

NEO-AVANT-GARDE TENDENCIES IN LATE 20TH CENTURY UKRAINIAN POETRY

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Summary

This paper investigates how neo-avant-garde tendencies shaped Ukrainian poetry of the 1980s–1990s, focusing on experimental aesthetics and the creative reworking of avant-garde traditions by groups like Bu-Ba-Bu, LuHoSad, and Red Wagon. The study demonstrates how these collectives creatively reworked the legacy of the historical avant-garde through irony, parody, intermedial experimentation, and a deliberate rejection of canonical forms. Drawing on theoretical debates surrounding the neo-avant-garde (Bürger, Foster, Silverberg), the paper situates Ukrainian developments within broader global contexts while foregrounding their unique cultural and political specificity.

The group Bu-Ba-Bu challenged nationalistic clichés and socialist-realist literary norms by employing grotesque humor, linguistic play, and performative poetics. LuHoSad, rejecting the notion of a literary vanguard, identified instead as a “rearguard” drawing on the entire tradition of world literature and baroque formalism, integrating visual poetry and performance into their work. Red Wagon, centered in Kharkiv, fused neofuturist language with post-Soviet existentialism, as exemplified in the early works of Serhiy Zhadan. These poets depicted fragmented realities, technological metaphors, and the search for spiritual meaning in a collapsing ideological landscape.

By synthesizing innovation with tradition, and subversion with play, these neo-avant-garde movements reshaped the trajectory of contemporary Ukrainian poetry. The study argues that their conscious engagement with historical and aesthetic precedents – particularly the Ukrainian baroque and futurism – enabled a dynamic reimaging of poetic form and identity in late 20th-century Ukraine.

Key words: poetics, humor, parody, grotesque, intertextuality, intermediality.

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1. Introduction

The concept of the avant-garde has long been central to discussions of literary and artistic innovation, yet its evolving definitions and contested legacy continue to provoke debate. While early theorists like Peter Bürger dismissed the neo-avant-garde as a diluted repetition of historical avant-garde strategies, more recent scholars argue for its critical potential to re-engage with cultural institutions and ideological norms. These debates are particularly relevant in the context of Ukrainian literature of the 1980s and 1990s – a period marked by radical aesthetic shifts, the collapse of Soviet authority, and the emergence of new literary voices. This paper investigates how Ukrainian poets of this era, especially those associated with the groups *Bu-Ba-Bu* («Бу-Ба-Бу»), *LuHoSad* («ЛьґоСад»), and *Red Wagon* («Червона Фіра»), reimaged the avant-garde tradition through experimentation, parody, and intermedial play, helping to redefine the literary landscape of post-Soviet Ukraine.

2. Definitions of Neo-Avant-Garde

Christopher Innes, in his book “Avant Garde Theatre: 1892–1992”, notes that the term “avant-garde” is frequently applied to any form of art that challenges tradition, often serving as a descriptor for artistic innovation that is soon surpassed by subsequent developments (Innes, 2003: 1). This fluid and sometimes ambiguous characterization has led to competing interpretations of what constitutes avant-garde art and how its legacy persists in later movements.

One of the most influential theoretical perspectives on the avant-garde comes from Peter Bürger, whose “Theorie der Avantgarde” (1974) argues that the historical avant-garde emerged as a reaction against modernist tendencies, seeking to dissolve the boundaries between art and life. Bürger contends that this movement fundamentally challenged the institution of art itself. However, he asserts that after World War II, artists began appropriating avant-garde techniques not as a means of radical subversion but rather as a way to legitimize their work within established artistic institutions. In Bürger’s view, the so-called neo-avant-garde merely replicates the gestures of its predecessors, reducing avant-garde poetics and techniques to formulaic, institutionalized conventions. Consequently, he dismisses the neo-avant-garde as a superficial iteration that ultimately undermines the transformative potential of the historical avant-garde (Bürger, 1984).

