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Seraphic Gender in *Doktor Serafikus* by V. Domontovych

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Abstract
The article explores the seraphic gender and its main features as an essential part of groundless existence, which was symptomatic of the Ukrainian 1920s, and examines its existentialist intentions in literature, tracing its origin back to the early European modernist literature.
The research closely refers to transformations of seraphic discourse throughout the 1910s-1940s and analyzes the unexplored chapters of the novel that influence the path of *Doktor Serafikus*. The elaborated theory of seraphic gender is presented through the following components: first, the meaningful constituents of seraphicity viewed through the early modernist perspective on sexuality and gender (androgyny, "imaginary sexuality," and homosexuality); secondly the interrelations of desire and writing; and thirdly, seraphicity in its expanded definition as an anthropomorphic landscape and its dissolution in music. The research is based on a partial reconstruction of s the cultural and historical circumstances that contributed to the evolution of *Doktor Serafikus*, as well as feminist psychoanalytic criticism as proposed by Julia Kristeva and a post-structural approach to textual analysis.

Key Words: seraphic, gender, androgyny, homosociality, V. Domontovych.

Introduction

In the evening of April 18th, 1949, Viktor Petrov left his rented apartment in House 12 on Feilitzschstrasse in Munich and disappeared. Much later, in a letter to Yurii Lavrynenko, V. Petrov's friend and colleague Yurii Shevelov wrote: "Of course, maybe Petrov is in seraphic adventures, God forbid! – but what if not?".[1] "Seraphic adventures" possibly refers to a bizarre journey to Mohilev of Doktor Serafikus in the eponymous novel the town, which he confused with Kamianets and for more than a day was not sure on which terra incognita he found himself.

Written in 1929, *Doktor Serafikus* [*Doctor Seraphicus*] was published by the community of Ukrainian emigrants in Munich in 1947.[2] 'Serafikus' serves as the

1 Yurii Lavrinenko & Yurii Sherekh, "Lystuvannia 1945–1949" ["Correspondence 1945–1949"], *Khronika 2000: Ukrainskyi kulturolohichnyi almanakh* 96, no. 2 (2013): 160–3.

2 Yurii Korybut indicates the reasons why the novel was not published in 1929: "*Doktor Serafikus* was written in 1929; however, did not see the world at that time, because the activities of private publishing houses, including *Siaivo*, was discontinued with the end of NEP" (Yurii Korybut, "Doktor Serafikus: Bedeker do romanu" ["Doctor Seraphicus: Afterword to the Novel"], in V. Domontovych, *Doktor Serafikus* [*Doctor Seraphicus*] (München: Ukrainska trybuna, 1947), 159).

nickname of the main character, Vasyl Khrysanfovych Komakha. I interpret "seraphicity," derived from this nickname, as a distinct mode of existence rooted in the Ukrainian cultural context that emerged after the revolution in the 1920s. This phenomenon implies a disregard for social, sexual, and political conventions. In this study, I analyze seraphicity as a form of gender identity that manifests not only in "imaginary"[3] or "denied"[4] sexuality but also in the writing and philosophical reflections associated with Komakha, reflecting the cultural sensibilities of the Belle Époque and Fin De Siècle periods.

The aim of this paper is to articulate the theory of seraphic gender and its key features as the essential aspect of the "groundless" existence that was symptomatic to the Ukrainian 1920s. This phenomenon reflects existentialist intentions in literature and can be traced back to early European modernist literature. The first research objective is to examine early Ukrainian modernism, focusing on its Neo-romantic and decadent tendencies, particularly in relation to the emancipation and transformation of gender identity. Secondly, the study seeks to elucidate the interrelation between anthropomorphic narration and bodiless seraphic characters in the literary works of V. Domontovych. Finally, it aims to conceptualize seraphic gender as an abstention from gender identification, representing a reimagining of abstract and chimeric sexuality.

I will conduct a comprehensive analysis of the functioning of seraphic gender in the novel *Doktor Serafikus.* Additionally, my intention is to outline the evolution of the author's engagement with political issues and to partially reconstruct Viktor Petrov's creative activity in the 1930s. Given the complexity of this topic, my study adopts an interdisciplinary methodology, integrating literary, gender, and philosophical studies. I seek to partially reconstruct the cultural and historical circumstances in which *Doktor Serafikus* emerged and will apply feminist psychoanalytic criticism as developed by Julia Kristeva, alongside with a post-structural approach. By the latter, I refer to philosophical analyses that explore the metamorphoses of conceptual images in writing, understanding such literary images as fluid entities that may undergo multiple transformations or take on diverse embodiments within the novel.

In the second half of 20th century, several French philosophers identified the scholarly phenomenon of "groundlessness" and the associated "indirect gender identifications"[5], which I connect to the notion of seraphicity. My research focuses on the works by Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, and Gilles Deleuze, who dedicate significant attention to the issues of literary creativity and writing. First and foremost, my research ideas gravitate to post-structural philosophy for its inseparability from the concept of "writing" and psychoanalysis. To a large extent, French philosophers of the 1950s and

3 Solomiia Pavlychko, *Dyskurs modernizmu v ukrainskii literaturi* [*The Discourse of Modernism in Ukrainian Literature*] (Kyiv: Lybid, 1999), 228.

4 V. Domontovych, "Doktor Serafikus" ["Doctor Seraphicus"], in *Divchynka z vedmedykom. Doktor Serafikus,* ed. Vira Aheieva (Kyiv: Komora, 2021), 262.

5 Tamara Hundorova, *Stat i kultura v gendernii utopii Olhy Kobylianskoi* [*Sex and Culture in the Gender Utopia of Olha Kobylianska*] (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2002), 164.

1960s consistently refer to the literary works of the modernist era, including Franz Kafka, Marcel Proust, Virginia Woolf, Antonin Artaud, Nathalie Sarraute, and others. These philosophers often integrated literary images into the ideas, style, and principles of their philosophical writings. Notably, all of the aforementioned writers were contemporaries of Viktor Petrov-Domontovych.

