inner world symbolizing the freedom and passionate love, saving them from their loneliness and routine. The research demonstrates the philosophical components of the sea complex in the analyzed works of fiction, outlines their main motifs and psychological details. It specifies the authors' contributions to the artistic representation of the Black Sea (the representational and informative descriptions vs the expressive descriptions) and its conceptualization as a space associated with Ukraine.

**KEYWORDS:** short novel; sketch; aquarelle in prose; sea complex; seascape



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## 1. Introduction

The history of Ukrainian maritime literature goes back centuries. The water-related motifs circulated in folklore and later became visible in the historical and literary works of the 17th and 18th centuries, e.g. *The History of Ruses*. Later on, they were interpreted anew in the poetry of the mid-19th century (*The Thought* and *Hamaliya* by Taras Shevchenko, *Farewell to My Ukraine* by Panteleimon Kulish, *The Thought* by Oleksandr Konysky and others). Having analysed the oldest cultural layers of modern Ukraine, Yuri Lypa concluded that it was the maritime commerce that accelerated the civilization processes in this area and from a certain time “the maritime culture had entered the Ukrainian worldview forever” (2007, 90).

However, the Black Sea became an object of active artistic reflection for Ukrainian authors only since the last quarter of the 19th century. Ukrainian maritime literature of that time produced nothing similar to the works of the European writers like Robert L. Stevenson or Joseph Conrad. The sea in it was a backdrop for the heroic deeds of the Cossacks (Mykhailo Starytsky), it helped to visualize the attitudes and the intimate, momentary experiences or emotions (Lesya Ukrainka, Oleksandr Konysky, Mykhailo Kotsiubynsky). It could also be presented as an important, mysterious, unruly element of the national cosmos as in the works of Dniprova Chaika.

The nautical motifs and the presentation of the Black Sea in fiction and non-fiction of that time owe their appearance to some brilliantly talented writers (Nechuy-Levytsky, Starytsky, Ukrainka and others), the widening of the formal and content horizons of literature, the renewal of its imagery and style, but also to “making up for the European literatures” (Shumylo, 2003, 16) which is evident in the historical and literary process of the last decades of the 19th century. The aggiornamento of the audience added the dynamics to the process. The readers became more aesthetically demanding and the literature designed for “the common people” couldn’t satisfy them anymore.

Discussing the artistic reception of the Black Sea, the representation of its space and the regional culture of Odesa, Akkerman and Crimea, it’s necessary to take into consideration an extra-literary factor: the intensive development of the railways which started in 1865

simplified the travel and exploration of those regions. It intensified the development of the local infrastructure and significantly influenced the development of the resort and spa culture of the Southern Ukraine.

The interest in the maritime literature in Ukraine has been increasing over the last two decades. *The Anthology of Ukrainian Nautical Poetry* appeared in 2004 and Konysky's works of his "Crimean period" were published in 2021. The international conferences "Maritime Fiction" (2010) and the II International Academic Conference "Odessa and the Black Sea as a literary and cultural space" (2016) gave a powerful momentum to the development of academic reflection on the maritime discourse of Ukrainian literature.

The published papers were focused on the poetry of the early 19th – early 20th century (Pohrebennyk, 2011), Shevchenko's poetry, the poetics of Ukrainka's *From My Travel Notebook* (Borzenko, 2011) etc. There are also the works considering the maritime components of Chaika Dni-prova's poetics (Nehodiaieva, 2011; Kazanova, 2018). Other authors considered the synthesis of arts in the works with maritime and symbolic components (Rysak, 1999; Naumenko, 2008). According to Naumenko, the presence of such a component could indicate "the authors' interest in restoring the ancient worldviews" and "the keen interest in the ancient archetypes of Mother and Father" (2008, 42). Among the modern literary studies in Ukraine there are the works focused on the "personal geographies" (Kocherga, 2003, 49).