Bürger’s position has been widely contested by later scholars, including Benjamin Buchloh (1984), Hal Foster (1996), and Dietrich Scheunemann (2005). Notably, Hal Foster challenges Bürger’s claim that the neo-avant-garde negates the radical aspirations of the historical avant-garde. Instead, Foster argues that the neo-avant-garde provides a means to critically engage with and rethink the institution of art. According to Foster, rather than simply reiterating past experiments, the neo-avant-garde actualizes the avant-garde’s project in a theoretically open-ended manner, allowing for continuous reinterpretation and renewal (Foster, 1996: 20). This ongoing critical discourse highlights the complexity of defining avant-garde movements and their legacy, raising fundamental questions about artistic innovation, institutional critique, and the evolving relationship between art and society.

Mark Silverberg claims that the neo-avant-garde’s “challenge goes beyond the level of institutional critique to the more general level of ideology critique” (Silverberg, 2010: 23). Silverberg’s neo-avant-garde does not require manifestos or groupings. Nor does it need to subscribe to the four main features of the avant-garde as described by Renato Poggioli, namely *antagonism* (the need to “agitate against something or someone”, especially “that collective individual called the public”), *activism* (“action for the mere sake of doing something”), *nihilism* (“destructive labor (...) attaining nonaction by acting”), and *agonism* (which posits “the artist as victim-hero (...) a paradoxical and positive form of spiritual defeatism”) (Poggioli, 1986: 25–40). Silverberg’s antidote to such aggressive posturing and self-destructive heroism lies precisely in the adoption of a more “neutral and ironic, less transgressive and more deconstructive” stance (Silverberg, 2010: 19).

In the introduction to “Neo-Avant-Gardes: Post-War Literary Experiments Across Borders” (2021), the following parameters of neo-avant-garde literature are defined:

Firstly, writers deal with their own poetics and aesthetics using the historical avant-garde as a source of inspiration, or frustration. This connection may be expressed explicitly as well as implicitly. Sometimes, it can be inferred from the paratext or the intertext, e.g. from mottos, quotations, pictures, characters embedded in the literary text.

Secondly, writers utilize experimental techniques which can be traced back to the historical avant-garde and include linguistic, stylistic, and narrative devices. Examples of such techniques include (photo)montage, ready-mades, collage, radically unconventional language and style, disintegrated or disjunctive syntax, eccentric metaphors, enhancing the dissimilarity between the connected semantic fields, increased degree of abstraction etc.

Thirdly, neo-avant-garde texts are deeply connected to social and political contexts and conflicts in which they function.

Fourthly, the epitext may also contribute to framing and labeling certain texts as neo-avant-garde. It encompasses publication in certain journals, performances in particular venues, presentations in experimental circles or in festivals considered experimental.

3. Purpose of the Study

This paper aims to explore how neo-avant-garde tendencies shaped Ukrainian poetry of the 1980s–1990s, focusing on experimental aesthetics and the creative reworking of avant-garde traditions by groups like *Bu-Ba-Bu*, *LuHoSad*, and *Red Wagon*.

4. Manifestations of Neo-Avant-Garde in Late 20th Century Ukrainian Poetry

The debates surrounding the neo-avant-garde are particularly relevant when examining the evolution of Ukrainian literature in the 1980s and 1990s, a period marked by radical aesthetic experimentation and a deliberate challenge to both Soviet and nationalistic literary traditions. In her book “The Post-Chornobyl Library. Ukrainian Literary Postmodernism” (2005), Tamara Hundorova describes the literature of this era as “characterized by irony and spectacle, (...) parodied ideological clichés, revived baroque playfulness, and foregrounded new kinds of characters and roles” (Hundorova, 2005: 37). She writes, “In Ukraine, postmodernism becomes simultaneously a reflection upon, the completion of, and a criticism of Ukrainian modernism. At the same time, it also continues and develops the avant-garde tendencies of the twenties and thirties (it is not a coincidence that the most popular authors during the 1990s are the futurist Mykhail Semenko, the formalist Maik Yohansen, and the modernist Viktor Petrov [V. Domontovysh])” (Hundorova, 2005: 39).

