

РЕЦЕНЗІЇ

THE ORIGINALITY OF THE RESEARCH ON OLES ULIANENKO'S LITERARY WORKS IN FELIKS SHTEINBUK'S MONOGRAPH

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САМОБУТНІСТЬ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ ТВОРЧОСТІ ОЛЕСЯ УЛЬЯНЕНКА В МОНОГРАФІЇ ФЕЛІКСА ШТЕЙНБУКА

АННА ГОРНЯТКО-ШУМИЛОВИЧ

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АНОТАЦІЯ. Друга частина монографії *Під „Знаком Саваофа, або „Там, де...”* Ульяненко є ґрунтовним продовженням дослідження творчості українського письменника Олеса Ульяненка (1962–2010) авторства Фелікса Штейнбука. Ульяненкознавець із Братислави вирішив якомога точніше відобразити суть і мету творчості Ульяненка, для якого справжнім і єдиним предметом розгляду була людина та її душа. Оригінальний аналіз досвідченого дослідника базується на екзегетичній інтерпретації прозової спадщини Ульяненка, альтернативній щодо традиційних історико-літературних трактувань. Книга, яка, як обіцяв її автор, містить найповніший, ґрунтовний та оригінальний аналіз творчості Олеса Ульяненка, водночас є основою для подальших фундаментальних досліджень літературної спадщини письменника та, безумовно, заслуговує на належну оцінку з боку як літературознавців, так і широкого кола читачів.

Ключові слова: Фелікс Штейнбук, Олес Ульяненко, літературна критика, традиція „нуар”, роман, українська література

ORYGINALNOŚĆ BADAŃ TWÓRCZOŚCI OLEŚIA ULIANENKI W MONOGRAFII FELIKSA SZTEINBUKA

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STRESZCZENIE. Druga część monografii *Pod „Znakiem Sabaota” albo „Tam, gdzie...” Ulianenko* to gruntowna kontynuacja studium twórczości ukraińskiego pisarza Ołesia Ulianenki (1962–2010) autorstwa Feliksa Szteinbuka. Ulianenkoznawca z Bratysławy powziął zamiar jak najrzetelniej odzwierciedlić istotę i cel pisarstwa Ulianenki, dla którego prawdziwym i jedynym przedmiotem rozważań stał się człowiek i jego dusza. Oryginalne dociekania wytrawnego badacza proponują alternatywne względem tradycyjnych historycznoliterackich interpretacji egzegetyczne odczytanie prozatorskiej spuścizny Ulianenki. Książka, która zgodnie z obietnicą jej autora, zawiera najpełniejszą, dogłębną i oryginalną analizę twórczości prozaika, a jednocześnie stanowi podstawę do dalszych fundamentalnych badań nad spuścizną literacką pisarza z pewnością zasługuje na należyte docenienie zarówno ze strony krytyki literackiej, jak również szerokiego grona czytelników.

Słowa kluczowe: Feliks Szteinbuk, Ołes Ulianenko, krytyka literacka, tradycja „noir”, powieść, literatura ukraińska

Oles Ulianenko – “our Ulian,” “Uliasha,” “Ulianchyk” – who died prematurely in 2010 at the age of 48, probably not having had time to tell the stunned Ukrainian reader about all the burning concerns of his native Ukraine, is gradually gaining the respect of readers, critics, literary experts, all those who care about the future of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. His unusual novelism, though neglected during the writer’s lifetime (scandalous stories with the novels *The Sign of Sabaoth* and *The Woman of His Dreams*), was favourably reviewed by serious academic exploration in Ukraine (Nila Zborovska, Roksana Kharchuk, Olha Punina, Nadiya Tenditna, Nadiya Stepula, Oleh Solovei, Mykhailo Brynykh, Myroslav Slaboshpytskyi, Bohdan Pastukh, Oksana Pukhonska, etc.), Slovakia (Feliks Shteinbuk), Poland (Anna Horniatko-Szumilowicz), America (Maria Revakovich), etc.¹ At the same time, nowadays, outside of Ukraine, it was Feliks Shteinbuk, the Ukrainian literary critic, who paid the most attention to Ulianenko’s work. Shteinbuk is a university professor (post-doctoral degree in language and literature studies) at the Comenius University in Bratislava (Slovakia). This scientist is also the author of a renowned collection of miniature critical essays entitled *Incubation of “Dinosaur Eggs”* (Kyiv,

¹ Bibliographic data of selected works of the above-mentioned scholars of Oles Ulianenko’s work are placed in references.

