

## INDIVIDUALISM OF THE ARTIST AND FREEDOM OF CREATIVITY IN THE THEORETICAL CONCEPT BY MYKOLA YEVSCHAN

**Iryna Vernudina**

Doctor of Philosophical Sciences, Associate Professor at the Department  
Language and Psychological and Pedagogical Training,  
Odesa National Economic University, Ukraine  
e-mail: irver69@gmail.com, orcid.org/0009-0009-0189-9832

### Summary

The article is devoted to the study of the theoretical heritage of Mykola Yevshan, one of the leading literary critics of the aesthetic and psychological trend in Ukraine of the early 20th century. He was a prominent representative of Ukrainian modernism and Nietzscheanism and a psychologically oriented analyst of art and artistic creativity. His critical studies are devoted to the study of the artist's creative personality, the study of art and the process of creativity. He defended the author's right to create freely and considered his personal freedom a necessary condition for creativity.

Mykola Yevshan was concerned with the problems of interaction between the artist and society, national peculiarities of creation and development of culture. He professed the idea of a «higher human» who is born in the process of creativity. His views are marked by the desire for secularism, modernity, and Europeaness. In the context of Ukraine's contemporary historical and cultural development, the article analyses many Mykola Yevshan's theoretical works that laid the foundations of avant-garde in Ukrainian theoretical science and literary criticism.

**Key words:** Mykola Yevshan, artist, creative process, creative individuality, literary criticism, modernism, aesthetic and psychological discourse.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.23856/6723>

### 1. Introduction

At the end of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th century, Ukraine had such a scientific base, such a wide range of philosophical, aesthetic-psychological and literary studies that we have reason to speak of a fundamentally new period of development in the history of Ukrainian science and culture, and hence the need for completely new psychological, aesthetic-literary approaches to its study. In this context, the theoretical work of the young Western Ukrainian theorist of modernism, publicist and literary critic, who lived and worked in Kyiv for a long time, Mykola Yevshan (1889-1919), is significant and very interesting. The theoretical legacy that M. Yevshan left behind gives every reason to speak of him as the first Ukrainian literary critic, who considered criticism to be his life's work, his profession and the only scientific genre based on which his abilities were realized.

During his short 30-year life and less than a decade of creative and scientific activity, M. Yevshan published over 170 literary-critical and journalistic works on the problems of artistic creativity, the role of the artist in the creative process, studies of the work of world classics and contemporary artists, translations into Ukrainian of a number of philosophical and literary works by Polish, Czech, German, and Italian authors. It can be stated with full responsibility that not a single noticeable phenomenon of the contemporary literary process passed by his attention.

**The purpose** of the study is the need to analyze in the context of modern theoretical approaches the creative and scientific heritage of Mykola Yevshan, one of the significant representatives of Ukrainian theoretical science of the modernist direction, a literary scholar with clearly structured psychological views.

**The scientific and research task** of the study is to increase knowledge in the field of Ukrainian studies, literary studies, psychology, aesthetics and criticism on the material of Mykola Yevshan's still significant for the cultural development of Ukraine's achievements.

**The methodology** for studying the concept of Mykola Yevshan is based on the principles of *subjectivity* in studying the process of artistic (literary) creativity, *aestheticism* in studying the creative process and *critical assessment* of the material that is in the focus of attention. The set of applied techniques, methods and scientific approaches in the study corresponds to the formulated goal and is determined by it.

## 2. Beginning of professional activity

While still studying at the Stanislav Gymnasium, the future literary scholar began his first "attempts of the pen" with several critical investigations and reviews published in the almanac "Na rozsviti". And as a nineteen-year-old young man and already an employee of the new literary biweekly magazine "Bdzhola", which was published in Lviv since 1908, M. Yevshan "brazenly spoke out" against Ivan Franko "with a reassessment of the work of Ivan Kotlyarevsky", which then stirred up the literary circles of Galicia. The criticism of the famous master brought Yevshan all-Ukrainian "*notoriety*" (*Encyclopedia of Ukraine, 1993*), but the Kyiv youth circle "solidarized" with the author of this bold public reproach "without publicity", congratulating him "not so much in terms of content as in terms of spirit" (P. Bogatsky).

