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THE PAST AND FUTURE OF UKRAINE THROUGH THE PRISM OF LITERATURE

Literature is an essential part of the culture of every nation that exists, existed, and will exist on Earth. In the works of the past, we immerse ourselves in the reality of writers who had already left this world, we explore their emotions and world-views, while contemporary authors describe the life around them and the hopes they see for the future. The rich collection of Ukrainian masterpieces serves as a trustworthy prism through which we can explore the sophisticated interconnection between the past, present, and future of Ukraine.

Starting with Old Ukrainian Literature that is deeply rooted in the 10th-century Kievan Rus, it is worth noting how it reflects the early intellectual achievements of the Slavic people. One of the most important texts from this period is the “Primary Chronicle,” also known as the Tale of Bygone Year. This work provides a historical account of Kievan Rus, encompassing religious, cultural, and everyday aspects. It merges historical events, religious concepts, and narratives, offering a comprehensive view of early East Slavic beliefs and practices. Another significant work is “The Tale of Igor’s Campaign,” which recounts the unfortunate expedition led by Igor Svyatoslavich against the Polovetsians in 1185. This narrative explores themes such as the ill-fated consequences of Igor’s campaign, the medieval Eastern European context, and the courage displayed by participants like Igor’s son Vladimir and his brother Vsevolod Svyatoslavovich. It is essential to mention such a historical figure as Hryhorii Skovoroda. Despite encountering challenges such as Russian censorship, his works persevered through underground circulation and revisions, making significant contributions to Ukraine’s intellectual and cultural legacy. Skovoroda’s enduring influence continues to resonate across time, shaping the philosophical discourse and inspiring deep reflections on the human condition.

We will look through the second period in Ukrainian literature named “New Literature” to precede. There are many bright examples of authors whose works represent Ukrainian past and future. The first one is Ivan Kotliarevsky. In the poetic verses of Kotliarevsky, the rustic landscapes come alive, echoing the laughter of lovers and narrating a timeless tale of love against the backdrop of Ukrainian traditions. Through his pen, Kotliarevsky immortalizes the essence of Ukrainian romance, capturing the nuances of the heart with a delightful blend of wit, humor, and cultural richness. “Natalka Poltavka” stands as a testament to Kotliarevsky’s mastery, enchanting readers with its vivid portrayal of love and life in the Ukrainian countryside. The key themes in “Natalka Poltavka” are rural romanticism, love and sacrifice, traditions, celebration of Ukrainian identity, humour, and satire.

The second one is Leonid Hlibov. Leonid Hlibov, with his imaginative storytelling, goes beyond the surface narrative, using the whimsical world of his fables as a canvas to paint thought-provoking lessons. His stories serve as mirrors reflecting the intricacies of human behaviour and provide a lens through which readers can contemplate timeless truths. The

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key themes in his fables are irony and paradox, educational value, timelessness, humour and wit.

The third one is Ivan Nechuy-Levytskyi. Through the artistry of Nechuy-Levytskyi's pen, the rural landscapes of Ukraine come alive, and the pages of "The Kaidash Family" unfold a rich tapestry of tradition, family dynamics, and the ebb and flow of village existence. In this literary masterpiece, Nechuy-Levytskyi delicately weaves the threads of everyday life, portraying the joys, struggles, and complexities of the Ukrainian peasantry. The key themes of his work "Kaidash Family" are family dynamics, village life, tradition and culture, social injustice, generational change, love and relationships, and nature.

The next step in the history of Ukrainian Literature is modern and contemporary literature. The period of modern Ukrainian literature is first and foremost associated with the Shot Renaissance, a tragedy, a generation that was supposed to liberate Ukraine and breathe into it the spirit of freedom and a form of expression, hunted down by the communist regime during the 1920s and 1930s. One of those souls was Mykola Khvylovy. Khvylovy is one of the most tragic stories, a story of ideological enthusiasm, disappointment and death. His magnum opus "I Am (Romantic)" is an impressionistic masterpiece that dwells on this idea of duality, of following this higher purpose of communism, the dualism of "the end justifies the means" or giving in to humanism, represented as the hero's mother. The story paints the bleak and depressing reality: "But it was a reality: predatory and cruel, like a pack of hungry wolves. It was hopeless reality, inevitable as death itself." The next trailblazer of modernism was Ivan Bahrianyi. While Khvylovy represented Ukrainian ideological struggle, Ivan Bahrianyi represented struggle in its rawest form. Painter by profession, writer by choice, he spoke his mind, took part in different literary groups and published his works in which he did the worst kind of crime there is, speak against the regime and act as a freeman, for what he served 8 years in camps of far east, of taiga, these experiences he outlines in his most famous works, "Tiger Trappers" and "Gethsemane," where he spoke about his brutal experiences. "Tiger Trappers" is such an important work, because it represents the Ukrainian spirit in its very essence. The theme of standing up to fight when all the odds are against you, and having no fear, perfectly encapsulates the spirit of the Ukrainian nation through the centuries.

Now, let's look at the present. Yuriy Ruf, a person beyond intelligent, a PhD in engineering, a terrific poet, was writing poems since he was 14. He wrote about taking pride in your nation, about fighting spirit and will, he even wrote a book for kids. He enlisted on the very first days of the war and tragically died from mortar fire. It is a vicious cycle that doesn't stop. Oleksandr Mykhed is another contemporary, luckily still alive, he's what you'd call a soldier-scientist/writer, the modern historian-chronicler. In "Nickname for Job" he spoke about what it was like to live through this massacre. And in his speech "The Language of War" he expanded on this topic of what it feels like to lose and to hope to not have lost.

The message is to not forget because if we do, evil will get away with murder, so let us remember all the pain, the horror, the brutality that Russia has brought. Let us remember the fear, dread and terror that Ukrainians have lived through, let us not forget.

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