2019), for which he received the Oles Biletskyi Literary Prize in the field of literary criticism (2019), as well as an original two-volume monograph under the title of *Under the "Sign Of Sabaoth" or "Where The ..." Ulianenko*, the first part of which, when published in 2020, was awarded the Panteleimon Kulish Literary and Art Prize (2021), with the second being published two years later in 2022.

The second part of the monograph "*Where the ..." Ulianenko* continues the study of the writer's creativity, which was begun in the first part entitled *Under the "Sign of Sabaoth"*. There is an epigraph which contains a quotation, in the original language, from Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls* (1843) ("...the contemporary court does not grasp that a lot of spiritual depth is needed in order to illuminate a picture taken from a miserable existence and take it to the level of a masterpiece...") [Shteinbuk 2022: 3]. Those words unequivocally indicate that the author sought to convey, as accurately as possible, the essence and purpose of Ulianenko's prose. A human being and their soul were the true and only subject of the image for this deceased Ukrainian writer. For a long time, many readers and critics did not accept Ulian's semi-vagrant lifestyle, his worldview reference points and all the more "noir"-like body of work.

The comprehensive monograph consists of: *Foreword*, *Introduction*, three chapters, *Afterword*, *Bibliography*, *Name Index* and *Subject Index*. In structuring the book, the author wrote the *Foreword* and only then the *Introduction*. They both differ in the way of narration (as the scholar admits, from "applausively approbatory verbiage of the *Foreword* to the *Introduction's* rationalisations") [Shteinbuk 2022: 6]. Reflections on the poetics, issues, and topoi of Oles Ulianenko's novels are being offered by the author. However, he first warned potential readers of his plans to consider not only traditional aspects, such as either stylistic and genre originality or the city and the laughter topoi in particular, but he also intended to raise issues that are far from conventional topics, such as, for example, questions of defiance or sexual deviance, topoi of villainy, madness or disgust. Therefore, Feliks Shteinbuk's research "is devoted to both the usual literary discourses and discourses that at first glance cannot be even qualified according to the definition of discourse and in general are located rather outside the boundaries of etiquette and usual decency" [Shteinbuk 2022: 7]. In comparison with the traditional literary discourse, it undoubtedly proves the originality and uniqueness of the book.

Since the author is compelled to resort to an "interpretation of non-artistic phenomena in an aesthetic context" [Shteinbuk 2022: 8], he went for theoretical definitions developed by Jack (also known as Judith) Halberstam, a modern American academic and professor of queer studies. In order to constitute the basis for the implementation of the methodological principles applied in the monograph, Shteinbuk culled the conceptual portraiture from the following works by Halberstam: *Low Theory* (the Introduction to the book entitled *The Queer Art of Failure*), 2011 and *An Introduction to Female Masculinity: Masculinity without Men* (Preface xxxii, point 1 from the 1998 book entitled *Female Masculinity*).

The first chapter “Poetics, or «*loci communes*»” is devoted to the research of style, genre, plot and composition, imagery and chronotope, whereby the writer’s style is studied according to at least several factors. They refer particularly to nation and society, as well as to deviance, sexuality and horror. The author adopts an individualistic stance regarding Ulianenکو’s use of tools of expressionism; he challenges the influence of German expressionists on Ulianenکو’s poetics. In Shteinbuk’s opinion, Ulianenکو is a postmodernist in style. Shteinbuk claims that Ulianenکو’s works, due to the double coding characteristic of his work, can be perceived either as an example of mass culture that aims at the naturalistic depiction of visceral and social horrors, or as an example of profound intellectual and philosophical prose. If we accept that expressionism is present in Ulianenکو’s poetics, then grotesque, irony and phantasmagoria are undoubtedly its integral components. As a result, the Shteinbuk stands in a certain opposition to the judgments of other scholars of Ulianenکو’s heritage (for example, Olha Punina, Oleh Solovei, Anna Horniatko-Szumilowicz), who confirmed the expressionist ambitions of “Ulian.”²

One can fully agree with Feliks Shteinbuk’s opinion that the artistic palette of novel thinking is typical of Ulianenکو, since his “desperate efforts” to penetrate the ontological foundations of human existence, in particular those which are body-related, are possible only with the aid of the novel as a genre, with its defining categories of “(not-)completeness” and “incipience” [Shteinbuk 2022: 46].

