

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2023.67.07.27>

How to Cite:

Horbolis, L., Kobylko, N., Rudenko, S., Veretiuk, T., & Antonovych, S. (2023). Discourse of disease in Lesia Ukrainka's epistolary. *Amazonia Investiga*, 12(67), 305-316. <https://doi.org/10.34069/AI/2023.67.07.27>


## Discourse of disease in Lesia Ukrainka's epistolary

### Дискурс хвороби в епістолярії Лесі Українки

Received: May 29, 2023

Accepted: July 18, 2023

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
#### Abstract


The article deals with peculiarities of a writer's experience of long-term illness, the influence of the disease on rhythm, lifestyle and creativity, based on Lesia Ukrainka's letters of 1883-1913 to relatives, friends, acquaintances, artists, and public figures. It is found out that the internal picture of the disease has been reflected in the letters with the help of the system of writer's diverse experience, feelings, and emotions. According to the epistolary, Lesia Ukrainka perceived the disease as a yoke, captivity, which prevented her from being proactive, from taking an active part in cultural, artistic, publishing and translation activities. At the same time, the disease built up a discipline, purposefulness of the writer, who worked hard at her educational and intellectual level, in such way cognized her capabilities, outlining the prospects of creativity. The article reveals peculiarities of the disease, changes in the writer's well-being, focuses on creativity as an active resistance to the disease, as a way of achieving self-esteem. The culture of work and rest, attention to the sick body, her scrupulosity in the performance of medical procedures contributed to the creation of acceptable conditions


#### Анотація


У статті на основі листів Лесі Українки 1883–1913 років до рідних, приятелів, знайомих, митців, громадських діячів досліджено особливості переживання письменницею багатолітньої хвороби, вплив недуги на ритм, спосіб життя і творчість. З'ясовано, що внутрішня картина хвороби відображена в листах за допомогою корпусу різноманітних переживань, відчуттів, емоцій авторки. Як засвідчує епістолярій, хворобу Леся Українка розуміла як ярмо, неволю, що заважає бути ініціативною, брати активну участь у культурно-мистецькій, видавничій, перекладацькій діяльності. Водночас хвороба формує дисциплінованість, цілеспрямованість письменниці, яка потужно працює над своїм освітньо-інтелектуальним рівнем, пізнаючи таким чином свої можливості, окреслюючи перспективи творчості. У статті зауважено особливості протікання хвороби, зміни в самопочутті авторки, зацентовано на творчості як активному протистоянні хворобі, способі досягти самоповаги. Культура праці й

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for creative work, which performed a therapeutic function in the life of the writer.

**Keywords:** epistolary, internal picture of the disease, psychology of creativity, drama, body, literary process.

## Introduction

The appeal of literary critics to the epistolary of Ukrainian writers is caused by importance of a number of problems related to theoretical, historical, literary and biographical aspects. Letters are a powerful material for creating a holistic portrait of an artist, forming the idea of creative laboratory secrets, finding out the facts of personal life, temperament, interpersonal relations, the writer's psychological state, as well as the formation of a complete picture of the cultural and artistic movement, the literary process, etc.

In the letters of 1883–1913, Lesia Ukrainka records not only the facts of public, literary and personal life, but also reproduces the course of her illness. Analyzing the writer's epistolary, we start from the concept of "internal picture of the disease", which allows us to reveal fully her character and emotional experiences. The creative process directly depends on the state of the poet's health: when the disease recedes, Lesia Ukrainka revives and becomes more active in public life, she writes and publishes a lot, and vice versa – the exacerbation of the disease prevents creative realization. We find a lot of medical terms, names of physiological processes, procedures and methods of treatment in the letters. A serious illness has effect on the choice of topics, images of poetry and leading motives.

## Theoretical basis

Long time Ukrainian writers' epistolary is of great interest to scholars. That is attested by systematic studies of the theoretical orientation of Zhanna Liakhova (Liakhova, 1996, p. 85-91), Liudmyla Morozova (Morozova, 2006). As well as works on the writers' epistolary of the XVI – beginning of the XVII centuries (Nazaruk, 1994), the second half of the XIX – beginning of the XX centuries (Ilkiv, 2016), 20-50s of the XX century (Kuzmenko, 1998), the second half of the XX century (Mazokha, 2006). A number of thorough scientific publications are devoted to the letters of Ivan Kotliarevskiy, Taras Shevchenko, Panteleimon Kulish, Mykhailo Kotsiubynskiy,

відпочинку, увага до хворого тіла, сумлінність у виконанні медичних процедур тощо сприяли створенню прийнятних умов для творчої праці, що в житті письменниці виконувала терапевтичну функцію.

**Ключові слова:** епістолярій, внутрішня картина хвороби, психологія творчості, драма, тіло, літературний процес.

Pavlo Tychyna and others. Researchers choose different angles of studying epistolary – cultural-historical, psychoanalytic, intimate, they also research letters as a component of a documentary-artistic tradition, as an important segment of cultural-artistic and literary contexts.

Nowadays many issues of the Ukrainian writers' epistolary heritage remain open and need to be studied applying an interdisciplinary approach, current methodology and involving little-known and unknown sources from public and private archives.