The conference proceedings demonstrate that the academic interest was focused mainly on poetry. The representation of the Black Sea in the texts of the late 19th century didn't gain the proper attention. The aim of this article is to analyse the peculiarities of the artistic representation of the Black Sea and the spaces associated with it in the prose works of the Ukrainian authors of the last two decades of the 19th century. The objects of study are the short novels of Nechuy-Levytsky *Mykola Dzherya* (1876) and *By the Black Sea* (1888); Starytsky's novel *Before a Storm* (1895); Konysky's short stories *A Morning in Alupka* (1896) and *A Winter in Yalta* (1896); Ukrainka's short story *By the Sea* (1898); Kotsiubynsky's short stories *Shaitan's Shackles* (1899) and *On a Rock* (1902).

"The maritime" as a concept of literary studies in my research implies the aesthetic perception of the sea and the seascapes, the representation

of the unique maritime culture, the depiction of the sea as an element which is not subject to human beings but inspires them to explore the new spaces and activates the ancient mythological images and topics.

Vladimir Toporov outlines the maritime complex in literature as dependent of “author’s mental structures” and demonstrates two main types of it: “a romantic version” where “the real sea” (often as a biographical fact) and stereotypes of its natural, objective descriptions should be discerned from “a maritime situation,” when “not the sea itself is being described, but something else while the sea becomes only a form of description (a maritime code of a non-maritime message), a kind of some deep metaphor” (1995, 578). Building on Toporov’s methodology and Mark Epstein’s system analysis of the landscapes, and taking into consideration the works dedicated to Ukrainian historical and literary process and the poetics of text (Ageyeva, 1994; Kuznetsov, 1995; Moklytsya, 2022; Poliszczuk, 2021; Rysak, 1999; Shumylo, 2003 et al.) I’m going to interpret the image of the Black Sea in the prose works of Ukrainian authors and to demonstrate their individual contributions to the perception of this image in the Ukrainian literature of the late 19th century.

## **2. “I love you, dear shores of the Black Sea...” The vision of the sea: from depiction to expression**

Nechuy-Levytsky entered the history of Ukrainian literature as “a great visual artist,” as “a colossal, all-encompassing eye of Ukraine”. Ivan Franko was fascinated by Levytsky’s artistic manner and admired his talent as a landscape writer. Franko wrote: “the visual impressions usually dominate, the artist sometimes just stands and admires the figures photographed by his eyes in all their movements and settings” (1982, 375). Nechuy’s recognizable individual style with its plethora of onomastic and topographic details can be defined as mapping or cartographic realism. In most cases “he depicted Ukraine as he saw it, not relying on any notional geography of places” (Tarnavsky, 2018, 85). Levytsky was among the first Ukrainian prose writers of the 19th century who actualized the image of the Black Sea as a real sea historically associated with Ukraine. He made this image aesthetic and conceptual.

The protagonist of his short novel *Mykola Dzherya* together with the other escapees comes to Dniester estuary in the North Western part of the Black Sea. The estuary area is a frontier space. Its waters separate the steppe part of Ukraine from the salt sea, so in the novel the estuary is presented as a symbolic locus where a former slave can change his life dramatically and become a free man.

On arrival to Dniester estuary Mykola discovers a space that inspires him and gives him a sense of freedom: "The surrounding picture was truly original (...) over a sand bar the Black Sea was turning blue, it was going up merging with the fog in the sky, with the golden sunlight (...) and there was a beautiful, round and shining blue sky above" (Nechuy-Levytsky, 1965, 100). The endless sea space is complimented by the equally endless sky and additionally emphasized by an ideal seascape with the white seagulls flying. Thus the Black Sea in this short novel becomes an extended metaphor of freedom.

According to Toporov a shore is an integral part of any literary seascape. In Nechuy's prose this image signals a retrospective or retardation. The shore and the sea interact and "the surf line indicates the most visible place of their interaction" (1995, 594). Watching the surf line for Mykola means the bitter memories and remorse when he thinks of his wife and daughter he left behind. Sometimes he desires to bring them to his new place, to get the family re-united, but he drops this idea as impossible. His new love Mokryna (this name is partially homophonic to a Ukrainian adjective *mokry* meaning "wet, watery") resembles the sea: she is fresh, passionate and boundless. Her love washes away his memories of home: "The waves gently bounced the shore, rustling like a forest under a light wind (...) It reminded him of the willows of Rastavitsia over that cabin where Nymydora slept. But his mind was full with Mokryna's pink face" (Nechuy-Levytsky, 1965, 118). Fleeing from police, Mykola takes Mokryna's advice and goes to the open sea where he experiences his first storm. This scene can be understood as an initiation, but at the same time it can be read as a reflection of Mykola's emotional turmoil caused by his feelings for Mokryna.

