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ETHICAL VS IDEOLOGICAL IN THE LITERARY DISCUSSIONS IN SOVIET UKRAINE IN THE 1920S: BORIS EIKHENBAUM IN KHARKIV IN 1926¹

Abstract

The article examines the theoretical discussions on the dualism of “form” and “content” in literature and art that took place in Soviet Ukraine in the mid-1920s. The subject is considered in the context of the development of two competitive approaches of study of literature and art — Russian formalism and Marxism. The problem is observed through the comparison of ethical and ideological positions of the modernists and Marxists in Russia and Ukraine in the 1920s.

Key words: formalism, modernism, Marxism, Soviet Ukraine, Eikhenbaum

INTRODUCTION

During the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century, in the secularised world, literature and art along with philosophy took over the main function of enlightenment and education. Through them, a person stepped into a range of ethical problems and became an adept of an established social and moral system. But from the second half of the 19th century, ethical and aesthetic aspects strongly diverge. In literature, this discrepancy is easily illustrated by the parallel coexistence of critical realism and late romanticism. If the critical realism is characterised by the inferiority of the aesthetic aspect to the social and the

¹ The article was written when I was a visiting PhD student at Queen Mary University of London. I would like to thank my supervisor, professor Galin Tihanov, who always inspired me in my research.

ethical ones, then for the late romanticism this paradigm is different — an aesthetic, “formal” aspect is understood as the most (sometimes the only) important thing. In other words, from the second half of the 19th century, with the development of late romanticism and the beginning of modernism the aesthetic approach “undermines” the ethical one. However, this does not mean that modernists were no longer interested in ethical issues.

In realism, “ethical” was understood as a predicate of the socio-psychological reality, but late romanticism² / early modernism understood “reality” as something totally different than realism. For example, late Romantics saw the true reality outside the ordinary world, which they did not consider as real. Most of them had seen the true reality, Kant’s “thing-in-itself” in aesthetic, ideal or symbolical spheres. For Symbolists, reality meant the “highest reality”, comprehended by symbols, poetic intuition, and illumination³. Surrealists invented the concept of “super-reality” hidden in the subconsciousness⁴. The middle and the second half of the 19th century is not only the epoch of critical realism and late romanticism, but also the time of the emergence of ideology in the modern meaning of the term⁵; Marxism, Nationalism, Racism and even “Laissez-faire Liberalism” had appeared at that time⁶.

It would be helpful to indicate the connection, in particular of Marxist ideology and late romanticism. The fundamental document of Marxism — *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) — begins with a phrase that would have done honour to any romantic writer: “The spectre is haunting Europe ...”⁷ Like critical realism and late modernism, Marxism proclaimed the breakthrough to the “true reality” as its main goal. For Marxism this true reality was the reality of “social relations of production” hidden under the “fake reality” of class society: under its politics, culture, religion etc., especially under so-called “false consciousness” of bourgeois society (the term coined by Engels). In Marx’s words:

² Following a long tradition of “modernity studies” we understand “late romanticism” as one of the phenomena (or implication) of “modernism”. See more: M.C. B o w r a, *The Romantic Imagination*, New York 1949.

³ M. W a c h t e l, *Goethe, Novalis, and the Poetics of Vyacheslav Ivanov*, Madison 1994, p. 66.

⁴ Read more: J. C h e n i e u x - G e n d r o n, *Surrealism*, New York 1990.

⁵ As a system of ideas and ideals, especially one which forms the basis of economic or political theory and policy. Some reflections on the term and its history: L. A l t h u s s e r, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*, in: *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, New York 1971, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>.

⁶ I. B e r l i n, *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age: Their Rise and Influence on Modern Thought*, London 2006.

⁷ Quote from Samuel Moore translation (in collaboration with Frederick Engels), 1888: K. M a r x, F. E n g e l s, *Selected Works*, vol. 1, Moscow 1969, p. 100.

The social relations within which [humans] produce, the social relations of production... in their totality form what are called social relations, society, and specifically a society at a determinate historical stage of development, a society with a peculiar, distinctive character. Ancient society, feudal society, bourgeois society are such totalities of relations of production, each of which at the same time denotes a special stage of development in the history of mankind⁸.

