

## **THE UKRAINIAN PICTURE OF OSCAR WILDE: FIRST TOUCHES**

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Oscar Wilde – is one of the most controversial figures in world literature, having entered into a dialogue with almost all European literatures. The reception of O. Wilde in Europe can be traced back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Since that time, it is also possible to follow the reception of his name, ideas and works in the Ukrainian literary and critical discourse. The artistic critical response in numerous reviews, essays, literary and critical portraits, biographies, parodies of artistic life, etc. play an important role in the process of reception of the writer and his literary heritage in a foreign language culture. Translation is a

special form of mediation and an important component of the perception of the literary heritage of a foreign author by a certain national literature. The choice of a work for translation is determined by the artistic needs of the perceiving literature. The synergy of literature with other art forms such as theatre, opera, cinema, book illustration, etc. can create an exceptional aesthetic pleasure. The explanation of a literary work by means of art often plays a primary role and sometimes replaces reading or completes it. The combination of all these components of reception allows us to characterize the introduction of the English-speaking Irish writer – Oscar Wilde – into the Slavic context in general and into the Ukrainian one in particular. Various ways of reception: original articles in Ukrainian periodicals, early literary reviews, critical studies, first Ukrainian translations have been analyzed in this research. The features of Wilde’s works reception in the cultural heritage of the representatives of Ukrainian literature and drama have been highlighted. The article under consideration argues that Oscar Wilde noticeably contributed to the emerging discourse around Decadence in art and literature in Ukrainian literary process. The existence of a receptive environment for the phenomenon of Oscar Wilde and his works in the Ukrainian cultural context during the 1st decade of the twentieth century is revealed and convincingly proved.

**Key words:** *Oscar Wilde, reception, literature criticism, translation, Ukrainian literature.*

**Statement of the problem.** Irish poet and playwright Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) is now widely recognized not only as one of the most representative figures of the British *fin de siècle*, but also as one of the most influential Anglophone authors of the nineteenth century. [5] His controversial aesthetic doctrines had a powerful impact on the development of modernism and symbolism cultures throughout Europe. “Wilde the writer”, “Wilde the playwright”, “Wilde the decadent”, “Wilde the aesthete”, “Wilde the journalist” “Wilde the dandy”, “Wilde the homosexual”, “Wilde the martyr”, “Irish Wilde” *etc*, deeply influenced the representatives of national European literatures. “His dandyism, witticism,

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paradoxes, and provocations became the object of parody and imitation. Oscar Wilde became a cultural type that migrated across borders and genres” [5]. Being imprisoned and then literary neglected in Britain, he became a true European phenomenon. A number of scholars have made separate studies concerning the reception of Wilde in their own national cultural histories. The situation was changed in 2010, when the collective monograph “The Reception of Oscar Wilde in Europe” ed. by Stefano Evangelista was published. This comprehensive volume reveals the European reception of Oscar Wilde, starting with the first translations and productions of his works in the 1890s. Twenty-three contributors to this monograph describe the ways Oscar Wilde was perceived and translated in the national linguistic and literary discourses of thirteen countries. Unfortunately, due to the lack of systematic scientific research, Ukraine was barely mentioned in the “Timeline”. Thus, it is high time to enrich the gallery of European portraits of Oscar Wilde by adding the first touches to the Ukrainian portrait of this iconic and controversial English-language author.

**The objective** of this article is to give a diachronic survey of the reception of Oscar Wilde in Ukraine and to provide a detailed analysis of the response to Oscar Wilde phenomenon in Ukrainian literary circles and the transformation of Wilde’s aesthetic principles into the Ukrainian literary and cultural discourse during the first stage of his reception (late 19<sup>th</sup>-early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries). The research is based on available original sources, which demonstrate the intensity of Oscar Wilde’s reception in the Ukrainian literary and cultural discourse of the period covered.

