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Expressionist Narrative of War (Vasyl Stefanyk’s Novellas in the Western European Context)

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Abstract: This article shows how the influence of Western European expressionism on Ukrainian art contributed to the formation of its national version in the works of Vasyl Stefanyk. The research applied comparative, biographical methods and method of close reading. The outcome of this detailed analysis demonstrates that the common features of Stefanyk’s antimilitary novels and Western European Expressionists are similar and feature such themes as the crisis of cultural values, anti-military issues, condemnation of murder, states of existential anxiety, tragedy of human existence and eschatological feeling. Furthermore, Expressionists and Stefanyk focus on the psychophysical states of characters – death, madness, injury, numbness, screaming, fear, panic, despair, agony, anxiety, prayer.

Keywords: expressionism, poetics, narrative, antimilitarism, death, archetype.

Introduction

The period on the eve of the First World War was the peak for the emergence of European Expressionism – a large-scale cultural phenomenon in Europe, which arose from traumatic experiences, such as the anticipation of the threat of war, distortion of consciousness and became the new vision of reality. As a stylistic trend, European Expressionism was shaped in Austria and Germany at a time when political tensions in Europe were at their peak. During the war, expressionism acquired a clear pacifist appeal and anti-military pathos. Many expressionist writers went through the crucible of war themselves, many had to become soldiers and paramedics, and many were destined not to return from the war (K. Adler, A. Lichtenstein, G. Sack, E. Stadler, A. Stramm, E. Lotz, G. Heym, G. Trakl and others). For the Expressionists, war is a huge civilisational crisis: a catastrophe for humanity. Hence, the artistic description of war is dominated by images of death, tragedy, deconstruction of the body, fratricide, chaos, homelessness, the aesthetics of the ugly, loneliness, motives of the destruction of the old world, escape into mysticism. Physical agony is accompanied by social decay and ethical degradation (Bonner 1988, p. 23). In 1920, the German writer and journalist Kurt Pinthus edited and published an anthology of expressionist poetry in the German language titled, *Dawn of Humanity* (originally titled *Menschheitsdämmerung*), in
the preface to which he noted that the war in expressionists’ writings was “depicted unrealistically, it is present as an eerie vision, it swells into global horror, an inhuman evil” (Menschheitsdämmerung 1920, p. 16). The philosophical grounds of Expressionism were the philosophical foundations of Phenomenology and Existentialism, in particular the scientific concepts of A. Schopenhauer, F. Nietzsche, H. Bergson, J. Stein, O. Spengler, K. Pinthus, E. Husserl, and Th. Dubler. As a stylistic trend, European Expressionism has become a special type of artistic thinking and outlook, drawn towards symbolism, religious mysticism and explorations of mental states.

In 1925–1926, interest in German Expressionism grew in the Ukrainian cultural space. In Ukrainian periodicals, translations of works by K. Edschmid, F. Unruh, G. Heym, B. Kellermann, L. Frank, G. Berger, G. Heijermans, J. Winkler, E. Toller and others, were published in separate editions. In 1925 Novellas, a collection of prose by G. Heym translated by V. Petrov, M. Rylskyi, and O. Burghardt was published in Kyiv. Later, Stepan Savchenko oversaw a collection of articles titled Expressionism and Expressionists. Literature, painting and music of modern Germany and wrote a thorough preface (Savchenko 1929). Like Western European Expressionism, its local version in Ukraine also expressed the mood of catastrophe, civilisational crisis and tragic outlook.

Vasyl Stefanyk became the forerunner and the brightest representative of Expressionism in Ukrainian literature. M. Rudnytsky wrote about him “[he] is the only Ukrainian writer of the modern era who can be fully translated into any European language” (Rudnytsky 1926, p. 2). The theme of war in Vasyl Stefanyk’s works, in terms of the poetics of expressionism and existential leitmotifs, has been understudied by researchers, so this paper takes a large step towards solving this by presenting a detailed analysis of the symbolic existentials of war (fear, death, loneliness, suffering, patience), the archetypes of national memory, as well as putting Stefanyk’s works in the broader context of European Expressionism. Furthermore, it is an opportune time for this brand new research to be presented to the world as Ukraine celebrates Vasyl Stefanyk’s 150th anniversary this year (2021).

