STUDIA UKRAINICA POSNANIENSIA, vol. VIII/2: 2020, pp. 151–162. ISSN 2300-4754.

DOI: 10.14746/sup.2020.8.2.12

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE UKRAINIAN HORROR FICTION ON THE BACKGROUND OF EUROPEAN GOTHIC TRADITIONS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

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ROZWÓJ UKRAIŃSKIEJ LITERATURY GROZY NA TLE EUROPEJSKICH TRADYCJI GOTYCKICH: ZARYS PROBLEMATYKI

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STRESZCZENIE. Przedmiotem publikacji jest ścisły zarys problematyki ukraińskiej literatury grozy przedstawiony na tle europejskich tradycji gotyckich w literaturze. Poruszone zostało zagadnienie niejednoznaczności stosowanej terminologii, którą zazwyczaj wykorzystuje się do tworzenia metodologii badań oraz ich samych. Autor podejmuje próbę umiejscowienia gotycyzmu literackiego w literaturoznawstwie. Artykuł zawiera zwięzłą analizę specyfiki prozy gotyckiej w literaturze Anglii, Francji, Niemiec, Polski i Czech, jednakże szczególnie wyróżniono ukraiński gotycyzm literacki, jego swoistość, wyjątkowość. Dostrzeżona została również ukraińska proza "chimeryczna", choć jej zaliczenie do literatury gotyckiej jest sporne. Ukraińskiemu nurtowi gotyckiemu w literaturze właściwe jest również zastosowanie mitologii ludowej, folkloru i demonologii. Autor doszedł do wniosku, że gotycyzm literacki w twórczości pisarzy ukraińskich stanowi doniosły wkład do literatury europejskiej, również światowej. Wymaga stałych badań literaturoznawczych z uwagi na jego nieustającą ewolucję i pojawianie się takich nowych gatunków nurtu gotyckiego jak fantastyka, *fantasy* czy literatura grozy.

Słowa kluczowe: literatura grozy, gotycyzm literacki, powieść gotycka, proza chimeryczna.

РОЗВИТОК УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ЛІТЕРАТУРИ ЖАХУ НА ТЛІ ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКИХ ГОТИЧНИХ ТРАДИЦІЙ: СТИСЛИЙ НАРИС

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АНОТАЦІЯ. У статті стисло репрезентовано традиції української літератури жаху, що розглянуті на тлі європейських готичних літературних традицій. Ідеться про неоднозначність поняттєвого апарату, що застосовується під час опису методологічних засад дослідження готичної прози; має місце спроба визначення статусу готичної літератури в сучасному літературознавстві. Стаття містить стислий аналіз єпецифіки англійської, французької, німецької, польської і чеської готичної прози, але увагу сконцентровано на своєрідності вияву української готичної прози. Крім того, автор порушив питання особливостей химерної прози в українській літературі. Українській готиці притаманне використання народної міфології, фольклору, демонології. Автор дійшов висновків, що українська готика — потужний унесок не лише в європейську, але й світову літературу, тому вона вимагає подальшого всебічного дослідження, оскільки розвиваються нові напрями цього жанру, зокрема такі, як фантастика чи література жаху.

Ключові слова: література жаху, готична література, готичний роман, химерна проза.

othicism is a specific notion in history and literature. The scope of its reference is gradually expanding. Initially, it was used to refer to a cultural phenomenon from the 18th century, whose features included an interest in the medieval period and historical past. The past and present attempts at defining Gothicism may be divided into two main categories. The first one may include all those who wish to treat Gothic prose (Gothic literature) as a coherently codified convention. The other category will include those who see this type of literature as a set of loosely related elements, subject to certain modifications depending on the time and the dominant view of the world, or generally speaking, social mood and individual consciousness, which is manifested in the community in various ways.

The phenomenon of and the very term "Gothicism" are specific hybrids, which cannot be readily included in any rigid frames. Gothic literature is therefore not only a return to the past and a revival of the past philosophies, views of the world or narrative styles. It is only a background, an inspiration and a source of ideas for later writers. Piotr Kruszewski claimed that Gothicism was one of the most powerful impulses for fantasy literature (including horror fiction) [Kruszewski 2017: 6]. Eighteenth-century Gothicism, with its rigid plot construction and tricks that were supposed to horrify the reader, was thus transformed in a complex world of human emotions and sensations derived from the experience of the increasingly

weird time and space, networked and invigilated by various circles and citizens themselves. Gothicism therefore involves not only copying old patterns, motifs and schemes, but is a way of experiencing the world around us. In the 21st century, there is a tendency to reject any generic purism, which is why Gothic literature includes such a wide range of phenomena that it is virtually impossible to describe them under a single name.