It could be argued that from the second half of the 19th century the aesthetic, ethical and ideological started mixing together. It is here the starting point of a strange union between many late romantic aesthetes, radical modernists and the supporters of the Marxist (communist) ideology. It was supposed that ethical judgment could not be based on divine revelation, or even on Ratio, or on any other immanent idea, but any real ethical judgment should “serve” the interests of the “true reality” of Marxists or modernists. Exactly on such grounds the well-known “marriage” between some of late romantics / early modernists and nationalism and even racism (proto fascism) had started.

But this “strange” romance came to an end in the second decade of 20th century. Opposing the mundane reality of bourgeois society with its “anthropocentric” ethics, modernists and Marxist ideologists parted ways when it came to the very difference of the object, they took for the “true reality.” That was not just a “difference”; that was a gap between them. For modernists, the true reality was aesthetic in nature, while for Marxists it was a reality of social injustice which can be radically cured by revolution and “proletarian dictatorship” only⁹. In this situation, the Bolsheviks couldn’t allow even the very existence of those who didn’t share their approach to “reality”. As Maria Mikhailova underlines in her work *Marxists Without a Future. Marxism and Literary Criticism (1890–1910s)*, Georgii Plekhanov was one of the first to authorise the combination of a participant in political life and a literary critic in one person.¹⁰ The better historian of art, in his conviction, would be not a writer or a scholar, but a “practical figure”. And the best critic would be the one who is politically biased and standing on a class point of view.¹¹ In other words, such an approach implied the possibility of making an ethical assessment based on the ideological position of the ruling class (proletariat) and its psychology, in Plekhanov’s terms.

The marriage between radical aesthetics and radical ideology was very short, and it ended up in a flood of harsh official Marxist criticism aimed at Soviet

⁸ Marx and Engels, 1956–71, vol. 6, p. 408; Marx and Engels, 1975, vol. 9, p. 212.

⁹ Read more: K. Kobrin, *Chelovek dvadcatykh godov. Sluchai Lidii Ginzburg*, in: *Modernité v izbrannykh shizhetach*, Moskva 2015, p. 151–200.

¹⁰ M. Mikhailova, *Marksisty bez budushchego. Marksizm i literaturnaiia kritika (1890–1910-e gg.)*, Moskva 2017, p. 35–36.

¹¹ G. Plekhanov, *Sud’by russkoi kritiki*, “Novoe slovo” 4, 1987, pp. 63–92.

modernists (whom they called “fellow travellers”¹² to the shining heights of future utopian society), and — several years after — in the ruthless purges of aesthetic dissidents. This happened after the end of Civil War in the former Russian Empire. All attempts by radical modernists (including literary theorists) to become a core of mainstream culture in the triumphant “new society” failed. And the question of ethics based on ideological values became one of the most important in this process, if not the most important one.

A STRANGE UNION BETWEEN MODERNISTS AND MARXISTS

It is not a secret that until 1917 many participants in Russian literary and artistic modernist movements and groups expressed sympathy for the ideas of socialism and communism (Alexander Blok, Maksim Gorky, Vladimir Mayakovsky etc.). The point of convergence of their ethical positions was precisely the very point we discussed above. This is what let Gorky preach cruel measures against the Russian “patriarchal” peasantry¹³, and Blok — to glorify the revolutionary thugs and murderers in the poem “The Twelve” (1918), whom he depicted as the apostles of the new ethics. Don’t forget, Jesus Christ himself leads them in the ending of the poem:

*В белом венчике из роз —
 Впереди — Исус Христос.
 (Crowned with a wreath of roses white,
 Ahead of them — goes Jesus Christ).¹⁴*

As mentioned above, the mutual disappointment started at the end of the Civil War. The triumph of the Revolution of 1917 showed that the aims of the victorious ideology and the modernist project were different. Here it is worth recalling the fate of Viktor Shklovsky, one of the founders of OPOIAZ¹⁵, who

¹² The term “fellow traveller” (also “poputchik,” ‘one who travels the same path’) was invented by Leon Trotsky to identify the indecisive intellectuals, who were sympathetic to the Communist regime, but were not the formal members of any organisation.

¹³ Л. П о л ’ а к о в а, *M. Gorkii o russkom krestianstve. Kontur problemy*, „Vestnik TGU” 2 (26), 2002, p. 71–74.

¹⁴ Translated by Maria Carlson for the outreach site “Russia’s Great War and Revolution” www.russiasgreatwar.org/. Quoted from <https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/handle/1808/6598>. Date accessed: 30.3.2019.