Stefanyk became a significant mediator between Ukrainian and European Expressionism in the 1920s, he transferred its main features into the Ukrainian context. Oksana Chernenko articulated the features of his expressionist style thus, “Stefanyk’s Expressionism, which grew organically from his own spiritual principles, but in unison with the spirit of the Western European culture, developed in the nurturing modernist environment of Krakow and well-read background of classics of contemporary writers, while retaining its special, unique originality and Ukrainian spirit” (Chernenko 1989, p. 84).

1. Literature Review

Currently, the theoretical foundations of Ukrainian Expressionism have been studied by literary critics in various aspects – genre (M. Moklytsia,


2. Methodology and data

In this study the comparative research method has primarily been used, resultantly the article compares artistic images, problems and the narrative of war in the works of Vasyl Stefanyk and European expressionists. In addition, the biographical method has been utilised, which helped to understand Stefanyk’s works through the prism of his personal experience of the horrors of war, traumatic incidents, memory and the tragedy of loss. The method of close reading used in the article makes it possible to analyse the imagology and symbolism of artistic texts about the war. The main purpose of the article is to show how the influence of Western European Expressionism on the Ukrainian art space contributed to the formation of its national version in the works of Vasyl Stefanyk, in particular at the levels of poetics, aesthetics, philosophy and worldview of war.

It is essential to note that at the time when Stefanyk lived and wrote, Ukraine, in particular its western territory - Galicia, where the writer came from, was part of other states - Austria-Hungary (until 1918) and later Poland (from 1918 to 1939). In fact, the stateless status of Ukraine determined its difficult geopolitical situation - territorial disunity, linguocide and forced assimilation. At the same time, however, it was a catalyst for the Ukrainian intelligentsia to assert its national identity. The forces which drove this were mainly the Ukrainian language, common historical memory, faith and religion, the cult of national heroes, the actualization of archetypes and common cultural values.

3. Key findings

3.1. The drama of war in the life of Stefanyk.

The war broke into the life of Stefanyk with tremendous shocks – the death of his wife, his fabricated (unjustified) arrest and vagabonding in various places in search of safe refuge during the war (more on this: How Vasyl Stefanyk was rescued from execution [In Ukrainian]. Available at: https://www.istpravda.com.ua/0000000/articles/2020/09/9/158101/). The writer was left with three orphaned sons. Stefanyk had a hard
time surviving the autumn and winter of the first year of the war in his native village. He later joined a refugee camp that went to the Carpathian Mountains in the Kosiv region to survive the war. From there, through the mountains, in 1916 Stefanyk moved to Hungary and then emigrated to Vienna, returning home only after the war had ended.

After 15 years of creative stagnation, the expression of the trials he had endured, re-inspired Stefanyk’s urge to write. As a victim and witness of the war, the writer addressed the reader with a painful self-reflection of this tragedy of humanity and personal psychodrama. In Vienna, one by one, his novellas were published: Children’s Adventure, Maria, The Sons, Mother Earth, The Baby-Watcher, Grandpa Hryts, Morituri and others, began to appear. United by a common vision of war, these texts later comprised the collection Earth, which was published in 1926 in Lviv (Stefanyk, 1926). Stefanyk’s war-related works became like drawings of a wounded writer’s soul, in which he “remembers this terrible era with his concentrated tragedy, near-speechless horror” (Moklytsia 1999, p. 96).

3.2. Basic principles of Expressionist worldview.

The defining features of this worldview are ecstasy, supersensibility, intuitionism, providentialism, mysticism and religiosity. According to Anna Bila, Stefanyk’s interest in death, psychological fractures in people, the aestheticisation of grief and tragedy, coincides with expressionist sentiments, “The concept of suffering as cleansing from unnecessary layers correlates with Stefanyk’s idea to write the ‘naked truth’, to know and discover the essence of peasant life” (Bila 2006, p. 269). In this collection Stefanyk develops an image-thematic paradigm, common with Expressionism – pain, blood, torment, wounds, agony, scream, cry, death, on an artistic level explaining the symbolism of language, vision, anthroposophy and high emotional tension. His characters are always in an extreme situation of ecstasy, crisis, shock, fracture, numbness, loneliness and thanatological visions. Stefanyk’s philosophical foundations of expressionist thinking are rooted in his deep faith in God, and these Christian principles spurred the development of his own perception of reality, imbued with Ukrainian spirituality, against the background of European Expressionism. According to Dmytro Rudyk, “Stefanyk is one of the few Ukrainian writers who with a brave hand opened the veil of false phraseology that justified the war, and behind it showed the terrible consequences of this war” (Rudyk 2021, p. 187).