The symbolic images of a white ship and a rainbow are the important components of the sea complex in *Mykola Dzherya*. In this short novel, much like as in the Bible and in Ukrainian mythology, the ship

symbolizes the salvation and wellbeing. It could be interpreted as a sign of a new life. Along with that Levytsky introduces a more complicated image of the rainbow. It appears after the storm and becomes a symbolic bridge that unites Mykola with his wife. In Mykola's prophetic dream "Nymydora decorated with ribbons and flowers, wearing her red boots, was descending to him by a rainbow as if by a staircase (...) where that rainbow touched the sea, he saw Mokryna with reeds on her head swimming and waiting for Nymydora to catch her and draw her into the stormy waves" (Nechuy-Levytsky, 1965, 113). The author obviously interprets the sea in his text as "the sea of life". Mykola's feelings toward his wife and daughter along with his dreams of a happy family life fall to the bottom of this symbolic sea, which according to Toporov, represents "death and fear" (1995, 589).

The descriptions of the Black Sea in *Mykola Dzheriya* are mostly realistic and rich in visual details. They could be categorized as representational and informative, though they include an element of author's value judgment as well (Kuznetcov, 1995, 84). The panoramic depictions of the main settings of this short novel show the foregrounds and the backgrounds, sometimes even more. Their palette of colours is rich and changes depending on the absence or presence of the sun and moon or atmospheric phenomena (a mist, a wind, a thunderstorm, a rainbow etc): "the moon was rising as if coming up for air out of a black wave. A little red path started shining far away in the sea (...) The sea shined..." (Nechuy-Levytsky, 1965, 102).

The change of focus in the narration impacts the style of descriptions of the Black Sea, they become more expressive, the palette of colours widens, the acoustic component becomes more intense ("the wind whistled, hissed and roared like an animal") (Nechuy-Levytsky, 1965, 102), the imagery becomes symbolic. Nechuy represents Mykola's perception of the storm using the "non-nautical" imagery: "the quiet sea started shaking beneath the boat (...) A dark stack turned into something like a big sheaf (...) Something in the sky started buzzing like a pine wood in the wind" (1965, 109). Thus in the representational and informative descriptions of the sea the colours are mainly pastel and the setting is roughly sketched, but in the expressive ones the setting is localized, the colours are predominantly

dark and the sea itself resembles a wild beast ready to attack the protagonist.

Nechuy's short novel *By the Black Sea* is set in the noisy multicultural Odesa. The masterful description of the summer city with its welcoming cafes, its wide streets, a cheerful park and a posh public garden next to a cathedral is balanced by Nechuy's characteristic exactness of topography: "that wide Deribasivska street, the main thoroughfare of the city with the two rows of acacias on its sides. The street led to the sea, going a bit down in a ravine, and through it as if through a gate a wide space could be seen far away with Langeron hill overlooking the sea" (Nechuy-Levytsky, 1966, 145).

Tarnavsky associates Odesa's atmosphere in this short novel with the mental and physical laziness and indifference inherent to everybody in the city (2018, 91). I can't agree with this statement. The city is represented as a spa centre (not even a sanatorium!). The vacationers here live a slow life focusing on entertainments and pleasures, while the local people are focused on business: "the cafeteria stuff kept running unceasingly; the cups of coffee and tea, the mugs of beer and plates full of ice cream were flying in their hands" (Nechuy-Levytsky, 1966, 139).

Viktor Komashko openly states that he has come to Odesa to bond with his beloved Sanya Navrotska and to win her hand. Selabros also comes to the city looking for a love affair. Mrs Borodavkina and widowed Mrs Melashkevich both don't mind a romantic affair either. A sheet, the key visual detail of summer Odesa, becomes a symbol of such hopes: "there were gentlemen wandering around with the sheets entwined with their belts, there were ladies with the beautiful baskets packed with embroidered towels and thin sheets" (Nechuy-Levytsky, 1966, 130). Even Potemkin Stairs, the city most famous cite, is associated with a spread sheet.