Hundorova observes that neo-avant-garde and postmodernist intentions in Ukrainian literature of the 1980s and 1990s often coincide. Sometimes, this leads to the merging of these two terms. The literature of this time period actively uses popular culture, street forms, and commercials, and becomes performative and multi-stylistic.

In this paper, my goal is to demonstrate the novel and experimental features of Ukrainian poetry of the 1980s and 1990s, while also showing how Ukrainian neoavantgardists were cognizant of their legacy and utilized achievements of previous generations of writers in their works.

One of the most significant artistic groups to emerge in late Soviet and early post-Soviet Ukrainian literature is *Bu-Ba-Bu*, initially recognized as an avant-garde movement influenced by neo-baroque aesthetics and later associated with postmodernism. Founded in Lviv in 1985, the group comprised three writers: Yurii Andrukhovych, Viktor Neborak, and Oleksandr Irvanets. The name *Bu-Ba-Bu* derives from the first syllables of three Ukrainian words – *bufonada* (buffoonery), *balahan* (puppet show farce), and *burlesk* (burlesque) – a choice that reflects the group’s commitment to playful irreverence and theatricality in their literary endeavors.

Central to *Bu-Ba-Bu*'s artistic mission was the creation of a new literary identity that challenged established norms. The group deliberately distanced itself from the traditional icons of Ukrainian literature, employing satire and parody to subvert canonical figures and conventions. Their work rejected the nationalistic canon of classical Ukrainian literature, the ideological constraints of socialist realism in Soviet Ukrainian literature, and even the literary authority of the preceding generation, known as the Poets of the Sixties. Instead, *Bu-Ba-Bu* championed an aesthetic of liberation, advocating for an uninhibited Ukrainian literary language that defied both Soviet censorship and nationalistic orthodoxy.

Beyond its literary innovations, *Bu-Ba-Bu*'s emergence must be understood within the broader socio-political context of the mid-to-late 1980s. Ukrainian society at the time was marked by profound disillusionment, exacerbated by the Chernobyl disaster and a pervasive loss of faith in the ruling authorities. Against this backdrop of societal entropy, *Bu-Ba-Bu* injected a sense of creative energy and renewal. Their embrace of absurdity, humor, and linguistic play served as a means of both resistance and revitalization, positioning them at the forefront of Ukraine's literary transformation in the waning years of Soviet rule.

Language innovation has been one of the primary legacies of the *Bu-Ba-Bu* group. One example thereof can be observed in "A Drum-Tympanum (a sonnet uttered by the Flying Head)" by Viktor Neborak. In this sonnet, the poet employs intricate wordplay, deliberate manipulation of syllables, and the visual demarcation of "BU" and "BA" across different lexical constructions. The lyrical hero embraces the notion of the world as a stage, where actors and bards merge life and art into a playful, performative act. This perspective signifies a rejection of traditional spiritual concerns, such as death and immortality, in favor of celebrating the inherently playful and joyous essence of artistic expression.

БУБОН (Сонет, виголошений Літаючою Головою)

– Малойте БАБУ голу БУ
 гуБАми дивиться доБА
 БУ дифірамБАм БУ таБУ
 вам зуби вставить БУБАБУ
 росте поезія з горБА
 в горбі з грошима боротьБА
 та Бунтом БУ-де БУБАБУ
 від азБУк голова слаБА
 гуБАми виБУхає Бард
 чим світ сичить – кричить театр
 зіграєш вірш якого варт
 потрапиш в рай (чи на монмартр)
 БУ смерті і безсмертю БУ
 і БУ і БА і БУБАБУ
 (*Bu-Ba-Bu*, 1995: 143)

A DRUM-TYMPANUM (a sonnet uttered by the
 Flying Head)

– Paint a BABE naked BLUE
 with lips the day looks BA
 BU in dithyramBs BU taBOO
 put your teeth in BUBABU
 poetry grows from hunchBACk work
 with money BATTLE in the hump
 and BUBABU will BE reBELLion
 your head's feeble from alphaBETs
 the BARD BURsts with his labia lips
 what the world hisses with the theater screams
 you'll play a poem that's worth it all
 you'll end up in Paradise (or Paris)
 BU to death to eternity BU
 and BU and BA and BUBABU
 Translated by Michael M. Naydan
 (*Naydan*, 2006: 456–457)

Neborak widely employs grotesque and satirical elements, as exemplified in the following poem, where he constructs the unsettling image of a blood-covered Flying Head that instills fear among the locals. This striking imagery serves as a cautionary allegory, warning against the uncritical consumption of popular culture and the resulting intellectual emptiness.