The author manages to extrapolate a single drama and deep tragedies to the dimensions of military catastrophe on the national scale. It is no coincidence that Stefanyk’s anti-military short stories, quoting I. Trush, make it possible to “study the character of the Ukrainian people, to seek a reflection of its physiognomy in literature” (Trush 1970, p. 64).

Stefanyk’s ability to show the collective emotion of war, one common picture of life, was revealed in the collection Earth, which Lesya Ukrainka once noted of his short stories, “if they were connected by a common plot, a folk novel would come out” (Lesya Ukrainka 1970, p. 48).
3.3. *The symbolism of the title of the collection “Earth”.*

The idea of the monolithic nature of the nation is expressed in the multifaceted, feminine symbolism of the title *Earth* (Zemlia, feminine gender in Ukrainian), which is the existential core of national identity and personal ontology of humans, the folk archetype, the centre of the peasant worldview. The understanding of such rooting in one’s own land was inspired in particular by the writer’s forced emigration. Stefanyk’s heroes feel very strongly the allusion of the earth, its power, the sacrum, they feel it almost to self-forgetfulness, numbness, boisterous cry, experience its loss, the drama of the rupture and leaving their own land. According to D. Dontsov, the earth becomes a fundamental image of Stefanyk’s natiosophy (philosophy of nation), “Our land, the earth, was the source of his philosophy, cold as silver and hot as tar, which burned him” (Dontsov 1927, p. 144).

In the novella with the eloquent title *Mother Earth*, the connection with the earth acquires the dimensions of genetic contact. Stefanyk, even in the conditions of his forced emigration, affirms the motive of national family rooting. The experienced landowner Semen reproachfully instructs his compatriot, the Bukovynian refugee Danylo, whom the war ‘expelled’ from his own house, “Let an old bird not forsake his old nest, because he is no longer able to build a new one. Because it is better that his head stiffen in the old nest than in a gully along some foreign road” (Stefanyk 1971. Mother Earth p. 128). This imperative is extrapolated to the state dimensions of national rooting in one’s own historical homeland, condemnation of assimilation with the enemy, because leaving one’s land threatens the eternal curse and degeneration, allows outsiders to take it, “When you enter a foreign country, and find yourselves within its cold walls, fate will scatter you over rocky spaces, and only in your dreams will you see your beautiful land. ... God will not receive you unto Himself, but He will come to meet you at His very gates if they kill you on your own land” (Stefanyk 1971. Mother Earth p. 128).

To be in one’s own land means to be under God’s protection, as one’s home is a firm apotropaic charm even during war. That is why the threatening instruction of the old landowner is so touching, “Return to your soft soil, and God will bless you there, even on the gallows...” (Stefanyk 1971. Mother Earth p. 128). Stefanyk’s antheism affirms the idea of the peasant’s genetic contact with the nursing matriarch, who feeds his daily routine with her vital energy and is his fundamental need, arouses in him the master’s instinct, “Our concern is with the land. If you let her go, you perish; if you hold on to her, she draws out all your strength, scoops up your soul with her palms; if you tend her and become stooped, she pulls out your sinews. But for all that you have herds and hocks and stacks of grain. And in return for your strength she gives you a houseful of children and grandchildren” (Stefanyk 1971. Mother Earth p. 128). Even in the face of death, for those experienced in the trials of war, the bosses Danylo and Semen, it is important that “our bones rot away in our own land” (Stefanyk 1971. Mother Earth p. 128).
In the military world of Stefanyk’s works, the earth is depicted as a phantasmagoric background of war, where “the whole world had gone mad - man and beast” and drowned in blood “It seemed as if the earth were complaining about the wounds inflicted on her” (Stefanyk 1971. Maria, p. 133).

In the novella The Sons, the earth has a cathartic effect on the devastated father, who lost his sons in the war. The land shares a touching empathy with old Maksym, his sacred language, “It is the soil that gives him that softness, and that is why he loves it so much” (Stefanyk 1971. The Sons, p. 144). And he realises his mission as a wise Homo Creator - to work on earth “for as long as God has appointed us time to work” (Stefanyk 1971. The Sons, p. 143). This is a way to humble him, to let time pass by, to calm him down. Having lost the dearest ones, Maksym, summoning the remaining strength of his soul and physical exertion, maintains this connection with the feeding land, trusts it and plows his field. It is the earth that represents for Maksym two worlds, separated by the death of his sons. One world is the heavenly life, family idyll when “God strewed brightness all over us, and all the people radiated gold” (Stefanyk 1971. The Sons, p. 145), and the world of the dead – “The sons are gone, the old wife, I’ve burrowed into the ground” (Stefanyk 1971. The Sons, p. 145), “The holy pictures on the walls have turned black, and the saints are looking at the empty house like hungry dogs” (Stefanyk 1971. The Sons, p. 145).