Lesia Ukrainka's epistolary has been of interest to theorists, literary historians and textual critics for many decades. For example, Vitalii Sviatovets (Sviatovets, 1981) researched the aesthetic component of the letter, comparing the writer's epistolary to her creativity. Lesia Ukrainka's letters in the book by Ivan Denysiuk and Tamara Skrypka "Noble Nest of the Kosaches" (Denysiuk, Skrypka, 1999) are used as important factual material; Lesia Ukrainka's letters in the works of Solomiia Pavlychko (Pavlychko, 1999; Pavlychko, 2002) are studied in a psychological way. The epistolary dialogue of Lesia Ukrainka and Olha Kobylinska as a manifestation of female friendship is presented in Vira Aheieva work "Female space: Feminist discourse of Ukrainian modernism" (Aheieva, 2008). Lesia Ukrainka and Olha Kobylinska correspondence is presented like "female platonic novel" in Tamara Hundorova's work "*Femina melancholica. Gender and culture in the gender utopia of Olha Kobylinska*" (Hundorova, 2002). Larysa Miroshnichenko in her work "Lesia Ukrainka. Life and Texts" (Miroshnichenko, 2011) highlighted the textual aspects of Lesia Ukrainka's letters. Valentyna Savchuk presented the history of collecting and publishing epistolary legacy of Lesia Ukrainka, analysis of published letters in the source and textual aspects in the monograph "The Fate of Lesia Ukrainka's Letters" (Savchuk, 2011). Serhii Mykhyda (Mykhyda, 2012) made an attempt to reconstruct the psychological portrait

of Lesia Ukrainka, as a modernist. The letters as a psychological text and narrative features of epistolary dialogue of Olha Kobylianska and Lesia Ukrainka are discussed in the monograph "Intimate discourse of the writers' correspondence of the second half of XIX – beginning of XX century" by Anna Ilkiv (Ilkiv, 2016).

### Methodology

The article applies a systemic-descriptive method, which is allowed for a comprehensive characterization of the writer's epistolary, in which the discourse of illness is represented; the biographical method contributed to understanding the unity of the writer's life and work; the cultural-historical method was applied to comprehend the specificity of the historical era; the principles of hermeneutics, receptive aesthetics, and comparative approach facilitated the study of stages and specifics of the course of illness, told in the letters of Lesya Ukrainka.

### Results and discussion

As we can see, Ukrainian epistolography is dominated by works in which Lesia Ukrainka's letters are studied in a psychoanalytic way. The objects of this study are Lesia Ukrainka's letters of the 1876-1913 at full length (published in 3 volumes at the Publishing House "Komora" in 2016-2018), which contained long-term resistance to the disease that has affected on quality of life, creativity, formation of life guidance, views on the writer's place in literature, etc. The information about her illness recorded in Lesia Ukrainka's epistolary is an important segment of cognition of the psychological type, the writer's creative laboratory, as she noted in a letter to Olha Kobylianska dated May 29-30, 1899, paraphrasing Goethe, "who wishes to understand the poet must go to the poet's clinic". In this article the key theses on the impact of the disease on the life and creative work of Lesia Ukrainka are formulated on the basis of a summary of numerous facts from Lesia Ukrainka's letters, which (in view of the article volume) are presented in fragments. The thematically close quotations stated in the material testify not only chronology, but also peculiar continuity of the problem raised in the letters, its long-term "presence" in the complex system of the writer's experiences.

In spite of censorship, letters for Lesia Ukrainka were an active channel of communication not only with relatives, but also with cultural and

artistic movement in general, because she had been far from home – abroad, for a long period of time, and regularly reported about her health, as well as creative, publishing, and public affairs. Besides, the writer did not have a diary. Dialogic, emotional and informative connection with the world is the main argument in favor of Lesia Ukrainka's epistolary. In addition, the primary role was played by an external factor – the disease took her time even to write letters, and therefore, diary was out of question. For Lesia Ukrainka letters were an opportunity to be heard, *to speak of* the disease, to share creative plans, to discuss literature and ways of its development with Ivan Franko, Olha Kobylianska, Mykhailo Pavlyk, Ahatanhel Krymskyi, Nadiia Kybalchych and others. Sincerely and as truthfully as possible Lesia Ukrainka wrote about her illnesses, pain, and general health, trying to hide nothing in the letter to Olena Pchilka, "dear mammy", in such way called always by her daughter. Only a few times, in 1901 when blood began to flow from the throat. In 1902 when pulmonary tuberculosis was suspected. In 1903 when "insomnia and nerves were stuck, the temperature was over 37°C" (Ukrainka, 2018, p. 41) and it was necessary to use morphine and chloral hydrate to have a rest, Lesia Ukrainka kept silence about her health not to disturb her relatives. In different periods of her life and illness she had "trustees" to obtain truthful information about her health, they were Mykhailo Drahomanov, Mykhailo Pavlyk, Antonina Makarova, Olha Kosach (a sister), Olha Kobylianska and Mykhailo Kryvnyiuk. Such ethical and personal approach in correspondence testifies to the culture of feelings and emotions of Lesia Ukrainka that was formed in difficult circumstances, her willingness to share intimacy only with like-minded people who would accept her thoughts with understanding.

The history of illness is reflected in the epistolary of Lesia Ukrainka quite fully, along with the recorded facts of personal, literary, public life of the writer, as well as her relatives and acquaintances. Psychologists actively use the term "internal picture of the disease", that is conscious or unconscious reflection of physical condition in the human psyche. The scientists are convinced that the internal picture of the disease depends on the patient's personality, his general cultural level, social environment, upbringing and is formed under the influence of knowledge about the disease. All these factors should be taken into account when someone studies Lesia Ukrainka's letters, considering that a lot of those things, that has been felt and experienced were

left unwritten, because physical pain (often unbearable) cannot be described and fully expressed even by such a talented person as Lesia Ukrainka.