Gothic literature was initially associated with one of the literary genres - the Gothic novel. The most famous texts that were later on used as a model for later works include *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole¹, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* by Ann Radcliffe and *The Monk* by Mathew Gregory Lewis. Ludvík Stepan described the Gothic novel as a type of historical novel and fantasy [Stepan 2002: 115]. The structural transformation of the Gothic novel has resulted in the appearance of numerous types of the novel: a crime story, western, terror fantasy and horror story. The horror story is a specific type of fantasy literature.

Thanks to Walpole, Radcliffe and Lewis, a completely new generic model has been created. These were "the stories of mystery and intrigue". The plot of such stories focused on complicated events, difficult to guess and inspiring awe and terror. The Gothic space included murky castles, monasteries, dungeons, tombs, cemeteries, labyrinths, wavy curtains or unpredictable nature [Rustowski 1997: 9]. The Gothic style also entailed darkness, shadows, murkiness, forests you cannot find a way out of, old manuscripts, a dreary dialect, religious rituals, magic, enchantments, spells, dreams, visions, hallucinations, drugs, somnambulism, madness. This type of literature should be regarded as English Gothic literature.

All the texts that can be classified as "Gothic" have one thing in common: they cannot be classified as a single genre. According to Agnieszka Izdebska, writing about Gothic literature is troublesome mainly because it is impossible to suggest a single, clear and unquestionable definition of this concept [Izdebska 2017: 325–338]. Many researchers studying Gothic literature (Izdebska, Nawrocki, Rustowski, Swierkocki and Groom) have made an attempt at ordering and narrowing down this notion. Based on their conclusions, it is possible to order and define certain generic features of the Gothic trend in European literature. A literary text may be considered to have Gothic features present in European literature if it refers to: 1) the Gothic style understood as aesthetics derived from the eighteenth-century Gothic novel, 2) such names of generic conventions as a novel of terror, a horror, terror fantasy [Izdebska 2017: 325–338; Nawrocki 2009: 131; Rustowski 1997: 9; Swierkocki 2003: 9; Groom 2012: 77–78].

In England there were such notions as a Gothic novel, Gothic romance or a novel of terror, whereas in France there was a mention of black romance, frenetic

¹ It initiated a new genre, which was later defined as a Gothic romance.

² Such events may include killings, abductions, ghost stories, vampire and spectre stories, stories including ominous signs, weird premonitions, dreams and predictions. See L. Štěpán, op. cit., p. 117.

novel or a novel of terror (*le roman noir, le roman frénétique, le roman terrifiant*). France had its own "Gothic revival", which stemmed from the local traditions referred to as the troubadour tradition [Sinko 1991: 159]. It was in that country that the grand vision of the Middle Ages was manifested, full of picturesque, serene and sentimental elements. We can therefore speak of an escapist tendency. Prose classified as black romance was the work of such authors as Charles Nodier and Victor Hugo. They became a source of the later French frenetic novel [Stepan 2002: 122]. Gothic novel was gradually reinforced with sensational aspects, elements of mystery and moralising. This contributed to the arrival of a brand new genre in France - *the mystery novel*. The frenetic trend or tradition is a phenomenon and a concept quite hard to grasp³. Violence and fascination with violence - these are spheres of the human imagination and often also of human life. The frenetic tradition is close to fantasy.

In Germany there was mention of a novel of terror (*Schauerroman*), and genres related to Gothic literature were known as a chivalric romance or a picaresque novel (*Ritterroman*, *Rauberroman*) [Swierkocki 2003: 9], which is corroborated by the views of scholars (Gazda, Izdebska, Pluciennik, Stepan) who look for the sources of the Gothic style in Romanticism and pre-Romanticism. The Gothic style was manifested through an interest in folk poetry, the lyrics of medieval minnesingers, the past heroic epoch (*Song of the Nibelungs*) and old ballads [Sinko 1991: 159–160].