Finally, the image of the earth corresponds to Stefanyk’s nation-building vision, revealed in the novella Maria, which through the apocalypse of war, through the death of innocent sons, through song and faith is able to revive life and restore the nation’s gene pool. It was for this land that Maksym’s sons died, fulfilling their mission – “We’re going to take our land from the enemy” (Stefanyk 1971. The Sons, p. 146), and remembering the sacred father’s instruction to preserve this land, “let me bury you both in our soil so that the enemy may not wrench it out for himself from these strong roots” (Stefanyk 1971. The Sons, p. 147). Old Maksym would only later realise the national importance of this victim.

3.4. The motif of the road and the image of emigrants.

Stefanyk’s personal traumatic memory of the war resonated with the motives of refuge, forced migration, flight, and local displacement. Universal confusion, panic and disorientation are effectively conveyed by means of impersonal narration. The image of emigrants is compared to the symbolism of “birds who fly not knowing where” (Stefanyk 1971. Mother Earth, p. 127). Once a wealthy landowner, Maksym is painfully experiencing his new status as a homeless man – “I’m an old bird without a nest” (Stefanyk 1971. Mother Earth, p. 127).

The writer conveys the expression of human despair through the anthropologisation of the image of the road, “The roads sounded dully and creaked; their speech was frightening, as were the shrieks born of that mad rage” (Stefanyk 1971. Maria, p. 133). The fear and panic of war are reflected in the states of spontaneous escape, instinctive self-rescue,
uncontrolled crowd syndrome and the path to obscurity, “Everything alive had been fleeting... Children carried still younger ones than themselves; behind them their mothers were burdened with bundles full of their belongings; and in the general press, many involuntarily pushed others into precipices. At night the cows lowed, the sheep bleated, and the horses trampled on people and on one another” (Stefanyk 1971. Maria, p. 133). Stefanyk personally experienced this escape route when he fled the war in the mountains.

3.5. Thanatological description of war.

In the apocalyptic mood of Stefanyk’s military novellas, the aggression of war and the deadly outrage of the enemy acquires thanatological features, a terrible threat to humanity, “The second is that the Muscovites are coming and blocking off the sun from us... The windows in the village are in darkness, and the church bells are silenced. The punishment of God has descended upon us for the sins of the whole world” (Stefanyk 1971. Maria, p. 127). The existence of the end of the world is conveyed by fantastasmagoric types of mutilation, deconstruction of the human body. Stefanyk naturalistically describes scenes of brutal torture of people, thickening the colours of people’s grief, “...from all over the earth wild men are coming to butcher the old, rape our young women and cut off their breasts. Small children are being put into trains and scattered all over the barren lands in distant kingdoms” (Stefanyk 1971. Maria, p. 127). The expressionist mood of war, the tragedy of existence is conveyed through the existence of total madness “the whole world had gone mad - man and beast” (Stefanyk 1971. Maria, p. 133), bloodshed “blood gushing out of them and painting crimson Rovers upon it” (Stefanyk 1971. Maria, p. 130), senselessness, indifference to death, frustration, ontological incertitude and emotional despair. Poetically, this expression is conveyed by metaphorical descriptions of war, “the cannons ... heaved the earth out of its primeval bed” (Stefanyk 1971. Maria, p. 133), “Houses rocketed up like flaming bales” (Stefanyk 1971. Maria, p. 133), “people sunk into the earth were petrified with fear and unable to raise their arms to make the sign of the cross over their children” (Stefanyk 1971. Maria, p. 133), “the crimson river formed a foam from the blood, and, like a wreath, its ferment revolved near the heads of corpses that floated gently down the stream” (Stefanyk 1971. Maria, p. 133). According to O. Chernenko, Stefanyk’s poetics is dominated by “vitalisation of death”, which arises as an existential way out: an escape.