ВОНА ПІДНИМАЄТЬСЯ, ЯК ГОЛОВА,
 відрубана голова волоцюги.
 Вона промовляє уперше, і вдруге,
 і втретє свої потойбічні слова:
 Я ЛІТАЮЧА ГОЛОВА!
 Над юрмищем площі нависло навскіс
 її всевидюще летюче бароко.
 Кров гусне в повітрі, розчахнутий зріз
 тінь відкидає, важку і глибоку:
 Я ЛІТАЮЧА ГОЛОВА! (...)
 Жереш мелодрами телевізійні?
 Ти розглядаєш драконів за склом!
 Стіну тобі проламає чолом
 ожила куля з оркестру Фелліні –
 Я ЛІТАЮЧА ГОЛОВА! (...)
(Bu-Ba-Bu, 1995: 145)

It rises up like a head,
 the lopped-off head of a vagrant.
 It utters words from the beyond
 once, twice, and for the third time:
 I AM THE FLYING HEAD!
 The all-seeing flying Baroque
 hangs above the city square's horde.
 Blood clots drip in the air, the torn cut
 casts a deep and heavy shadow:
 I AM THE FLYING HEAD! (...)
 Are you devouring TV soaps?
 You gaze at dragons behind the glass!
 The wrecking ball from Fellini's Orchestra
 has come to life and breaks through your wall –
 I AM THE FLYING HEAD! (...)
*Translated by Michael M. Naydan
 (Neborak, 2005: 61)*

Oleksandr Irvanets parodies Volodymyr Sosyura's renowned poem "Love Ukraine" (1947), subverting its nationalistic fervor through irony and satire. As Michael M. Naydan observes, "Parody, of course, is one of the highest forms of praise – especially since the object of parody must be a universally recognized cultural icon worthy of irreverence" (Naydan, 2006, p. 458). The comedic effect arises from Irvanets's retention of Sosyura's original rhythm while substituting the topos of Ukraine with American states, thereby satirizing the excessive admiration for American culture in 1990s Ukraine.

ЛЮБИТЬ
 Любіть Оклахому! Вночі і в обід,
 Як неньку і дедді достоту.
 Любіть Індіану. Й так само любіть.
 Північну й Південну Дакоту.
 Любіть Алабаму в загравах пожеж,
 Любіть її в радощі й біди.
 Айову любіть, Каліфорнію теж.
 І пальми крислаті Флоріди. (...)
(Bu-Ba-Bu, 1995: 87)

LOVE!
 Love Oklahoma! At night and at supper,
 Like your mom and your dad quite equal.
 Love Indiana. And the very same way
 Love Northern and Southern Dakota!
 Love Alabama in the red glow of fires,
 Love her in joy in misfortune.
 Be sure to love Iowa. And California, too.
 And the branchy palms of Florida. (...)
*Translated by Michael M. Naydan
 (Naydan, 2006: 458)*

In his cycle of poems "Lessons from the Classics" (1992), Irvanets incorporates a reference to Volodymyr Korolenko's well-known statement, "Man is born for happiness, like a bird for flight." However, his ironic reinterpretation of this maxim generates a humorous effect through the use of specifying questions. By invoking various bird species (*turkey, ostrich, kiwi, emu, marabou* etc), Irvanets prompts a range of associations in the reader's mind, further enhancing the playful and satirical tone of the passage.