Literary imagery and space of the imaginary have become crucial for French philosophical discourse and rejection of the postulate of a logocentric world. In the second half of the 20th century, French philosophy harbored and granted prominence to ideas such as Lacanian psychoanalysis, the rupture of consciousness at the boundary between the Symbolic and the Imaginary, the pervasiveness of language, and the complex relationship with the Other. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, there is a subtle link between Ukrainian literature and these ideas, making post-structuralist practices and concepts relevant to Ukrainian modernist literature. Moreover, the post-structural perspective is particularly compelling because it emerged as an attempt to reflect on the catastrophes of totalitarian regimes and the societal consequences of their collapse, seeking to understand how freedom and the plurality of thought could become viable.[6] Accordingly, French philosophy of the second half of the 20th century possesses a distinct creative element that aids in affirming freedom of thought and the expression of human will in post-totalitarian societies. The application of post-structuralist approaches and psychoanalytical methods in this research contributes to the "philosophizing of literary studies"[7] within the Ukrainian context, enhancing their visibility in the European academic environment.

Fin De Siècle and Other Contexts

The existing literary scholarship enables me to identify the following significant components of the seraphic gender: a "paraphrase of homosexuality,"[8] an "imaginary sexuality"[9] which is abstract and, therefore, whimsical, and a "denied sexuality."[10] I will attempt to outline these three elements within their historical and cultural contexts.

Despite the fact that *Doktor Serafikus* was created in 1929 and recounts events from the second half of the 1920s, there is no doubt that Vasyl Komakha and his nickname, Serafikus, trace back to an earlier, pre-revolutionary era. From the story, it becomes clear that he is, to a certain extent, involved in the social and political life of his time and teaches at the university. However, his inner world remains immovable

6 Michel Foucault, "Preface," in Deleuze, Gilles & Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schisophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), xiii.

7 Solomiia Pavlychko, "Metodolohichna sytuatsiia v suchasnomu ukrainskomu literaturoznavstvi" ["Methodological Situation in Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Studies"], in *Teoriia literatury* [*Literary Theory*] (Kyiv: Osnovy, 2002), 488.

8 Pavlychko, *Dyskurs modernizmu,* 227.

9 Ibid., 228.

10 Domontovych, "Doktor Serafikus," 262.

and incorporeal within the time-space of the 1920s: "despite all his swampy heavy massiveness, he seemed to be an abstraction and a fiction."[11] Seraphicity represents a space of freedom that was almost impossible to preserve while being fully involved in the Soviet literary and academic life of Kyiv, due to the social and cultural upheavals of 1925–1928. This was a period marked by the evolution of literary organizations, literary discussions, and the total publicity of intellectuals. In other words, *Doktor Serafikus* serves as an illustrative example of queer modernism.[12] In such a novel, variations of sexuality can be expressed, but, to a greater extent, a modernist novel enables "indirect gender identifications."[13]

Doktor Serafikus cannot be compared to other romantic novels of the same period, for instance, *Maister korablia* [*The Shipmaster*] by Yurii Yanovskyi, or the lesser-known novels *Zolotyi pavuchok* [*A Golden Spider*] by Oles Donchenko and *Beladonna* by Vasyl Mynko. A more fitting comparison is between Komakha and Yakov Mykhailiuk – also known as Snub-Nosed Mephistopheles – from Volodymyr Vynnychenko's novel *Zapysky kyrpatoho Mefistofelia* [*Notes of the Snub-Nosed Mephistopheles*],[14] written on the eve of the revolution in 1916. This comparative pair is particularly relevant due to the symbolic opposition of Faustus and Mephistopheles. Specifically, Serafikus has a somewhat Faustian desire to have a child without a woman, accompanied by ghostly dreams of such an achievement. By contrast, Snub-Nosed Mephistopheles is entirely corporeal, embodying the vitality of biological and intellectual life rather than being confined to laboratories or legends. Moreover, he has a child from a woman and does not suppress his desires – both for the woman's body and for an emotional connection with the child. Thus, these two characters represent opposing extremes on the spectrum of desire and vitalism in early Ukrainian modernism.

The motif of androgyny was highly relevant at the turn of the century, captivating both Ukrainian and Western European intellectual environments. In my view, this relevance can be explained through Virginia Woolf's concept of artistic androgyny, which Elaine Showalter describes as "a utopian projection of the ideal artist: calm, stable, unimpeded by consciousness of sex."[15] Importantly, Showalter notes an abstinence "from the confrontation with femaleness or maleness. Her ideal artist mystically transcends sex, or has none."[16] In this context, androgyny enables the

11 Domontovych, "Doktor Serafikus," 169.

12 Benjamin Kahan establishes the term "queer modernism" that delineates the sexually transgressive and gender deviant energies that help fuel modernism's desire to thwart normative aesthetics, knowledges, geographies, and temporalities. See: Benjamin Kahan, "Queer Modernism," in *A Handbook of Modernism Studies,* ed. Jean-Michel Rabaté (John Wiley & Sons Limited, 2013), 348.

13 Hundorova, *Stat i kultura v gendernii utopii Olhy Kobylianskoi*, 164.

14 Volodymyr Vynnychenko, *Zapysky kyrpatoho Mefistofelia* [*Notes of the Snub-Nosed Mephistopheles*] (Kyiv: Vikhola, 2023).

15 Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977), 289.

16 Ibid.

creation of art and poetry beyond bodily impulses and eroticism. This perspective resonates with Serafikus, a character who constantly embodies "denied"[17] sexuality. He is not ready to sacrifice his peace of mind before his master's exams because of Tasia; his creative energy and composure are essential for reading, making scientific notes, and preparing for his examinations. Doktor Serafikus exists beyond sensuality, which is safely confined to the realm of imagination. He transforms innate sexual desire into a distant, idealized love that will be perfect only if remains unfulfilled: " 'Above' and 'as if' are the only true bliss, sweet good, supreme comfort [...] the path of abstractions and negatizations."[18] These are the thoughts Komakha conveys to the next woman he encounters on his way.