¹⁵ OPOIAZ (Society for the Study of Poetic Language) — Russian acronym created from «Общество по изучению поэтического языка», which along with the Moscow Linguistic Circle was one of the precursor groups to Russian Formalism. The group was formed in St Petersburg, Russia, in 1916, by a group of students and professors working in literary and

until 1921 simultaneously participated, and even “made” two revolutions at the same time: the political one and the modernist revolution in literary theory. The reader of his famous autobiographical book *A Sentimental Journey: Memoirs 1917–1922*, is impressed by a convincing sense of the narrator’s ethical rightness and even infallibility. The hero transforms the world of two realities — social and aesthetic (life and theory) — at the same time¹⁶.

But already after 1923 Shklovsky and other Russian formalists¹⁷ drew double fire of criticism from Marxist ideologists. On the one hand, it was Leon Trotsky¹⁸, in 1917–1924 the next most popular and powerful Soviet leader after Lenin, on the other, the formalists were criticised by the members of the so-called “proletarian writers” organisations and groups who considered themselves as the more hardcore and “real” Marxists than the official Soviet ideologists and leaders themselves.¹⁹ The main criticism from the Marxist camp was aimed at Formalism as an ideological and bourgeois worldview that opposes the Marxist understanding of literature. Maria Mikhailova highlights that such an approach was not new as “from the very beginning, a part of Marxist criticism was aimed only at the propaganda of a new worldview, and was not interested in developing a specific approach to literary phenomena. But the flatness, the lack of alternatives, became really signs of the Bolshevik partisanship, which claimed to establish a hard line in determining the quality of literary production.”²⁰

language studies. Its members included Viktor Shklovsky, Boris Eikhenbaum, Yury Tynyanov and Roman Jakobson. At different times, OPOIAZ included E. Polivanov, L. Jakubinsky, O. Brik, V. Vinogradov, V. Zhirmunsky etc. The group was interested in uncovering the working mechanisms of literary technique, or more precisely identifying the specific quality of language use that separated the literary text from the non-literary text. Subsequently, the Formalist method had a great influence on the theory of structuralism and the movement of the so-called New Criticism.

¹⁶ More on the relationships between Revolution and first generation of Soviet Russian intelligentsia in the brilliant Lidia Ginzburg’s essay “Generation at a Turning Point.” *Lidia Ginzburg’s Alternative Literary Identities. A Collection of Articles and New Translations*. Edited by Emily Van Buskirk, Andrei Zorin. Peter Lang, Bern 2012, p. 369–382.

¹⁷ Here and continuing in this article, Formalism refers to the theory of the Formalist method developed by OPOIAZ. At the heart of the Formalist method lies the idea of the immanence of literature and, therefore, an appeal to study the internal laws of its development. Formalists believed the main problem of literary criticism is the specificity in the form of the work, and all the elements of which it is composed are constructive elements. Formalists saw that the main task of literary criticism is in the analysis of separate devices that form a basis of the construction of the artwork.

¹⁸ L. Trotsky, *Literatura i revoliutsiia*, “Pravda” 166, 1923.

¹⁹ Since 1924, on the pages of such journals as *Na literaturnom postu* (At the Literary Post), *RAPP*, *Proletarskaia literatura* (Proletarian Literature) Formalism was actively criticised by the Marxist camp. See more: V. Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History-Doctrine*, Yale 1981.

²⁰ M. Mikhailova, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

A similar situation can be found not only in the Russia of the 1920s, but also in other national republics of the USSR. In these cases, the national specific couldn't cover the main plot about the relationships of ethical and ideological in literature and art.

DISCUSSION AROUND BORIS EIKHENBAUM'S ARTICLE "THE THEORY OF THE 'FORMAL METHOD'"

This was fully experienced by Boris Eikhenbaum, who came to Kharkiv in April 1926 to read three open lectures on the theory of Russian Formalism: "What is the Formal Method", "The Struggle for Literature", and the topic of the third one was his new brand theory of "literaturnyi byt" (literary environment).²¹ Afterwards, in the August issue of the journal *Chervonyi Shliakh*²², the Ukrainian translation of Eikhenbaum's article "The Theory of the 'Formal Method'" was published.