The writer noted that she had “an extremely Ukrainian and even special Volyn nature” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 125). And in another letter she stated: “I start to believe in my nature – quite enduring” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 166). “Optimism and pessimism, as I am convinced, depends mostly on temperament” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 226), and added: “Who knows, whether I have so much optimism by nature, or there is another reason...” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 317). Admirers and researchers associate Lesia Ukrainka with a strong-willed and always optimistic person. However, the letters somewhat destroy this established idea. Her health-correlated optimism was focused on creative activity: when the disease receded, Lesia Ukrainka revived and became more active in art, public life, she wrote a lot, published, and vice versa – exacerbation of the disease caused pessimism, hysteria, anxiety, because the disease took away precious time needed for active work, hinders creative fulfillment. Lesia Ukrainka’s letters of 1883-1913 speak about pain in her arm, legs, and kidneys, about nervous disorders and extreme weakness, about the fact that she cannot sit for a long time. “My leg is not good, it is getting worse and worse” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 104). “The leg gives trouble as always” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 404), that “walking and riding are equally difficult” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 259). “My health is so-so” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 396), and even “nerves begin to go out of obedience” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 427), “start again from the beginning” my tuberculosis epic and because of it my energy does not increase” (Ukrainka, 2018, p. 372). Generally, Lesia Ukrainka is quite restrained in concluding about her health. “... if it were not an anemia, it would be very good, well, but finally it’s okay – if it can’t be absolutely good, then let it be at least not bad” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 330). However, the information received from doctors about the disease (tuberculosis of the kidneys) was described in details in letters to her mother and sister Olha (who was a doctor) in late 1907 – early 1908.

Duration of the disease, long-term palliatives formed in Lesia Ukrainka awareness of disease chronicity, which had to be accepted and taken into account during life: “it (sick leg. – L. H.) cannot be the same like in other people. It has shortening and chronic dislocation, because after all the bones in it are not as they should be and it cannot be cured” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 277).

Subsequently, tuberculosis is spreading rapidly to the lungs, kidneys. Lesia Ukrainka understood that she had seriously – physically and morally – to prepare herself for a long-term struggle with pain and illness for the sake of life and creativity. After the conclusion about renal tuberculosis and ways of its treatment, she remarks in a letter to the Hrinchenkos, dated February 21, 1908. “The worst prospect for me is that I have to live the rest of my days in a foreign land, because renal tuberculosis demands a very dry and hot climate, but where can I get it in Ukraine?” (Ukrainka, 2018, p. 372). The topic of the foreign land bothered Lesia Ukrainka constantly, this fact evidenced in her letters (“And the worst is that I dislike abroad. Despite the fact that I have lived there for a long time, I have not got accustomed to it” (Ukrainka, 2018, p. 443). “Who doesn’t need to go to foreign country, even a beautiful one, is the happy one, though not always aware of his happiness” (Ukrainka, 2018, p. 452)), and in her works (for example, poetry, dramas “Boiarynia”, “The Orgy”, “Babylonian Captivity”, etc.) and personal experience. The treatments in resorts far from home were not only a financial burden on the budget of Kosach family, but they also exhausted Lesia Ukrainka emotionally (lack of communication, inability to be constantly active in literary, artistic, social, political life, etc.). Such a long “context” of circumstances was a kind of impetus for writing a drama-extravaganza “Forest Song”, in which she reported missing motherland in philosophical symbolic key. The image of Mavka, which she had “kept in mind” for a long time, which was fascinated her “for ages”, was actualized abroad (in the Caucasus, in Kutaisi). The writer called the days of work on the “Forest Song” “the right time”, which is somewhat paradoxical, because this “right time” was provoked by nostalgia. Far from home her identity was actualized and her home became closer, more necessary, and more understandable. It is possible that such a powerful artistic work could appear in a short time abroad. Having been in treatment abroad for a long time, immersed in the disease, feeling its destructive effect on the body, Lesia Ukrainka turned in upon herself, into the understanding of her body and its resources, prospects, although not entirely happy. “Oh, it’s not so much fun to stay all year alone, although there is clear sky and blue sea!” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 158), – she wrote it in a letter to Mykhailo Drahomanov, dated September 3, 1891. Lesia Ukrainka was experienced and tempered by distance, she appreciated moral and financial support of her relatives (when I am at home “I don’t feel excluded in the world” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 161),





and she reconsidered her relations with other writers.

Lesia Ukrainka's letters contain many medical terms, descriptions of sensations, procedures (for example, stretching), postoperative states (for instance, during her staying in Berlin in 1899 and preparation of a plaster device for walking), etc. In such a way the internal picture of the disease is captured, there is a holistic (with a body-centered perspective) image of a strong and disciplined patient who fights hard for the life, wishes to make a complete recovery: "... I have to fight for my life, and somehow ...keep my strength up" (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 133). Lesia Ukrainka expresses her hopes for recovery and a conscious attitude to a long struggle with the disease in her works. For example, in a letter to Mykhailo Kosach, dated May 18, 1890, she quoted a hopelessly reliable poem. "I am on a steep flint mountain / I will lift a heavy stone, / And, carrying that terrible weight, / I will sing a merry song", summing up: "I have about a dozen such poems. So many topics and so little time!" (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 100). So alone, with help of her own intellect, efforts and work (of course, not without the support of relatives) Lesia Ukrainka created a safe space for herself. In the letters, she described pain with varying degrees of severity and duration (weak, aching, unbearable, permanent, and temporary) – when she had pain in the head, neck, arm, throat, lungs, leg, heart. "I say more than once that my nature is "chronic", because really everything in me is chronic, both illness and feelings. As anemia, tuberculosis, hysteria, and friendship, love and hate" (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 133), – she wrote it in a letter to Olha Kobylinska, dated May 29-30, 1899.

Lesia Ukrainka described treatment in Kyiv, in Kharkiv region by the folk healer Paraska Bohush; in Berlin, she noted the results of consultations with leading doctors in Italy, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and she emphasized the changes in the course of the disease. Here is, for example, how the state of health was described after injecting a triple dose of iodoform in Kyiv in the winter of 1897 and using morphine to relieve pain. "It was a very hard time, I hardly came to my senses and I would not allow to do experiments like triple doses of iodoform and other "forced" methods" (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 426). The consequences of iodoform for the weakened organism were severe – "a seizure of forgetfulness with delirium" (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 426). These are the states in which the writer *had to be* in order to live and work.

