

Published by the decision of the Scientific Council  
of Khachatur Abovian  
Armenian State Pedagogical University



Department of Philosophy and Logic  
named after Academician Georg Brutian



# W I S D O M

Special Issue 2(3), 2022

PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE



*WISDOM is covered in Clarivate Analytics' Emerging Sources  
Citation Index service*

YEREVAN – 2022

DOI: 10.24234/wisdom.v3i2.757

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## MODERN UKRAINIAN GRAND NARRATIVE: PROSPECTS FOR EVOLUTION

### Abstract

The article analyzes the features of the modern Ukrainian narrative. Particular attention is paid to interpreting the term “grand narrative”. By “grand narrative”, we mean the global intellectual narrative of concepts of experience and knowledge, which emerged in the Enlightenment. The paper notes that the grand narrative not only managed to systematize European thinking but has made an intellectual expansion into the whole scientific world. Today, the grand narrative is a rather broad concept, and it means a new method of historiography. The article pays attention to historical research methods: chronological, historical-comparative and retrospective. The work is formed based on the conclusions of the classics of Ukrainian history (M. Hrushevsky) and the grand narratives of modern Ukrainian historians. The results of the study show that in Ukraine, several versions of the grand narrative are formed on different scientific principles: multiethnic, Eurocentrism, Westernization (modernization), and nationalism. We believe that bringing the Ukrainian grand narrative into westernization is undesirable because it significantly limits the heuristic potential. But the national-state concept of narrativism has potential in history, as many Ukrainian “stories” are written under the influence of Soviet stereotypes. Therefore, we believe that today we need to rethink narrativism to find a new Ukrainian grand narrative.

*Keywords:* history, grand narrative, Ukraine, modernity, interpretation, methodology.

### Introduction

The question of the regeneration of narrative (we are talking about Rebirth of Narrative) is particularly relevant today in world historiography. At the same time, the relationship be-

tween scientific (academic) historiography and historical writing has become quite tense. While the end of the twentieth-century narrative suffered a heavy blow due to the postmodern relativism, the studios of popular history have not experienced such problems. At the same time,

today, the concept of grand narrative has a slightly different content and can even be applied in the meaning of a kind of tool for historical research (Kolesnyk, 2008, p. 166). Consequently, many Western European historians now interpret the grand narrative in the sense of a methodology or even a new research method. The latter has several functions, particularly the integration of history into other human sciences (Strauss, 2005, pp. 3-5).

At the same time, the problem of rethinking the history of Ukraine and the formation of a new grand concept or grand national narrative is quite an acute and urgent problem in contemporary Ukrainian humanitarianism. Additional relevance of our study is provided by the treatment of the term “grand narrative”, which is quite ambiguous and problematic in modern scientific studios. Let us note that the search for a new kind of grand narrative in Ukrainian historical science is connected with some changes nowadays in Ukrainian history. First of all, we are talking about a departure from the Soviet concepts of its writing. At present, there are many modern concepts of Ukrainian “grand narratives,” which focus on the principles of polyethnicity or the principles of Eurocentrism. Thus, our article aims to critically analyze the contemporary Ukrainian grand narrative through the prism of its formation and evolutionary changes to highlight the main trends in contemporary Ukrainian historiography.

#### Materials and Methods

To illuminate the problem of the existence of the modern Ukrainian narrative, we turn to general scientific methods of research, among them - analysis, synthesis, induction, and deduction. Great attention is paid to the historical research method, with the help of which we traced the evolution of grand scientific narratives in Ukrainian historiography. The article is also formed based on the method of abstraction. The latter forms the transition from unrelated concepts to concrete conclusions. With the help of the histor-

ical-comparativistic method, we compared different understandings of this complex issue in modern historiography.