This issue also included two articles by Ukrainian critics considering Eikhenbaum's text and lectures as well. These are "The Sociological Method in History and Literary Theory" by psychophysicologist Zaharii Chuchmarëv and "The Formal Method in Literature" by literary historian Ahapii Shamrai. The article by literary critic Viktor Boiko, the next participant in the discussion, "Formalism and Marxism", was published in the December issue. And finally, in the journal *Krasnoe Slovo*²³ in 1927, appeared the article "Formalism and Its Paths" by the literary critic Anatolii Mashkin.

²¹ Both Boiko and Mashkin in their articles talk about the Eikhenbaum's three lectures, while Boiko indicates the dates of April 16–18. However, in local newspapers "Vesti VUTSK" and "Kommunist" of April 17 and 18, there was a note about two lectures that took place on April 18 and 19 in the House of Scientists. You can also find out from the newspapers that after his visit to Kharkiv, Eikhenbaum went to Kyiv, which means that he had a "Ukrainian tour." See: Lekcii prof. B. Eikhenbauma v Budyнку Vchenych, "Visti VUTSK", 17 April (1926); Lekcyi i disputy v Dome Uchenykh: Lekcyi B. Eikhenbauma, "Communist", 18 April (1926).

²² *Chervonyi Shliakh* (Red Way) was a social, political, and literary monthly journal, which was published in 1923–1936 in Kharkiv by State Publishing House of the Ukrainian SSR. In 1923–1926 a Ukrainian politician and activist Oleksandr Shums'kyi was its editor-in-chief. In 1926 Shums'kyi was accused of nationalism and had been fired from the position as well as from the position of People's Commissar of Education. In 1926 Mykhailo Ialovy and Mykola Khvylovyi became editors-in-chief of the journal for a short period, but after that they were fired on the same ground as well. During the 1920s the journal represented a lot of Soviet Ukrainian literary groups.

²³ The literary journal *Krasnoe slovo* (Red Word) was one of the publications of the All-Ukrainian Union of Proletarian Writers (VUSPP), created in 1926. At that time the journal was published in Kharkiv by State Publishing House of the Ukrainian SSR. It was aimed on promoting Ukrainian culture among Russian-speaking readers. The journal had been publishing in Russian.

The discussion that arose around Eikhenbaum's article serves as one of the best examples of how ethical, aesthetic and ideological matters and attitudes faced each other in early Soviet culture.

The retrospective logic of Eikhenbaum's article stretches from the phonetic aspects of the poetry, through the Formalist antithesis of the "poetic language" / "common language," and to the problem of the social and cultural institution of literature — the "literary environment." The formalists approach to the "literary environment" was the outcome of two synchronous, contextual phenomenon changes²⁴. First, that was an outcome of increasing ideological press of Soviet ideology and its cultural institutions. As Viktor Erlich notes, from the mid-1920s, Formalism began to be perceived as a serious competitor to "historical materialism"²⁵. Secondly, the concept of "literary environment" appeared as a result of the crisis of Russian formalist theory itself. In the mid-1920s, Russian formalists tried to go on with their theory and to fit it (and to fit themselves of course) into the new Soviet context, where literature had been considered as a sort of "ideological trumpet", as one of the main tools in the construction of a new communist society.

Here we will discuss the talking points of three participants of the discussion — Chuchmarëv, Boiko and Mashkin, all of whom based their positions on the grounds of Marxist conception of literature.

1.

In his article "The Sociological Method in the History and Theory of Literature", Zakharii Chuchmarëv speaks from the standpoint of reflexology of his time. The critic himself was a specialist in the field of psychophysiology and psychology of labour. Since 1923, he had worked as a researcher at the psychophysiological laboratory of Kharkiv Psycho-Neurological Institute, and from 1927 he was the head of it. During this period, he was engaged in the study of the psychophysiological conditions, connected to the professional exhaustion of a person.

Chuchmarëv had attacked Formalism as an "antipsychological" phenomenon. In his article, he appeals to some of OPOIAZ works, mentioned by Eikhenbaum in his text. Chuchmarëv quotes a passage from Lev Jakubinsky's work *O zvu-kach poeticheskogo iazyka* (The Phonation of Poetic Language): "<...> if a poet experiences such emotions, that provoke a smile, he <...> will avoid sounds

²⁴ Read more: A. Aage Hansen-Löve, *Der russische Formalismus. Methodologische Rekonstruktion seiner Entwicklung aus dem Prinzip der Verfremdung*, Wien 1978.