**Results and Discussion.** “The reception of Oscar Wilde” has been a kind of challenge to numerous scholars. Thus, international contributors to the above-mentioned collective monograph (2010), focused their analysis on Wilde’s reception in Spain (Marta Mateo, Richard A. Cardwell), Germany and Austria (Robert Vilain, Sandra Mayer), Hungary (Mária Kurdi), Croatia (Irena Grubica), France (Richard Habbit), Italy (Rita Severi, Eliza Bizzotto), Germany (Chris Walton, Rainer Kohlmayer and Lucia Krämer), Denmark (Lene Østermark-7 Studia methodologica, ISSN 2304-1222, No. 53. 2022

Johansen), Czech Republic (Zdeněk Beran) and Russia (Evgenii Bershtein). The British and Irish reception of Oscar Wilde was studied by Josef Bristow [1], Peter Raby [22], Ian Small [24], Melissa Knox [13], Jerusha McCormack [16], and many others. The reception of Wilde in Poland was described by Wanda Krajewska [14], in Latvia – by Ilze Kacane [9], in the Netherlands of 1882-1905 by Pieter-Jan Sterenborg [25], Oscar Wilde in Vienna is the first book-length study in English of the reception of Oscar Wilde's works in the German-speaking world by Sandra Mayer [15]. Rostyslav Dotsenko<sup>1</sup> [4] and Maksym Srtikha<sup>2</sup> [26] are known to be the only authors of few essays on "Wilde in Ukraine" in the XX century. The first academic research on reception of Oscar Wilde in Ukrainian literary and critical discourse appeared only in 2011 [3].

**Presentation of the research material.** Each national literature, due to its historical, social and political factors, as well as to aesthetic values and intellectual preferences of the recipients, finds certain relevant features in the literary works of a particular writer. Ukraine, like any European country, experienced both more active and more passive periods in the reception of Oscar Wilde, and therefore, this whole period can be divided into several stages. In order to explain when, why, and how the Ukrainian reception of Wilde developed, it is necessary to briefly dwell on its prehistory. It should be noted that the comprehension of Wilde's ideas and concepts, as well as the reception of his prose and drama in the Ukrainian literary and critical discourse was a long and gradual process, on the one hand, and a complex historical and cultural phenomenon on the other one.

In the early XX century, Ukrainian literary life was rather heterogeneous and depended upon the socio-political conditions and territorial structure of the country, therefore, the reception of Wilde and his writings took place at the intersection of three cultures: Ukrainian, Polish and Russian. The turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries – the period of *fin de siècle* – is known for the decline of established norms and rules and is associated with decadence,

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<sup>1</sup> Rostyslav Dotsenko (1931-2012)– Ukrainian literary critic, translator, writer and former political prisoner

<sup>2</sup> Maksym Srtikha (born in 1961) – Ukrainian scientist, public and political activist, translator, writer

modernism, symbolism, and aestheticism. The concept of New Art, which spread from Western Europe to Slavic cultures, necessitated a radical rethinking of the role of the Artist and the Critic and their functions. The struggle for independence and national identity was at the forefront of artists' minds. It was the time, when Ukrainian prominent poets and writers could not but turn to the aesthetic doctrine and literary works of Oscar Wilde in their creative search. Wilde's writings, their translations and critical studies of his works, articles, and news in the periodical press were spread in two ways: Russian (through the Left Bank Ukraine<sup>3</sup>, Southern Ukraine, and Slobozhanshchyna<sup>4</sup>) and Western or European (through Halychyna<sup>5</sup>).

**Criticism.** The crisis of *Narodnyk* movement, politically conscious movement of the intelligentsia, and the emergence of modern discourse are characteristic features of the *fin-de-siècle* period in Ukraine. The years of 1896 (M. Ilnytskyi), 1898 (S. Pavlychko), or 1903 (O. Biletskyi) are considered to be the initial steps of modernism in Ukraine. In 1903 Mykola Voronyi<sup>6</sup> published his almanac *Z-nad hmar i dolyn* (From Above the Clouds and Valleys) in Odesa. The periodical "expanded the aesthetic framework of Ukrainian culture" [21, p.105]. Voronyi appealed to young generation of writers to "avoid naturalism and classical approach to the literature and pay attention to aesthetics and the Art" [27, p.14]. M. Voronyi called himself the first Ukrainian artist and aesthete.

The reception of New Art in Ukrainian cultural discourse generally was controversial and new ideas of decadence, symbolism, aestheticism were often considered to be "not genuinely Ukrainian". Such conclusions could be made from the correspondence of an outstanding Ukrainian modern poetess Lesia Ukrainka<sup>7</sup> to her brother-in-law Mykhailo Kryvyniuk<sup>8</sup>. Analysing Zinaida Vengerova's<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> is a historic name of the part of Ukraine on the left (East) bank of the Dnieper River, comprising the modern-day oblasts of Chernihiv, Poltava and Sumy as well as the eastern parts of Kyiv and Cherkasy.