The arrival of Gothic literature in Poland is marked by the series of texts published by Tadeusz Mostowski titled Wybór powieści moralnych i romansów [A Choice of Moral Novels and Romances] [Mostowski 1804]. Some of the novels by Maria Wirtemberska are a combination of fantasy and psychological prose [Szary-Matywiecka 1994: 34]. However, the dominant aspect is sentimental. The favourite motifs used by Polish writers include madness, insanity, atmosphere of mystery or ruin [Szary-Matywiecka 1994: 68–70]. It is worth noting that most texts included elements of fantasy and terror, but these were not dominant. For Romantic writers, Gothic background was later associated rather with satanic and infernal motifs and elements: Jozef Ignacy Kraszewski's witches are replaced in the prose by alchemists, magnetizers and other specialists in so-called occult knowledge [Stepan 2002: 126–127]. Gothic motifs in the work of Adam Mickiewicz (Dziady, Grażyna, Romantyczność) include mysterious figures of black knights, images of repentant souls, damned soul-spectres and traitors, as well as the satanic grotesque jester known from the medieval intermedia [Stepan 2002: 129]. At present, the publishing market for such categories as fantasy, science-fiction and horror stories is even more abundant than before⁴. Fantasy literature is often published in cycles, the most famous of these being doubtless The Witcher by Andrzej Sapkowski.

³ The main form of expression was a novel or a story.

⁴ It is worth noting that specialist fantasy journals were slowly disappearing from the market. The last issue of "Click! Fantasy" appeared in 2005, the last "Magazyn Fantastyczny" was published

In the Czech Republic, there were a few terms to describe the literature of terror: gotický roman, hrůzostrašný román, román hrůzy, černý román, krvavý román (krvák, krvas) [Vachal 1990: 5]. In Czech popular literature, especially Gothic literature, the authors drew on the known motifs (stereotypes), which include the gallows, inn, alchemist's laboratory, monastery, cemetery, buildings full of secret rooms, underground hideaways, and mysterious passages⁵. Kolár properly constructs the whole space, also including erotic scenes. In Communist times, parodies of horror stories appeared in Czech literature, e.g. Drakulův švagr [Dracula's brother-in-law] by Miloslav Švandrlík. An exception were psychological horror titles, e.g. Spalovač mrtvol [The Cremator] by Ladislav Fuks. The most popular type of horror story was the anti-utopian horror, which expressed criticism of the Communist authorities. This is why these stories were banned. After the collapse of the Communist regime, catastrophic Gothic novels appeared (Miloš Urban and Jan Bittner).

In the analysis of literature studies as regards Ukrainian Gothic prose one cannot disregard the fact that the Ukrainian state as an independent entity recognised by the international law was formed only in 1991. Before that, Ukraine was only one of the Soviet republics in a totalitarian and non-democratic state - the Soviet Union. Gothic literature was associated with the bourgeoisie, with backwardness and as such was not welcomed by Soviet censors⁶. The first studies of Ukrainian literary experts, who started to use such terms as "Gothic, Gothic literature, Gothicism" appeared at the beginning of the new millennium. An opportunity to start a discussion of this genre, or maybe just a literary style, was the publishing of Antolohiia ukrainskoho zhakhu [The Anthology of Ukrainian Horror Fiction] in 2000. The author of the introduction, Nataliia Zabolotna, referred to this publication as "the most horrific book in the history of Ukraine" [Заболотна 2000: 3], whereas Vasyl Pakharenko wrote in the afterword that this type of literature is referred to in a number of ways: as terrible, Gothic, literature of fear or thriller, and that this genre is closely related and often intertwined with science-fiction, mystique, folk fantasy, and adventure stories, as well as phantasmagoric and surrealist texts [Пахаренко 2000: 791]. In the foreword to one of his anthologies, Vynnychuk claimed that in Slavic literatures the supernatural is presented with a great dose of humour and

in 2011, "Magia i Miecz" in 2002, "Mała Fantastyka" in 1990, "Portal" in 2003, "Science Fiction" was published until 2012, the last "Sfinks" appeared in 2003 (and was later reactivated in 2009), and the last issue of "Ubik" was published in 2006 (a total of seven issued were published altogether). At the present time, the existing titles include "Nowa Fantastyka" (although no longer in its electronic version) and "Fenix Antologia" (the reactivated "Fenix").