²⁵ V. Erlich, *Russian Formalism: History, Doctrine*, Yale 1981, p. 97.

formed by pushing his lips forward (o, u).”²⁶ In this statement, the critic sees the interdependence between the poetic form and psychology, so he concludes: “Jakubinsky in verses transfers the study of form to the soil of psychology, i.e. draws attention to the psychological experience that causes this form.”²⁷ Thus, the “emotional experience” in Chuchmarëv’s conception is a sort of “natural” starting point to which the author subordinates the external form which is supposed to express this experience. Then, starting from the works of Vladimir Friche²⁸ and Gorgii Plekhanov, Chuchmarëv replaces the psychological factor with an economic one which is “historically monumental and solid”, in his opinion. This argument influences Chuchmarëv’s interpretation of Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*. The critic reduced the content of the novel to a number of social and psychological determinants: to the decline of the Spanish nobility in the beginning of 17th century and the growth of the bourgeoisie, as well as to Cervantes’ social consciousness and even emotions. So Chuchmarëv summarises: “The construction of the novel, its entire form is the result of Cervantes’ psychological experiences that are defined by the economic factor.”²⁹

From the standpoint of psychology, Chuchmarëv interprets Eikhenbaum’s conception of the “literary environment”: “<...> the same form can cause different experiences-meanings in the reader; because of this the researchers of the form in its functional aspect <...> should turn to the psychology of the reader and writer, and then look for the reasons for psychology too.”³⁰ Such reasons, Chuchmarëv sees in the class nature of society.

However, for all his bias Chuchmarëv reasonably notes that formalists, unwilling to admit, find themselves within the framework of “psychological aesthetics.” As Ilona Svetikova notes, the antipsychologism of the Formal school arose on the wave of a common European struggle with psychologism as the main course of the humanities in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries. However, outwardly postulating a break with the psychological school, the formalists still used some of its reasoning and methods³¹.

Finally, Chuchmarëv sums up his article with a simple and predictable thesis: “Only class ideology can be scientific.”³² At this point, it is important to

²⁶ Z. Chuchmarëv, *Sotsiologichnyi metod v istorii ta teorii literatury*, “Chervonyi shliakh” 7–8, 1926, p. 213.

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ Vladimir Friche (1870–1929) was a Marxist literary critic and teacher. Georgii Plekhanov (1856–1918) was a Russian revolutionary and a Marxist theoretician.

²⁹ Z. Chuchmarëv, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 214.

³¹ I. Svetikova, *Istoki russkogo formalizma: Traditsiia psikhologizma i formalnaia shkola*, Moskva 2005, p. 53.

³² Z. Chuchmarëv, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

emphasise that by making such a statement Chuchmarëv subordinates the scientific approach to the ethical and ideological ones. This means that “scientific objectivity” no longer exists and all the judgments are supposed to be made from the standpoint of class ideology.

2.

Viktor Boiko’s³³ article “Formalism and Marxism” deals mostly with Eikhenbaum’s lectures. From the very title of the article, we can conclude the object of Boiko’s criticism. He tries to “defend” Marxist literary theory from the alleged “attacks” of the formalists. In general, his entire argument is based on the classical Hegelian triad “thesis-antithesis-synthesis”, where the main formalist theoretical points stand for a “thesis”, Boiko tries to dismantle them using Plekhanov’s and Trotsky’s theoretical works on art.

Boiko figures out four main “sins” of Formalism. According to the critic, the first “sin” of formalists lies in the universalisation of their method of studying literature. Boiko defines the Formal method as “auxiliary” for the mainstream revolutionary literary criticism. In his definition, Boiko proceeds from Leon Trotsky’s criticism and amply quotes the party leader: “By declaring form as an essence of poetry, this School reduces its tasks to analysing <...> the etymological and syntactic properties of poetry. This is a partial work <...> certainly, it is necessary and useful if we understand its partial, rough, ancillary and preparatory character.”³⁴

The second “sin” of the formalists Boiko sees in the “discard of content”. However, the author gives formalists credit for their appeal to study the formal aspect of the literary works. According to Boiko, two amendments should be made here. The first is the requirement to study not only the form, but also the content. The second is to “limit the material”. Based on Plekhanov’s thesis that literary work “could be only such that conveys something to us through images rather than logical arguments,”³⁵ Boiko disputes the formalist position that any verbal work can serve as an object of historical and literary study.