Людина родиться для щастя,
 Як птах для польоту.
 Як птах ...
 Як індик,
 Як півень,
 Як деркач на болоті?
 Як страус,
 Як ківі,
 Як ему,
 Чи як марабу?
 А може, як той, що ховає
 Товсте своє тіло у скелі?
 Всі ж бо вони народились літати,
 Тож плазувати вони принципово не можуть.

А може без порівнянь?
 Може, людина просто
 Родиться для щастя?
 (Bu-Ba-Bu, 1995: 91)

Man is born for happiness,
 like a bird for flight.
 Like a bird ...
 Like a turkey,
 Like a cockerel,
 Like a bittern in the mud?
 Like an ostrich,
 Like a kiwi,
 Like an emu,
 Or like a marabou?
 Or maybe like the one that hides
 Its fat body in a rock?
 After all, they were born to fly,
 So they cannot crawl on principle.

Or maybe we should drop the comparisons?
 Maybe, man is simply
 born for happiness?

Translated by Kateryna Nikolenko

Yuri Andrukhovych's poetry integrates elements of Halychyna's cultural heritage, refined humor, contemporary Ukrainian language, and an urban sensibility. His works are distinguished by their irony and rapid emotional rhythm. Frequently criticized for being "apolitical" and "anticivic," Andrukhovych addressed these critiques in his poem "Ironic Message on One Occasion" (*«Іронічне послання з одного приводу»*, 1985). In this work, he asserts that the "ivory tower" is the poet's natural domain, a vantage point from which one can perceive the harmony between the earthly and the divine.

Кажуть, ніби я мешкаю в башті зі слонової кості.
 Кажуть, без апеляцій, аж сумніватися годі.
 Що ж, буду радий, – заходьте до мене в гості!
 Муза-вахтерка зустріне внизу при вході.
 От вам віконце, Ви полюбіть красвиди.
 Як поетично, приміром, пасуть корову!
 Ну а якщо нічого у Вас не вийде –
 дам вам трубу – підзорну чи оркестрову –
 гляньте і грайте! Зернину й зорю завважте,
 кожну печаль полюбіть і кожну втому.
 Це – чудеса. Це – ефект високої башти.
 А я при столі сидітиму.
 Я ні при чому.
 (Morenets, 2016: 19)

They say I live in an ivory tower.
 They say it without appeal, leaving no room for
 doubt.
 Well, I'll be glad to have you visit me!
 The gatekeeper muse will meet you at the entrance.
 Here is a window, do admire the views.
 How poetically, for example, a cow is grazing!
 Well, if nothing works out for you,
 I'll give you a spyglass or a trumpet –
 look and play! Notice the grain and the dawn,
 love every sorrow and every fatigue.
 These are miracles. This is the effect of the high
 tower.
 And I will sit at the table.
 I have nothing to do with it.
Translated by Kateryna Nikolenko

Andrukhovych's lyrical hero is characterized by the depth of his feeling. His whimsical, humour-filled tone is balanced by the state of being deeply moved by the beauty of the world, which differentiates Andrukhovych from other *Bu-Ba-Bu* poets like Viktor Neborak who tended towards the grotesque and the meticulous imagery building (collections of poems

“Amber Time” («Буритиновий час», 1987); “The Flying Head” («Літаюча голова», 1990), and Oleksandr Irvanets, who tested the limits of traditional lyrical genres through burlesque expression (collection of poems “Fire in the Rain” («Вогнище на дощі», 1987)).

In 1984, another literary group was created in Lviv under the name of *LuHoSad*, which included Ivan Luchuk, Nazar Honchar and Roman Sadlovsky. When characterizing the work of *LuHoSad*, Bu-Ba-Bu and others of their generation, Valerii Shevchuk used the term «необароковий авангард» (“neobaroque avant-garde”). However, literary critic Taras Luchuk came up with a different artistic philosophy which was supported by the representatives of *LuHoSad*. They believed that the literary process didn’t begin with *LuHoSad*, which is why there was no point in talking about avant-garde, or the leading guard in the late 20th century. In turn, they called themselves the “literary rearguard.”