It is worth noting that Ulianenکو’s novels are *a priori* very difficult to read, perhaps due to the constant compositional violation of the linear unfolding of the episodes being described. For that reason, “the distinguishing of the plot’s events is blurred” [Shteinbuk 2022: 48]. Shteinbuk is right when he states that this is a deliberate act on the part of the writer, that it is “a representation of internal intentions aiming to penetrate the meanings formed on the border of more than contradictory phenomena – social and bodily existence, by means of extremely intense artistic analysis” [Shteinbuk 2022: 58].

As Shteinbuk rightly notes, Ulianenکو’s works contain non-standard imagery based on “metaphorical decorations” that “powerfully and originally depict nature, the city, and man, and also offer a remarkable artistic and philosophical reflection on what is seen, heard and felt” [Shteinbuk 2022: 69]. In addition, the imagery in Ulianenکو’s novels determines the lack of answers to sacramental questions, which

² Among other things, Oleh Solovei wrote about the expressionistic manner of writing, which constitutes a considerable “difficulty for the reader’s digestion” of Ulianenکو’s works, considering that Ulianenکو, like Vasyl Stus, made a “conscious choice in favour of the expressionist worldview” [Solovei 2018: 65]. Also, Olha Punina, in describing Ulianenکو’s novelistic writing as “experimental,” notes that its “expressionistic intensity” is evidenced by the writer’s “metaphor of world-chaos as a leading marker of style” [Punina 2016: 64]. However, Anna Horniatko-Szumilowicz mentions that the writer realised himself creatively in the expressionistic style of writing that was in character for modernism and neomodernism. Ulianenکو needed this style for the Ukrainian version of “noir” [Horniatko-Szumilowicz 2021: 203].

is a powerful stimulus that actuates the world of the novels analysed as a whole and, in particular, their imaginative world. Shteinbuk justifiably states that because of the above, it is relevant to interpret Ulianenko's artistic imagery as this kind of symbolism which aims not only to reproduce reality, but also experience inner feelings of horror and despair that are proper to man ontologically [Shteinbuk 2022: 75].

And finally, regarding the chronotope in Ulianenko's works, according to Shteinbuk, the leading principle in the chronotope of his novels is space rather than time, as we observe the fact of the absence or dubiousness of temporal markers. The category that eliminates time from the chronotope is, in the Shteinbuk's opinion, death, which is omnipresent in Ulianenko's novels.

According to Shteinbuk, the second chapter, "Issues, or 'difficult places'", is devoted to selective and subjective aspects of the issues in Ulianenko's novels, namely: the presence of a national narrative, issues of defiance, and finally, such taboo areas as the body, gender, homosexuality or sexually perverted subjects [Shteinbuk 2022: 97]. This is the most polemical part of the monograph; Shteinbuk's conclusions are characterised by a high degree of non-standardisation and experimentation.

Thus, for example, he defends the opinion that the national theme is manifested in Ulianenko's works on several levels. First of all, his protagonists, despite being mostly marginalised, are still Ukrainians (not including Jews, since, according to Shteinbuk, three models of relations with Jews are proposed in Ulianenko's novels, under the conditions of "wild contradictions and inconsistencies of these relations" [Shteinbuk 2022: 108]). The events of all the novels topographically take place in Ukraine, in well-known megacities – in Kyiv, for example, but also on the outskirts – somewhere in the south of Ukraine. Shteinbuk concludes that the national narrative, although distorted, is still present in Ulianenko's prose, as the degenerate protagonists kill each other, and therefore are exposed to the deadly threat that characterises the Ukrainian national space. According to Shteinbuk, "those who respond to aggression and violence in this way not only defend themselves from death, but if they do not prevent denationalisation, they at least appear to be involved in the affirmation of their national identity precisely through saving their physical existence" [Shteinbuk 2022: 113]. And, therefore, according to Shteinbuk, "if you want to survive and remain a Ukrainian, you must not back down in front of your Ukrainian compatriot in the fight for life and national identity" [Shteinbuk 2022: 114].