⁵ Broader range of literature quoted by V. Krejčí: J. Kamper, J. J. Kolár, *Obzor literární a umělecký*, 1901/1902, roč. 4; č. 1–2; č. 3–4, s. 39–42; č. 5, s. 68–72; č. 6–7, s. 89–92; č. 8, s. 115–116; č. 11, s. 160–162; č. 12, s. 171–175; č. 13, s. 191–193; č. 16, s. 235–236; č. 17, s. 249–252; č. 19, s. 277–279; č. 20, s. 291–301.

⁶ The author's interview with Yurii Vynnychuk, 22 January 2018, the author's own resources.

there is a tendency to interpret surreal events and images with the use of folklore [Винничук 2014: 4].

The first book published in independent Ukraine which was undoubtedly an express example of Gothic literature appeared in 2001: it was an anthology of Gothic prose compiled by Yurii Vynnychuk and titled Nichnyi pryvyd: antolohiia ukrainskoi hotychnoi prozy XIX stolittia [A Night Spectre: the Anthology of Ukrainian Gothic Prose from the 19th Century]. The above-mentioned collection of texts was noticed by Liubov Kryvutsa, who mentions it in her article, saying that Ukrainian fantasy literature veers towards folk demonology and attempts to find the sources of supernatural events in folklore [Кривуца 2015: 296-303]. The author of the anthology, Yurii Vynnychuk, claims in the foreword to the anthology, titled Nichnyi pryvyd [A Night Spectre], that Gothic prose is a branch of fantasy literature [Винничук 2014: 3-7]. This is why its origins should be traced back to ancient times, because the first writings that have any literary value - the myths of various nations, national epic poems - are examples of fantasy. Vynnychuk directly claims that Gothic literature in Ukraine stems from old Ukrainian literature and folk mythology. A distinctive contribution of Ukrainian culture to the world body of fantasy literature is fairy tale fantasy, mythical, written with a dose of humour, with wit, where sometimes one can even suspect the writer is mocking the reader. The second volume of the above-mentioned anthology also comes with a foreword by Vynnychuk, titled: Uzacharovanomu liustri [In an Enchanted Mirror]. In this foreword, Vynnychuk claims that nowadays Gothic prose is one of the most popular fantasy genres.

Ivan Denysiuk said that an express feature of Ukrainian Gothic literature is vivid folklorism, and strictly speaking, mythologism: constructing the plot around a meeting between humans and folk demonology - witches, devils, water-nymphs and litavets [Денисюк 2004: 142–154].

The author of an article about Fedir Zarevych, Liubov Melnyk, briefly describes the generic indicators of Gothic literature and explains the place of Ukrainian literature within the body of Western European Gothic literature. In doing so, she emphasises that Ukrainian Gothic literature derives from "the local folk demonology and vampirology" (and this is what makes it unique). This is why it should be recognised that a distinctive feature of Ukrainian Gothic literature is faith in supernatural forces and in the human ability to contact these forces [Мельник 2009: 84–88].

Special attention should be paid to the literary phenomenon described by Vynnychuk (in his foreword to *Antolohiia hotychnoi ukrainskoi prozy u 2 tomakh* [*The Anthology of Ukrainian Gothic Prose in two volumes*]) and referred to as "chimeric prose", especially that the author sees it as an inherently Ukrainian genre [Винничук 2014: 3]. As regards the origins of the term "Ukrainian chimeric prose", Vanda Chaikovska offered an exhaustive explanation. In her article from