A year later, when the first issue of the magazine "Ukrainian Khata" was published in Kyiv on March 24 (April 6, 1909), M. Yevshan would become its permanent author and there would be almost no issue of the magazine where his article or literary-critical investigation would not be published. Starting his work in "Ukrainian Khata" as a first-year student at Lviv University, still studying Ukrainian and German studies at the time, M. Yevshan was already so educated that it was not uncommon to hear comments that the novice critic wrote like a "privat docent" (M. Shapoval). In a few years, Mykola Yevshan would become a central figure among Ukrainian literary critics.

Having begun his career in the publication "Bzhola", he would publish in the magazines "Narod", "Nove Zhyttya", "Literature and Scientific Bulletin", "Buduchnist", "Ukrainian Khata", and later in the newspaper of the city of Stanislav "Respublika" (*Materialy z istorii natsionalnoi zhurnalistyky, 1999*). In 1909, his first substantial works on Ivan Franko and Mykhailo Drahomanov appeared in the magazine "Buduchnist". In 1910, having moved to Kyiv, the young critic met Mykhailo Kotsiubynsky, Lesya Ukrainka, visited Hanna Barvinok, Mykyta Shapoval (M. Sryblyansky) and other famous writers of that time.

It should be noted that the beginning of the publication in Kyiv of the literary, scientific and socio-political monthly "Ukrainian Khata" (1909-1914) caused a wide spread of that aesthetic, philosophical and literary-critical polemic, which had gradually matured since the last years of the 19th century. in Galicia and at the beginning of the 20th century. spread both in the central and northern (Kyiv) and eastern (Kharkiv) regions of Ukraine. Having rejected populism and realism as the ideology of the past, the directors of the magazine P. Bogatsky, M. Shapoval, its authors M. Yevshan, A. Tovkachevsky, O. Oles, Yu. Tyshchenko (Yu. Siry), M. Vorony, V. Skrypnyk, Y. Budyak and others promoted the "national-gradual-democratic" direction of their activities, basing literary criticism on the principles of aesthetics.

Aesthetic views, aesthetic and literary criteria and requirements were clearly defined in almost every critical and analytical study or work of Mykola Yevshan. Bright psychologism, the acquired newest artistic tendencies, progressive ideas of Jean Marie Guyot, Charles Baudelaire, Hippolyte Taine, Friedrich Nietzsche, Johann Fichte, Sigmund Freud, the influences of the theories of German romanticism, Young Hegelianism, positivism, psychoanalysis, etc. turned out to be a significant theoretical basis that shaped and gave conceptualization to the scientific views of the young Ukrainian researcher, publicist and literary critic.

In general, M. Yevshan adhered to cultural and historical traditions in the study of the works of classic and contemporary artists, including modernists. He promoted the cult of individualism, the unlimited freedom of the author in the creative process, and defended the independence of a self-sufficient, bright personality as a person of a new formation. The collections of his articles during his lifetime as a leading publicist and critic – “Under the Banner of Art. Literary and Critical Articles” (*Kyiv, 1910*); “Taras Shevchenko. Articles” (*Kyiv, 1911*); “Where Did We Come From?.. A Matter of Ukrainian Literature of 1910” (*Lviv, 1912*) – became “the foundations of the avant-garde in Ukrainian literary criticism” (*Vdovychenko, 2005: 129*) of the early 20th century.