The most obvious thesis of the second chapter is the constation of complete defiance, which is experienced by all Ulianenko's protagonists without exception. They contest their miserable and inert existence, the result of which is a refractory attitude, and disapproval of such an animalistic life. After realising that the world is full of callousness and obmutescence, Camus' "absurd man," according to Shteinbuk, "comes to the conclusion that only he himself can be the source of all values and the only judge" [Shteinbuk 2022: 121]. Of course, in Shteinbuk's opinion, there is an

“unbelievable combination of intractable intentions with absurdity and metaphysics” in the writer’s works. It complicates the interpretation of the idea of an unruly person, which is peculiar to Ulianenکو, since the metaphysical dimension of his novels greatly strengthens the sense of absurdity, which can be overcome only by defiance itself. Therefore, “metaphysical infinity” does not keep the characters from refractory and destructive encroachment on their own lives and on the lives of others.

One might dispute Shteinbuk’s interpretation of Camus’ “Man in Revolt,” presented by the philosopher in his famous essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). After all, according to Camus, a human can paradoxically find happiness in an absurd existence. A human, like the mythical Sisyphus, has no hope for the best, because their life is meaningless and difficult. And yet in Camus’ view, Sisyphus rolls his own stone, repeatedly reaches the top of the mountain, and is happy then. The same can be said about a human, cf. “All Sisyphus’ silent joy is contained therein. His fate belongs to him. His rock is a thing likewise, the absurd man, when he contemplates his torment, silences all the idols” [Camus 2015: 94].

We agree with Shteinbuk’s opinion that it is difficult to find another writer in Ukrainian literature whose discourse would be as carnal as that of Oles Ulianenکو. At the same time, the novelist’s “radical-corporeal artistic visions” do not deny the national tradition, but rather continue and deepen it. No one would deny that Ukrainian literature has long traditions of bodily discourse, starting with folklore, through ancient Ukrainian literature, its classical period up to the present day. Shteinbuk is convinced that Ulianenکو, relying on world and national traditions, “is not capable of neglecting his attention to any, even the most terrible or disgusting side of a human being” [Shteinbuk 2022: 150].

Having analysed gender issues in Ulianenکو’s works, Shteinbuk arrives at interesting conclusions. He challenges the view that Ulian’s novels reproduce a traditional sexist model, according to which a woman’s actions are determined by her irrational and inconsistent nature, as opposed to a rational male. In Shteinbuk’s opinion, the novels seem to do it only at first glance. The problem, however, is that the actions of male characters from various works are no less chaotic and impulsive. Therefore, Shteinbuk has doubts as to whether Ulianenکو tried to deny a strictly differentiated sex-gender world, since he managed to overcome the sex-gender determination or doom of the characters of his own works. Regarding homosexual or sexual-perversion themes in Ulianenکو’s works, Shteinbuk rightly considers Ulianenکو to be the only Ukrainian writer in whose work homosexual issues were presented regularly, in fact, as a permanent thematic and content element of artistic discourse. Shteinbuk finds as many as six strong arguments in defence of the need for Ulianenکو’s introduction of homosexual and sexual-perversion themes, which underwent a complex and extremely contradictory evolution in his works.

Shteinbuk asks questions about the “poetological and aesthetic sense” of descriptions and episodes of “dirty sexuality” in Ulianenکو’s books, and finds six rea-

sons for this state of affairs. There are important factors among them. For example, the fact that LGBTQ content indicates the extraordinary importance that a person attaches to their ability to get pleasure from various actions related to the sexual sphere. The desire for pleasure and the ability to achieve it cannot be limited either by laughter or even by the threat of death. An artistic representation of a person outside of these abilities and desires would distort the image of the corresponding anthropological being. The image of a person's conflicting abilities provides the basis for a philosophical and aesthetic understanding of the glaring contradictions typical for a human being. Queer content is an inevitable accompaniment of passion. Finally, the work of Oles Ulianenko turns out to be extremely powerful in the artistic sense. It does not neglect anything in its desperate attempts to reach some extreme aesthetic limit. Beyond them an unfathomable horizon of meanings emerges. It is completely different, much deeper, than any ideological, political, pedagogical, etc. speculations [Shteinbuk 2022: 201–202].