This short novel is centred on the image of the Black Sea. The reception of the sea is a marker (a bit too straightforward though) which helps to differentiate the positive and the negative characters. Komashko, Mavrodin, Navrotska and Murashkova belong to the first group, Selabros, Borodavkin, Fesenko belong to the second.

The image of the sea becomes a symbol of human soul, its artistic aspirations (Mrs Borodavkina is only apparently shallow) and its ability

to think profoundly (Komashko and Navrotska). The contemplation of the sea fills the characters with the desire to travel and have adventures, so they even imagine hearing Byron's *On Parting (Child Harold's Pilgrimage)*. Strauss' lively melodies also make them dream of the happiness of mutual affection.

The Black Sea is an independent character of the novel. The sea unites all other characters, it has an impact on them, and, though indirectly, defines their future. Komashko associates his beloved Sanya with the gentle yet lively sea covered with a silver mist of romantic suspense. Her eyes reveal her virtues and their colour resembles the blue sea. The sea helps the young couple to understand that they are meant for each other. At the same time the wide space and the fresh sea air lull Mrs. Murashkova's vigilance. An ideal seascape provides a backdrop for her emotional turmoil caused by Selabros. She notices his phoniness and shallowness, she compares him with a wind "coming spontaneously from the sea to disappear in the steppe" (Nechuy-Levytsky, 1966, 192), but in reality, he becomes a storm that ruins her life.

### **3. "...Between the cypresses the sea was laughing, fresh and shining..." The impressionist approach to the Black Sea**

The Ukrainian literature of the 1890s demonstrates a tendency to move towards the Modernist discourse. It gradually abandons its social determination, becomes more associative, personalised and focused on emotions. The prose becomes more fragmented and, as Ageyeva points out, "a new, though also mimetic, stylistic trend, the Impressionism" comes into being (1994, 12).

The signs of the pre-Impressionism are evident in the works of Levytsky. They manifest themselves in his dynamically presented landscapes where the sun is the key detail which makes the descriptions "momentarily emotional" (Shupta-Viazovska, 2015, 34). The Impressionistic techniques are already apparent in Konysky's prose, they become a stylistic tendency in Ukrainka's short stories, and acquire the full development in Kotsiubynsky's novellas. Each of these authors found their own approach to mastering the Impressionist way of writing.



Impressionist techniques in Konysky's short fiction of 1890s are rather sporadic, though for him it was the time of looking for the new creative approaches in depiction of the characters' emotional states. His Impressionist techniques manifest themselves in the local "accents of colour and shading within a landscape sketch" (Kuznetsov, 1995, 82). Crimea with its unique combination of landscapes (the mountains, the steppe and the sea) was a place of the physical and emotional restoration for Konysky. It also inspired him to work in the new genres of Impressionist sketch, etude and poem in prose that lead to the subsequent change of focus. The author became more interested in describing the nature and the emotional states of his characters.

In his short story *A Winter in Yalta* Konysky demonstrates the otherness and even strangeness of the peninsula by describing the local architecture and culture. He also shows the elements of the spa culture, a novelty for Crimea of that time. He shows the tourists who hope "to stop the development of their illnesses" or "to regain their strength and to strengthen their nerves" (Konysky, 2021, 29), to spend their money or just to get married. Standing on Yalta promenade the protagonist describes in great detail the view which resonates with his state of mind. The sparkles on the sea merging with the permanently clear blue sky far away generate the sense of ease and freedom. The protagonist forgets about his own illness and the reason of his coming to Yalta. As a holidaymaker Konysky considers the sea as a place of healing, where he can symbolically bury all his physical and mental issues to get rid of them forever. On the other hand, the sea itself is presented as a vacationer who hopes for a sunny day: "The sky and the sun and the sea breathed into the vacationers some warm feeling of a quiet, gentle happiness or a contentment which was close enough to happiness..." (Konysky, 2021, 31)