<sup>4</sup> is a historical region, now located in North-eastern Ukraine and South-western Russia.

<sup>5</sup> Halychyna (Galicia) – historical and geographic region in Central-Eastern Europe, once a small kingdom that straddled the modern-day border between Poland and Ukraine.

<sup>6</sup> Mykola Voronyi (1871 – 1938) – Ukrainian writer, poet, actor, director, and political activist.

<sup>7</sup> Lesia Ukrainka (born Larysa Kosach, 1871 –1913) Ukrainian writer and poetess, active political, civil, and feminist activist.

<sup>8</sup> Mykhailo Kryvyniuk (1905 - 1993), Ukrainian philologist, public figure, in 1918 translated Wilde's story "The Happy Prince"

<sup>9</sup> *Studia methodologica*, ISSN 2304-1222, No. 53. 2022

article on Oscar Wilde in *Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopedic Dictionary* (1892). she wrote: “When you read Veng(erova), let me know all your impressions on all those Aesthetes and Pre-Raphaelites whom she described. Unlike her, I saw no sign of progress, but only the signs of insanity or insincerity”. [12, p. 383] Ukrainka’s opinion partly supported that of Max Nordau’s, expressed in his scandalous pamphlet *Degeneration*, where ‘a great aesthete’ Oscar Wilde was characterized as mentally ill, and his collection of essays *Intentions*, which contained the views on the role of Art and freedom of the artist, was called “immoral”.

Sigmund Freud’s conception and works on sexuality attracted the attention of many *fin de siècle* writers across Europe and became part of the “discursive explosion around the topic of sex” [21, p. 78]. Being in opposition to Victorian society, Wilde became famous not only for his literary works, but also for the “infamous” trials that led to his downfall. Delivering his well-known speech at the trial for “gross indecency”, Oscar Wilde appealed to the Hellenistic views of Plato and Socrates in the context of ‘love that dare not speak its name’. Ahatanhel Krymsky<sup>10</sup> “felt, experienced and in the boldest way embodied in literary forms such typical European discourses of the late nineteenth century as the disharmony of the human soul and its dionysianism; decadent hedonism and exotic passions” [20, p. 45]. Krymsky was familiar with Wilde’s biography, he mentioned it in his lectures on Arabic literature, delivered in 1899 in Moscow. Analyzing the works of the Oriental poet Abu Nuwas – the singer of male love, Krymsky takes the side of the Irish writer, arguing that Wilde’s only fault was bad timing, that if he had been born two thousand years earlier, his “crime” would have been considered a virtue. Krymsky called Wilde “a very gentle, sympathetic, and undoubtedly gifted poet” [20, p. 99]. Moreover, by placing Wilde’s ‘crime’ in the context of ‘Greek love’

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<sup>9</sup> Zinaida Vengerova (1867-1941) - Russian literary critic and translator

<sup>10</sup> Ahatanhel Krymsky (1871 –1942) - Ukrainian orientalist, linguist and polyglot, literary scholar, folklorist, writer, and translator

and considering it 'normal', the Ukrainian writer is convinced of Wilde's innocence, and he saw a kindred spirit in the scandalous poet.

The encyclopedia articles, reviews, epigraphs, epistolary heritage, lectures *etc.*, as well as the fact that the aesthetic acquaintance with Oscar Wilde phenomenon through secondary sources was (or was not) perceived by Ukrainian writers before his doctrines and oeuvre popularization among ordinary readers were characteristic features and peculiarities of Wilde's reception in Ukraine in the early twentieth century. Obviously, the absence of Oscar Wilde's name in such sources is not a sign of ignorance of his ideas in literary circles. Oscar Wilde's writings were not widely available to the Ukrainian reader in general; English and other European languages were mostly spoken by the Ukrainian intelligentsia. Hnat Hotkevych's<sup>11</sup> statement about the importance of impressionist criticism is one of the documentary pieces of evidence: "When I read a Symbolist, I follow the symbols; when I read Hoffmann and Poe, I follow the logic of their fantasy or the fantasy of their logic; when I read Oscar Wilde, who draws fantastic pictures on a realistic background, I think - why should art be undoubtedly realistic? [11, p. 134] Antin Krushelnytsky<sup>12</sup> used a quote from Wilde's novel *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, which is considered an example of European decadence as a literary school as an epigraph to his comedy *The Eagles*.