Lesia Ukrainka's relatives helped her to endure the unbearable pain, as well as correspondence with close people and, of course, the hope for her recovery. "I am going to stay in the hospital until May (this is the period when the body had to recover from the injection of iodoform in winter 1896 in Kyiv. – L. H.), and then maybe this devilry with my leg will pass forever" (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 426). However, there was a long treatment ahead – difficult and exhausting. After treatment in Kyiv, Lesia Ukrainka felled unwell, she could not get up for a long time, that's why she wrote little, lying down and by pencil, because she didn't want to strain and tire her leg by sitting at the table. The complexity of the health situation and at the same time the optimistic attitude of Lesia Ukrainka is expressed in a laconic-categorical conclusion from her letter to Mykhailo Kryvyniuk: "... I have to learn walking..." (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 440). It was 1897 and the 15 years of disease, and the next 15 years would not be less difficult for her body and creativity years.

*Captivity of illness* has a detrimental effect on well-being, way of life, creativity, even handwriting: "...while *rewriting* (here and further in the quote it is Lesia Ukrainka's italics – L. H.) for "Bukovyna" <...> two poems, then laid down three times (to rest. – L. H.) – did anyone hear that?" (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 100), "And my countless "topics" – What will be with them, with my poor orphans?" (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 100), "It is one more trouble, because of *some* (here and further in the quote emphasis were made by Lesia Ukrainka. – L. H.) unknown to me reason, my handwriting becomes even *worse* than it has been!!! It is said that misfortunes do not come single" (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 101). "I don't feel like writing, there is no balance of the soul" (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 116). "I feel that I have somehow lost my temper and I'm sure that no matter what I write, nothing but nonsense would have appeared" (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 161). "I lost my mental balance, and here you have already known there is no style" (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 337), "I do not feel so good to be witty" (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 399). This is a conscious, recorded in numerous letters of the writer's inner understanding of the disease.

The operation in Berlin in 1899, which Lesia Ukrainka hoped for, and called it the "last card", abruptly took away several months of her creative life. Medical procedures required special efforts from the patient. In her letters to her family, she recalled that after the operation, the dressings "were so hard that one could go crazy. The last three nights I can sleep only with help of

bromine and sulfonal, and first of all I could not sleep without morphine. Delirium and all sorts of such things did not give peace of mind to me or to my mother <...>. Then my nerves were so torn that I have been just afraid to write a letter not to frighten people with my mood” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 105). “Lying on my back, very flat and low, in plaster estate, this pose is not poetic and not literary, so I do not write anything but letters <...>. For such purely mechanical reasons, I forgot that I am a writer” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 113). “...the pose was unfavorable, and the mood was even worse, – I did not want to show cowardice, so, all that remained was to keep silent” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 115).

According to the epistolary, Lesia Ukrainka was not satisfied with “plant life”. She strove to work – to write works of art, critical articles, to take an active part in public and political life. Also to translate and to publish books, to collect and record folklore. To prepare for publication Mykhailo Drahomanov’s works, to learn languages, to discuss actively with progressive writers and critics such as Serhii Yefremov, Ivan Franko, Olha Kobylanska, Ahatanhel Krymskyi, to visit theater to “learn all kinds of things” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 118). She wanted “to be printed in order to be independent” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 501). For her it was “far more interesting than all these anemia, tuberculosis, boredom” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 416), because, she was convinced, “my body, though bad, is stubborn and capable of a great struggle” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 431). “One way or another – we will still fight! I still have a long way to go and I think that the *worst* (Lesia Ukrainka’s italics – L. H.) has already passed” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 437). However, as we know from biography of the writer, it did not pass and the disease progressed. So, a letter to sister Olha Kosach, dated September 10, 1909, convinces that the passion to work does not disappear: “... I have a lot of grandiose literary ideas right now and I would like to delay the time of complete disability...” (Ukrainka, 2018, p. 445). The writer had many plans; she strove to fulfill herself, to tell the world important things about literature, to explain to Ukrainians who they are.

Lesia Ukrainka innate desire for self-fulfillment (according to Charlotte Bühler) was supported by her variety activities, which contributed to her intellectual and cultural improvement, growth of her ability to fulfill in difficult life circumstances, with a seriously ill and exhausted body. The writer read a lot, actively responded to notable cultural and artistic events. She was a participant and in-depth analyst of the Ukrainian and foreign

literary process, as evidenced, for example, by articles “Two Directions in Modern Italian Literature (Ada Negri and d’Annunzio)”, “New perspectives and old shadows (A new woman of the western European fiction)”, “Notes on the latest polish literature”, “Utopia in fiction”. As well as letters to Mykhailo Drahomanov, Olena Pchilka, Ivan Franko, Mykhailo Pavlyk and others. Creativity was a spiritual need for Lesia Ukrainka, an opportunity to change reality by adjusting to the course of disease, a way of self-expression, self-affirmation and adaptation to the social environment. Creativity increased the level of her internal and external organization, resisted disease, apathy and monotony of life. While working, she felt needed. With the help of her work, Lesia Ukrainka changed reality in accordance to her views of the world, art, the role and significance of an artist in society.