The methodological basis of the article was the universal principles of systematicity, scientificity, and abstractness. Meanwhile, much attention was paid to the retrospective and chronological research methods, which are quite widely used in modern humanitarianism. Through the chronological method, the formation of the principles of grand narrative in Ukrainian history is shown. In addition, the methodological basis of our study was formed by the works of the classics of Ukrainian history. At the same time, the article is formed based on the use of modern Ukrainian historiography. In particular, the work of Kolesnyk (2020) is devoted to the terminological features, in particular, the definition of the concept of “grand narrative”, “metanarrative”, and “narrative”. The current state and specific features of the development of modern historical science were analyzed by Mereniuk and Parshyn (2021). Attempts to improve the classical grand narrative of Ukrainian medieval history were made by Parshyn (2018). Certain aspects of the development of historical scholarship through the prism of educational change were analyzed by Dahalan and Ahmad (2018). So, the historiographic base of this study is wide enough, and it will allow us to thoroughly analyze the evolution of the concept of “grand narrative” in the modern intellectual environment and the directions of its further development.

#### Results

##### The Grand Narrative: Peculiarities of Interpretation

Grand narrative literally means “grand narrative”. In historiography, it can be considered that the term was first coined by the famous French philosopher and thinker Jean-François Lyotard (1924-1998). Thus, the concepts of grand narratives became the basis for the critique of historical scholarship in the era of postmodernism. However, this form of criticism (“history is only

a text”) was exaggerated to be indigenous or non-alternative, and subsequently, the concept itself proved successful and took root in the humanities (Browning, 2000, p. 25). In this paper, we use the concept of “grand narrative” proposed by Jean-François Lyotard in his classic work “The State of the Postmodern” (Kolesnyk, 2008, pp. 155-156). In this work, the scholar positions the grand narrative as a certain standard of historiography, which imposes the unification of the components of history.

At the same time, there is confusion in contemporary historical scholarship in terms of terminology. We are talking about different interpretations of the concepts of “grand narrative”, “master narrative”, “metanarrative”, “Great History”, “general scheme”, etc. Note that in Western European studios, the notion of the grand narrative refers to a global intellectual text that combines concepts of experience and knowledge (Strauss, 2005, p. 3; Danilenko et al., 2021). As a phenomenon, it emerged in the Enlightenment and later became an ideological category of the postmodern (given its exact definition), while the “metanarrative” in the Modern era distinguishes these two concepts.

The metanarrative is a universal category formed based on scientism. The strict metanarrative implies using unified principles, laws, causal relations, etc. At the same time, the grand narrative in the concept’s meaning denotes a set of basic ideas or categories (Kolesnyk, 2020, pp. 149-150). The central idea in it is Development, which can be represented by various derived categories, in particular “evolution,” “progress,” “revolution,” etc. At the same time, the metanarrative has other derivative categories, such as “historical peoples,” “non-historical peoples,” “cultural and national revival,” etc. The main part of such a metanarrative is the principle of Eurocentrism, which is reflected in the ideas and cultural activities of Old Europe (Kolesnyk, 2008, p. 156). At the same time, other variants, which depend on the carriers of the values of civilizations (in particular, the United States, Russia, etc.) are also common.

The grand narrative, as a category of the Enlightenment, not only systematized European thinking but carried out an intellectual expansion into the world (Browning, 2000, p. 25). At the same time, there was an imposition of stereotypes of thinking that were unique to the West (Gurman, 2013). Thus, there was a peculiar disregard for such historiography systems as Arab-Islamic, East Asian, etc.

At the same time, since the end of the nineteenth century, the rival category of the grand narrative system has been the so-called formational scheme (Dahalan & Ahmad, 2018). The latter paid special attention to the role of the economic factor in world history. The direct content of this theory was represented in such categories as “formation”, “production”, “class”, “revolution”, etc. At the same time, it should be noted that the grand narrative models of the twentieth century have changed somewhat. We are talking about the geohistory of F. Braudel and the theory of the third wave of E. Toffler. However, as is commonly believed, all this ended with some pessimistic expectations in the example of F. Fukuyama’s theory of “the end of history” (Kolesnyk, 2008, pp.157-158). Thus, to summarize, the classical grand narrative is a peculiar way of reconstructing history, when a large or medium (small) scheme was “thrown” on certain historical “raw material”.

