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Юрій Винничук, *Аптекар: роман*, Фоліо, Харків 2015, ss. 443

Yuriy Vynnychuk (born in 1952) is a well-known writer, who in his novels *Malʹva Landa* (2000), *Springtime Games in Autumn Gardens* (2005), and *Tango of Death* (2012) portrayed a distinct image of Lviv. He is also the author of a series of non-fiction books on Lviv, such as *Legends of Lviv* (1999–2003, 6 editions), *Kneips of Lviv* (2000), and *Secrets of the Lviv Cafés* (2001). Lviv is not only the leading theme in Vynnychuk's writings but also his sanctuary, a place he connects to his own mythology – an optimal space where one can realize all of his abilities.

The Pharmacist (Kharkiv, 2015) continues and develops this discourse, although in his latest novel Vynnychuk introduces readers to some unknown features of his talent. Let us begin with chronology. The plot of *The Pharmacist* begins in the distant 17th century, in the years 1636–1648, a period notable for Ukrainians because of an event that took place during this time established the national consciousness of Ukrainians – that is, the war for liberation of Hetman Bohdan Khmelnitsky, during the course of which Ukrainian Cossacks liberated Ukraine from the rule of the Polish nobility, although as a consequence they were unable to fully appreciate this victory, and fell under the influence of the neighboring Russia. Other writers, such as Petro Panch, Ivan Le, Pavlo Zahrebelʹnyi, and Roman Ivanychuk, usually wrote about this period of Ukrainian history in

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order to strengthen the national-patriotic feelings. However, the discourse in *The Pharmacist* is completely different. It appears that the author intentionally chose such a problematic period, however, he is not at all concerned with the popular uprising. Moreover, he seems indifferent to the problems of Ukrainian self-consciousness. Nevertheless, he intentionally creates the image of Old Lviv as a haven of cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism. In the city all citizens are equal no matter what their religious or ethnic background is, be it German tradesmen, Polish or Ukrainian noblemen, Italian merchants, or Spanish corsairs. The author specifically distances himself from the stereotypes present in Ukrainian historical literature. His novel is principally ahistorical, although the realities of the old times are recreated with the requisite effort and skill. Vynnychuk's novel has more in common with European, that is, postmodern, intellectual novels of Umberto Eco, Milorad Pavić, and Patrick Süskind, than with Ukrainian historical literature. First of all, this similarity is reflected in the way Vynnychuk writes about his individual fantasies about the past, and the adventure themes, which include merely historical personages are participants, and focuses on the exposition of man as an individual member of a community, and at the same time an outstanding personality, a creator, an intellectual, and a rebel against social injustice and falsehood.

It is precisely characters of this type which appear in the *Pharmacist.* They are defined by an internal dualism, the division of their own 'self', which nicely combines with a code of honor and morality. That is, they are not those, who pretend to hide something which may be seen as undesirable or shameful. The protagonist Lukash Hulevich, a medical doctor and a pharmacist, returns to Lviv from Italy pretending to be his deceased friend Martin Airer from Zaltsburg, and who is always afraid of being discovered. The brave young lady Yuliana also uses a similar technique of wearing a mask: to study medicine in a Western university, she pretends to be a young man and is later forced to hide her gender in order to continue her education. The country girl Ruta who is engaged in witchcraft and miraculous salvation also feels like an outsider in Old Lviv. Another example is the mysterious Albert Kalkbrenner, a well-known adventurer who ran away from persecution in Prague and spends his nights on alchemy and black magic, and dreams of creating a synthetic man – a *golem*. Lviv becomes a good place for him to engage in such risky experiments. Even the servants of the pharmacist, Halshka and Aizek, have their own secrets, as does, indeed, Kasper, the city executioner. On the other hand, the duality of reality also appears in the representatives of the city's elite: judges, merchants, and advisors. Specifically, the

colorful burgomaster Bartolomey Zimorowicz, who was, in fact, a real historical figure, is at the same time a strict mayor and a poet and a humanist.

Basically, Vynnychuk's Lviv is a city of metamorphosis: the private sphere seems completely different from the public sphere, the city appears to have a dualistic and contradictory identity, which does not correspond with its public image. According to Vynnychuk, this is a 'city-chameleon':

> Мінливе і непостійне, як вродлива жінка, яка знає собі ціну. Тут багаті вдають, що вони менш багаті, а бідні – що вони менш бідні. Львів манить до себе і водночас віддаляється, закохує і зраджує, продає себе, не продавши. Ось ти думаєш, що він уже твій, а він – як пісок поміж пальців (p. 248)[1].