The works addressed to readers expanded Lesia Ukrainka opportunities to be present in society, to be active in literary and cultural life. With the help of literary characters who are in extreme situations, she sought to share with the public her experiences of strangers, nostalgia, knowledge of pain (physical and moral), loss, strength and weakness, power and powerlessness. Enduring another battle for health, to reveal herself to the reader existentially, emphasizing the strong-willed neo-romantic character (“In the Dense Forest”, “Babylonian Captivity”, etc.) (Bodyk, Horodniuk, Fedorova, 2022). Literary critic Hanna Levchenko (Levchenko, 2013, p. 71) notes the general constitutional tendency of the poetess psyche to hysteria, introverted intuitionism and enthusiastic steroid accentuation of Lesia Ukrainka’s personality. It, according to the researcher, led to the emergence of images of mythologies and religions in her lyricism, stylization of literary genres, to interest to early Christianity in drama; steroid accentuation of character influenced the formal and semantic properties of the writer’s works. In a letter to Osyp Makovei, dated June 9, 1893, the writer noted that she wrote “mostly in those days when I have some sorrow in my heart, the work goes faster” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 201).

Lesia Ukrainka’s optimistic and pessimistic mood and the productivity of her creative work depend not only on her health, but also on the seasons. “In winter my strength was failing a little, but in summer I am optimistic as usual, now more than usually” said in the letter to Mykhailo Pavlyk, dated July 29, 1893. And in a letter to Mykhailo Drahomanov, dated April 17, 1894, she added: “I used to believe in spring and summer” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 276). The warm

season suppresses the disease, promotes health and strengthens the optimistic attitude of the writer, “because I am more optimistic in life than in my literature” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 151). Lesia Ukrainka went to the sea (the Crimea, Italy), to the mountains in Bukovyna – and the diseases subsided, nerves calmed down, anemia receded, cough and fever did not bother.

We have already had the opportunity to note on the basis of Lesia Ukrainka’s letters from the “Crimean period” that the sea took an active part in overcoming the writer’s illness; the sounds of the sea (that was the music as unfulfilled desire due to the disease) triggered the mechanism of ignoring the disease, healing the soul and body. “It is the sea, which helps Lesia Ukrainka to block in her mind the information about the destructive power of the disease, declares victory over the troubles of life” (Horbolis, 2020, p. 188). Appealing to Lesia Ukrainka’s letters from the Crimea, it is appropriate to speak of the writer’s unsatisfied desires to be physically healthy, happy, that are the driving forces of fantasies, “and each individual fantasy is the fulfillment of desires, the correction of dissatisfied reality” (Freud, 2001, p. 111). Thanks to the sea, Lesia Ukrainka hoped for a significant improvement of health, which was necessary for exhausting creative work. The sea was an alternative therapy for the writer’s soul and body.

It should be added that anxiety, restlessness, emotional and physical exhaustion of Lesia Ukrainka body are caused by family problems. She worried about illnesses of her father and husband Klyment Kvitka, difficult family relationships due to sister Olha relations with her fiancé Mykhailo Kryvnyiuk, who was arrested in 1907. But, perhaps, mostly she worried of relatives and friends deaths: uncle Mykhailo Drahomanov (1895), beloved Serhii Merzhynskyi (1901), brother Mykhailo Kosach (1903), father Petro Kosach (1903) – too much for a sick, but strong-willed person. In such difficult periods of life, everyone wants to “lie down and become a petrified” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 366), in such way the “hanging letters” were appeared, as Lesia Ukrainka called them. They are full of sadness, longing, despair and hopelessness. The writer endures unbearable pain and exhausting years of medical procedures, but she can barely withstand the irreparable loss of people infinitely dear to her. But the minutes of despair pass, the pain of loss subsides.

During periods of turmoil, Lesia Ukrainka was both strong and weak. She supported her sick

uncle and his family (at that time she lived in Sofia); during her two-month stay in Minsk with the sick Serhii Merzhynskyi, she was also courageous and patient. “He loved my “stoicism” (*firmness*) and did not tolerate “cowardice””, Lesia Ukrainka wrote in a letter to her friend Vira Kryzhanivska-Tuchapska (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 415). Lesia Ukrainka’s letters describe in detail her emotional state after Mykhailo Drahomanov’s death: “I have now become unsociable” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 370). “Every night I am attacked by such attacks of the sadness that I will one day go mad. I do not know when it will end...” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 388). “My friend, the anguish is so heavy...” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 365) and so on. For a long time, according to the letters, she could not accept the death of her brother Mykhailo – she wrote little, the answers to the letters of her friends were delayed for a long time.

Every time accompanying her dear people in the last way, Lesia Ukrainka found the strength to recover. For example, after the death of uncle Mykhailo Drahomanov, in her letters she noted. “If it had been ancient times, I would have been singing Lazar in letters, but now I will probably get used to souring forever, last winter has something changed in my nature. I don’t know whether it turned out for good or for bad” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 347), “Actually, *we* (Lesia Ukrainka’s italics – L. H.) must have power over ourselves. He (Mykhailo Drahomanov – L. H.) taught me how people suffer disaster and struggle with the fate!.” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 261).

The bereavement of her beloved Serhii Merzhynskyi, as has been known from Lesia Ukrainka’s letters and creative biography, became the impetus for writing “The Obsessed”, a drama that was a powerful reaction of her soul and body to the injustice, which took away her love. It is a defense against death, loneliness, against thoughts of death, it is a fact of connection “which exists between basic organic attitude of the author and that which is expressed in her works” (Vygotskiy, 1998, p. 287). During writing “The Obsessed” there was, according to Sigmund Freud (Freud, 2001), the transition of subconscious desires into artistic images, into creative energy, so the internal mental conflicts found a way out and they were fulfilled in the work. “Art is a necessary discharge of nervous energy and a complex method of balancing body and environment in the critical moments of our behavior,” – says Lev Vygotskyi (Vygotskiy, 1998, p. 279). Lesia Ukrainka’s *drama of life* and personal experience were embodied in the drama “The Obsessed” with the help of allegorical

images, a corpus of deep philosophical problems. So creativity became a kind of refuge for her emotions.