### 3. Conceptualization of Mykola Yevshan’s views

Mykola Yevshan’s conceptual article “Problems of Creativity” was first published in the journal “Ukrainian Khata” in 1910 (No. 6, pp. 24-31). In it, he equates the problems of creativity with the problems of individualism, emphasizing that what is decisive in literature is not the result, but the process of creation itself, in which the personality of the artist and the peculiarities of his inner psychological world occupy a prominent place. One should agree with the opinion of the Ukrainian writer Solomiya Pavlychko, who considers such an approach to be rooted in the plane of individualistic discourse of F. Nietzsche, the ideas of most of whose works significantly influenced and “scandalized” the European public at that time (*Pavlychko, 1999*).

Freedom of creativity, individualism as an artist's artistic credo, and the deep psychologism of the creative process became the titular objects of research of Yevshan the theorist. Almost all his literary and critical studies are imbued with the idea of revealing the essence and ultimate tasks of creativity, its influence on both an individual and society. The critic concluded that achieving the ideal embodiment of a creative idea is possible only if the artist professes eternal universal human values integrated into the creative process. M. Yevshan carried out the search for criteria for maximum self-realization of the artist's personality in his work through analytical reading and isolation of the specifics of the author's style of the most talented of them: T. Shevchenko, I. Franko, L. Ukrainka, O. Kobylanska, V. Stefanyk, P. Kulish, M. Gogol, S. Botticelli, J.-J. Rousseau, R. Kipling and many others. A significant number of his aesthetic and literary studies are dedicated to their work.

Having directed his scientific interests to the plane of aestheticism and artistic culture, he professed the humanistic and cultural paradigm of art and saw its main mission in changing life and man himself for the better. “The world into which creativity takes us,” wrote M. Yevshan, “is a wide life... The intimate dream of all ages, all generations of people who were aware of their cultural aspirations appears before our eyes – the image of the best person, a person single-minded and harmonious in his feelings and deeds, who, without falling into collision with either the generality or himself, could be enough for himself, be happy by himself” (*Ievshan, 1998: 15*).

Comparing art and reality, M. Yevshan deliberately emphasized some points and stated: “A kind of abyss is thus created between a work of art and reality, they find themselves as if at completely opposite poles, built on completely different foundations and from different materials” (*Ievshan, 1998: 21*). The realization of this was more painful for him because “the separating abyss that arises between a man and his dream” can be overcome only “at the moment of creative inspiration”, when the creation of an artistic image is able to embody a dream, but “in real life” it cannot come true. Obviously, these thoughts of Yevshan the aesthetician are completely determined by the experience and feelings of Yevshan the man as an extraordinary personality.

Polemically “contrasting his strong, unyielding individuality” which only an artist is capable of capturing, with all those “cursed questions” of “confused problems of ethics and philosophy that torment the artist” (*Ievshan, 1998: 416*), M. Yevshan called for the creation of his own religion, which would embody the natural essence, ideals and feelings of the artist, because “the word with which great poets address us is a deed” (*Ievshan, 1998: 79*). Inspiration, which illuminates only the work of selected critics, he called a religious source from which “that mood flows,” which is born “from pure poetic ecstasy”. Only creativity in its profound understanding can generate inspiration and insight. And creativity itself arises thanks to and because of insight and creative inspiration. “At that moment,” verbalized M. Evshan this unique creative state, - such an elevation of spirit, such a solemnity of mood occurs that every insincerity and falsehood in a person's word must give way, everything is leveled and harmonized. The dissonances and contradictions that exist in human nature disappear somewhere, and in one moment a feeling of such unity, depth and seriousness is born that a person involuntarily becomes face to face with eternity and feels himself lifted to such a height from which he begins to look at the world with different eyes, to understand its riddles and secrets” (*Ievshan, 1998: 25*).