Such a strategy of love is reminiscent of early Ukrainian modernism of the 1910s, particularly when considering how Tamara Hundorova characterizes Osyp Makovei's reactions to the literary works of his fellow writer Olha Kobylianska: "As a true Ukrainian author, completely in accordance with the national literary tradition, he runs away from sensuality, when the latter does not sublimate, let's say, into ideal love."[19] This observation aligns closely with the notion of the "imaginary"[20] sexuality of Serafikus. It is important to note that such a conception of love leads to a separation between real bodily experience and the imaginary, as Andre Roche suggests. According to him, such an inner life paves the way that "does not anticipate the cross of sentimental with sensitive reality."[21] Thus, on the one hand, early modern poets try to invent a new sensuality while renouncing the sentimentalism of Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovyanenko, exoticizing nature, listening to feelings, experimenting, and observing. On the other hand, "the forms of decadent sensuality in Ukrainian literature tend to turn into a gesture that claims to replace reality itself."[22] This tendency corresponds to the "denied"[23] sexuality of Serafikus. In early modern poetry, there is often a movement toward the discovery of sensuality and, later, the body; however, in the case of decadent poets, there is a final dispossession of corporeality and a search for artificial forms of existence. *Doktor Serafikus* fully belongs to this second trend of early modernism.

Undoubtedly, the title of *Doktor Serafikus* by V. Domontovych echoes *Séraphîta (Seraphita)* by Honore de Balzac, the beginning of which was published in 1834. In Balzac's novel, the theme of androgyny intersects with mysticism and the teachings of the Swedish theologian and philosopher Emmanuel Swedenborg. Seraphitus-Seraphita is not dependent on physical and social determinations, as his\her inner spirit prevails

17 Domontovych, "Doktor Serafikus," 262.

18 Ibid.

19 Hundorova, *Stat i kultura*, 201.

20 Pavlychko, *Dyskurs modernizmu,* 228.

21 Andre Rosh, *Persha stat: Zminy ta kryza cholovichoi identychnosti* [*The First Sex. Changes And Crisis Of Male Identity*], transl. Iryna Slavinska (Kyiv: Osnovy, 2018), 96.

22 Tamara Hundorova, *ProIavlennia Slova: Dyskursiia rannoho ukrainskoho modernizmu* [*The Emerging Word. The Discourse of Early Ukrainian Modernism*] (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2009), 233.

23 Domontovych, "Doktor Serafikus," 262.

over external circumstances. Moreover, this spirit is comprehensive, capable of any metamorphosis: Seraphitus-Seraphita cannot be determined by gender (a social construct) or sex (a physical attribute). The girl Minna perceives Seraphitus as a young man with whom she falls in love, while another character, Wilfrid, perceives Seraphita as a young woman for whom he feels affection. Seraphita declares: "When you call God a Creator, you dwarf Him. He did not create, as you think He did, plants or animals or stars. Could He proceed by a variety of means? Must He not act by unity of composition? Moreover, He gave forth principles to be developed, according to His universal law, at the will of the surroundings in which they were placed. Hence a single substance and motion, a single plant, a single animal, but correlations everywhere."[24] Particularly, the androgyne evolves within this flux of multiple syntheses. Similarly, Vasyl Komakha has several embodiments: Vasyl Khrysanvovych and Doktor Serafikus-Faust; Insect Dad and Fats. However, while Seraphitus-Seraphita ascends to heaven, remaining an unattainable and incorporeal embodiment of love, *Doktor Serafikus* discovers earthly love, abandoning abstraction and the ability to metamorphose his own substance.

Homosociality and Acquiring Gender Identity

As Richard von Kraft-Ebbing argues, androgyny can be seen as a form of homoerotic identification.[25] The issues of sexuality and androgyny are present in *Doktor Serafikus* and are typical of the Fin De Siècle period in general.[26] Doktor Serafikus and his friend Korvyn experience a philosophical friendship during their student years that closely resembles ancient Greek *philia*, with Komakha taking on the role of mentor and exerting influence over the other. Korvyn describes this period of his life as "seraphic."[27]

At this point, I should make a textological remark: there is evidence suggesting that although *Doktor Serafikus* was not published in 1929, the final chapters were excluded from the version published in 1947. These unpublished and unexplored chapters are currently preserved in the Central Kyiv Archive of Literature and Arts. In these chapters, Korvyn refers to their relationship as a romance and admits to writing letters to Serafikus. This mention of correspondence draws attention to another notable exchange of letters, namely, that of the Ukrainian philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda with his friend and beloved student, Mykhailo Kovalynskyi. In the 1920s, Viktor Petrov studied Skovoroda, including his relationship with Mykhailo Kovalynskyi. The

24 Honore de Balzac, *Seraphita*, transl. Katharine Prescott Wormeley (Project Gutenberg eBooks, 2005 [eBook #1432]). https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1432/pg1432-images.html.

25 Hundorova, *Stat i kultura*, 171.

26 Solomiia Pavlychko, *Natsionalizm, seksualnist, oriientalizm: skladnyi svit Ahatanhela Krymskoho* [*Nationalism, Sexuality, Orientalism: the Complex World of Ahatanhel Krymskyi*] (Kyiv: Osnovy, 2016), 92.