Thus, it can be stated that at the turn of the 19th-20th centuries there was a favorable environment in the Ukrainian literary and critical discourse, ready to perceive the concepts of the New Art in general and the philosophy and works of Oscar Wilde in particular.

**Translations.** In the early years of the XX century, foreign literature became an element of Ukrainian national literature, and translation was the element of literary creativity of many Ukrainian writers. The so-called *Ems Decree*

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<sup>11</sup> Hnat Hotkevych (1877-1938) - Ukrainian writer, ethnographer, playwright, composer, musicologist, and bandurist.

<sup>12</sup> Antin Krushelnytsky (1878 – 1937) - Ukrainian writer and literary critic, teacher, Minister of Education of the Ukrainian People's Republic (1919), publisher-editor, fighter for the independence of Ukraine in the twentieth century. Victim of Stalin's terror.

(1876-1905), a secret decree of the Russian Tsar Alexander II, was being implemented on the territory of Greater Ukraine (as a part of the Russian Empire), and prohibited the use of the Ukrainian language in printed publications, as well as the import of Ukrainian publications and staging of plays or lectures in Ukrainian. As a result of such a policy, all Ukrainian translations were published mainly in Halychyna (Galicia) literary almanacs, newspapers, and other periodicals, which played a key role in the reception of foreign literatures. Ukrainian poets, writers, and intellectuals translate foreign, mainly European authors, and in particular the works of Oscar Wilde.

The periodical *Literaturno-Naukovyi Visnyk* (Literary-Scientific Herald) edited by Ivan Franko,<sup>13</sup> was founded in 1898 in Lviv – the cultural center of Halychyna. The journal published political, historical and literary essays, and theoretical and critical reviews. The column *Z chuzhyh literatur* (From Foreign Literatures) introduced readers to the news of world literature and published Ukrainian translations of the most popular pieces of prose, poetry, and drama. “The choice of texts for translation (...) was directly related to artistic and even political concepts” [23, p. 223-224]. In 1904, trying to “get closer to modern European literary trends and movements”, *LNV* published the first Ukrainian translation of Wilde – *Salomé*. The author of the translation was Ivan Krevetsky<sup>14</sup>, who did not choose Wilde’s most decadent and symbolist tragedy by chance, but rather because of its affinity with the Ukrainian literary movement. Written in French in 1891, this play had the least success in England and was banned from being staged in England (as well as in Russia until 1917). In Britain Wilde suffered a long period of comparative neglect following the scandal of his conviction for ‘gross indecency’ in 1895. However, the situation was quite different in Continental Europe, Eastern and Central Europe in particular. The first performance of “Salomé” was staged in 1896 at the Symbolist *Théâtre de l’Oeuvre* in Paris, when

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<sup>13</sup> Ivan Franko (1856 – 1916) – Ukrainian poet, writer, social and literary critic, journalist, interpreter, economist, political activist, doctor of philosophy, ethnographer, and the author of the first detective novels and modern poetry in the Ukrainian language

<sup>14</sup> Ivan Krevetskyi (1883 – 1940) – Ukrainian historian, bibliographer, public figure, journalist.

Wilde was still in prison. Wilde's 'rehabilitation' process began with a German production of *Salomé* as one-act opera by Richard Strauss (1905)<sup>15</sup>. The Austrian premiere took place at the Graz Opera in 1906. It was staged in numerous theaters in Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which included Halychyna. At the turn of the century, experimental theaters turned to the production of "Salomé" for the modernization of directing and acting. The value of I. Krevetsky's translation (as well as Wilde's original) lies in the destruction of the recipient's established horizons through the writer's peculiar, decadent and symbolist interpretation of the Biblical plot. The author of the translation used Galician local dialect words for the better understanding of the text by target readers; it was focused on Ukrainian (Galician) artistic circles as well.