#### 4. Art, creativity, artist as objects of psychological analysis

Mykola Yevshan was convinced that true creativity is like a true religious enlightenment, and the origins of artistic creativity have a transcendental character. “Religion here becomes the highest mood at the moment of creation”, the critic wrote in “Shevchenko’s Religion”, “an organic need for pathos, prayer, holiness...” (*Ievshan, 1998: 28*). Hence, art and creativity should in no way be subordinated to any narrow, tendentious ideological or party guidelines. Their calling is “to serve only life, to raise its level” to satisfy and saturate “all the highest aspirations and needs” of man and all of humanity (*Ievshan, 1998: 25*). These sound thoughts of his formed the basis of the polemic that arose at the beginning of the 20th century between him and V. Vynnychenko, who “with all due honor predates Marxism in art”, as M. Yevshan wrote about his views.

Formulating the intersection of the complex relationship between the artist and society as the central problematic factor of contemporary aesthetic thought, M. Yevshan recognized: only talent and the call to creativity are the driving force that structures the existence of creative individuality in the system of social relations “personality – society”. And he especially emphasized: “We come to the idea that every creator as such has his own religion, carries in his soul an ideal that clearly tells him about his position in the universe, indicates his purpose and directs all his activities” (*Ievshan, 1998: 27*).

It is not difficult to notice in Yevshan’s “religious-creative” concept his research interest as a psychologist: “When asking about the poet’s religion, we ask about everything that constitutes the basis of his entire psyche, his entire individuality; we are looking for that “holiday of

saints” of his, which will open up before us every minute and will shine with the clear flame of the ideal...” (*Ievshan, 1998: 27*). Such a need to embody the ideal of an extraordinary harmonious person, the need to join the highest spiritual values, is capable, according to Yevshan, of uniting the Ukrainian intelligentsia with all educated Europe. The intelligentsia as the driving force of these searches will stand out as a separate powerful socio-cultural community, which will be subject to reforming and renewing social existence, and in return – creating the modern history of its country/state.

Crystallizing his theoretical views in the landmark article “Under the Flag of Art” (1910), M. Yevshan emphasized: man is inherent in creative altruistic vital forces, and the creation of beauty through art ennobles. Moreover, the process of this creation, in his opinion, is both a need and an imperative. It was for this reason that he rejected literary activity that did not raise the top aesthetic values, in fact lowered it to the level of journalistic pamphlets, instead he admired such writers as Vasyl Stefanyk, in whose works he found an organic combination of social aspirations with the aesthetics of composition.

M. Yevshan raised questions in his articles that provoked further discussions of a modern and artistic nature: what is and what can art be for man? How do art and life relate to each other? What is the main vocation of art and the main tasks of poetry? S. Pavlychko notes that in almost all theoretical and critical articles of M. Yevshan, in all the annual literary reviews he wrote for 1908, 1910-1913, in all the reviews of the works of individual authors, and in the articles about T. Shevchenko, he talks about the relationship of art to life.

Based on his own aesthetic concept of Ukrainian literature, exploring the problems of freedom of creativity, individualism of the artist, the realization of his talent, M. Yevshan also worked out the concepts of beauty, form and style, aesthetic ideal, artistic truthfulness etc. His critical and journalistic heritage cannot be characterized only by the stereotypes of “aestheticism” or “modernism”, as it is today. Especially given that modernism in Ukrainian literature is usually called the current of literary and public thought that was positioned by the magazine “Ukrainian Khata”. Today, from the point of view of historical perspective, Mykola Yevshan should be perceived as a theorist of Ukrainian modernism of the first decades of the 20th century, a creator of a higher aesthetic and individualistic culture, a defender of the nation and its unique “separateness before the whole world”, who defended the right of the individual to be himself.

M. Yevshan deeply respected O. Kobylyanska and highly appreciated her work. In his opinion, she was one of those Ukrainian artists who, precisely out of sincere love for her people, did not idealize them, did not elevate them to an imaginary pedestal, but worked conscientiously, bringing victory “in the fight against evil, uncultured, rudeness” closer. That is why their souls were so related, that is why Olga Kobylyanska and Mykola Yevshan can rightly be considered the forerunners of the “higher human” in the then country of “spiritual stagnation”.