#### The Formation of the Ukrainian Grand Narrative

As for Ukrainian historical thought, the original grand narrative embodied the idea of Russia’s special place and its significance among other nations, including Western Europe. Thus, the priority of the Ukrainian grand narrative was the very history of Ukraine from its earliest times. Within the framework of modernism, the first important grand narrative appears in the arena of historiography - the “History of Ukraine-Rus” by M. Hrushevsky (Merenuk, 2021). He formed a fundamental and scientifically grounded scheme of Ukrainian history, the key catego-

ries of hardship and continuity (Wynar, 1987). In part, it could be argued that the origins of the grand narrative are contained in the works of such Ukrainian historians as M. Kostomarov, M. Maksymovych, V. Antonovich, and P. Kulish, etc.

However, it was M. Hrushevsky, having systematized the experience of the mentioned predecessors, who first formed a powerful concept of the Ukrainian grand narrative. His theory was formed in sharp disputes with the imperial Russian historiography of that time, which had fully owned the history of Russia.

In *The History of Ukraine-Ruh*, a 10-volume monograph, M. Hrushevsky focused on the history of Ukraine from ancient times to the second half of the seventeenth century (Wynar, 1987). He devoted scientific articles and several source studies to the theoretical justification of the independence of the historical development of the Ukrainian people as a separate nation. He subjected a crushing criticism of the concept of “all-Russian” nationality and its history. He believed that Russian historical thought neglected the true development of the Ukrainian and Belarusian peoples. The latter was a particular manifestation of the so-called Russian chauvinism. To popularize the developed concept of the past, M. Hrushevsky wrote several books and articles published in different languages, particularly Ukrainian, German, French, English, Bulgarian, and Czech. Among these works, we should mention “*Essays on the History of Ukrainian People*” (1904), “*Brief History of Ukraine*” (1910), “*Illustrated History of Ukraine*” (1911), etc. A characteristic feature of the then Ukrainian grand narrative was that a large number of written sources: chronicles and ancient documents were found and first published by their authors. The motivation of such studies is largely dictated by the need to show the state’s history as more ancient. Such motive can be explained by the interest of historians in the ancient times of statehood (Hrushevsky & Pasicznyk, 1997).

So, the grand narrative, the great history of ancient Ukraine, formed the basic context and

laid the basic principles of large monographic studies devoted to the actual problems of Ukrainian historical thought (Merenuik, 2021). Firstly, it was possible due to the source base used and later served as a basis for forming monographic, thematic-generalizing historical studies. In particular, in the works of I. Krypiakevych, M. Korduba, I. Dzhydzhora ta I. Kryvetskyi.

Note that the works of the Ukrainian historian I. Krypiakevych contains broad grand narrative principles of text construction. His popular scientific essays, for example, “*The Great History of Ukraine*” and “*A Brief History of Ukraine*”, do not lose their relevance until now. In addition, this historian formed a kind of scientific basis for the further development of the military history of Ukraine. He did not manage to realize his intentions for objective reasons. The defeat of the Ukrainian liberation struggle of 1918-1921 led to the occupation of Ukrainian territory and increased censorship (Lytvyn, 2019, p. 233). Accordingly, it was not possible for a scholar in interwar Poland to publish broader grand narrative essays on the history of Ukraine. This would have been an official challenge to the Polish authorities and would have led to his imprisonment. When I. Krypiakevych became a Soviet historian and professor at the University of Lviv after World War II, the project of writing a comprehensive Ukrainian history became even more difficult to realize than in interwar Poland (Lytvyn, 2019, p. 234). For a long time, the historian’s work was either not needed or was published partially in the form of separate articles. In fact, only after 1991 was it possible to republish his works, partially unspoiled by Soviet censorship. Although much of it still requires conceptual reconsideration.