Ukrainian translations of two Wilde's poems in prose "The Artist" and "The Disciple" (trans. by V.Voloshyn) were published in the Lviv weekly *Nedilya* (Sunday) in 1912. The editor Yaroslav Vesolovsky<sup>16</sup> in his struggle for the freedom of the Ukrainian language in Galician periodicals and institutions promoted Ukrainian translations on the pages of *Nedilya*. In the same year, the article *Oskar Ual'd pro literaturni zarobitky* (Oscar Wilde about making money with literature) [19, p. 8] appeared in the *Notes* column. The author, hidden under cryptonym 'O.K.' based his review on a paragraph from the German weekly *Pan*. Its contributor Alfred Kerr, a German theater critic, wrote about Oscar Wilde's profound and insightful letter of reply to an aspiring writer who was looking for advice on how to succeed. Wilde advised him not to rely on writing for a living, adding: "The best work in literature is always done by those who do not depend on it for their daily bread, and the highest form of literature, Poetry, brings no wealth to its author" [10]. Having analyzed the letter, the Galician correspondent advised the young Ukrainian generation of poets to follow Wilde's recommendations to achieve success.

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<sup>15</sup> German libretto based on Hedwig Lachmann's German translation of Wilde's *Salomé*.

<sup>16</sup> Yaroslav Vesolovsky (1881 – 1917) – Ukrainian poet, prose writer, translator, critic, journalist, public, political and cultural figure.

The literary-scientific magazine *Iliustrovana Ukraina* (Ukraine Illustrated) appeared twice a week in Lviv. In 1913 two poems in prose by Oscar Wilde were published in the Ukrainian translation: *The Artist* (anonymous translator) and *The Doer of Good* (I. Radyslavych<sup>17</sup>).

**Wilde and Ukrainian modernists.** The reception of New Art went far beyond translations. Solomiia Pavlychko [21, p. 56] mentioned that in Halychyna (Galicia) of *fin-de-siècle*, Austrian, German, and Polish magazines and almanacs published news from the cultural life of Vienna, Krakow, London, or Paris, which were lively discussed not only in the university cities of Ukraine. Representatives of European *Art Nouveau* attracted the attention of Ukrainian writers no less than of their colleagues – modernists in Poland or symbolists in Russia. All three waves of Ukrainian modernists referred to the phenomenon of Oscar Wilde and his literary works. Representatives of such discourses as *Moloda Muza* (Young Muse) and *Ukrains'ka Hata* (Ukrainian Hut) turned to the philosophy and literary works of Oscar Wilde in search of a universal symbolic style and imagery.

Lviv literary group *Moloda Muza* (1907 - 1909) was one of the links of European literary organizations, such as: *Young Belgium*, *Young Germany*, *Young France*, and *Young Poland*. The group represented “a movement, that is well known among other nations – decadent, symbolist, modernist, aesthetic, or as it is called. The purpose of this movement is the worship of Beauty”. [23, p. 3] Wilde’s poem in prose “The Artist” was translated by a member of the group, Sydir Tverdokhlib<sup>18</sup> and published in the periodical *Ridnyj Krai* (Homeland). Mykhailo Yatskiv<sup>19</sup> – another member of *Moloda Muza* who mentioned Wilde in one of his critical reviews in the context of opposition to society [6, p. 4]. Wilde reminiscences can be traced in some Yatskiv’s stories.

Kyiv almanac *Ukrains'ka Hata* (1909 – 1914) united supporters of *New Art* and aimed to expand the Ukrainian literature and enter the mainstream of European

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<sup>17</sup> Pseudonym of Ivan Stavnychyy (1891 - 1973) – Ukrainian journalist, editor, translator, publisher

<sup>18</sup> Sydir Tverdokhlib (1886 -1922) – Ukrainian poet, translator and politician

<sup>19</sup> Mykhailo Yatskiv (1873 - 1961) – Ukrainian writer, member of the modernist group "Young Muse".

cultural development. It stood on the side of modernism, rather than of decadence aesthetics. In this context, Mykola Yevshan<sup>20</sup> is worth mentioning as the brightest representative of the critical discourse of *Ukrains'ka Hata* and the creator of the unifying doctrine of artistic culture. Yevshan was neither 'an aesthete' nor 'an artist' like M.Voronyi, but in most of his literary reviews and critical essays, he mentioned the name of Oscar Wilde and paraphrased or quoted the Irish writer: "And Wilde is right: 'For the good we get from art is not what we learn from it; it is what we become through it. Its real influence will be in giving the mind that enthusiasm which is the secret of Hellenism, accustoming it to demand from art all that art can do in rearranging the facts of common life for us – whether it be by giving the most spiritual interpretation of one's own moments of highest passion or the most sensuous expression of those thoughts that are the farthest removed from sense; in accustoming it to love the things of the imagination for their own sake, and to desire beauty and grace in all things. For he who does not love art in all things does not love it at all, and he who does not need art in all things does not need it at all. (Quote from Oscar Wilde, *The English Renaissance of Art* in critical essay *The generation fight and the Ukrainian Literature*) [7, p.45].