Consistent in his call for an aesthetic revolution, principled in his demands for aestheticization as a modern trend of the turn of the century, the leading Ukrainian critic-publicist, literary and art historian of a new type appeared before his contemporaries as a true ideologist of the struggle of generations. Rejecting the “old brakes” of utilitarianism of the previous era, he professed new artistic and artistic values. Each theoretical study of M. Yevshan is imbued with psychologism and aestheticism, since he was convinced that the basis of any creative activity (style, method, direction etc.) is the aesthetic perception of reality.

Clearly defined artistic guidelines should model the creative process, the “cornerstone” and crown of which is the creative individuality of the artist. An authentic feature of M. Yevshan is also considered to be his so-called “militant aestheticism” – a completely independent and stable phenomenon. The existence of the “bold, ironic, contemptuous in his attitude to all

cultural taboos, modernly uninhibited and uncomplicated when it came to classics and traditions” (Pavlychko, 1999: 161) young Ukrainian critic revolved within the range of his own understanding of freedom as a phenomenon of human existence.

From the very beginning of the creation of the Western Ukrainian People's Republic with its capital in Lviv in 1918, Mykola Yevshan (real name – Fedyushka) became its defender, then served in the Ukrainian Galician Army and during this period wrote almost nothing. In November 1919, the young talented publicist and literary critic, while in the ranks of soldiers, prematurely passed away due to a typhus pandemic. A peasant boy, whose family farmed the land and lived in poverty, became “an aristocrat of the spirit, a preacher of aestheticism and a new view of the tasks of writing” (Bohatskyi, 1955).

## 5. Conclusions

So, the psychological and aesthetic-literary concept of M. Yevshan was based on three main provisions: firstly, *it is individualism, the talent of the artist, freedom of creativity, the “higher human”*. Secondly, *the national idea as the basis of cultural formation and state progress*; at the same time – the denial of Ukrainophilism and populism as ideologically limited, politically outdated, archaic artistic schemes. Thirdly, *the persistent desire for urban civilization, secularism, modernity, Europeanism*. All factors, according to the views of M. Yevshan, are consistent with each other and without each other are ineffective. This relationship was also emphasized in her study by S. Pavlychko: “individualism for Yevshan... is the basis of nationalism” (Pavlychko, 1999: 134). Meanwhile, he was certainly a “Westerner” (S. Pavlychko), and his “critical modern discourse was determined by a broad philosophical understanding of modernity and the era, nihilism, reassessment of canons, anti-populism, individualism, elitism, psychologism, feminism. All this is mixed with Nietzscheanism and nourished by it” (Pavlychko, 1999: 160).

M. Yevshan’s historical and philosophical understanding of the peculiarities of Ukrainian national cultural creation was based on a clear priority of aesthetic and artistic and artistic traditions. He recognized the leading European tendencies, based on which his own Ukrainian ones, devoid of populist and Ukrainophile views, should have emerged. This is precisely what explained Yevshan’s support for the ideological and creative searches of Ukrainian modernists, who became the inspiring force of the transformations of the new time. The integration of the processes of cultural progress of Ukraine into the European context was perceived by him as corresponding to the then world trends. But this did not mean the rejection of his own spiritual achievements: “Therefore, the main thing is that, entering into closer relations with foreign literatures, one should not waste the original features of one’s own and not force it to put on foreign costumes, no matter how attractive they may be, so that, instead of strengthening native literature with elements of foreign trends, one should not introduce decay and poison” (Yevshan, 1998: 312).

So, it becomes obvious: Mykola Yevshan is a mature, conscious and patriotically oriented critic-aesthetician of a “pro-European orientation” (V. Vdovychenko). The philosophical section of his concept is immersed in the natural, organic whirlpool of Ukrainian original culture: “New culture must be national, must emerge from the depths of the people’s soul, but it cannot be Ukrainophile” (Yevshan, 1998: 53). He rejected populism as an outdated and harmful phenomenon, instead striving for the free cultural development of Ukrainians as equals among other European peoples.