The disease affected personal and creative life of Lesia Ukrainka, changed attitude, guidelines, values. Illness defiantly took away her music (her dream was to play music professionally). Although for a long time Lesia Ukrainka taught others to play and continued to play by herself, immersing herself in musical imagery, explaining the complex world and herself in it. Music therapy, as has been known from the letters, alleviated her pain in Minsk at the bed of sick Serhii Merzhynskyi.

Lesia Ukrainka did not intend to forget about literature because of the illness, it was the last outpost that gave meaning to live – she had creative plans, as she mentioned, “for three lives” and wanted to implement them successfully, identifying herself with literature, productive activity, not disease. Creativity made her free from illness emotionally, thoughts of illness. It was the creative work, which made Lesia Ukrainka intellectually free from illness. “Individual freedom is the highest value in the coordinate system of Lesia Ukrainka, it is associated with the concepts of “will”, “choice” and “responsibility”, – notes rightly the literary critic Lesia Demska-Budzuliak ( Demska-Budzuliak, 2009, p. 11).

The illness required from Lesia Ukrainka to be attentive to her body, to take medication and perform procedures carefully, adhere to the regime and culture of rest and work. Letters of different years prove discipline and obedience of the patient Larysa Kosach. She has followed the doctors’ prescriptions conscientiously, often sacrificing creativity to please her body: not to write a lot so as not to get tired, to write lying down during periods of deteriorating of health, to walk with a stick to avoid swelling of legs, maintain health at resorts (the Crimea, Italy, Egypt), not to be nervous. In her letters, Lesia Ukrainka constantly expressed dissatisfaction with such prescriptions, “medical bridles”, as she called them. For example, she wrote: “I’m sitting “smeared in the oven”... I hardly bargain for permission to write letters” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 368), “I’m lying in plaster fetters” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 107), “Sometimes I am so complaining that one cannot gather me together ...” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 106).

Despite constant attention to the body, Lesia Ukrainka did not get the desired result: the leg hurt not only in the cold season, but also in warm,

interfering to work, nervousness did not disappear; another hard disease was added – renal tuberculosis. Diseases ruthlessly took away precious moments of creativity, full-fledged communication with relatives, writer colleagues, publishers, public figures. Lesia Ukrainka identified the disease with a yoke in her letters, and in the letter to Mykhailo Hrushevskyi, dated May 12, 1910, she sadly stated about dramatic poem “Rufin and Priscilla”: “I’m not sure that I will have ever written so big (means the volume) thing, because my strength is not return, and still falling. I’m not able even to rewrite the same thing for a second time” (Ukrainka, 2018, p. 477).

Pleasing the body and loosing creativity had a negative effect on well-being – so there was a conflict with her body. Here is a brief chronology of this dangerous feeling for every person, with elements of despair, contempt, apathy, followed by long-term (sometimes, unbearable) pain: “When it (her leg. – L. H.) gets better, it will have been a lot of water under the bridge. Well yes, but now I wish it gets better enough that *it will not interfere with my life* (our italics – L. H.), Oh, if it is not my leg, I could do a lot in the world!” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 144). “I start getting tired of caring about myself (what can I say! – I’ve been tired of this for a long time), and I start bargaining for the right to sit at the table for two hours a day. Will I ever be free? After nine years of captivity, I learned a lot of skepticism. And, I wish at least for a year or two to be free from my own yoke” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 148-149). “I am sorry that I have to live like a hermit. I am of no use to people or to myself, but the trouble keeps me so. It would be better...if that desire and that small talent went to someone else, more humane one” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 160). “My leg has not got better radically yet, and my insignificant body and my 15 years’ illness are blamed of the case that it will have to use a knife” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 432). “If the devil hadn’t bedridden me ...” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 435). “...a disabled person like me can make you even more sadness” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 438), “...because I’m so a disabled person who does not want to show herself in society” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 127). “Well, I am not so disabled as not to be able to see people” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 128). “Surgery is killing my muse” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 140). “...while I’m here (in Berlin, after a complicated operation – L. H.), I’m not a writer or even a person. I’m a surgical orthopedic model ... “material”, not a person” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 141). “I am a disabled person, a lost to society, *I have no right* (Lesia Ukrainka’s italics. – L. H.) to finish myself” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 384).



“...finally, I am no longer a person, but a plant” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 386), “I have a lot of grandiose literary ideas right now (this is about the autumn of 1909 – L. H.) and I would like to delay the time of complete disability...” (Ukrainka, 2018, p. 445). “Now I am, to tell the truth, a disabled person, I just do not want to bear my title formally” (Ukrainka, 2018, p. 448-449). From such a hopeless state for many people, Lesia Ukrainka was saved by creativity, for her it was the only way to restore self-esteem – literature, because “when I write, I live” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 69), because “...trouble is trouble, but deed is deed” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 102).

To fulfill herself, the artist looked for a compromise with her body, because the level of her creative activity did not decrease, the goal did not disappear, control over the situation was not lost, the degree of criticism and self-control was not reduced (although, of course there were moments of despair). According to the letters, Lesia Ukrainka adjusted herself to getting used to the pain: “Summer (we are talking about 1898. – L. H.) is passing and I must in advance accept the idea that such attacks of heat and leg pain will be from time to time, because even in the Crimea they have been” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 69). “Attacks of hysteria, weakness of heart... I will soon get used to them” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 89). It seems that the writer does not fully understand the danger of these manifestations of the disease. The need to make concessions to the body was also mentioned in the letter from San Remo to Mykhailo Kryvnyuk. Apparently, contemplating about nervous state of the patient Larysa Kosach, caused by the inability to work actively, the Italian doctor allowed her to write: “... the luminary (a doctor – L. H.) reduced my “working day” and from 6 hours left only 4! Although he said that I should not give up the literary work at all, because it can also harmful influence into my psychology – but more than 4 hours I can’t work. “Well, what can I do for 4 hours?! I just don’t know what I should do in such “expensive time”” (Ukrainka, 2018, p. 83). As you know, creativity is an extremely complex and exhausting process due to mental state, external and internal factors. When the subconscious dominates the consciousness, when inspiration comes, intuitive creative activity is optimized, the artist must release this energy into a work of art, to fulfill it in an image, idea, pathos, plot, etc. The classic (and what is important – actually the author’s) illustration of the creative act is the lines from Lesia Ukrainka’s well-known letter to Liudmyla Starytska-Cherniakhivska, dated May 29, 1912, where the