Although the concept mentioned earlier by M. Hrushevsky became the first weighty Ukrainian grand narrative, as modern Ukrainian historians argue, it had a certain inconsistency with the European historiographical movement. Ukrainian historian I. Lysiak-Rudnytsky was the first to write about it. He pointed out that in the Ukrainian grand narrative of M. Hrushevsky the Lithua-

nian, Polish, and later Cossack era had no correspondences in the historical texts of other nations (Lysyak-Rudnytsky, 1994). He believed this fact isolated the Ukrainian historical grand narrative from a broader interpretation. He divided his model into 1. Ancient and medieval history. Here appeared the sub-periods of Kievan Rus' and later the Galicia-Volhynia kingdom. The most recent is purely the first Ukrainian state; the third sub-period is the Lithuanian era. 2. Early period (until the end of the eighteenth century). 3. Ukraine in the nineteenth century. 4. Ukraine in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Kolesnyk, 2008, pp. 158-159). At the same time, in my opinion. Lysiak-Rudnytsky, the main problem of the modern history of Ukraine is the process of the formation of the nation, the transformation of the ethnolinguistic community into a united and self-conscious community (Lysyak-Rudnytsky, 1994).

Thus, we believe that the first weighty grand narrative work is M. Hrushevsky's *History of Ukraine-Rusa*. However, it is accepted in historiography that his works were not classical European narratives. I. Lysiak-Rudnytsky, who formed his scheme of the history of Ukraine based on European historiography, was one of the first to point out the inconsistency of Hrushevsky's grand narrative. These were the first serious grandiose attempts in Ukrainian history. In the future, other concepts of narratives will influence the formation of the modern Ukrainian grand narrative.

#### Modern Ukrainian Narrative

Several approaches remain popular in the contemporary Ukrainian narrative. It is quite common to interpret the nationality of history through the prism of multiperspective and multi-ethnicity. A prominent representative of this approach is the Canadian historian P. Magocsi. In his works, he defends the theoretical foundations that existing histories about Ukraine's past are stories about a purely Ukrainian nation (in the meaning of the subject of history), but not stories about the history of the territory on which Uk-

raine now stands (Magocsi, 2010). This historian calls his grand narrative the first historical work that depicts the development of all nationalities that settled on Ukrainian territory (Magocsi, 2010, p. 12). It should be noted that the narratives of P. Magocsi are similar to modern European grand narratives.

Another famous historian of Ukrainian origin who lived and worked in Canada was O. Subtelnyi. His thorough and written in a lively literary style, "History of Ukraine" was a real event in the Ukrainian scientific life of the early 1990s. Compared with the "old" Soviet histories, it was characterized by the depth of interpretation, a thorough erudition of the author, literary talent, and a fresh look at historical events little known in Ukrainian society of that time. His concept of the grand narrative is written through the prism of the views of M. Hrushevsky (he also used the definition of "princely epoch", "Polish-Lithuanian epoch", etc.), but in its essence, it was filled with sorrow for the statelessness of the Ukrainian people, and quite critical of the Ukrainian elite of different times. The influence of Westernization processes, then still unknown in Ukrainian historiography, can be felt in his work. It should be noted that the popularity of this edition was very high. For a long time, O. Subtelnyi's work became an unofficial textbook in Ukrainian schools, and the author's conclusions on various issues were quoted even in dissertation studies.

Ya. Dashkevych's concept of historical development. Dashkevych also incorporates the foundations of the grand narrative. His theory of national history is built on the principles of state relativism. In particular, in his interpretation, the general history of Ukraine includes alternation of epochs of statelessness and statehood (Kolesnyk, 2008, p. 156). The views of Ya. Dashkevych's views completely contradicted the influence of the 1990s old Soviet history. He believed that the artificial increase of periods of statelessness in the Ukrainian nation was a dirty game to the detriment of all Ukrainians. This "dirty game" was led by unprincipled opportunistic historians, who, in many things, followed the official ideol-



ogy rather than the real historical facts.

A. Kappeler, who wrote *A Small History of Ukraine*, has shaped his narrative on poly-perspective principles. The author integrated the development of various ethnic groups into his concept of Ukrainian history. In particular, the work pays special attention to Poles, Russians, Jews, and Germans, all nationalities that lived in Ukraine in different periods (Kappeler, 2014). Most contemporary narrative works by Ukrainian historians focus a great deal of attention on the content of polyethnicity and Eurocentrism.

An attempt to revive grand narrative texts throughout the 1990s was the conclusion of the series “Ukraine Through the Ages”. It was suggested that authors of specialists from different periods of history would create a thorough selection of books from the past of the Ukrainian land from primitive times to the present. The project united quite a variety of scientists, the results of whose work, we note, were criticized. At the same time, the project “Ukraine through the Ages” was able to satisfy the great historiographical need of the then society.