The third chapter, “Topica, or ‘strange’ places”, is devoted to an extremely rich, if not the most complex in Ulianenko's artistic world, system of topoi, including the topoi of marginality and absurdity, the city and the bridge, madness and cruelty, contempt and disgust, boredom and laughter, and finally, despair and hope. The first one Shteinbuk considers is the topos of marginality, the most characteristic and most often analysed among Ulianenko's topoi. Shteinbuk rightly appeals to the words of numerous scholars that Ulianenko was immersed in the underworld full of criminals, madmen, and perverts. By quoting the words of scholars, Shteinbuk proves that marginality is only an example of another approach to reality and borders on the concept of absurdity. Following the path of such reflections, it can be stated that Ulianenko's protagonists lead “absurd lives on geographical, historical, ideological, social, religious, gender, sexual, physiological and even medical margins” [Shteinbuk 2022: 213]. In Shteinbuk's opinion, a common feature of Ulianenko's novels is how protagonists function on the margins of absurd existence and attempts to overcome it, which fail in most cases. Shteinbuk also notes that sometimes the writer “resorts to a slightly different strategy, according to the principles of which the main thing is not the protagonists' stay on the margins and attempts to break out of their limits, but, on the contrary, the search for meaning that leads to the margins of existence” [Shteinbuk 2022: 215]. Therefore, the reciprocity of these topoi (marginality and absurdity) is very productive and allows us to understand unexpected meanings in such complex discourses as Oles Ulianenko's novelism. After all, both “marginal absurdity” and “absurd marginality” are actually represented in it. They interact with each other, turning into an exclusive poetic means of creating a complex, contradictory and original artistic world.

Shteinbuk explores the reciprocity of the topoi of the bridge and the city from an extremely original perspective. In his opinion, Ulianenko retrieved the topos of the bridge as a phenomenon that separates but also links, which is between the

opposite zones of security and danger. As for the topos of the city, we can speak of “the dramatic topos of the multifarious existence of a contradictory anthropomorphic being that threatens and, on the contrary, becomes ill or becomes a victim of aggressive harassment, devours and is concurrently exposed to the danger of destruction, combines, as a ‘hermaphroditic being,’ male and female, and is also capable of getting pregnant, which certainly correlates with life, despite the fact that it inevitably and always leads to death” [Shteinbuk 2022: 245]. In this way, Shteinbuk proves that the secret of the bridge lies in the fact that “just as the bridge acquires a central position in relation to water and fire streams, it also functions similarly in relation to the combination of the city torn into pieces, or, more precisely, life and death; it offers a place, a point, which at the same time does not belong to any of the opposite phenomena – neither to the river, nor to the shores, on the one hand, and neither to Pechersk, nor to Rusanivka, on the other” [Shteinbuk 2022: 241]. Next, Shteinbuk analyses the reciprocity of the topos of madness and cruelty, noting that they, just like the topoi of marginality and absurdity, are isomorphic in relation to each other and that they echo in a semantic sense, as they are often interpreted as marginal and absurd phenomena. According to his classification, the correlation between the topoi of madness and cruelty in Ulianenko’s works is threefold. The first group, consisting of those novels in which the mentioned topoi form a vicious circle, includes *Stalinka*, *Eye of Fire*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *Pearls and Pigs*. The second group, marked by the dominance of the topos of madness, includes such works as *Bohemian Rhapsody*, *The Cross on Saturn*, and *The Woman of His Dreams*. The third group, which consists of works with a clear preference for the topos of cruelty, presented in its many varieties, includes the novels *The Sign of Sabaoth*, *Dauphin of Satan*, *Flowers of Sodom*, *Angels of Vengeance*, *Where the South Is*, *Seraphim*, *Sophia*, and the story of Sedoy.