writer noted the state in which she had been writing the drama-extravaganza “Forest Song”. “I write “only in a fit of insanity,” because then I can only fight (or rather forget about the fight) with exhaustion, fever and other depressing symptoms, when I am simply galvanized by some idea fixe, some invincible force. The crowd of images does not allow me to sleep at night, it torments me *like a new illness* (our italics – L. H.)” (Ukrainka, 2018, p. 589-600). This is a powerful inner energy that should be released and to protect creative personality. Otherwise, the blocked creative potential disturbed the author as an unspeakable desire, hurt like physical pain, which was a complicated unstable state of Lesia Ukrainka health. Her abilities and talents were banned by doctors who did not approve (limit the time) of her creative work not to harm her health. However, as it already was mentioned, creative energy could not be stopped. And her failure to turn into a work of art turned into an examination of the author, an inner dissatisfaction, as evidenced by the eloquent lines from her letter to her sister Olha Kosach, dated November 28, 1899. “It is unpleasant to think to myself that the day has passed in vain again, I do nothing neither to me, nor to people <...> I really got tired, when I’ve been writing the abstract, etc., but that was, by the way, healthier fatigue, healthier for both morally and even physically... I cannot take a pen in hand, but is it better when unwritten thoughts will not let you sleep at night? <...> As for me, work is like music, sometimes it serves instead of mustard plaster (moral, of course). So, for example, a month ago, if it was not for my indefatigable, truly inhuman writing, interrupted at times by sonatas and nocturnes, I might have had seizures again, such were the circumstances... So there were no seizures... I know that it is very sublime to use literature instead of morphine, but it is still better than to use morphine instead of literature. This “morphine” does not allow me to get dirty, sour and sleepy – thanks it for that” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 168). For Lesia Ukrainka, literature becomes, according to Sigmund Freud (Freud, 1998), a means of reconciling two hostile principles – the principle of pleasure and the principle of reality. The writer strives for a full life, and creativity (active, productive) heals her exhausted body, appears as a “function of health and has its own therapeutic effect” (Aheieva, 2007, p. 3). After all, “the psyche is a single whole, and as a whole, but with different activity of certain departments, it protects its homeostasis in problematic life situations” (Titarenko, 2009, p. 187). For Lesia Ukrainka, such “problematic life situations” were an illness and the ban on writing caused by

it, which disorganized her life and work, and caused *fear of being unfulfilled*. This is the “real fear” that, according to Sigmund Freud, “seems to be something rational and natural, it can be called a reaction to the perception of external danger. That is, the expected, anticipated damage; it is associated with the escape reflex and can be considered as a manifestation of the instinct of self-preservation” (Freud, 1998, p. 398). Fears of fulfillment constantly troubled the artist, as evidenced by her works (for example, “The Orgy”, “Forest Song”, etc.). Fear did not leave the writer even in her dreams, as stated in a letter to Lidiia Drahomanova-Shyshmanova, dated October 2, 1896: “I dream that my drama (“Blue Rose”. – L. H.) is playing on the stage and I play the main role by myself... there is an act, there is an intermission, 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th – and the audience *does not hear anything* (Lesia Ukrainka’s *italics*. – L. H.), after all, it is the final, it is getting dark on the stage, and the curtains are not lowered. I finally ask – although I do not believe in the role: why do not lower the curtains? Someone answers in a sarcastic tone, “because there is no one in front of!” I look: in the ground floor – “Arabian desert”, empty boxes yawning black, I did not have the courage to look at the gallery. My drama failed...! And I scream in despair: whistle...! You see, it is no longer applause, but at least a whistle!.. But even this desperate call remains a voice crying in the wilderness...” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 414). It is significant that even in a dream, in this liberated state of consciousness, Lesia Ukrainka is involved in literature; it seems a prophetic-symbolic dream about her drama, about her, as an author, who has been not fully understood by many critics and artists, “revered, but not readable,” as she remarked about herself.

Creativity in Lesia Ukrainka’s life becomes a psychological defense capable of overcoming internal (for example, as it has already mentioned conflict with the body) and external (the impossibility of full participation in literary and artistic life, especially during long stays abroad) conflicts. It is well known that psychological protection is “a system of mechanisms aimed at minimizing the negative experiences associated with conflicts that threaten the integrity of the individual” (Titarenko, 2009, p. 186). Creativity is a psychological protection, which resists adverse circumstances actively, “unconsciously protects him (a human – L. H.) from emotionally negative overload” (Titarenko, 2009, p. 190) and weakens the anxiety of Lesia Ukrainka. Literature becomes for the writer a means of self-regulation of her psychological state. In this context, the study of the bioenergetics influence

of art seems promising, when rhythm harmonizes the mental state of a person. Dmytro Ovsiankyo-Kulykovskiy’s opinion (Lev Vyhotskiy appeals to it in his work “Psychology of Art”) about the nature of lyrics that lifts the spirit, adjusts to the positive, disciplines, calms the nervous system, drives away fear and encourages the psyche. “The harmonious rhythm of the lyrics creates emotions that are differ from most other emotions in that way, that they, these “lyrical emotions”, economize psychic power by bringing a harmonious order into the “mental structures”” (Vygotskiy, 1998, p. 280). In the process of creating the works (poetry, dramatic poems, translations, etc.), Lesia Ukrainka’s body and mental organization were “in a harmony” with the verse size, the inner rhythm of the work in this way so the artist continued resisting the disease.