27 Domontovych, "Doktor Serafikus," 216.

friendship between Skovoroda and his student, as well as the bond between Korvyn and Serafikus, implies an intimate exchange of thoughts and an unfolding passion in their letters, which together can be considered as an aspiration to create an ideal form of communication. Ultimately, this ideal friendship can be identified as Platonic *philia*. Tamara Hundorova asserts that the prototype of *philia* was "female procreative nature": "by analogy with the biological female function of giving birth to children, male philosophers were entrusted with the function of giving birth to knowledge."[28] Notably, Korvyn had a bride at the time. However, philosophical friendship proves difficult to reconcile with the presence of his bride, Tetiana Berens, who seeks a bodily connection and marriage. Furthermore, when Komakha and Korvyn are in public, they adopt heterosexual roles. Korvyn becomes feminized, while Komakha struggles to acknowledge his own masculine appearance. Their "mutual acquaintances asked Serafikus about Korvyn, 'And where is your wife?' And to Korvyn: 'Where is your husband?'"[29]

Furthermore, the relationship between Serafikus and Korvyn is shaped by social and cultural factors. I will address several such aspects. Firstly, the modernist era was marked by "shifted social dynamics," where women could interact more freely with men.[30] For instance, Korvyn and Ver first encounter on the beach, and later they meet Komakha in a café. However, Komakha resists being in such uncertain heterogeneous space where women and men can communicate and interact freely. In addition to cafes, he avoids theaters and trips outside the city, such as to the river. I argue that his avoidance of these spaces stems from a deep-seated fear of women and his own unreadiness for any form of interaction with them.

Secondly, researchers such as Andre Roche, Nils Hammarén, and Thomas Johansson highlight the durability of male partnerships in the uncertain and tense pre-revolutionary atmosphere of the late 1910s. Nils Hammarén and Thomas Johansson introduce the term *homosociality* to describe enduring friendships, love, and intimacy between men without sexual urges.[31] Although I have defined Korvyn's letters to Serafikus and their relationship as *philia*, in which sexuality and bodily interaction are involved, we cannot analyze their relationship in isolation from its social and cultural contexts. The crisis of masculinity was symptomatic not only of modernism but also of the broader processes shaping male gender identity, as partially reflected in the partnership of Korvyn and Komakha. Andre Roche describes such relationship as follows: "Besides the sentimental education, these trusting conversations fill the time of existence that precedes the start of a career and expected social recognition."[32] The partnership between Korvyn and Komakha can thus be understood not only in terms of their platonic spiritual motives but also withing the socio-cultural circumstances, under which it was much safer to have a comrade.

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28 Hundorova, *Stat i kultura*, 24.

29 Domontovych, "Doktor Serafikus," 217.

30 Rosh, *Persha stat,* 201.

31 Nils Hammarén & Thomas Johansson, "*Homosociality: In Between Power and Intimacy," SAGE Open* 4, no. 1 (2014), https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244013518057.

32 Rosh, *Persha stat,* 77.

Eventually, Korvyn undergoes a process of gender identification when the shaky and half-ghostly triad of perfect companionship with Serafikus and Tetiana dissolves after their first meeting together. Little is known about Korvyn's youth, his adult masculine physique is described as follows: "A slim posture, a swarthy face, and a long dark arm – all that women find desirable."[33] This description suggests an evolution in Korvyn's character and marks the conclusion of his "seraphic period" in life. While he continues his friendship with Serafikus, this friendship no longer resembles passion or the peculiar intimacy they once shared; instead, it transforms into a bond between two friends, devoid of *philia*.

However, a certain "seraphic" imprint remains on Korvyn despite all his embodied life: "a man of different planes, broken and crossed out lines, mutually contradictory movements and features – the most obvious sign of Cubism – was his (Serafikus's) only student and first disciple."[34] Since Korvyn rejects his love for Komakha and its loss, his denial-in-itself becomes evident. This process can be designated as the melancholy of gender. Judith Butler argues that melancholy evolves when "a masculine gender is formed from the refusal to grieve the masculine as a possibility of love."[35] Korvyn's "broken and crossed out lines" point to melancholic "incorporation of the love that it disavows."[36]

Korvyn embarks on a path of heterosexual attraction and consciously nurtures it within himself. As for Serafikus, it is difficult to confirm that he undergoes a similar journey of love and its loss, as this story is told solely from Korvyn's perspective. However, Komakha also discovers heterosexual attraction. In the case of Tasia, this attraction is exclusively an instance of "imaginary sexuality,"[37] but Komakha eventually seeks to channel his desire toward Ver. Particularly, he writes to her in one of his unsent letters: "I would not sit in the room, bending my big body over the table, but act as my grandfather, a bearded man. He walked behind the plow, straining his muscles, feeling the dampness of the earth, getting drunk on the spring smell of the earth, which excites like a woman."[38] The abstract figure of Komakha or Fats, a "paper silhouette,"[39] fills himself with corporeality because of his desire to Ver. This point will be further elucidated in the next chapter.

Desire and Writing

The writing of Serafikus and his Imaginary are filled with corporeality, but lacks a real relationship with Ver. The published first part of the novel ends at the moment

33 Domontovych, "Doktor Serafikus," 201.
34 Ibid., 217.
35 Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power. Theories in Subjection* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 146.
36 Ibid., 139.
37 Pavlychko, *Dyskurs modernizmu,* 228.
38 Domontovych, "Doktor Serafikus," 286.
39 Ibid., 225.

of Komakha's distress. To trace all the "impossible conditions"[40] of the text, I have examined previously unexplored episodes. In a variant that exists only in the archive, Serafikus wanders tirelessly through the streets, and his walks are described as "automated stereometry, objectless construction."[41] Finally, Komakha discovers Ver's body in reality: "and a quiet pain pierces him, a quiet pain for himself, for Ver, and for the universe. He takes Ver's head in both hands, lightly squeezes it in his palms, and sways in a rhythmic oscillation. Pain, happiness, suffering, and agony."[42]