Other topoi analysed in pairs by Shteinbuk include vileness and disgust, which, as a rule, function in Ulianenko’s works on a sexual basis, because, according to the words of the scholars Shteinbuk quotes, “sexuality is in the same row with all vileness and, accordingly, that which is rejected by the human world” [Shteinbuk 2022: 276]. He concludes that the existential dimension of Ulianenko’s works is revealed precisely thanks to the vile and repulsive images that personify the loneliness and uselessness of the inner world of the protagonists and the imperfection of the external world, which they are forced to overcome constantly. According to Shteinbuk, the artistic heritage of Oles Ulianenko is filled with figurative representatives of the topoi of contempt and disgust, among other things, and sets itself the goal of creating a specific discourse. And therefore, “the purpose of such descriptions involves either a resolute, yet cowardly rejection, or a bold and also no less resolute perception of the repulsive and base as topoi, which are endowed with an aesthetic dimension in themselves and which are aimed “not at providing aesthetic pleasure, but at disturbing the aesthetic restlessness” [Shteinbuk 2022: 293].

As is traditionally the case for Shteinbuk, the topoi of boredom and laughter are considered together as conditioning each other. The topos of existential boredom, which is present in almost every novel by Ulianenko analysed here, inextricably causes laughter. The latter, however, even the one that is directly nominated as joyful and cheerful laughter, according to Shteinbuk, “under the condition of its thorough examination, turns out to be more or less vulgar and inauthentic laughter, able to deny boredom only nominally” [Shteinbuk 2022: 311]. And so Shteinbuk, following the opinion expressed by J. Bataille, states that in Ulianenko's works, “laughter can act not only, for example, as what Nietzsche says is a way of ‘affirming life in its fullness, including ugly and disharmonious aspects of existence’, but also to be a consequence of ‘longing’, or rather boredom” [Shteinbuk 2022: 306].

The interpretation of the last pair of topoi – despair and hope – is perhaps the most original in Shteinbuk's research palette. In his opinion, in Ulianenko's works, particularly such as *The Winter's Tale*, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, *The Sign of Sabaoth*, or *Angels of Vengeance*, Ulianenko does not even mention the topos of despair, especially since “the dead generally do not care about everything, and the victims mostly experience not despair, but hope, leaving despair to rapists and murderers” [Shteinbuk 2022: 328]. As for the topos of hope, Shteinbuk claims it is hardly presented in Ulianenko's works. Therefore, “since the topos of hope is absent in those works that are also devoid of the topos of despair, this confirms the thesis about the determination of hope by despair, namely, the absence of hope is caused by the absence of despair, which has the ability to generate hope” [Shteinbuk 2022: 333]. Summarising the reflections of the third chapter, Shteinbuk restates the conditionality of how the pairs of topoi from Ulianenko's novels function, noting that the writer's literary heritage does not speak for unenlightened despair, absurdity and marginality, madness and cruelty, baseness, disgust or boredom.

In the *Afterword*, Shteinbuk clearly and logically formulates his conclusions. However, he emphasises that it was impossible to answer all questions regarding Ulianenko's work. Hence, he admits that it is necessary and important to continue further development of the problem.

The basic monograph is complemented by name and subject indexes that confirm Shteinbuk's competence and increase the scientific value of the book. In general, the structure of the work adequately reflects the idea of the work. The detailed division of the text into three chapters and seventeen subsections is striking. Each section is preceded by an “Introduction to the section.” Each subsection begins with a quote selected from Ulianenko's novels, which signals the aspect of the study that is elaborated in this fragment of the monograph. Additionally, selected quotations precede individual reflections within the subsections. Such a multi-syllabic structure of the monograph may seem to be confusing at first glance. Sometimes, the content is likely to be overloaded; there is an impression that it is not easy to understand the text. On the other hand, what the reader receives from Shteinbuk is

an extremely scrupulous step-by-step analysis of the aspects of poetics, issues and topics of Ulianenko's novel legacy.