3.6. The problem of lost childhood.

Against the background of the pacifist issues of his novellas, Stefanyk at the same time actualises the problem of lost childhood, devalued joys of life, experienced by the generation of children, dragged in the whirlpool of war. The terrible drama of the war is perceived by a vulnerable child’s soul and echoes in the expression of fear and misunderstanding of the essence
of this man-made catastrophe. Involuntarily, children become involved into the daily problems of adults, perceiving in their own way topics, tabooed for them, they demonstrate high level of social involvement and gain their terrible experience of war.

In *Children’s Adventure*, at first glance the indifferent behaviour of Vasylko to his mother killed by a cannon, who is lying bloodless in the middle of the field, is rather a manifestation of his moral unreadiness to accept and understand death. Therefore, the boy compensates for this loss by showing his own mentorship, he makes mature decisions, cares for his younger sister, understands the situation in the family and a purely boyish interest in the war. Extremely powerful is the symbolic image of bloody bread that Vasylko gets from the bosom of the murdered mother for his hungry sister.

The *Baby-Watcher* demonstrates a different reaction of children to the atrocities of war. Trying to psychologically integrate into the world of adults, children perform a simulated funeral of a Russian hussar. Instead of a real action, the child overhears the conversation between the parents, when the father demands that the mother kill the hated hussar, while the children call him an ordinary child and do not understand why he must die.

3.7. Gender representations of war.

Stefanyk’s military novellas possess clear gender labelling. The male representation of war is military, protective, although permeated with sentiments of kinship, fatherhood, fellowship and folk memory. Thus, the novella *The Sons* expresses the culmination of emotional agony of a father who has lost both sons. Stefanyk shows the elderly father’s exalted emotional shock, his emotional despair and resentment towards the world since “he lost both his sons, and ever since he’s always fuming in the field as well as in the village” (Stefanyk 1971. *The Sons*, p. 143). “No other poet described a stronger cry of parental pain”, D. Lukiianovych wrote (Lukiianovych 1970, p. 88), placing the image of Maksym next to the ancient Greek Laocoon. So strong is this unspoken emotion of a cry of despair, anger, when the world has lost its charms, its ontological meaning, has become a wasteland.

The house marks the family tragedy, it draws ever closer to the details of the icons of saints, who were once the heart of the spirituality and happiness of the family, and now have blackened, testifying to the death of a deserted house and joyless old age.

The dialogue of the old father with the little lark, the messenger of his happy past, is full of great expressive tension. The old man is annoyed by the larks’ singing, reminiscent of his younger son, who as a child played carefree with the bird and played the flute. Maksym chases away the lark, because that song shakes his soul with even greater sadness, “Go away, little bird, go to those lands where they have not yet taken away the loaves of plaited bread, where the children haven’t yet been slaughtered” (Stefanyk 1971. *The Sons*, p. 142).
In Maksym’s angry appeals to God there is an emotional climax of the short story, “Lord! The golden books in the churches lie that You had a son, they lie that You had one! You’ve resurrected Yours, they say. But I’m not asking You to resurrect mine. All I’m asking You is to show me their graves, that I may lie beside them. You see the whole world, but over my sons’ graves You’ve become blind…” (Stefanyk 1971. The Sons, p. 145−146). The only thing that keeps the father on this earth is pride in his sons and the realisation that they died for Ukraine. Maksym’s farewell dialogue with his sons plays a powerful role in the exposition of the novella, “‘Father’, said he, ‘now we’re going to fight for Ukraine’. – ‘For what Ukraine?’ – And he lifted a lump of earth with his sword and said: ‘This is Ukraine, and here’ – pointing the sword to his chest – ‘here’s her blood. We’re going to take our land from the enemy” (Stefanyk 1971. The Sons, p. 146).

Eventually, in the soul of Stefanyk’s Laocoon, there is a spiritual reconciliation, a humiliation, when he seemingly gets used to the lonely house again. By lighting a fire in the furnace, Maksym performs the ritual of domestication, preserves the continuity of the family, immortalises the sons in prayer, “And you, Mother of God, be my housekeeper. You with your son in the middle and Andriy and Ivan beside you both, on either side …You gave one son, and I gave two” (Stefanyk 1971. The Sons, p. 147).