Another interesting example of Konysky's creative evolution is his short story *A Morning in Alupka* which could be categorised as an Impressionistic sketch focused on the Black Sea. The protagonist who suffers from a nervous agitation envisions Kyrgyz steppe and a fort where Taras Shevchenko lived in exile. He hears the menacing sounds of the Caspian Sea which "throws the sadness to its shores as if willing to get more grief" (Konysky, 2021, 22), but in a minute he looks away and sees Alupka through his window: "It is still sleeping (...) A beautiful mosque

with its tall minaret stands dormant. It seems that the minaret is so tall because it wants to look Ai Petri into the eye". The protagonist's reaction to the Black Sea is totally different: "I felt physically and morally exhausted and weak. I stopped writing..." and "I just kept silently admiring it totally enchanted by its majestic beauty" (Konysky, 2021, 23). Such a vivid description of the chronotope results in a dynamic Impressionistic picture with a wide range of colour nuances and shades: "the Black Sea resembled a wide, endless carpet (...) it wasn't water, it was some grey-bluish glass (...) far, far away, where the sight could hardly reach, the endless sea shined with the small sparkles (...) a grey wall on the Southern part of the sea was followed by a golden red wall rising high into the blue sky" (Konysky, 2021, 24). In *A Morning in Alupka* the protagonist describes his perception of a dawn, so the acoustic impressions are minimal, even the minaret near Ai Petri is silent "till a mullah calling the faithful to prayer will disturb its peace" (Konysky, 2021, 24). The protagonist emphasises his visual impression of the bright morning sun comparing it with volcanic lava: "The sea went red under that new wall, the water seemed to burn down there, deep, deep down there, the fire seemed to reach the very bottom of the sea" (Konysky, 2021, 25). The sun invigorates the seascape, it sets the order in which various details of the adjacent landscapes come into view and disappear. Konysky successfully creates a dynamic picture of the Black Sea where the natural phenomena such as the sunlight, determinate its palette and mode, while the protagonist's emotional states resonate with the states of the sea.

The Black Sea plays an important role in Lesya Ukrainka's creative biography. Her lyric cycles *A Trip to the Sea* and *Crimean Memories* are connected with it. She perceives the sea as "a capricious creature that can be stormy and hazardous, enticing and meek or gentle and tender" (Rysak, 1999, 115).

There are two plot lines in her short story *By the Sea*: One of them outlines the protagonist's attitude towards the sea and the other follows her relationship with Alla Mykhailivna, a young lady from Moscow who came to Yalta to cure her tuberculosis. The protagonist came to Crimea for the same reason, but this is never openly stated in the text. As Kocherga points out Yalta for Ukrainka "is never a sanatorium, it's a place where her talent takes root" (2003, 50).

It may seem that Ukrainka, much like Levytsky, is too formulaic and straight, making the attitude towards the sea a marker to divide her characters into the positive and the negative (e. g. Alla Mykhailivna doesn't like the sea: "what can you do in this tedious hole?"; "I don't like your 'beautiful sea,' it's just water, that's all" (2021, 206)). But right from the start the author warns the readers against such interpretation:

As a child I was unpleasantly surprised to see at the exhibitions those big oil paintings so full of merciless realism (...) to break the illusion I used to come very close to a picture till I could see it no more. There were just the dots of paint in front of me and through them I could discern some thick threads of canvas and I was wondering how could I be afraid of them when I watched them from a distance? (Ukrainka, 2021, 204)

This quote demonstrates that the narrator wants to find something more important in the realistic worldview. This "something" is her "beautiful sea" tightly connected to her most intimate dream, to retire with the sea, to escape from the routine and aggressiveness of her usual environment. She speaks to the sea as if it were a living being, feels for it and pities it: "its deep green wave was hardly seen beneath the garbage, watermelon rinds, sunflower husks, some yellow streams and reddish clouds flowing from boats and a steamer with the oil which was set for unloading at a pier" (Ukrainka, 2021, 221).

But it's not only the spots on the sea that Ukrainka finds hard to accept. A person also could be a spot on the ideal picture of the world. Anything that doesn't belong to the sea seems grey, unattractive and not matching her inner world and her feelings. Much like skittish Alla Mykhailivna with her unlucky love affairs, and just as the noisy crowd of holidaymakers in the city park. "The people are everywhere!" the protagonist cries in despair. The sea is her escape. She can focus on it and it won't disappoint her. "I happened to see right in front of me a long dark path going between the two dense walls of cypresses. It went on and on and then suddenly stopped or dipped down and in a narrow opening between the cypresses the sea was laughing, fresh and shining, and that made me laugh too" (Ukrainka, 2021, 205). Ukrainka poeticizes the Black Sea and the protagonist's connection with it. Her seclusion with the sea

brings her the much desired harmony and the phosphorescence she happened to observe is interpreted as an answer of the sea which revealed her a secret of the everlasting values and inspired her to keep going.