³³ Vasyli’ Boiko (1893–1938) — Ukrainian political figure and a literary critic. In 1917 he graduated from Kyiv University, was a member of the Kyiv political organization the TUP (Association of Ukrainian Progressists), one of the founders of the Ukrainian student movement. Since 1917 Boiko was a member of the Ukrainian Party of Social Democrats. In April 1917 he was elected as a member of the Tsentralna rada (Central Rada). From 1918 he was teaching at universities and institutions in Kyiv. In the early 1920s Boiko moved to Kharkiv. Since 1926 he was a head of the Chair of literature at the Research Institute of Literary Studies. In 1933 he was accused of nationalism and sent to the Urals, where he taught Russian literature at the Verkhneuralsk Pedagogical Institute. He died of a heart attack.

³⁴ Z. Chuchmarëv, *op. cit.*, p. 232.

³⁵ V. Boiko, *Formalizm i marksyzm (z pryvodu lekcii prof. Eikhenbauma)*, “Chervonyi sliakh” 11–12, 1926, p. 147.

The next “sin” the critic sees “in the theory of complete immanence of literature.”³⁶ As the main counterarguments, Boiko refers to the classic Marxist formula — “literature is a mirror of the class struggle”: “It gives new material for art and literature, puts forward a new content, which requires a new form.”³⁷ Boiko criticises formalists for their “unwillingness to study the reasons of literary evolution” and also for the “theory of adjacency of literature”. In such a way, the critic denotes Eikhenbaum’s conception of “literary environment”, in which he sees the fourth “sin.”

Boiko sums up his article with a quite predictable question: “Are formalists friends or enemies of us?” And concludes: “Formalists are becoming the enemies of Marxism with their general theoretical arguments, their initial philosophical position.”³⁸

Boiko’s article, in a sense, could be considered as a classic example of Marxist criticism, based on the understanding of literature as an ideological tool in the hands of “the most revolutionary class” and its party; the main functions of literature are determined by the social system and can be reduced to such categories as “ideology,” “class,” and “accessibility.”

It is important to note here that criticism of the Formal method is conducted by Boiko in two directions — as an ideological platform that is hostile to Marxism, and as a “sum of devices” applicable to the study of a literary work. Therefore, according to the critic, Marxism must adapt some formalist approaches in the field of literary study in order to strengthen its method. In general, the development of the Formalist theory in the Ukrainian criticism and literature of the 1920s is characterised by a tendency to synthesize or even to mix two “schools”, one being the Formalist school and the other the sociological. In Russian literature, the “formalist and sociological method” was actively developed by Boris Arvatov, who considered art as a system of devices, but “contrary to the Formalist school, as a system entirely determined by social practice.”³⁹ In Ukrainian literature, an important representative of the so called “forsotsy” (formalists-sociologists), was the literary theorist and critic Borys Iakubs’kyi. In 1922, he published a poetry textbook called *Nauka virshuvann’a* (The Art of Versification), which was the first attempt in Ukrainian literature to consistently present the theory of verse, based on the material of Ukrainian poetry. At the same time, Iakubs’kyi was also the founder of the sociological method in Ukrainian literary criticism. His study *Sotsiologichnyi metod v literaturi* (The Sociological Method in Literature) was published in 1923.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 150.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 158.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 162–163.

³⁹ B. Arvatov, *Sotsyologicheskaja poetika*, Moskva 1925, p. 49.

3.

The next participant, Anatolii Mashkin⁴⁰, in his article “Formalism and Its Routes” did not go far from Boiko’s position. However, if Boiko’s arguments were mainly based on references to Plekhanov and Trotsky, Mashkin appeals both to the main theses of Eikhenbaum’s lectures in Kharkiv and to his works on Tolstoy, Akhmatova and Lermontov.

First, Mashkin divides the participants of the discussion into two camps — “sociological” and “formalist”. The so-called “formalist camp”, according to the critic, “focuses its attention on the aesthetic function of the language.”⁴¹ Afterwards, Mashkin focuses on the analysis of the position of the formalists.