Thus, the extraordinary figure of M.Y. Yevshan, who conscientiously worked in the theoretical field of Ukraine at the beginning of the 20th century, marked with his activities the formation and further development of a fundamentally new aesthetic, artistic and artistic space. Thanks to the psychologism and scientific activity of the first Ukrainian literary critic, the theoretical base of the fields of journalism, journalism, professional criticism and translation was significantly replenished and was further based, including on his literary and art history heritage.

## References

1. Bohatskyi, P., Shapoval, M., Zhyvotko, A. (1955). *Ukrainska Khata. Kyiv, 1909-1914. [Ukrainian Khata. Kyiv, 1909–1914]. Redaktor-Vydavets Pavlo Bohatskyi (Spohady). Uporiadkuvav Sava Zerkal. Biblioteka "Ukrainskoho hromadskoho slova". Ch. 2. Vydala ukrainska hromada v Novim Yorku. [in Ukrainian]*
2. *Encyclopedia of Ukraine (1993). Ed.: Volodymyr Kubiiovych, Danylo Husar Struk. Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto press incorporated. Vol. 5: St – Z. 886 p.*
3. Ievshan, M. (1998) *Borotba heneratsii i ukrainska literatura [The struggle of generations and Ukrainian literature]. Mykola Yevshan. Krytyka. Literaturoznavstvo. Estetyka. Kyiv. Pp. 45–53. [in Ukrainian]*
4. Ievshan, M. (1998). *Problemy tvorchosti [Creativity problems]. Mykola Yevshan. Krytyka. Literaturoznavstvo. Estetyka. Kyiv. Pp. 12–17. [in Ukrainian]*
5. Ievshan, M. (1998). *Rediard Kipling [Rudyard Kipling]. Mykola Yevshan. Krytyka. Literaturoznavstvo. Estetyka. Kyiv. Pp. 416–420. [in Ukrainian]*
6. Ievshan, M. (1998). *Relihiia Shevchenka [Shevchenko's religion]. Mykola Yevshan. Krytyka. Literaturoznavstvo. Estetyka. Kyiv. Pp. 25–30. [in Ukrainian]*
7. Ievshan, M. (1998). *Suchasna polska literatura i yii vplyv na nashu [Modern Polish literature and its influence on ours]. Mykola Yevshan. Krytyka. Literaturoznavstvo. Estetyka. Kyiv. Pp. 307–313. [in Ukrainian]*
8. Ievshan, M. (1998). *Suspilnyi i artystychnyi element u tvorchosti [The social and artistic element in creativity]. Mykola Yevshan. Krytyka. Literaturoznavstvo. Estetyka. Kyiv. Pp. 18–25. [in Ukrainian]*
9. Ievshan, M. (1998). *Taras Shevchenko [Taras Shevchenko]. Mykola Yevshan. Krytyka. Literaturoznavstvo. Estetyka. Kyiv. Pp. 79–119. [in Ukrainian]*
10. *Materialy z istorii natsionalnoi zhurnalistyky Skhidnoi Ukrainy pochatku XX stolittia (1999). [Materials on the history of national journalism in Eastern Ukraine at the beginning of the 20th century]. Uklad.: N. M. Sydorenko, O. I Sydorenko. K.: Doslidn. tsentr istorii ukr. presy. 448 p. [in Ukrainian]*
11. Pavlychko, S. (1999). *Dyskurs modernizmu v ukrainskii literaturi [Discourse of Modernism in Ukrainian Literature]. Solomiia Pavlychko. 2-he vyd., pererobl. i dopovn. K.: Lybid. 447 p. [in Ukrainian]*
12. *Vdovychenko, H. V. (2005). Ukrainskyi modernizm: filosofska spadshchyna M. Yevshana i M. Khvyloвого [Ukrainian Modernism: The Philosophical Legacy of M. Yevshan and M. Khvylovy]. Multyversum. Vyp. 51. Pp. 127–135. [in Ukrainian]*