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**UKRAINIAN FEMINISM AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY
AND ITS LEGACY IN FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM****УКРАЇНСЬКИЙ ФЕМІНІЗМ НА ЗЛАМІ СТОЛІТЬ
ТА ЙОГО СПАДЩИНА У ФЕМІНІСТИЧНІЙ
ЛІТЕРАТУРНІЙ КРИТИЦІ****Sachkovska Yu. I.**

*Assistant Lecturer at the Department of
Translation Theory and Practice,
Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatiuk National
Pedagogical University
Ternopil, Ukraine*

Сачковська Ю. І.

*асистент кафедри теорії і практики
перекладу,
Тернопільський національний
педагогічний університет імені
Володимира Гнатюка
м. Тернопіль, Україна*

Nataliya Kobrynska, the founder of the Society of Ukrainian Women [3], once stated: “Through literature, I came to understand women in society – so I wanted to lead others as well.” This formulation is highly symptomatic for the early stage of Ukrainian feminism, as it explicitly links literary creativity with social awareness and collective emancipation. Her short story “For a Crust of Bread” (1884) presents the figure of an independent woman

who assumes responsibility not only for her own survival, but also for her position within the social structure. What is particularly striking is that this literary articulation of female autonomy appears several decades before Virginia Woolf's well-known reflection on the necessity of a woman's economic independence and private space for creative work, published only in 1929. Such temporal precedence invites a reconsideration of the established Western-centered chronology of feminist thought and highlights the originality of Ukrainian women's writing at the turn of the century.

The literary activity of Nataliya Kobrynska was highly appreciated by Ivan Franko, which reveals another distinctive feature of Ukrainian feminism in this period – namely, the presence of intellectual support from male writers and critics. This phenomenon complicates simplified oppositions between “male” and “female” literary traditions and suggests a more dialogic cultural environment, in which feminist ideas could circulate within broader intellectual networks. In this sense, Ukrainian feminism emerged not as a marginal discourse but as an integral part of the national literary process.

Olha Kobylianska, one of the members of the Society of Ukrainian Women, further developed these ideas in her literary and public activity. She actively advocated gender equality and promoted educational initiatives aimed primarily at middle-class women. Her life credo, expressed in the phrase “to be one's own goal,” reflects a radical rethinking of female subjectivity. In her literary works, Kobylianska constructs a system of oppositions that foregrounds a strong female figure in contrast to a weak or internally conflicted male character, whose vulnerability is often portrayed as a consequence of patriarchal social structures. Together with Nataliya Kobrynska, as well as Lesya Ukrainka, Olena Pchilka, Kateryna Hrushevska, and Yevheniia Yaroshynska, she represents a cohort of Ukrainian women writers whose primary concern was the development of female spiritual autonomy and the right to a dignified life beyond the restrictive framework of the so-called “four K” – Kinder, Küche, Kirche, Kleider.

The emergence of these literary voices coincided with the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, a period commonly associated with the “first wave” of feminism in Western Europe. However, the Ukrainian feminist movement developed under specific historical conditions, as the territory of Ukraine was divided between neighboring empires. As a result, feminist ideas were inseparably intertwined with the national liberation struggle. Literature in this context performed a dual function: it transmitted social and cultural ideals, stereotypes, and myths, while simultaneously reflecting political realities, often in metaphorical or symbolic form. This interaction between gender discourse and national

identity constitutes an important theoretical dimension for contemporary feminist literary criticism.

A crucial stage in the development of Ukrainian feminist literary thought is associated with the work of Solomiia Pavlychko – a writer, literary critic, translator, and public intellectual. Her collection “Feminism” (1968/2002) became one of the most influential texts in Ukrainian feminist criticism. Pavlychko explicitly articulated the problem of women’s self-awareness, social inequality, and the systematic exclusion of women’s voices from literary history. She emphasized that the feminine tradition in Ukrainian literature – from Marko Vovchok to Lina Kostenko – had never been studied as a coherent phenomenon, thus calling for a revision of the national literary canon. Given the specific historical trajectory of Ukraine, shaped by imperial domination and cultural suppression, Pavlychko argued for the necessity of developing an independent periodization of Ukrainian women’s writing [2].

One of her key theoretical insights lies in the assertion that all literary texts may be subjected to feminist reading. Such an approach presupposes a deconstructivist analysis of female reception, aimed at uncovering latent meanings, embedded codes, and symbolic structures that have traditionally remained marginalized or silenced. This methodological stance closely aligns with the core principles of modern feminist literary criticism, which focuses on the reconstruction of lost or forbidden female experience and the exploration of women’s worldview as a distinct cultural and symbolic system [1].

As contemporary feminist scholars emphasize, “Feminism came to signal that women’s lives matter; then feminist criticism came to evidence that women’s writings about women’s lives matter” [4, p. 468]. Another important task of feminist criticism is the revision of literary history with the aim of restoring unjustly forgotten women writers to the canon. Despite significant progress in this area, Ukrainian women’s literature remains insufficiently explored, particularly in terms of its theoretical conceptualization and international reception. The unique historical, cultural, and ideological background of Ukrainian feminist writing calls for further interdisciplinary research that integrates feminist literary criticism with broader theoretical frameworks concerned with representation, cultural memory, and the ecology of women’s experience.

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