

Iurii Lavrinenko ta Iurii Sherekh: Lystuvannia 1945-1949 [Iurii Lavrinenko and Iurii Sherekh: Letters, 1945-1949]

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Iurii Lavrinenko ta Iurii Sherekh: Lystuvannia 1945-1949 [Iurii Lavrinenko and Iurii Sherekh: Letters, 1945-1949]. Project coordinator, Lesia Iu. Lavrinenko, with the support of Ukrain's'ka Vil'na Akademiia Nauk u SShA, introduction and footnotes by Tetiana Shestopalova. *Khronika 2000: Ukrain's'kyi kul'turolohichnyi al'manakh* [Chronicle 2000: Ukrainian Culturological Almanac], Iurii Buriak, editor-in-chief, edited by Iryna Skakun, compiled by Tamara Skrypka, no. 2 (96), 2013, published 2015. 308 pp. Illustrations. Index. Cloth.

In the 2000s and 2010s, several important editions of the letters of prominent Ukrainian literary figures were published in Ukraine. An exceptionally high standard for this type of publication was set by Vydavnytstvo "Chasopys 'Krytyka'" with its printing in 2005 of volume 1 of the planned ten-volume edition of the collected letters of Panteleimon Kulish (within the 35-volume set *Panteleimon Kulish: Povne zibrannia tvoriv* [Panteleimon Kulish: Complete Edition]). Meticulously gathered from a vast array of diverse sources, Kulish's letters dating from the years 1841 to 1850 were assembled in that volume accompanied by very extensive and detailed explanations and commentaries. Although the book is 648 pages long, the texts of the actual letters take up only 328 pages. The rest of the book presents critical essays, explanatory footnotes, and extraordinarily detailed commentaries shedding light on the contexts of events and the identities of the people discussed by Kulish in his correspondence. Subsequently, in 2008, Vydavnytstvo "Chasopys 'Krytyka'" published another, similarly extensive epistolary collection (compiled by Volodymyr Panchenko): a book of Mykhailo Kotsiubyn's'kyi's letters to Oleksandra Aplaksina, a young employee of the Chernihiv statistics bureau with whom the writer had had an intense platonic relationship during the last years of his life. In that volume, too, less than half of its total 640 pages are devoted to the letters themselves. The remaining pages contain a painstakingly researched and expertly presented scholarly apparatus: essays, footnotes, commentaries, and so on.

However, this exceptionally lofty scholarly standard for the preparation and publication of the collections of letters of prominent Ukrainian literary figures proved overly time-consuming, costly, and difficult to sustain, even for those who had established it. To date, Vydavnytstvo "Chasopys 'Krytyka'" has managed to publish only one more volume of the planned ten-volume set of Kulish's collected letters (volume 2, in 2009; volumes 1 and 2 were compiled by Oles' Fedoruk). Furthermore, it has not produced any other work comparable to the edition of Kotsiubyn's'kyi's letters to Aplaksina. Other publishers, in setting about serious projects of this kind, have designated somewhat less ambitious goals for themselves. Perhaps the best example of a

very important and high-quality publication of this type is the three-volume edition of Lesia Ukrainka's collected letters compiled by Valentyna Prokip (Savchuk), which was put out from 2016 to 2018 by another Kyiv-based publisher—Vydavnychi Dim "Komora." The texts of the letters in that edition have been scrupulously deciphered from the originals. Moreover, dozens of hitherto unknown letters were discovered in the course of archival research. All of the letters are presented in the book with explanatory footnotes and commentaries, but still, the scope of the scholarly apparatus is not as monumental and elaborate as what we see in the Vydavnytstvo "Chasopys 'Krytyka'" editions of the letters of Kulish and of Kotsiubyns'kyi.