Despite the uniqueness of the research hypotheses and the indisputable originality of their confirmation, Shteinbuk chose a fairly conventional form of step-by-step analysis, which usually involves the formulation of a hypothesis, followed by definitions of the concept, category or phenomenon fundamental to this aspect of the research, usually authored by several to several dozen scholars. The first step is then followed by a short analysis of successive novels by Ulianenko through the prism of the same concept / category / phenomenon, and only after such a research scheme does Shteinbuk draw conclusions that confirm the hypothesis. As a result, while Shteinbuk deploys various aspects of Ulianenko's novelism, the reader has to deal with multiple repetitions of plot, situational, descriptive details of successive novels, but is thoroughly acquainted with their content and prepared for the poetic features of Ulianenko's discourse.

Almost all of Ulian's novels fall within the scope of Shteinbuk's research aspirations, such as *The Winter's Tale*, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, *Stalinka*, *The Dauphin of Satan*, *The Sign of Sabaoth*, *The Son of the Shadow*, *Where the South Is*, *Fire Eye*, *Seraphim*, *Sophia*, *Angels of Vengeance*, *Flowers of Sodom*, *The Woman of His Dreams*, *Pearls and Pigs*, *Cross on Saturn*. He deals brilliantly with the smallest details from the artistic world of Ulianenko's protagonists, demonstrating a thorough knowledge of the fiction analyses.

Shteinbuk's reading, his research competence, familiarity with critical literature, his use of the theoretical guidelines of numerous scientists, literary critics, philosophers, psychologists, including Ukrainian, American, French, and Russian ones all command respect. The bibliography is impressive - it comprises 360 items. Despite what has been said, we consider it expedient to supplement the reference list with the academic achievements of Polish experts on Ulianenko, especially a number of articles by Anna Horniatko-Szumilowicz.

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The academic understanding of the figure and work of Oles Ulianenko as a unique artistic and social phenomenon in Ukrainian culture and literature, and more broadly, in Slavic and world literature in general, is currently of particular importance. Despite the fact that the writer's work is increasingly attractive to the academic community, a certain polarisation is noticeable in the approach to Ulianenko's artistic heritage, as well as to him as an individual. For mostly non-literary reasons, his work is sometimes underestimated in his homeland, and for linguistic reasons (lack of knowledge of Ukrainian) it is little-known abroad. However, there is sufficient justification for Ulianenko's name to be included in the pantheon of classics of world humanitarian heritage. Thanks to his extremely painstaking sci-

entific work, profound and accurate, frequent experimental reflections and undeniable research talent, Feliks Shteinbuk, an expert on Ulianenko from Bratislava, has not only established the position of Ulianenko in the Ukrainian circle of writers, strengthened it in the gallery of world writers, but has also proved beyond any doubt that Ulianenko “turned out to be able to say extremely weighty and important things about humanity” [Shteinbuk 2022: 342]. And this is his most valuable gift to Ukrainian and world literature.

We fully agree with Shteinbuk's declaration that the monograph offers a multifaceted consideration of those aspects of Oles Ulianenko's work which until now have only briefly become the subject of academic interest or have been interpreted in their sociological or moral-ethical aspects. In particular, homosexual problems and sexual perversion problems in general remained outside the interest of academic researchers. Therefore, as Shteinbuk himself notes, the academic weight of this study is primarily determined by attempts to overcome numerous restrictions and taboos characteristic of Oles Ulianenko's works. In Shteinbuk's opinion, there is a need to focus more on Ulianenko's novels' artistic and aesthetic phenomena.

It is worth noting that Shteinbuk has a clear awareness that there are not fewer questions, but even more, because he asks a number of them, in particular, “Why did death turn out to be so attractive for the writer's artistic aspirations?”, “How did he manage to combine his macabre artistic visions very often with such a deep and authentic irony that there is not even a shadow of suspicion about his possible blasphemous instructions or intentions? Finally, in what way did this unique artist of words, who described “social reality in extremely gloomy colors”, not become only “an unpretentious bard of primitive and boring ‘noir’”? [Shteinbuk 2022: 342].

In summary, the second part of the monograph *Under the “Sign of Sabaoth” or “Where The ...” Ulianenko*, which, according to Shteinbuk's promise, offers “the most complete, thorough and original analysis of the creative work of Oles Ulianenko, and at the same time provides a basis for further fundamental studies of the writer's literary heritage” [Shteinbuk 2022: 8], deserves due appreciation, and not only from writers, but also from the widest circle of readers.

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