Yevshan supported the statements that through imprisonment, suffering and 'self-sacrifice' Wilde came to martyrdom, and thus followed the popular Russian Symbolists myth about Oscar Wilde the martyr, who sacrificed his life for the sake of high ideals and Art: "These are not paradoxes, but statements of fact, sometimes perhaps strange. It is a fact, not a paradox, that such a 'dandy' as Wilde becomes the most of a martyr in prison, humbles himself in *De Profundis* in front of the divinity of Christ, becomes purified and meek, like a saint before the Judgment" (critical essay "Zygmunt Krasinski - Polish writer") [7, p. 329].

All in all, Wilde's impossibility-oriented revision of decadence-as-romance, placed at the heart of the receptive-creative double-bind entailed by his concept of 'criticism', has many crucial qualities that would help literature and literary

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<sup>20</sup> Mykola Yevshan, born Fediushko (1890-1919) - Ukrainian literary critic, literary scholar and translator  
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transactions, calling for a radical sense of alterity in the reading subject that might well become a co-creative creature.

Here are some more quotes to support our research.

“Once, Wilde felt very strongly the need of such a vital ideal when started his wild literary career. He conceived the importance of every breath, every moment of human life, when appealed not to vast any minute” and thus Yevshan quoted lord Henry’s monologue from Wilde’s *PDG: Червоні маки* (Red Poppies) about O.Oles’ play *Po dorozh v kazku* (On the Way to a Fairytale) [7, p. 446].

(...) when Wilde said, “Life is too important to be taken seriously (Critical essay *German Bung, Artyst i cholovik (psychologichni studii)* (German Bung, an Artist and a Man (Psychological study) [7, 402];

(...) like that soul in Wilde’s story (critical essay “Maria Konopnitska” – a polish writer) [7, 313];

“Wilde was quite right when protested against classical authors accusing them in slowing the literary process down” in *Ukrains’ko-i Avstrijsko-rus’ki klasyky* (Ukrainian – and Ausrtian- Ruthenian classical authors) [7, p. 595];

“Wilde did not say in vain that classical authors stop the development of poetry” in critical essay on M.Holybets’s poetry *Buvajut’ hvuli* (Waves Occur) [7, p. 553].

The above mentioned and many other references and quotations demonstrate a deep knowledge of Wilde’s philosophy and works, in particular, *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*, *De Profundis*, *The Ballad of the Reading Goal*, poems in prose etc., and especially the collection of essays *Intentions*, which outlines his basic aesthetic doctrine. Like Oscar Wilde, Mykola Yevshan took the side of literary and critical impressionism, calling young generations of writers for “leaving any beliefs outside the Temple of Art” [7, p. 24]. He recognizes creativity not only as “self-opposition to everything” (Nietzsche), but as “aesthetic or philosophical hedonism” (Wilde), and thus formulates a new role for criticism: “to see not only what is written, but also what goes beyond what is just beginning” [8, p. 555]. As a representative of the entire discourse of *Ukrains’ka Hata*, Yevshan turns to

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Wilde's philosophy to support new trends in Ukrainian critical thought and the literary process.