According to the epistolary, Lesia Ukrainka’s attitude to treatment is deeply meaningful, generally positive, even when her weakened body has to endure morphine, bromine, sulfonyl “and all this hell” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 114). She was an active patient, who was trying to understand prescriptions of doctors, the nature and effectiveness of medical procedures, the effects of drugs on her body, as well as to compare the findings of leading doctors in Italy, Switzerland and Germany to understand the prospects of recovery. Of course, during the years of treatment she got tired with resorts, medicines and doctors – those “benefactors of humanity ... who “forget” tweezers in stomachs” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 131): “I’m full of doctors and medicines” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 82), “there is no worse than a foolish doctor” (Ukrainka, 2016, p. 325). However, she believed in the effectiveness of treatment, medical procedures, appointments, recommendations, is persistently treated, “to live as *a human* (Lesia Ukrainka’s *italics*. – L. H.), not as a creaking tree...” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 450). “It is impossible to live as an idle in a sanatorium year after year, but I must learn to “be healthy in normal conditions”. I mean in conditions not of lying down, but of a person” (Ukrainka, 2017, p. 501). Having got sick when she was a child, Lesia Ukrainka had no experience of quality (without disease) adult life, but had a long *experience of disease* in different circumstances. *Being a sick* for decades was transformed into an experience of confronting the disease that has changed Lesia Ukrainka, as researcher Valentin Badrak stated “thoroughly, what is called, to the information and energy structure of cells” (Badrak, 2015, p. 6).

The psychological component of Lesia Ukrainka disease is determined by the writer's attitude to the illness (physical suffering, experience of pain, etc.) and is understood from the position of the writer's reaction to the disease: *being sick, live with the illness* and "*participation*" of the disease in her life.

It is fully justified, we think, there are associations with Friedrich Nietzsche, in whose life, as we know, the disease is constantly present and has led to action, it had an energy stimulus has helped to open new facets of life, to plunge into the life, understand the value and the cost of many things (Nietzsche, 2005, p. 17). *Creativity* was positioned as a *value* in Lesia Ukrainka's life, due to her disease, she cherished life and the significance of it did not decrease with the course of her illness. "The need to repel suffering leads to a huge strain of the intellect, in which a person begins to see everything in a new light, and moreover – a person wishes to live" (Yushchenko, 2013, p. 53). The Ukrainian writer interprets the disease as a givenness with which she has to live, to resist its active manifestations. There are no complaints about what had happened in Lesia Ukrainka's letters. It looks like the *Nietzsche's* idea of "amor fati" is read out in the text – love and respect to one's destiny, perception of everything that happens in life as an opportunity to gain more experience. There are no tragic moods, thoughts about death or suicide in Lesia Ukrainka's letters, on the contrary, a high degree of vitality is read, the conviction that there are no unsolvable problems, and they can be solved by changing the attitude to them. Sickness became a part of the writer's life; Lesia Ukrainka formed her understanding of well-being, which was to be active in literary and artistic life reflected in her attitude to life and creativity. The artist created an image of the world in which the dilemma of "to write or not to write" did not exist. Difficulties, belief in her strength formed her goals: to write, to publish, to translate, etc. Lesia Ukrainka chose creativity, focused on literature, forming creative plans for the future. Having formed over the years the ability to communicate constantly with the disease, the writer consciously took the disease to the background, adjusting to effective work even in adverse conditions and circumstances.

### Conclusions

Lesia Ukrainka's epistolary is an important document, which contains facts of personal life, as well as information about cultural, artistic, political, social realities of the end of the XIX century – beginning of the XX century. It

diversely adds an image of the artist, traits of character, peculiarities of psychological type, makes more vivid specifics of her work, vision of her creative laboratory, worldview, circle of communication, spheres of interests, and also informs about the disease with which the artist had to live and fight to work actively in literature. Against the background of an array of reports of Lesia Ukrainka's life, information about the disease (features, symptoms, treatment, medical procedures, prescriptions of doctors, etc.) presented in letters to relatives, friends and acquaintances is quite extensively. Correspondence is an effective way to "speak" about the disease, talk about it and thus reduce the "degree" of pain.

Lesia Ukrainka's epistolary of 1883-1913 is a kind of primary source of feelings, inner experience, emotional states of the writer; it is a story of a long-term conscious resistance to the disease. The discourse of the disease in letters with a clear body-centered perspective forms a psychological portrait of Lesia Ukrainka, an idea of the culture of her feelings and emotions, emphasizes the role of the body in the fierce struggle for creativity and self-fulfillment. The author of the letters interprets the disease as a yoke, captivity, which prevents her from being active in the literary process, public and political life. The sickness corrects creative plans, increases the level of self-organization of the artist, and becomes a kind of verification of opportunities for the writer, makes creativity as a value that can provide the writer with self-expression, self-affirmation, realization, adaptation to the social environment. Lesia Ukrainka identified herself with literature, but not with disease.

Anxiety and fear of being unrealized, illness and death of relatives and friends, long stay in the treatments far from home had a negative impact on the well-being and creativity of the Ukrainian writer. Attention to the sick body, discipline in following the prescriptions of doctors, the culture of rest and work, the ability to find a compromise with the sick body were aimed at the effectiveness of creative activities. Lesia Ukrainka's intellect freed her from illness in her work.

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