According to the author, Lviv is presented as a Renaissance–Baroque city, where not only the trade routes of the West and East cross, but also languages, cultures, the spheres of influence, traditions, and ways of thinking overlap. This open city also has its own mysteries, opening its secrets to only the most adept pathfinders. This is precisely how the characters of Vynnychuk's novel appear: Lukash, Yuliana, Kasper, Ruta, Zimorowicz, and others. The dualistic nature of Lviv, its specific mixture of material and ephemeral exists even in the descriptions of the scenery. Vynnychuk switches from the description of buildings and squares to smells, sounds, and shadows. In this way, he shows readers that senses have no less meaning in the life of the city than its public image of the 'Altanus in heaven,' which is full of the gifts of the earth and exotic goods from foreign lands. The closeness to the center of Galicia becomes a space, which keeps many secrets, and these, it appears, are not appreciated by the characters of *The Pharmacist*: passionate pathfinders, who come to live in Lviv and expose the criminals hiding in it.

In this way, the impressions of the world, the calmness, and welfare become superficial, in part because of the year 1648, which foretells of a greater military catastrophe for Western Europe, the Noble-Cossack War. The author skillfully ends his exposition with the eve of this event and does not encompass it fully. However, the world already feels a sharp tension, two wars are already in the

[1] "Changing and inconstant, like a beautiful lady, who knows her worth. Here, the rich pretend that they are less wealthy, and the poor that they are less poor. Lviv beckons and at the same time distances, falls in love and betrays, sells itself, without selling. And so, you think, that it is already yours, but it, like sand, falls through your fingers".

air. One part of the novel is titled: *Premonitions of War.* It reflects the general atmosphere of this time. After all, it is not for no reason that Lukash Hulevich and Yuliana come to Lviv, enriched by their great experience of war with the Turks. It is this experience which has made them stronger and more experienced. The ruminations of the author on this theme provide us with a surprisingly current perspective that can be linked to some contemporary times, the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian War and the human tragedy associated with it:

> …Людина, яка вже опинилася коли-небудь у горнилі війни, ніколи не зможе почуватися затишно пізніше, коли війна завершиться. Бо, пройшовши війну, ти стаєш кимось, хто спізнав істину, і ти навіть готовий її проповідувати. Але нема кому слухати. Пробувши скількись часу в бруді і крові, ти хочеш бачити світ чистим і неспотвореним, чесним і справедливим. Але натомість бачиш щось зовсім інше… Душа з цим не годна змиритися. Душа бунтує і рветься до бою… (p. 354)[2].

The pressure grows rapidly and is about to erupt into an open conflict. In one exceptional episode of *The Pharmacist,* the Ukrainian nobleman and writer Yuriy Nemyrycz, who was also a historical figure, appeals to the Lviv elite, and convincingly calls for war with Muscovy, as he believes it to be inevitable. He exposes the Polish nobility and the suppression of the Orthodox Ruthenian peasants. It is as if the writer seeks to hold us in this wonderful historic moment, in the fragile balance of power, which is just about to erupt into a terrible war. The condition of 'premonition of war,' when, it seems, it is not yet too late to avoid it and save the lives of many people.

Yuriy Vynnychuk is a well-known master of literary stylizations and mystifications. This layer of his talent is exceptionally shown in *The Pharmacist.* He creates a particular *text within a text,* presented in the form of the diary of Lukash Hulevich, which was purported to have been written during the time of his residency in Lviv. He is interested in various legends and tales about witches, demons, evildoing, and executions, which took place and were popular

[2] "…A person who at some point already found himself in the heat of a battle will never feel comfortable, once the war is over. This is because, having gone through war, you become a person who has found the truth, and you are even ready to preach it. But there is nobody who will listen. Spending some time in dirt and blood, you want to see the world as clean unsullied, honest, and fair. However, instead of this, you see something entirely different… a soul cannot contend with this. A soul rebels and seeks out the battle…"

in the medieval city. This is supposed to create an irreproducible and specific character of Lviv. With haste and skillfulness, Vinnuchuk also uses techniques from popular literature, attracting motifs and topics such as the motif of travel, *mésalliance,* secret love, the temptation of the Devil, and mystical experiments. He also expertly uses Faustian motifs (the experimentation of the alchemist Kalkbrenner) and the detective theme – the search for criminals and their punishment for harassment and killing of a Lviv girl. Generally speaking, through the entire text the author confidently caries an intrigue, exposing it only in the last episodes. He also describes the specific colorful scenes, such as public festivals and city executions. And yet considering this, the whole novel is lively and easy to read, it does not bore the reader. In all these aspects, *The Pharmacist* includes tendencies present in contemporary European novels, as it contains the typical set of artistic modes which engage the readers, satisfy their curiosity for the hidden, mystical side of human life.

Vynnychuk's *The Pharmacist* is a brilliant novel written by a skillful writer able to provide readers with a significant literary experience, because of his ability to develop a complex theme and not forget about the artistic details. The author creates a specific urban epic, underlining the multiple meanings and contradictions of Lviv and its inhabitants. Lviv appears as a 'chameleon-city,' which engages and convinces the reader. Moreover, the novel expresses universal and still relevant conflicts of interests and values, such as honor and the lack of it, humanism and immorality, sincerity and hypocrisy.