The rapid discovery of Komakha's heterosexual desire becomes even more important when I take a closer look at Serafikus's transformation in the unpublished pieces. However, now I would like to focus my intention on the published version of the novel, dated 1947, and its ending. In this version, on the last pages, Komakha writes a letter to Ver that will never be sent and read, yet Serafikus keeps writing letters. In other words, Doktor Serafikus partially finds a way to enter the Symbolic. While earlier he produced notes and fragments, by the end of the novel, he begins to create his own writing–endless letters to Ver, manifesting his subjectivity through writing, forming his "distant love" for the woman, and expressing his desire. Thus, he moves away from his initial seraphic nature and unintentionally balances the Symbolic and Imaginary registers. At the beginning, Komakha fails to enter Irtsia's "imagined 'as if'"[43] and remains confined to the world of notes, lacking any creative will of his own. A similar tendency is articulated by one of the characters in the novel *Andrii Lahovskyi* [*Andrii Lahovskyi*] by Ahatanhel Krymskyi, which will be discussed later. Konstantin Schmidt affirms that if "a person writes poems, then he is an ascetic."[44]

In Imaginary, Serafikus claims eternity and rejects history and the usual flow of things. Julia Kristeva noted that "the time of the imaginary is not that of speech. [...] It is a tortuous time, a time that incorporates the atemporal unconscious, the toilsome repetition of the eternal return."[45] Consequently, in the letters to the other, Serafikus becomes the subject of the statement. Importantly, Serafikus can now postulate his desire because the desire to write is born. Beyond this research, such writing can be considered as anamnesis–in other words, the process of creative work of memory "with the aim of a rebirth, or in other words, a psychical restructuring."[46]

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40 Ibid., 224.

41 Viktor Petrov, "Doktor Serafikus" ["Doctor Seraphicus"]. Novel. Mechanic, with author's corrections. No. 95, 116. Fond 243: Petrov Viktor Platonovych (1894–1969), ukrainskyi etnohraf, literaturoznavets i arkheoloh [Petrov Viktor Platonovych (1894–1969), Ukrainian Ethnographer, Literary Scholar and Archaeologist]. Central State Archive-Museum of Literature and Art of Ukraine, Kyiv.

42 Ibid., 127.

43 Domontovych, "Doktor Serafikus," 262.

44 Pavlychko, *Natsionalizm,* 170.

45 Julia Kristeva, "The inexpressible child," in *New Maladies of the Soul,* transl. Ross Mitchell Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 110.

46 Julia Kristeva, "New forms of revolt," *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy – Revue de la philosophie française et de langue française* XXII, no. 2 (2014): 8.

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the distinct negating type of love that Ver and Serafikus affirm: "The end of the novel can be indifferent only when it is turned into the beginning of love."[47] Ver also detests Korvyn's banal remarks about love for a woman. Believing in the search for the new modes of relationship between people, she does not reject heterosexual passion but finds the establishment of conventional relationship repulsive, as does Serafikus. He reflects on the burden of relationship when the desire to have a child awakens in him. In the novel, many dialogues are devoted to love and its various embodiments, yet the negativity of love ultimately prevails. In fact, Ver and Serafikus "have fun looking for a reason."[48] Their connection is a search for a variety of relationships: firstly, love expressed through art and coincidences, as when Ver discovers Serafikus can play the piano; secondly, a conventional relationship of lovers who confess their intimacy while hiding in a room away from the rest of the world; and thirdly, a failure of love, since the seraphic "fullness is absence"[49]: Komakha wants to embody humanity itself and thus needs all women at once. As a result, the world remains entirely seraphic–a realm where there is no need to conceive or carry the other. There is no place for conventional family structures and lovers' relationships. Nonetheless, no realized form of love emerges; instead, love manifests as a constantly changing connection between the two.

Still, it is the "imaginary" seraphic love that begins to enter the Symbolic register and evolves through letters. Serafikus writes: "All that I am, you are. I don't exist. You exist. I exist through you."[50] However, here Komakha remains detached and seraphic, as Serafikus explains: "in anxious desire and hope to meet you [Ver], I [Serafikus] walk, run, search, ask, disturb, rush from one place to another — and never meet you."[51] In this way, Serafikus does not suppress desire, but fully follows it. Julia Kristeva concludes one of her essays as follows: "the tails [...], which structure the subject and consequently create the necessary preconditions for linguistic categories, are tales of love."[52] Eventually, Serafikus opens such a love story. As mentioned above, Serafikus discovers his desire for Ver and, consequently, begins producing his own writing.

Andrii Lahovskyi and *Docktor Serafikus*: Body and Writing

As I mentioned earlier, *Docktor Serafikus* is closer in style to early modernist prose, where homoeroticism and "indirect gender identifications"[53] prevail. For the purposes of a comparative analysis, I have chosen the novel *Andrii Lahovskyi* by Ahatanhel Krymskyi, the first two parts of which were published in 1905. Ahatanhel

47 Domontovych, "Doktor Serafikus," 207.
48 Philippe Sollers, *H* (Paris: Seuil, 1973), 167.
49 Domontovych, "Doktor Serafikus," 248.
50 Ibid., 286.
51 Ibid., 286–287.
52 Kristeva, "The inexpressible child," 112.
53 Hundorova, *Stat i kultura*, 164.

Krymskyi was an orientalist, a writer, and the first secretary of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. He was 23 years older than his colleague at the Academy of Sciences, Viktor Petrov. During his years at the Academy of Sciences, Ahatanhel Krymskyi abandoned his literary work and died in 1942. At the same time, Viktor Petrov produced numerous publications in the Displaced Persons camp periodical *Arka* and through the Artistic Ukrainian Movement. Among these were his two published novels, *Docktor Serafikus* and *Without Ground*. In the shared background of Ahatanhel Krymskyi and Viktor Petrov, there were common academic colleagues, a shared historical context, Viktor Petrov's public speech criticizing Ahatanhel Krymskyi, and the unpublished drafts of Viktor Petrov's article with similarly critical content, dated 1928. In the ideological public field, Ahatanhel Krymskyi and Viktor Petrov were openly at odds. However, despite the generation gap and the difference in their ideological positions, the dialogue between the two intellectuals became possible in the space of literature. In a letter to Ahatanhel Krymskyi, while thinking about *Andrii Lahovskyi*, Lesia Ukrainka wrote: "The only way to prevent 'nature' from climbing 'without notice' through the window is to let her in the door, then maybe she will respect *Sprechstunden* set for her more."[54] These words can aptly be applied to Serafikus, who is still on the way to realizing the presence of windows and doors for love to enter.