The preparers and publisher of the book under review, *Iurii Lavrinenko ta Iurii Sherekh: Lystuvannia 1945-1949*, set for themselves more-modest scholarly goals and standards, but they nevertheless produced a work that represents a highly valuable resource for the study of the history of twentieth-century Ukrainian literature. This book contains the personal correspondence between two major figures in the Ukrainian émigré literary milieu: eminent linguist and popular literary critic Iurii Shevel'ov (pseudonym Iurii Sherekh) and literary critic and political publicist Iurii Lavrinenko (pseudonym Iurii Dyvnych). Their letters cover the years 1945 to 1949, which makes them particularly interesting to scholars, as they provide a rare real-time glimpse into the dynamic and very interesting, but still considerably understudied, Ukrainian literary and cultural life of displaced persons camps (DP camps) in post-World War II Germany and Austria. In fact, this is probably the first book edition of letters dating to and dealing with this important episode in Ukrainian literary history to be published in Ukraine. (Granted, an edition of some of Shevel'ov's letters came out in Kyiv in 2011, under the title *Vybrane lystuvannia na tli doby: 1992-2002* [*Selected Correspondence against the Backdrop of an Epoch, 1992-2002*], but it includes his correspondence with Oksana Zabuzhko from the last years of his life, and its content chiefly concerns the turbulent political and cultural events of the 1990s in Ukraine.)

Between 1945 and 1949, Shevel'ov was one of the most eminent leaders of MUR, that is, *Mystets'kyi ukrains'kyi rukh* (The Artistic Ukrainian Movement)—an organization of Ukrainian émigré writers, dramatists, and literary scholars in Europe (primarily residing in DP camps in the American occupation zone in postwar Germany). Although Ulas Samchuk was the official head of MUR, Shevel'ov was generally considered to be the organization's true leader and main driving force. He was arguably MUR's most prominent literary critic. He edited the prestigious literary-artistic journal *Arka* (*Arch* [Munich]). His counterpart in this correspondence, Lavrinenko, was a strong supporter and sympathizer of MUR, but he never became an active member of the organization. A literary critic, publicist, and

organizer of publishing ventures (an editor of the almanac *Suchasnyk* [*A Contemporary* (Munich)]) and one of the editors of a popular newspaper *Ukrains'ki visti* [*Ukrainian News* (Neu-Ulm)]), Lavrinenko was more closely associated with Ivan Bahrianyi's Ukrainian Revolutionary Democratic Party, which for the most part competed with the nationalist parties with whom Shevel'ov co-operated as editor of *Arka*. As a result, Lavrinenko and Shevel'ov's frequent epistolary discussions of matters and events associated with MUR tended to be polemical in nature, and they focused not so much on day-to-day organizational issues but on fundamental questions of ideology and principle. Thus, they are of particular value and interest to those who study and attempt to understand the complex realities of that fascinating chapter in the history of twentieth-century Ukrainian culture.

This epistolary discourse, moreover, is both uncontrived and passionate, as Lavrinenko and Shevel'ov were fairly close friends and addressed each other with remarkable candour. (They were former fellow students in Kharkiv who developed an especially close bond during their dangerous journey together through Nazi-occupied Ukraine—from Kyiv to Lviv.) They shared many literary interests and fundamentally saw each other as like-minded allies, particularly in the environment dominated by western Ukrainians and their nationalist parties. However, they had markedly diverse temperaments, social backgrounds, and life experiences, and these dissimilarities on occasion caused a palpable feeling of tension and psychological drama in their letters. (Later, during their life in New York, these considerable character differences led Lavrinenko and Shevel'ov to drift apart. This process was discussed by Sherekh [Shevel'ov] in the essay “Z povisty pro dvokh lurkiv” [“From the Tale about Two Lurkos”], which the preparers of this edition decided, for some reason, not to include in their collection.) All of these elements—the genuine feeling of affinity and friendship between the two men, their honest support of each other, and, at the same time, their overtly expressed criticism and some serious differences of opinion communicated with remarkable directness—make this assembly of letters an especially fascinating read. The letters give us considerable insight not only into the events of that period but also into the psyche of both of these prominent émigré intellectuals.