The article *Ukrains'kya Dekadentshchyna* (Ukrainian Decadence) (1913) by Ivan Semenovych Nechuy-Levytsky<sup>21</sup> summarizes the ten-year period of the reception of Oscar Wilde in Ukrainian literary and critical discourse in the context of the perception of the "New Art". The Ukrainian writer reveals the genesis, development, and spread of this Western doctrine among Ukrainian and Galician masters of poetry and prose, and characterize Oscar Wilde and his works. On the one hand, Nechuy-Levytsky takes the side of Max Nordau, Lesia Ukrainka *etc.*, and criticizes "modernism and decadence with their eroticism, symbolism, erotomania, extreme shame and (...) pornography" [17, p. 188], but on the other hand, he calls Wilde one of the "great decadent storytellers" whose program is based on three basic principles: Love, Beauty, and Death [17, p. 219]. In a few words, he outlines the aspects of Wilde's aestheticism: "Without artistry and beauty, works have no value, no matter how high and worthwhile their content and their ideas are... All sins are nothing if they are written beautifully, in all their beauty. First of all, the literary work must be beautiful," says Oscar Wilde, as well as his dandyism which is a rebellion "against the regulations and customs of life, religious and sexual" [17, p. 193]. As to Oscar Wilde himself, the Ukrainian author depicts him as a "bizarre man that walked in London parks in sixteenth-century attire with a white collar around his neck as big as a nest, saying directly that aesthetics is higher than morality" [17, p. 194]. The author is well acquainted with Wilde's biography, his imprisonment, and his writings. Having carried out a comparative analysis of Western European and Ukrainian masters of poetry and prose, Nechuy-Levytsky contrasts European modernism with Ukrainian decadence, revealing their differences, in: 1) *a clear literary language* in Europe and a dialect or quaint dialect in Ukraine; 2) *style* – the absence of Beauty, Poetry, etc. in the works of Ukrainian masters of fiction, while in his fiction "Wilde the decadent depicts even sinful characters by means of poetic beauty and forms" [17, p. 213-214]; 3) *scale* –

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<sup>21</sup> Ivan Semenovych Nechuy-Levytsky (1838 - 1918) – Ukrainian writer, ethnographer, folklorist, and lecturer.  
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in Europe, modernists are united in various literary circles or clubs, staying aloof but enriching national literatures, while for “smaller literatures such decadent trends are harmful”. The Ukrainian critic summarizes that decadence in Ukrainian literature, which first appeared in Halychyna (Galicia) and later in Ukraine, seems to be alien here, like “the plague virus.”

Wilde’s themes and characters have become the sources and models for heroes in prose fiction of other Ukrainian writers. This influence is a vast topic of further research, but it worth mentioning in present essay. Wilde reminiscences can be noticed in the works of Volodymyr Vynnychenko, Yaroslav Ivashkevych, and Agatangel Krymskyi. Therefore, the features of a so-called reproductive (critical reviews) and productive (fiction) reception of Oscar Wilde are obvious.

Borys Yanovsky, a prominent composer and musical critic,<sup>22</sup> turned to Oscar Wilde’s drama. Yanovsky, who was ahead of the Austrian composer Alexander Tsemlynsky in this regard, in 1912 wrote the opera “The Florentine Tragedy” which firstly was staged in Odesa in 1913.

### **Conclusions**

This paper is a contribution to the rich mosaic of The Reception of Oscar Wilde research. It demonstrates that at the first stage of the reception of Oscar Wilde phenomenon (1899 – 1913), great attention to his name, ideas, artistic doctrine, creativity, and ‘myth’ was focused in narrow literary, artistic, and modernist circles. The choice of works for translation was not random and proved close acquaintance with Wilde’s literary heritage, which had originated from reading his works in the original, on the one hand, or from previous Russian, Polish or other languages translations. Unfortunately, critical reviews of that decade on individual literary works by Wilde and his aesthetic platform have been unknown yet.

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<sup>22</sup> Borys Yanovsky born Siegl (1875 -1933) - Ukrainian of German descent composer, music critic, conductor and teacher

The Ukrainian Reception of Oscar Wilde timeline (1899-1913):

<b>Year</b>	<b>Translations</b>	<b>Criticism</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>1899</b>		Ahatanhel Krymsky mentioned Wilde in the context of male love in his lecture on Abu Nuwas	
<b>1904</b>	<i>Salome</i> (Ivan Krevets'ky)		
<b>1907</b>			A. Krushelnutsky quoted <i>PDG</i>
<b>1908</b>		Hnat Hotkevych 'Literaturni vrazhinnia'	
<b>1911</b>		M. Yevshan in the preface to A. Tovkachevsky's book <i>Utopia i dijsnism'</i> . <i>Zbirka statej</i> .	
<b>1912</b>	<i>The Artist, The Disciple</i> (V.Voloshyn)	O.K. 'Oskar Ual'd pro literaturni zarobitky'	
		M. Yevshan in critical reviews	
<b>1913</b>	<i>The Artist</i> (anonymous), <i>The Doer of Good</i> (I. Radyslavych)	I.S.Nechyi-Levyts'ky 'Ukrains'ka Dekadenshchyna'	B.Yanovs'ky <i>Florentine tragedy</i> (opera)

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