The two texts are similar in some plot details: the passion for a woman, male friendship, the platonic devotion, and the main characters' dedication to writing (in Andrii Lahovskyi's case, it is poetry, and in Komakha's case, it is letters), and seraphicity. For Andrii Lahovskyi, seraphicity is best understood in his asceticism, through which he finds healing from a sexual connection with the Greek Zoya and a break with the Schmidt family, particularly, with the eldest brother, Volodymyr. A weak scientist and mathematician, the neurasthenic Andrii Lahovskyi involuntarily enters into a relationship with a woman and feels closeness, partly physical, mostly spiritual, with Volodymyr. Then he overcomes his loss with the help of the teachings of Efrem Syrin, through fasting and his voluntary detachment from the usual flow of life. Andrii Lahovskyi's way is characterized by the suppression of desire and the body. From asceticism and "denied sexuality,"[55] Vasyl Komakha goes in the opposite direction toward the incorporation of loss, the expression of his melancholy in writing to Ver, and finally the discovery of desire accompanied by confusion about its recognition. Despite such an obvious discrepancy, we have another reverse paradox: although Andrii Lahovskyi renounces desire and the body, Krymskyi's writing remains corporeal. Concurrently, although Komakha attempts to find the body, Domontovych's writing remains seraphic and indifferent to the corporeality of the story, at least in the entirety of the work published in 1947.

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54 Lesia Ukrainka, *Povne akademichne zibrannia tvoriv u chotyrnadtsiaty tomakh* [*Full Academic Edition of Works in 14 Volumes*], vol. 13, *"Lysty (1902–06)"* ["*Correspondence (1902–06)*"], ed. Yu. Hronyk (Lutsk: Lesya Ukrainka Volyn National University, 2021), 402.

55 Domontovych, "Doktor Serafikus," 262.

The text of *Andrii Lahovskyi* does not lose its physicality, as asceticism and ecstatic experience are primarily associated with physiological starvation and physical exhaustion. While touches to Serafikus are transparent, in other words, less physical, those in the child's hands of Irtsia, the touches in *Andrii Lahovskyi* become the bonds of tension, joy, and sincerity of the characters in various episodes. This is evident in several of such episodes: "the professor bent down and leaned his face against the half-lying Volodymyr's chest and listened fondly to his heart beating;"[56] "Lahovskyi snuggled his cheek even tighter against his chest;"[57] and "kissing his brother Volodymyr goodbye."[58] No less remarkable is the episode when Andrii Lahovskyi hears Volodymyr having sex with Amalia in the next room: "the unison creak of the tapchan that served Volodymyr for the bed… smacks of kisses… intermittent breathing… some fragmentary sentences…"[59] Moreover, in the first part, when Andrii Lahovskyi pays attention to his own neurasthenia and to his mother's disease, he perceives the illness as a sign of the time, in other words, he is sick because he belongs to this modern age. Consequently, he comes to terms with himself, protecting his body, and allowing himself to express feelings for his comrades. Zoya violates this illusory integrity, as a sexual connection with her causes Andrii Lahovskyi to stay in bed for several days. Despite the obvious spiritual fatigue, his body also warns of physical exhaustion. The thesis about the corporeality of Andrii Lahovskyi is also summed up by the words of Solomiia Pavlychko: "Krymskyi can be considered a revolutionary no less than Olha Kobylianska. Actually, only together with these two authors does the body find its way to Ukrainian literature."[60]

The Transformation of Seraphic Discourse through the 1920s-40s

Considering the divergent paths of Andrii Lahovskyi and Vasyl Komakha, it is possible to confirm the specific historical characteristics of the epoch of V. Domontovych, his unique connection to biologism, and the entrenched cisgender heterosexuality as the conventional norm in the Soviet 1920s. The unpublished pieces in which Komakha "gets tired of his own seraphicity,"[61] expressing the desire to have 15 children and a cow, and to be "carnal," "familial," and "earthly," are extremely illustrative in these terms.[62] In the end, Serafikus meets Tasia by chance. From the meta-position of the narrator, she analyzes the feelings expressed by Komakha and affirms: "After the stage of seraphic isolation, you enter the stage of biological self-awareness."[63] Tasia, an outspoken censor-reviewer, a brief summary of whom is presented after the main text,

56 Ahatanhel Krymskyi, *Andrii Lahovskyi* [*Andrii Lahovskyi*] (Kyiv: Vikhola, 2023), 150.
57 Ibid., 151.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid., 205.
60 Pavlychko, *Natsionalizm*, 113.
61 Viktor Petrov, *Doktor Serafikus*, 138.
62 Ibid., 136.
63 Ibid.

unequivocally confirms: "hand in hand with Tasia, a life-supporting girl, and not a broken, oppressed woman raised on the decadent luxury of pre-revolutionary literature and theater. This is the social meaning of the novel."[64] However, Domontovych's characters are always displaced from their eras, and Serafikus, as I noted above, is also a person of the Fin De Siècle and early Ukrainian modernism. This is because during the post-revolutionary years, it was extremely hard to adapt one's inner life to the new reality of futurist optimism, and then to the unified vision dictated by the socialist-realist conventions. Serafikus is a character of the Soviet future to which he does not fully belong to.