O. Chernenko remarks that “the old father experienced a great triumph of his soul. He agreed with God’s will, elevating above himself, above his sufferings and all earthly desires, knowing for the first time that premature death is not the end of life” (Chernenko 1989, p. 207). Stefanyk’s image of the father in The Sons has intertextual echoes with the novella of the German expressionist L. Frank The Father (Der Vater), which was included in the collection of his anti-military works Man Is Good (Der Mensch ist gut), 1917.

With similar expressionist strokes, Leonhard Frank describes the despair of father, who lost his only son in the war and for whom the world becomes empty. At the same time, this novella has a clear humanistic narrative of the author, who through the mouth of the aggrieved condemns fratricidal war and human inertia to murder, preaching the slogans of love and humanism, “Today in Europe there is no man who is not a murderer!... We are looking for the enemy of god knows where, and we think we find him. Our enemy is not an Englishman, nor a Frenchman, nor a Russian, and their enemy is not a German. The enemy is in ourselves. And we see the enemy in others because the real enemy is something that does not exist. Lack of love is our enemy and the cause of all wars. The whole of Europe is crying because the whole of Europe can no longer love. The whole of Europe is mad because it can’t love”. An orphaned father gives a simple recipe for ending the war to a rabid restaurant audience, “You just have to love, and then no more shots will be fired. Then peace will come. Then we will become children of our planet ... The whole continent is crying. But it shows that the continent is capable of love” (Frank, 1917). Similarly, Stefanyk, through the tragic fates of individual
characters, shows how alien, absurd, incomprehensible this war is, where man becomes only cannon fodder in the new redistribution of Europe.

Extremely powerful in Stefanyk’s military short stories is the feminine reflection of war, evolving from the image of an ordinary woman to the archetype of a guardian woman, matriarch, and, according to S. Khorob, even rising to the heights of the Mother of God in Maria (Khorob 2016, p. 418). The feminine aspect is firmly rooted in the centre of her spiritual universe, her own home, which is a strong outpost of family harmony. When this world collapses, a woman loses her identity, suffers emotional shocks, becomes mute as the heroine of Mother Earth, as “She has left her words on the windows and on the gilded holy pictures in her home” (Stefanyk 1971. Mother Earth, p. 126). In this transcendent connection of woman and house is the strong power of the Ukrainian family and the code of its immortality. When a woman leaves the house, she dies. While Maksym’s wife garlanded the holy pictures with “periwinkle and sweet basil, and gilded the doves in front of them” (Stefanyk 1971. The Sons, p. 143), God’s radiance of peace poured over the house. With the death of a woman, the house with blackened images becomes a wasteland, the centre of family misery that came here with the death of the hostess and her sons.

A woman equips men for war with charms (nankeen cloth, white shirt), which have a powerful apotropaic (protective) role, symbolises spiritual unity, the continuous liaison between mother and son, is an object of memory (image of Taras Shevchenko).

Admiring the sacrifice and inner strength of the woman, Stefanyk proved himself a master of depicting women’s distress in a condensed and ample phrase, reflecting the full range of maternal suffering: sudden death of a woman at the gate farewelling her sons to the war (The Sons), muteness, “…she’s lost her reason beneath the wheels. While she could still see our village from the wagon, she just wept and kept jumping down to the ground. When she could no longer see her village, she became mute” (Stefanyk 1971. Mother Earth, p. 126), hair turning grey overnight (Maria). The symbolism of maternal pain is expressed by an eloquent cordocentric (heart-centred) metaphor, “…mothers were holding their hearts in the palms of their hands and blowing on them to ease their pain” (Stefanyk 1971. Maria, p. 132). Researchers observed the similarity of this image with the one in the work of German writer Rainer Maria Rilke (Chernenko, 1989, p. 211).

The expressiveness of the collective mothers’ lament for the sons in Maria is an allusion to the gospel story of the weeping brides on the Via Dolorosa, “All the mothers there were running behind those long even columns of their sons, falling on their knees and lamenting” (Stefanyk 1971. Maria, p. 132). In the same way, the collective female emotion of suffering is conveyed through the metonymic semanticisation of emotional pain, “women who looked on with intense longing and breathed with despair” (Stefanyk 1971. Maria, p. 137).

The hyperbolisation of the tragedy of a mother’s cry when her most precious treasure – her sons – is taken away, was written by Stefanyk with all the skill of expressionist technique, “I heard her eyes fall out and roll
away on the ground like lifeless pieces of stone. So it seemed to me, but it was certain that the light on her forehead had already gone out” (Stefanyk 1971. The Sons, p. 147). This symbolic detail personified by Stefanyk, the expressive potential of colour (grey, black) resonates with the poetics of the expressionist lyrics of the German poet Georg Trakl (1887 -1914).