Jarosław Poliszczuk in his analysis of Kotsiubynsky's prose in the context of Modernism, points at the dominant elements of the author's style, such as the exotic topics, attention to lyrical and psychological details and the visuality (2021). A sketch *Shaitan's Shackles* and an aquarelle in prose *On a Rock* are the parts of Kotsiubynsky's Crimean cycle. In these short stories, apart from depicting the peninsula's exotic culture and way of living, the author makes the Black Sea an important part of the space that defines the characters' fates.

The life of a young Tatar girl Emene is incredibly boring, only watching the sea "blue, shining blue as the Crimean sky" (Kotsiubynsky, 1988, 278) gives her some relief. She understands that she is doomed to live behind the barred windows only watching the real life outside. She sees the tourist ladies walking around freely or prancing on their horses with her beloved Septar as their guide. Everything seems easy and within reach, but it's impossible for Emene as it is impossible to cross the wide sea situated "there, behind her father's house, beyond the village, where the stone crags are standing high and threatening, separating the land of Allah from the land of pagans" (Kotsiubynsky, 1988, 278).

The aquarelle in prose *On a Rock* elaborates on the same topic. Its title hints on the failure of Ali's plan to elope with Fatma. Its genre definition suggested by the author marks its Impressionist style, because this short story, as the previous one, is focused on the characters' inner experiences. *On a Rock* presents the colours and sounds of the Black Sea as a frame for a story of a pair of lovers whose feelings emerge and grow against this backdrop. The sea becomes their last refuge and the final chord of their love: "A tender blue wave, warm and clean as a girl's bosom, was throwing the lace of foam on the shore. (...) Ali was swimming to meet Fatma." (Kotsiubynsky, 1988, 385)

Being a true Impressionist Kotsiubynsky in his aquarelle emphasizes the blue colour as the dominant tone of the Black Sea. This blue colour enters every open window and only Fatma who is married against her will is unhappy with it. The sea irritates the poor girl, it blinds her in the mornings by its odious colour, "it breaths like a sick man," it "is

impatient in its mist as a swaddled child in its clothes" (1988, 379). The sharp smell of the sea makes her sick and its largeness gives her a feeling of impending doom. Her attitude towards the sea changes a bit only when she falls in love with Ali. She starts watching the sea because on its sand her love has thrived.

Kotsiubynky shows Ali's relationship with the sea in great detail. Ali is a seasoned sailor, he's dextrous with his boat even in stormy weather. His slim figure, his handsome tanned face and his red headscarf look great against the blue sea.

The poetics of Impressionism manifest itself in the wide colour palette: "the blue sea was waving and boiling", its waves become greenish, foam gets a misty yellowish colour. The author adds some drops of red to the background consisting mainly of the darker and lighter tones of blue: First there is Ali's red headscarf which helps Fatma to recognise him and at the end "Ali's most handsome head with a face of Ganymede was bumping against the sharp rocks and bleeding" (Kotsiubynsky, 1988, 384).

#### **4. The Black Sea through the lenses of a historical novelist**

Starytsky's endeavour to create a great historical project as a counter-discourse aimed at the glorification of the past and "the struggle for the values of his own people" (Poliszczuk, 2008, 47) has left its mark on the way of depicting the Black Sea in the national literature. In Starytsky's novel *Before the Storm* the sea is the background of the Cossacks' heroic deeds and bravery, the fear of it is a joking matter. In his romantic Cossack myth the author emphasises that even an unexpected storm can't shake the courage and confidence of a Cossack leader: "The wind started howling and whirling the rain, the waves moaned lifting their grey peaks to an immense height (...) now he was piloting his boat himself, his mighty breast lifted high, his eyes burned with courage and his face was lit by this noble flame" (1965, 361).