We cannot explain how bodily conscious heterosexual desire becomes possible for Serafikus, but we can confirm that in the turning point of the late 1920s – early 1930s, the text involuntarily mimics the surroundings and becomes repressed. The anonymous censor-reviewer confirms the social meaning of the novel, discarding from this meaning the artistic tendencies embodied in the characters, for instance, the Faustian motive of giving birth to a child not from a woman, the homosocial connection between Komakha and Korvyn, the abstract embodiment, and, therefore, the paradoxical nature of V. Domontovych's writing. It seems that the anonymous censor-reviewer managed to draw such a conclusion by virtue of several last episodes, in which Komakha faces the reader of his handbook on reflexology. His reader Azarychev is the ordinary man that works at *Chervonyi Profintern* [*Red International of Labor Unions*] factory, he impresses Komakha with his appearance: "a crumpled jacket, a blue shirt, an ordinary face of a worker."[65] It is an essential moment when Komakha envisions the recipient of his work outside the university within the framework of Soviet system. He has an offer to give several lectures to the workers of this factory, but hesitates to consent. It is inconvenient, because he does not have "either a simple understandable language, or a stock of specific images" for such an audience[66] Eventually, he gives lecture, getting a lot of attention and questions, hence he enters the world of proletarian masses. Consequently, Komakha is eager to renounce his previous interests and endless note-making, he strives for "close direct connection with the masses," he wants "to touch the consequences of work."[67] Moreover, he becomes concerned with "fundamental questions, a review of the basics of scientific systematics."[68] Particularly, "Komakha dreams of extensive synthetic studies" and "social reconstruction of humanities."[69] All his considerations are elements of monumental transformations at which Soviet scientists aimed. He leaves behind modernism embodied in Ver that translates *Ulysses* by James Joyce and intends to leave their romance in seraphicity.[70]

64 Ibid., 146.
65 Ibid., 131.
66 Ibid., 134.
67 Ibid., 141.
68 Ibid., 142.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid., 138.

The end of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s marked a period of erasure of national culture, plurality of opinions, and identifications began: the ban and the subsequent self-liquidation of the VAPLITE in the winter of 1928; the SVU process in the spring of 1930; and finally, the formation of the only possible literary organization, the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934.

The continuation of the seraphic discourse in the epoch of 1947 became a saving grace for Serafikus as a character. Defeated post-war Germany was a borderland in which there was a chance to renounce any ideologies, both fascism and *bilshovysm*, to shed and dispel inner fears. Unfortunately, the Ukrainian emigrants remained afraid due to the threat of deportation back to the Ukrainian SSR[71]. However, the members of MUR (Artistic Ukrainian Movement) managed to renew the tenacity of Ukrainian modernism and conduct a literary discussion that had been interrupted for at least 20 years and had been deprived of the majority of its members. Under such circumstances, it became possible for V. Domontovych to publish the first part of his work, free from the intense attempts to turn Doktor Serafikus into an exemplary Soviet person, and instead emphasizing his love for pragmatic matters and biological existence.

Along with the publication of the novel about Serafikus, Viktor Petrov's historiosophical essays, Yurii Shevelov's review of the novel, and the memories of Viktor Petrov-Domontovych himself are valuable for analysis. As Yurii Shevelov states, "Domontovych begins where abstraction begins."[72] These words fully correspond to the pervasive image of the "paper silhouette"[73] in *Doktor Serafikus* and the incorporeality of the narrative itself: the narrator mentions the "paper silhouette" several times to characterize Serafikus and Ver. Later Ver and Korvyn meet a hunchback who cuts out Ver's silhouette from black paper. The narrator talks about the eagerness for life that hides behind Ver's paper silhouette. In addition, the life of *Serafikus* unfolds in the papers of scientific notes, then in his endless letters, and it is through the letters that Serafikus takes the first steps towards finding the body. At the same time, Shevelyov's statement denies the literal meaning of the novel and encourages readers to pay attention to all the "impossible conditions"[74] of the text. Hence, I would like to emphasize that the previously unpublished chapters, in which Komakha loses his seraphicity and obtains his identity as a Soviet professor, represent a textual variation that was denied by V. Domontovych while preparing the publication in 1947. As a researcher, I respect the intellectual rights of the author and do not intend to exploit unpublished pieces to reinterpret or break the primary aesthetic unity. However, I have analyzed these chapters in order to highlight the plurality of the text and see all "impossible conditions"[75] of seraphic discourse.

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71 Oleksa Voropai, *V dorozi na zakhid: Shchodennyk uticacha* [*On the Way to the West: The Diary of a Refugee*] (London: Ukraińska vydavnycha spilka, 1970), 145.

72 Yurii Sherekh, "Ne dlia ditei" [Not for Children], in *Ne dlia ditei. Literaturno-krytychni statti y eseii* [*Not for Children. Essays on Modern Ukrainian*] (New-York: Proloh, 1964), 365.

73 Domontovych, "Doktor Serafikus," 225.

74 Ibid., 224.

75 Ibid.

Anthropomorphic Writing of V. Domontovych

When I talk about seraphicity, I claim that it is present in Domontovych's writing as both the anthropocentric narration and writing itself. It is my contention that seraphicity and anthropocentric narrative are inherent not only in the novel *Doktor Serafikus* but also in other texts by Domontovych written at various times. Mostly, Domontovych's creative world is constructed around characters, it is "literary" in the classical sense. Viktor Petrov's article *Ekzystentsializm i my* [*Existentialism and We*], produced in the 1940s, is worth mentioning, in which he states: "A human knows only a human; the world of things is closed to them; our cognition is anthropomorphic, it is subjectivist and egocentric."[76]