2006, not only did she address the origin of the notion, but also tried to define the main features of this literary phenomenon and made an attempt to find a place for it in the history of Ukrainian literature. She managed to define the time frame for the texts classified as "chimeric prose": it started in 1958, when a novel by Oleksandr Ilchenko, titled Kozatskomu rodu nema perevodu, abo zh Mamai i Chuzha Molodytsia [The Cossack Brotherhood Will Always Be There] was published, until the publication of such texts as Dim na hori [House on the Hill] (1983) or Na poli smyrennomu [In a Secluded Field] (1983) by Valerii Shevchuk, or Lebedyna zghraia [Flock of Swans] (1971) by Vasyl Zemliak, Levyne serce [Lionheart] (1976) by Pavlo Zahrebelnyi, *Pozychenyi cholovik* [A Borrowed Man] (1981) by Yevhen Hutsalo [Чайковська 2006: 79-82]. The theses included in the brief article by Chaikovska mentioned above are elaborated in a lengthy monograph on "chimeric prose" by Anna Horniatko-Szumilowicz. The author of Ukraińska proza "chimeryczna" lat siedemdziesiątych i osiemdziesiątych XX wieku [Ukrainian "Chimeric" Prose of the 1970s and 1980s] did not offer an unambiguous definition of the time frames of this literary phenomenon; she only admitted that the peak of the "chimeric" trend was in the 1970s and early 1980s [Horni-atko-Szumilowicz 2011: 25].

Chaikovska admits that initially, the term "chimeric" used in literature was consistently neglected and disregarded by literature experts. Such texts were readily classified as folklorism or conventionality (unrealistic trend). This type of a literary phenomenon was not desired by the ideologists of the real socialism, who had a different idea of "forming and consolidating Soviet power in the Ukrainian countryside" [Horniatko-Szumilowicz 2011: 29], which had nothing to do with the magic, bucolic and mythical atmosphere.

Horniatko-Szumilowicz claims that the appearance of "chimeric" prose was conditioned by the colonial status of Ukraine as a state [Horniatko-Szumilowicz 2011: 31]. Using a hidden context, "mask" literature, referring to Ukrainian folklore and cultural heritage was a literary device for opposing censorship and the denationalisation of Ukrainians. The fact that "chimeric" literature flourished in the 1970s and 1980s was therefore largely caused by the political situation in Ukraine. One of the first people to note this, although not directly, was Andrii Kravchenko: in 1988, in a journal titled "Naukova dumka" he distanced himself from the assumption that the leading criterion for distinguishing "chimeric" prose as a separate literary phenomenon was its "unrealistic" quality [Кравченко 1988: 126].

Once we move on to the generic features of "chimeric" prose, we should point to the historical context, drawing on the work of Horniatko-Szumilowicz. The themes of "chimeric" novels are related to the Kievan Rus', the Cossack times, seventeenth-century Lviv, Carpathian highwaymen and the reality of postwar Ukraine. Apart from the historical context, Horniatko-Szumilowicz also points to the rural themes, whereas this feature should not be perceived in a narrow and

literal way. The Ukrainian countryside is supposed to be seen as the mainstay of tradition, a place where Ukrainian language is cherished and maintained, along with Ukrainian customs and traditions — a place free from Soviet mock-progress, understood as a way of destroying Ukrainian national heritage and the legacy of Ukrainian tradition and culture [Horniatko-Szumilowicz 2011: 35–36].

In 1990 Valerii Shevchuk claimed that the first anthology of fantasy stories and novellas in the history of Ukrainian literature was the book titled *Ohnenyi zmii* [*The Fiery Dragon*] [Шевчук 1990: 3–7]. Shevchuk initiated the discourse about specific features of Ukrainian fantasy literature. The term "Gothic literature" was not yet used by that time. He included his considerations in the foreword to Yurii Vynnychuk's anthology *Ohnenyi zmii* [*The Fiery Dragon*], titled *U sviti fantazii ukrainskoho narodu* [*In the World of Fantasy of the Ukrainian Folk*].