In a conference dedicated to the 10th anniversary of *LuHoSad*, Taras Luchuk gave a succinct explanation of the rearguard concept: “Everything that exists in literature, everything created by our predecessors, came before us. We are chronologically behind the entire development of literature, we are closing the literary process (of course, our time is limited to our time – for some people we will be predecessors). And that is why our work draws from the entire heritage of world literature, and that is why we are behind the main forces in the march of literature (...) That is why we are the rearguard, the “rear” detachment in literature. This is manifested in the fact that our work reflects poets of all times and nations (of course, to the best of our ability)” (*Luchuk, 1993: 16*).

From 1990 to 1995, Ivan Luchuk edited the “Parnassusland” («Парнасленд») rubric in the Lviv newspaper “City Hall” («Паруша»). By the way, it was in “Parnassusland” that publications of the literary group *Red Wagon* first appeared.

Intertextuality and intermediality are key features of the *LuHoSad* poets’ work. They ventured into poetry (they particularly liked palindromes and sought to continue the traditions of baroque poetry, particularly palindromes by Ivan Velychkovsky (1651–1726), poetic performances, theatre, and visual art. For instance, Nazar Honchar created the PERHAPS studio, which is deciphered as PerformanceHappeningStudio. He also created the TLC, or “Theatre of the Lazy Creature” («Театр ледачої істоти»), which meant to prioritize the experiences of the observer.

Roman Sadlovsky, who suffered a stroke at the age of 24, has written few poems, and was not able to write because of his health issues. However, he began exploring poetry from a visual side, calling his literary and poetic pieces “poetrypainting” («поезомалярство»). He published two books: “Sleepy Suns” («Сонні сонця», 1996) and “Two Windows” («Два вікна», 1999). Each one of these books includes only one poem, every line of which takes up a whole page. These books are not just meant to be read – they are meant to be looked at, studied, and seen.

In turning to “poetrypainting,” Sadlovsky continued the traditions put in place by Mykhail Semenko (1892–1937). Ukrainian futurists were very interested in the effect of synesthesia and the different combinations of words, sounds, colours and shapes. Semenko, in particular, believed in the integration of poetry, painting, sculpture and architecture.

In 1922, the *Association of Panfuturists* was created in Kyiv. In their journal which was called “A Semaphore to the Future” («Семафор у майбутнє»), Mykhail Semenko published his paper “Poetrypainting” («Поезомалярство»), in which he explained the foundations of a new art: “...we have destroyed all the previous forms of poetic expression because they are too small for us. Then another process is inserted into the same moment: the process of decomposing the material of poetry, the word, into its original elements. The word is subjected to vigorous experimentation” (*Semenko, 2010: 289*).

For Semenکو, a poet, the word has always been an important expressive means of art. But, being subjected to the process of destruction, it “reaches its end. The word is decomposed and used from all sides – as a concept, symbol, image, paint stain, tonal sound, and finally as prose” (*Semenکو, 2010: 296*), so, as he notes: “the word, as such, will no longer be the main thing in the texture of prose” (*Semenکو, 2010: 297*).

The Kharkiv neo-avant-garde of the 1990s encompasses the works of Andriy Bondar, Volodymyr Tsybulko, as well as Serhiy Zhadan, Rostyslav Melnykiv, Ihor Pylypchuk, who later formed the literary group *Red Wagon*. For the purposes of this paper, the activities of the group will be illustrated using examples of Serhiy Zhadan’s works as he has become one of the most influential and recognizable Ukrainian poets.

Upon moving to Kharkiv in 1991, the writer quickly immersed himself into the literary and cultural life of the city. He was one of the co-founders of the neofuturist literary movement *Red Wagon*, which utilized wordplay and grotesque to parody journalistic clichés and challenge conventional public tastes. *Red Wagon*’s activity was centered around Kharkiv Literary Museum. It was them who opened the 1993 exhibition dedicated to Mykola Khvyliovy. Building off the traditions of Ukrainian futurism (in particular, the poetry of Mykhail Semenکو) and postmodernism (most prominently represented by the literary performance group *Bu-Ba-Bu*, founded in Lviv in 1985), *Red Wagon* offered a fresh perspective on poetry and became a powerful force in the Kharkiv literary underground scene.