In *Divchynka z vedmedykom* [*The Girl with a Teddy Bear*], the human is a whole and there is no question of their metamorphosis from human to plant, insect or animal, while only a fragmented reality is present around the characters, with the only way out being to fall into the wasteland of work at a factory, where other people determine the rhythm of life, as it happened to Ipolit Varetskyi. Moreover, one should pay attention to Domontovych's anthropomorphic landscape, partially expressed through different objects endowed with 'industrialized' descriptions, so that nature becomes more accessible to human understanding. It is also important to consider his other works, particularly *Samotnii mandrivnyk* [*The Lonely Traveler*]. In this novel, the narrator admits that nature is destined to become culture: for example, V. Domontovych describes the "lacquered shine of a brown branch."[77] In *Spraha muzyky* [*The Thirst for Music*], snow metaphorically becomes cotton wool.[78] However, in Ukrainian literature, particularly in poetry, nature has a power that should be discovered renewed in the human world. In Viktor Petrov-Domontovych's literary work, there is no place for a mythical worship of and a sacrificed word: a blossoming almond branch will be transformed into a glass of water on a table with a white tablecloth. Consistently, this articulation of nature agrees with Victor Petrov's reflections on Picasso's cubist piece of art that depicts a dead violin.[79]

In *Spraha muzyky,* the idea of artificial nature and man himself becomes pervasive: the main character Rainer Maria Rilke seeks to get rid of his own body and

76 Viktor Petrov, "Eksistentsializm i my" ["Existentialism and We"], in *Rozvidky* [*Intelligence*], vol. 2 (Kyiv: Tempora, 2013), 881.

77 V. Domontovych, "Samotnii mandrivnyk prostuie po samotnii dorozi" ["A Lonely Traveler Walks a Lonely Road"], in *Spraha muzyky: vybrani roboty* [*The Thirst for Music: Selected Works*], ed. Vira Aheieva (Kyiv: Komora, 2021), 375.

78 V. Domontovych, "Spraha muzyky" ["The Thirst for Music"], in *Spraha muzyky: vybrani roboty* [*The Thirst for Music: Selected Works*], ed. Vira Aheieva (Kyiv: Komora, 2021), 303.

79 Viktor Petrov, "Zasady poetyky (Vid 'Ars poetica' Ye. Malaniuka do 'Ars poetica" doby rozkladenoho atoma)" ["The Principles of Poetics (From 'Ars Poetica" by Ye. Malaniuk to "Ars Poetica' of the Age of Decomposed Atom)"], in *Rozvidky* [*Intelligence*], vol. 2 (Kyiv: Tempora, 2013), 904.

dissolve into music, which seems to be the most self-sufficient shelter since Romanticism. In addition, Ipolit Varetskyi "believed in the crystal purity of Zyna's intense ringing viola" more than her words.[80] Komakha also transforms the environment into objectless music, becoming its conductor, after which Ver turns into "a minute embodiment of imagined music" for a brief moment.[81] In *Divchynka z vedmedykom,* there are such lines*:* "seraphic transparency of the air"[82] that seem to be a precursor of its manifestation in the abstract fiction of *Doktor Serafikus*. Importantly, Komakha "seemed like an abstraction and a fiction"[83] and was devoid of human features from Irtsia's perspective, in whose imagination he moves from the Insect Dad to the category of Pups — not fully a person, but only a human likeness. Komakha is seraphic, therefore not chosen, not defined, and indifferent to things and people around.

Conclusion

I examined the concept of seraphic gender from the perspectives of Fin de Siècle contexts, the psychoanalytic approach in Julia Kristeva's interpretation, gender studies, and a post-structural philosophical approach. I meticulously discovered the essence of seraphic gender in groundlessness, which implies paradoxes in writing, contradictory meaningful components of "seraphicity," and the intersection of various discourse practices.

The components of the elaborated theory of seraphic gender are as follows: firstly, the analysis of meaningful components of seraphicity from the early modernist perspective on sexuality and gender (androgyny, "imaginary sexuality,"[84] and homosexuality); secondly, an exploration of the interrelations between desire and writing, and the resulting evolving subject; thirdly, the transformation of seraphic gender through the 1920s–1940s; finally, seraphicity in its expanded definition, as it appears in other writings by V. Domontovych's writings, is found in the anthropomorphic landscape and in an eagerness to dissolve into the abstract art of music.

To conclude, seraphic gender exists on the intersection of different sexualities present in Fin de Siècle, and it cannot be reduced to one particular practice or identity. However, the comparative analysis of *Doktor Serafikus* and *Andrii Lahovskyi* revealed the gap between the early modernist tendency toward corporeality and seraphic abstractions. The essential part of seraphicity is its paradoxical character, which can be illustrated by Komakha's tendency to express his heterosexual desire in writing to Ver and to balance his Imaginary and Symbolic entities. Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytical

80 V. Domontovych, "Divchynka z vedmedykom" ["The Girl with a Teddy Bear"], in *Divchynka z vedmedykom. Doktor Serafikus* [*The Girl with a Teddy Bear. Doctor Seraphicus*], ed. Vira Aheieva (Kyiv: Komora, 2021), 42.

81 Domontovych, "Doktor Serafikus," 257.

82 Domontovych, "Divchynka z vedmedykom," 81.

83 Domontovych, "Doktor Serafikus," 169.

84 Pavlychko, *Dyskurs modernizmu,* 228.

approach to the text contributed to an understanding of Komakha's discovery of otherness in Ver and their constantly altering relationships, particularly due to the unconscious self-analytical intentions revealed in his letters to Ver.

Importantly, the article consistently refers to transformations of seraphic discourse during the 1920s–40s, as the unpublished literary pieces drastically modified the path of *Doktor Serafikus* and were forgotten in archives. However, the unexplored chapters present valuable material that could help to understand how the seraphic intentions of V. Domontovych's writing were suppressed by Soviet censorship targeting Ukrainian intellectuals in the 1930s. Finally, I examined various transpositions of seraphicity in other works by V. Domontovych from the 1920s–1940s in order to broaden the horizon of seraphic discourse and discover all its "impossible conditions"[85] in both fictional and non-fictional texts by the author.

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85 Domontovych, "Doktor Serafikus," 224.

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