Renowned contemporary historian Ya. Hrytsak puts forward his concept of modern Ukrainian history. His history is built on the principles of modernization change or westernization (Hrytsak, 2019). He notes that modernization processes outside of Western Europe are transformed into westernization. It is a kind of copying of European principles given their effectiveness (Hrytsak, 2019, p. 123). In his concept, the fundamental thesis is the opinion that without a weighty Western influence, Ukraine could not have emerged (Kolesnyk, 2008, pp. 165-166). Although, according to Ya. Hrytsak, there could be some alternative, in particular, “Russian civilization” or “Russian society”, but “quite inarticulate”. He begins his modern history of Ukrainian lands with the discovery of America (which, according to the author, is the main event in both European and Ukrainian history). Later on, Ya. Hrytsak (2019) notes that Ukraine, due to all transformational changes, is a peculiar product of Westernization processes (pp. 131-132). In his

concept, the historian takes the theory of civilizational mission as a basis, particularly in Europe. In addition, he applies to Ukraine a peculiar metaphor of a slow snail, which, although slowly, is “crawling” towards Western civilization.

At the same time, the contemporary Ukrainian grand narrative is also built based on traditions of national-state concepts. It should be noted that such a national principle of the formation of the “great history” finds a prominent place in contemporary Ukrainian textbooks, manuals, and monographic studies (Kolesnyk, 2008, p. 159). At the same time, one of the principles of modern grand narrative works is an attempt to fit the history of the development of Ukrainian lands into general historical processes. This is caused by the fact that for quite a long time in Ukraine, history has been explained through the principles of Soviet theories.

Consequently, many textbooks, manuals, and monographs were written based on accepted Soviet concepts. Ukrainian historians are trying to overcome Soviet teaching and writing history principles. Consequently, modern researchers try to pay much attention to the development of Ukraine through the prism of general European transformations to characterize the history of Ukraine as a separate world (European) phenomenon. In addition, the Ukrainian specialists in the study of ancient Russia note the Ukrainian heritage of the history of Russia, especially concerns the history of the Galitsko-Volynsk state, which, as it is commonly believed, is the first purely Ukrainian state. A great contribution to developing this nation-state concept is a monographic study by I. Parshyn, who investigated the development of the Galicia-Volhynia state through the prism of the analysis of diplomatic relations (Parshyn, 2020). The author substantiated in detail the Eurocentricity of the Galicia-Volhynia state. Studying European Latin medieval sources I. Parshyn noted that the princes and kings of the Galicia-Volhynia state were known in many European countries, so their power was mentioned many times by European chroniclers (Parshyn, 2018, p. 12). As scholars of the world, it is necessary to

integrate their national history into world history.

At the same time, we note that when writing world histories, Ukrainian historians should also pay great attention to the changes that took place in Ukrainian territories. Consequently, when describing world-historical events, we should not forget about the analysis of those transformations that took place in Ukraine at that time. We believe that this approach should guide modern Ukrainian textbooks, many of which are written according to the Soviet cliché.

### Discussion

The theme of grand narrative is undoubtedly relevant for contemporary studios. Making sense of the past of entire countries or peoples requires a specific methodology, which cannot always be adhered to. After all, the choice of relevant ways to achieve a scientific goal and its establishment is a matter of a kind of brand. Contemporary topics of historical research also have a certain “fashion”. It is doubtful that the writing of universal and thorough historical studies today can be considered its latest manifestations (Danziger, 2012). On a scholarly level, world histories that fit into the format of a single well-illustrated book are popular. Perhaps this can be considered the first hint of a return to large texts, not articles. Obviously, readers’ (consumers’) sympathies are inclined toward holistic studies rather than individual pieces; accordingly, the value of grand narratives will also grow.