In Stefanyk’s eponymous novella, Maria cannot come to terms with the cruel truth of the war, she does not understand why she has to give her much-cared-for sons to the enemy. This condition leads to complex psychological shifts, uncontrolled emotional breakdowns, “I didn’t really understand. I’m innocent. I lost my mind when I saw this Ukraine taking my children from me …” (Stefanyk 1971. Maria, p. 132). However, later, when meeting her sons’ fellows, who are forced to serve in enemy armies, Maria realises the value of such a sacrifice and “rises her spirit to the ideals of her sons” (Lukiianovych 2021, 176). The song sung by the mother warriors appears in the novella as a sacred identifier of Ukrainianness, historical memory, it heals the mother’s heart, leads the woman to spiritual enlightenment, “That song drew from her depths, as born some long-forgotten treasure chest, all that was enchanting and bright, and unfolded it before her. She could not see enough of herself in that wonderful new dawn” (Stefanyk 1971. Maria, p. 136). Simultaneously, this Cossack song becomes an emanation of national grief, acquires dimensions of national lamentation – “for it is she, that Ukraine of theirs, that weeps for her own children and desires them all to be united” (Stefanyk 1971. Maria, p. 137).

3.8. The stylistics of Stefanyk’s novellas.

Stylistically, Stefanyk’s anti-war novellas are masterpieces of expressionist technique, given that its main guideline is to try to evoke impressions. Walter H. Sokel wrote about the unique antipsychologism of expressionist works, which lies in the absence of any comments or motivations, “integrity (events) should look as if it were not a story, but what is happening” (Sokel, 1969, p. 157).

Absolute master of form, Stefanyk proved to be a unique master of conveying the military imagery in short tragedies of the soul, conflicts and dramas of people involved in the whirlpool of war. According to Franko, “he is able to convey the most intense moments so convincingly and credibly that it is impossible not to believe them” (Franko I., 1982, p. 50). Stefanyk’s prose is characterised by “hyperbolic deformation of the outside world” (Chernenko, 1989, p. 213), lyricism and metaphorisation, parabolism, symbolisation, a unique artistic synthesis of music, painting and cinema art. As R. Movchan notes, “V. Stefanyk’s style is an example of expressionist expression, a man’s desperate cry against the background of his tragic trials in an extreme situation” (Movchan 2016 p. 115).

Reducing the narrative to the level of lapidary dialogues or fragmentary descriptions, ignoring the fabula, possessing the power of expressing thoughts and detail, Stefanyk creates a tragic emotion of war. It is no coincidence that his style was brought closer to the static dramas of
M. Maeterlinck, although Stefanyk tensely *lives through* each of his works. Such an empathic character of his writing was well-spotted by D. Lukiianovych. “While writing, Stefanyk’s heart is bleeding and is torn apart, and when he finishes, he has to live through every thing, he suffers together with his characters” (Lukiianovych 1970, p. 84).

**Conclusion**

The expressionism of Stefanyk’s collection of novellas *Earth* can be considered a “conceptual version of the pan-European projection” (Yastrubetska, 2013, p. 96) with inherent thematic, poetic and stylistic features: rebellion against the existing socio-political crisis, the absurdity of life, pacifism, tragedy and disappointment, intuitionism and irrationality, aestheticisation of the ugly, religious mysticism, hypertrophied emotionality, outrage and symbolism. Transforming the experience of European, mainly German and Polish expressionism through the national outlook, folk poetry tradition and folklore, Stefanyk developed his artistic vision of war. The writer focuses on the complex dimensions of the philosophy of war, destructive psychology and aggression. His anti-war prose affirms the values of sincere fellowship, conscious citizenship, empathy and human consolidation, actualises archetypes of historical memory (symbols of home, parents, holy pictures, land, embroidered shirts, graves, songs).

The article shows that the artistic vision of war in Stefanyk’s creativity has a tragic autobiographical psychogenesis. The most important motifs and themes that represent the narrative of war in Stefanyk’s collection “Earth” are the motif of the road and the image of emigrants, thanatological description of the war, the problem of lost childhood, gender representation of war, and the symbols of the image of the earth. Hence Stefanyk’s anti-military prose is thoroughly humanistic and has preserved its relevance to this day.

**References**