Another thing that makes this collection of letters a memorable resource about the period in question is the aforementioned “real-time” aspect of the letters’ “narrative.” Unlike memoirs written many years and decades after the fact and filtered through the experiences of subsequent events—for example, Sherekh’s “MUR i ia v MURI: Storinky zi spohadiv; Materiialy do istorii ukrains'koi emihratsiinoi literatury” (“MUR and Myself in MUR: Pages from Memoirs; Materials about the History of Ukrainian Émigré Literature” [see 209-38])—Lavrinenko and Shevel'ov's correspondence

provides a rich cache of vivid everyday details and genuine emotions relating to the lives of these noted activists and literati within the insecure environment of postwar Germany. Thus, for example, we gain insight into Shevel'ov's fear of being assassinated by Soviet agents (in the aftermath of Viktor Petrov's disappearance) and how this fear made him particularly secretive about his imminent departure from Germany to Sweden (197). We also learn that Shevel'ov, hiding his identity in Germany, used falsified documents under the name "Jury Tkaczuk" (110). We get an understanding of the difficulties of cross-border correspondence (in relation to the time when Lavrinenko lived in Austria, and Shevel'ov, in Germany). For example, long delays in letter deliveries owing to censorship at the border prompted Lavrinenko to write in Russian and to encourage Shevel'ov to write in German in order to make their letters easier for the censors to understand (39-42). Furthermore, we get a strong sense of the extremely difficult life conditions experienced by both men: severe food shortages, extreme poverty, and serious health issues (Shevel'ov's cardiac and neurological conditions and a plethora of ailments plaguing the Lavrinenko family). Thus, it is quite remarkable that both of these men (as well as some other Ukrainians living in similar circumstances) not only managed to work creatively but in fact made significant contributions to the development of Ukrainian culture and literature.

The lively correspondence between Shevel'ov and Lavrinenko constitutes by far the most valuable asset of the book under review. The scholarly apparatus that accompanies their letters does not measure up to the high standards established by the aforementioned volumes of the letters of Kulish, Kotsiubyns'kyi, and Ukrainka, and, regrettably, it leaves much to be desired. Tetiana Shestopalova's introduction (8-20) is very general and does not really offer any new information or interpretation for those who have read Shevel'ov's own essays and memoirs about MUR. Her footnotes to the letters are rather minimalistic and somewhat haphazard. Occasionally, items of secondary importance in relation to the book's subject matter receive detailed commentaries (e.g., 121), while many important points are left sans explanation. Sometimes, the commenter is unable to decipher abbreviations that are fairly well known in scholarship, such as OM (see 79), which refers to Ob"iednani mystetstva (United Arts—an umbrella organization that was supposed to unite MUR with associations of Ukrainian artists, musicians, and performing artists) and UZh (see 167), which refers to the popular 1920s periodical *Universal'nyi zhurnal* (*Universal Journal* [Kharkiv]). In some cases, blatant errors are introduced. For example, Bohdan Nyzhankivs'kyi is identified in an editorial insertion as "Borys Nyzhankivs'kyi" (87). Errors can also be found in the captions in the photographs section (269-91). For example, Viktor Petrov is misidentified

as Volodymyr Shaian (276), and Shaian is identified as Petrov (275). In addition, captions refer to Hryhorii Kostiuk (273) and Hryhorii Podoliak (275) without indicating that this was one and the same person; we can also at times observe confusion between Kostiuk (actual name) and Podoliak (pseudonym) in the general text. Finally, the final text section of the book (209-67), which contains various MUR documents and selected articles by Sherekh and by Lavrinenko dedicated to MUR, seems to have been rather randomly assembled. These materials, although interesting in their own right, appear without an introduction or commentaries and are not in any obvious overarching logical order.

In the end, though, scholarly flaws notwithstanding, this edition of eighty-two letters (in total) written between 1945 and 1949 by two eminent Ukrainian émigré literary figures is of great value to literary scholars and, in fact, to all readers interested in the history of modern Ukrainian culture and literature. This assembly of letters from the MUR period can be seen as fairly unique for two reasons. First, for the entire period, Shevel'ov and Lavrinenko lived far away from each other and met in person rather infrequently, and this stimulated extensive correspondence between them that was detailed and descriptive in nature. Second, they took care to preserve these letters in their personal archives. Other collections of letters from that time (for example, the correspondence between Shevel'ov and his close MUR associate Ihor Kostets'kyi, which are preserved in the archive of the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in New York) are generally smaller, inasmuch as a significant number of letters were lost during the turbulent postwar years. But a combined edition of these other collections of letters should certainly be prepared and published. The letters of Shevel'ov and Lavrinenko featured here clearly suggest that the publication of the personal correspondence of other MUR activists would considerably enhance our understanding of this important episode in the history of Ukrainian culture.

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