The difficulty in writing them, in our opinion, lies in the fact that many of the authors of really outstanding studies were simultaneously the discoverers of these or those sources. This gave them the right to broadly interpret the material obtained, compare it with other studies, and fit it into the existing texts’ proof (or refutation). The modern studies in the source study component are considerably inferior to the works of the XIX-early XX century. (This is especially true for Ukrainian history). In fact, many monuments of the Antiquity, Middle Ages, or New Age were first published in this period. Thanks to this, his-

torians had a wide opportunity to use new information, which, in turn, opened up the possibility of a wider conclusion and the construction of original concepts. On this basis (and using the thorough erudition of researchers), it was possible to find a whole people in history, as M. Hrushevsky, for example, did. The first books of his grand narrative, “History of Ukraine-Russa”, is written in a somewhat survey style if we compare them with the following volumes, which dealt with the Cossack and Hetman state (Wynar, 1987). At the same time, even in this form, they do not lose their scientific weight and are quite relevant for citation.

At the same time, when most archival materials have already been put into scholarly use, it is much more difficult to write works of this kind. The modern historian pays more attention to interpreting sources than to working with them independently. For this reason, it is difficult to write chronologically broad texts. Obviously, there is a need not only for search work but also for new possibilities for interpreting monuments.

The modern trend of postmodern historiography can bring a new vision and a critical understanding of already known sources (Browning, 2000). At the same time, many efforts have turned to microhistory, the history of things, and the like. These promising avenues of research will not be able to produce a grand narrative, although they are capable of bringing much fresh information to already known studios. Perhaps they themselves emerged as a result of a conscious rejection of “big texts”. In our opinion, however, advances in modern source studies will facilitate a return to the grand narrative.

Ukrainian historians are in a certain advantageous position because for a long time, the history of Ukraine has been taboo for authentic research. Accordingly, the discovery of new sources is quite possible. This could provide an impetus for the creation of substantial new research, as opposed to the “histories” already written under Soviet influence. The rethinking of the known (and the discovery of the unknown) written and archaeological heritage will reveal new



facts and overcome clichés. Although some historians (Ya. Hrytsak, P. Magocsi) suggest consciously abandoning the Ukrainian discourse in favour of westernization or description of the past of minorities of Ukraine, in our opinion, the state vector of historiography will be decisive for the revival of “big texts” in Ukraine and perhaps in the territory of former Soviet republics in general.

We understand and hold true the poly-perspective principles of A. Kappeler. However, we believe that attempts to integrate the history of Ukraine and the history of individual ethnic groups are more evidence of the extensive development of science. A mechanistic increase in the research object does not automatically lead to the creation of a grand narrative. On the contrary, following the way of improvement and expansion of the source base, serious progress can also be achieved in the theoretical plane.

#### Conclusion

Thus, the characteristic feature of contemporary Ukrainian historiography is the appeal to the problem of the grand narrative. Let us note that the search for new types of historiography is associated with systemic changes in Ukrainian historical science, particularly regarding the decommunization and derussianization of the past. It was a departure from the Soviet concepts of description and narration. In particular, many approaches to creating new Ukrainian “grand narratives” are being discussed today. Among them, the principles of polyethnicity, Eurocentrism, and state direction predominate. Based on the critical analysis of the state of modern historiography (taking into account its evolutionary changes and new tendencies), it is noted that the emergence of the grand narrative in Ukraine took place at the beginning of the XX century when M. Hrushevsky wrote, “The History of Ukraine-Rus”. His work still gives rise to discussions, particularly about the need for the revival of this type of work in the following.

In the example of the analysis of actual tho-

ughts (Ya. Hrytsak, P. Magocsi, etc.), an ambiguous attitude to the grand narrative is conducted. The Eurocentric aspirations of these researchers regarding the pro-Western interpretation of the history of Ukraine are summarized. Foreigners (A. Kappeler) also have a suitable place in it. At the same time, the state potential of grand narrative writing is demonstrated, which, in our opinion, is quite promising.

Among practical recommendations, we note the need to integrate Ukrainian history into world history. At the same time, we note that when writing world histories, Ukrainian historians should also pay great attention to the changes that took place in Ukrainian territories. An important basis for describing the history of Ukraine is the reference to similar events in Europe and the world, which will allow us to interpret them in detail. We believe this approach should become a significant tool in writing Ukrainian textbooks and summaries of history.

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