In his poetry of the time, Zhadan depicts a lyrical hero who is homeless and lost amid the world that is falling apart and values that are changing. His exaggeration of the role of technical progress in society leads to the emergence of new technologically-oriented metaphors and their connections with the themes of religion and spirituality.

Волога і різка, мов контури дерев,
в повітрі застряє Господня арматура.
Вирізблюється день, холодне між дверей
блукаюча вода – твоя температура.
Поважне надбання – ця вогкість по ровах,
ці розчерки птахів, що в’язнуть сторожами
допоки будуть нам стояти в головах
великі небеса великої держави,
це коливання, цей тижневий падолист,
це обважніле тло, немов червона паста.
Розхитуєш містки, якими подались.
Так легко перейти, така спокуса впасти.
(*Zhadan, 2005: 64*)

Moist and sharp, like the contours of trees,
God’s scaffolding is stuck in the air.
The day carves itself out, wandering water
cools between the doors – your temperature.
A respectable asset – this dampness in the ditches,
these strokes of birds that get stuck as guards
as long as the great heavens of a great state stand in
our heads,
this fluctuation, this weekly fall of leaves,
this heavy background, like red paste.
You shake the bridges we had crossed.
It’s so easy to cross, such a temptation to fall.
Translated by Kateryna Nikolenko

The images of falling leaves, heavy skies, cold, autumn accentuate the lyrical hero’s feeling of loneliness amid the disintegration of the Soviet Union (“the great heavens of a great state”) while also realizing that many of his compatriots still maintain mental ties to the Communist past (“this heavy background, like red paste”). However, Zhadan’s lyrical hero also has hope in his soul – and he turns to literature, art, culture for salvation. In particular, he turns to the image of Bohdan-Ihor Antonych – a key figure of Ukrainian modernism who spoke of the beauty of natural environment and an individual’s deep connection with nature in his poems.

БОГДАН-ІГОР

(...) Нічний вібруючий бузок.
 Під вікнами, як сіль у рані,
 потужний звук, що рушить грані –
 дерева проливають соки,
 мов труби схованих в пісок
 важких органів.

Набряклі залози весни
 над стінами районних центрів.
 З яких чіпких підземних нетрів,
 з чиєї вогкої вини
 постануть ще подібні сни –
 густі й відверті?

І цей напівпрогрітий мед,
 прозора і ядуча слина –
 по всьому. Березнева глина,
 розмиті фарби, рух планет
 і довгі описи прикмет
 Отця і Сина.
 (Zhadan, 2005: 61)

BOHDAN-IHOR

(...) Nighttime vibrating lilacs.
 Under the windows, like salt in a wound,
 a powerful sound that shakes the edges –
 trees spill their sap,
 like pipes hidden in the sand
 of heavy organs.

The swollen glands of spring
 above the walls of district centers.
 From which tenacious underground slums,
 from whose damp guilt
 will similar dreams arise –
 thick and frank?

And this half-rotten honey,
 transparent and poisonous saliva –
 everywhere. March clay,
 blurred colors, the movement of planets
 and long descriptions of the attributes
 of the Father and the Son.
 Translated by Kateryna Nikolenko

5. Conclusions

The neo-avant-garde tendencies in Ukrainian poetry of the 1980s and 1990s reflect a complex interplay between innovation and tradition, irony and seriousness, playfulness and critique. Literary groups such as *Bu-Ba-Bu*, *LuHoSad*, and *Red Wagon* challenged both Soviet ideological constraints and national literary canons by reviving and reinterpreting avant-garde practices through satire, intertextuality, linguistic experimentation, and performative strategies. Their work demonstrates a conscious engagement with historical predecessors – from baroque poets to Ukrainian futurists – while responding to the shifting cultural and political realities of late Soviet and early post-Soviet Ukraine. This synthesis of past and present enabled a dynamic reimagining of Ukrainian literary identity, positioning the neo-avant-garde as a vital force in the transformation of contemporary Ukrainian poetry.

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