Building on a folk lay *Oleksiy Popovych* the writer makes the image of the sea a mirror of spiritual purity. The Cossacks perceive an unexpected storm as an omen of presence of an unrepentant sinner among them.

It might lead to a failure of their naval expedition in spite of their noble purpose (to liberate the prisoners kept by Turks).

Starytsky uses his playwright's skills to dramatize this scene to the maximum: "chaika (a Cossack boat) flew up as an eggshell with the white mountains of the waves and rushed down into the pits" (1965, 361). The struggle with the storm saps Cossacks' physical and moral strength so finally old Hrabyna repents publicly and throws himself into the sea to end the storm which calms down soon after that.

The water in the novel performs its archetypal function of purification and the large, unexplored sea becomes a mythological element. The author points out that a Cossack who did wrong to families, children or widows has no right to stay in this sacred space. This detail stresses the difference between the Black Sea and the Dniipro. The river is presented in the novel as a merciful and benevolent space which can tolerate the presence of a sinner among Cossacks in a boat. The river with its mild waves and green banks reflected in the water is positioned as a place of peace and harmony.

Toporov argues that the steppe is an important part of the sea complex. The features which make it similar to the sea are the limitlessness and the oscillatory movement (1995, 580). The novel *Before the Storm* begins with a description of an autumnal steppe with two travellers riding through it. The melancholy mode of the steppe seems alarming to a baptised Tatar Oleksiy-Akhmetka. Its unwelcoming appearance reinforced by the cold wind scares him, but the elder traveller (Bohdan Khmelnytsky) wants to reassure him: "Ah, the spirit, the splendour, the freedom! (...) just expand your chest and go meet the wild wind" (Starytsky, 1965, 12). The steppe isn't just a large and lonely space it's a symbol of freedom.

The semantic similarity of the steppe and the sea is clear in the novel. It is stressed by the images of the white and green waves that move rhythmically with the wind, the sky merging with the steppe/sea on the horizon making the characters feel really free: "He's elusive as a strong wind of the steppe, they can't bound him as they can't bound the stormy sea," "the sea plays with its green waves," "the steppe lies wide as a green sea with no shores to be seen" etc. The author romanticises the steppe, makes it special, treats it like a living being ("a sleepy

steppe," "the steppe lived and breathed with the thousand sounds," "the steppe emanated some kind of a quiet, elegiac pensiveness"). He keeps the steppe in high regard and positions it as a father for the Cossacks, emphasising the necessity of co-operation with it, because the steppe educates the Cossacks, nurtures their bravery and becomes the last refuge for their bodies. Chyzhevsky in his studies of Ukrainian national character also stressed the importance of the steppe which, due to the variety of its constant threats, "became the crucial thing in the development of the psychological traits" of Ukrainians (205, 16).

## 5. Conclusion

In the prose works analysed in this article the image of the Black Sea becomes a plot building component. The seascapes help to form the emotional frame of events; the sea impacts the characters and defines their behaviour and destiny. The depiction of the sea depends on the genre and narration type of the stories: The novels are mostly Romantic in style, the short novels are mainly realistic and the short fiction is Impressionistic. The Romantic elements in Starytsky's novels manifest themselves in the semantics of his central images (steppe, chaika etc) and in his associations with the folk poetry. His descriptions of the sea also draw upon the Romantic tradition. Nechuy-Levytsky's cartographic realism evolves into the pre-Impressionism with its characteristic emphasis on the actual chronotope, lyric elements, dynamic landscapes and pastel colours. The modernisation of the literary process resulted in the Impressionistic reception of the sea in the works of Konysky (sporadically), Ukrainka and Kotsiubynsky. Their works are new in genre and content, they are focused on protagonists' feelings; the landscapes are reduced to their main details associated with the actual emotional states of the characters.

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- **NADIIA BOIKO** – PhD, senior research fellow, Shevchenko Institute of Literature (Ukraine). Research interests: Ukrainian literature of the 19th century. Most important publications: *History of Ukrainian Literature, Vol. 6; Silhouettes of Ethnic Images in Western Ukrainian War Prose of the First Half of the 20th Century; The irony as a feeling of reality; Ivan Franko's Perception of Oleksandr Konysky: the Processes of Convergence, Divergence and Memorialisation.*