As a starting point, Mashkin takes a quotation from Eikhenbaum’s work *Skvoz’ literaturu* (Through Literature 1924), where the author refutes the causal relationship between art and life, temperament and psychology. Such a position looks too subjective for the critic, because Eikhenbaum “is limited to ascertaining phenomena, but their genesis does not interest him at all”: “And so vainly he tries to build a ‘positive’ science of literature <...>. Building positive science means abandoning the idealistic approaches.”⁴² In general, the formalist approach to the analysis of the artistic form is rejected by Mashkin because it is “beyond any dependence on social conditions.”⁴³

At the same time, Mashkin positively appraises the formalists’ interest in studying the “literary environment”, since “environment”, according to the critic, “is one of the links in the chain of social factors that determine art.”⁴⁴ The author summarises: “From his (Eikhenbaum — G.B.) contradictory judgments, after all, there are only two ways out — into even greater metaphysics or into the realm of true science, whose core is the Marx doctrine.”⁴⁵

Thus, in analysing Eikhenbaum’s works, the critic justly names the aesthetic factor as the main in the evolutionary system of Formalism, but overall the

⁴⁰ Anatolii Mashkin (1884–1932) was born in Vyatka (today is Kirov, Russia). In 1902, he joined The Russian Social Democratic Workers Party. He was repeatedly arrested for participating in student demonstrations while he studied at Kazan University. He graduated eventually from St. Petersburg University. He joined the Red Army and participated in the Civil War. In 1919 Mashkin organised the work of the People’s Commissariat for Education in Kharkiv. After the Civil War, he became a professor of Kharkiv Pedagogical Institute of Professional Education and taught literary history at Kharkiv Institute of National Education (today is V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University) and Institute of Marxism. He is the author of several works on literary criticism and language teaching. He died in 1932.

⁴¹ A. Mashkin, “Formalizm” i ego puti, “Krasnoe slovo” 2–3, 1927, p. 151.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 153.

⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 163.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

aesthetic and philosophical position of the formalists is assessed negatively by the critic, primarily in relation to the social model of the functioning of literature. So, it is quite understandable why the formalists' appeal to the "literary environment" is considered by Mashkin as a right step towards the "transition" of some theorists of the Formal school to Marxist positions.

CONCLUSION

The polemic around Eikhenbaum's article and his lectures shows how by the mid-1920s the ethical in the understanding of modernists began to conflict with the ethical in the understanding of the ideologists of Marxism. The latter criticise Formalist theory as un-ethical (the usage of the words like "sin"). Thus, this "crime" against Marxism is interpreted by Ukrainian Marxists in the terminology of dual bipolar system: "Good" (which means theory of class struggle etc.) versus "Bad" (which means dubious aesthetics close to "bourgeois decadence"). That's how "ethical" becomes "ideological" in this particular historical case. At the same time, the critique of the Russian formalists' aesthetic position becomes the starting point of the discussion as a whole.

In other words, as Marxist ideology based on the Marxist conception of "true reality" were comprehended, all competing theoretical positions were not simply rejected, but labelled negatively in the system and terminology of Marxist ethics: the good one could be an opinion or a point of view which is faithful to the only true (Marxist) understanding of society. Again: that is the real reason why Boiko accuses formalists of "sins", calling their views as "hostile" to the only truth of Marxism.

As a postscript, I'd like to notice the famous change in the not just theoretical but ethical position of the formalists themselves. Since the middle of the 1920s, they made an attempt to go beyond the scope of their own method and turned to the study of the social mechanism of the functioning of literature. In this one can see, in a sense, the surrender of their own aesthetic and ethic positions and again — an attempt to re-approach the "ethical", but now in its understanding of the Marxists of course.

Summary

In the 1920s, the avant-garde groups and movements enriched modernist discussions by drawing attention to the fact that the revolution in arts and literature is of the same nature as the political and social ones. Russian formalism positioned itself as a universalist theory aimed to make a revolution in literature. The claims of Marxism — to be universal theory explaining everything and making the only true revolution in history — were of the same nature. However, the problem

of “ethical” became the point of divergence between modernists (in this case — formalists) and Marxists. Opposing the mundane reality of bourgeois society with its “anthropocentric” ethics, modernist and Marxist ideologues parted ways when it came to the very difference of their understanding of the object, they took for the “true reality.” For modernists the “true reality” was of aesthetic nature, for Marxists that was a reality of social injustice which could only be radically cured by Revolution and “proletarian dictatorship”. So, from the mid-1920s Russian formalists drew double fire of criticism from Marxist ideologists. A similar situation can be found not only in the Russia of the 1920s, but also in other national republics of the USSR: in Soviet Ukraine the variability of views on the meaning and social significance of art and literature was limited by political restriction imposed by official communist ideology. In these cases, the national specific couldn’t cover the main plot about the relationships of ethical and ideological in literature and art.

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