The author presented a detailed outline of the history of fantasy (Gothic) literature in Ukrainian culture. As an example of the first valuable piece of such literature, he quotes the old East Slavic chronicle Повість временних літ [The Tale of the Past Years]. On the other hand, the first Ukrainian (Ruthenian) collection of the lives of saints is the thirteenth-century *Kyievo-Pecherskyi pateryk*. This is one of the most unique texts in the whole body of the Old East Slavic hagiographic literature; it includes fantasy stories about how the saints fought evil spirits and how the evil forces took on the forms of women, devils, monsters or beasts. In Galicia, a few collections of epigrams were published over the three centuries (16th–18th). Poets from Lviv used to write poems about devils and witches: Sebastian Klonowic, Jozef Bartłomiej Zimorowic and Szymon Szymonowic. Another writer from Lviv — Benedykt Chmielowski — wrote a lengthy work in the 18th century about devils and witches. He made quite an effort to classify all of them. Shevchuk argues that Ukrainian demonological folk story as a literary genre is an unlimited area for imagination and fantasy. The work of folklore researchers was the basis for the work of Ukrainian romanticists, and more precisely, it contributed to the appearance of the Romantic fantasy short story. Just like Shevchuk, in his foreword to Antolohiia ukrainskoi fantastyky XIX-XX st. [The Anthology of Ukrainian fantasy from the 19th and 20th century], Vynnychuk also indicates that Ukrainian Romantic literature (he also refers to it as Gothic) originated from old Ukrainian literature [Винничук 2017: 3]. Vynnychuk claims that the 19th century saw an outburst of Romantic fantasy and he links this phenomenon to the appearance of Gogol's writing. He notes that after Vechory na khutori bilia Dykanky [Evenings on a Ukrainian Farm Near Dykanka] there was a fashion for literature about devils and witches. He claims that utopian stories by Danylevskyi and Kostomarov were close to Gothic. The author of the anthology points out that the stories from Galicia were much more full of terror than literature from other parts of Ukraine; they were mostly

written by monks and clergymen. They also have a much more moralising and allegorical tone.

In 1997 another anthology was published, *Kvity v temnii kimnati* [*Flowers in a Dark Room*]; the stories were collected by Volodymyr Danelenko. This anthology includes forty six stories, the majority of which may be regarded as examples of short Gothic prose. In 1999 an anthology of short stories by Vasyl Gabor was published, *Knyha ekzotychnykh sniv i realnykh podii* [*A Book of Exotic Dreams and Real Events*]. Both of these literary events fit into the phenomenon observed at that time and involve increased inspiration from the magical short story. This phenomenon was noticed in the 1980s and 1990s [Мельник 1999: 7]. Vasyl Gabor combined the elements of the classical Ukrainian short-story writing of the late 19th and early 20th century with the beginnings of the magical short story of the late 20th century. He used a series of elements that he combined into specific pairs: Gothic literature and folk fantasy, crime story and sensation, phantasmagoria and surrealism [Horniatko-Szumilowicz, 2006: 38].

Antolohiia ukrainskoho zhakhu [The Anthology of Ukrainian Horror Fiction], published in 2000 in Ukraine, compiled by Vasyl Pakharenko, is a book of eight hundred pages and includes seventy stories by thirty-two writers such as Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko, Orest Somov, Mykola Hohol, Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko, Mykola Kostomarov, Mykhailo Chaikovskyi, Ivan Franko, Mykhailo Kotsiubynskyi, Nataliia Kobrynska, Vasyl Stefanyk, Yurii Vynnychuk, Valerii Shevchuk and Oleksandr Zhovna.

The aforementioned anthology compiled by Yurii Vynnychuk *Ohnenyi zmii* [*The Fiery Dragon*] was not the only collection of texts that are the subject matter of his interest. Another piece of Gothic fantasy was a collection of short stories published in 1990, titled *Mistse dlia drakona* [*Place for the Dragon*], in 1992 a novel titled *Laskavo prosymo v Shurohrad* [*Welcome to Ratville*] was published and in 2003 there was *Knyha bestii* [*Book of the Beast*] - a Ukrainian bestiary. One year later, in 2004, it was followed by an anthology of Ukrainian stories about devils entitled *Chort zna sho* [*Hell Knows What*]. In 2010–2018 Vynnychuk collected the legends of Lviv, fairy tales, legends, myths, mystic stories, as well as magical stories, Gothic and fantasy tales in numerous anthologies.

As follows from the above, the Gothic trend has been present in Ukrainian literature for centuries; initially, it came in a convention similar to the eighteenth-century Gothic novel with moralising and allegorical themes. With time, the Ukrainian Gothic trend became more unique and developed its own distinctive features; writers increasingly sought inspiration in folklore and their texts feature figures from Slavic mythology. A characteristic genre distinct from Gothic literature and encountered only in Ukrainian literature is chimeric prose, which was often a means of opposing the Communist ideology and denationalisation of Ukrainians in the periods of enslavement.

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