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INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH



**PROCEEDINGS OF IV INTERNATIONAL
SCIENTIFIC AND PRACTICAL CONFERENCE
NOVEMBER 20-22, 2025**

**CHICAGO
2025**

INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Proceedings of IV International Scientific and Practical Conference
Chicago, USA
20-22 November 2025

Chicago, USA

2025

UDC 001.1

The 4th International scientific and practical conference “International experience in scientific research” (November 20-22, 2025) BoScience Publisher, Chicago, USA. 2025. 894 p.

ISBN 978-1-73981-121-1

The recommended citation for this publication is:

Ivanov I. Analysis of the phaunistic composition of Ukraine // International experience in scientific research. Proceedings of the 4th International scientific and practical conference. BoScience Publisher. Chicago, USA. 2025. Pp. 21-27. URL: <https://sci-conf.com.ua/iv-mizhnarodna-naukovo-praktichna-konferentsiya-international-experience-in-scientific-research-20-22-11-2025-chikago-ssha-arhiv/>.

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THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL FIN DE SIÈCLE EPOCH IN
ARTISTIC PERSONAE: THE POETIC VISION OF LINA KOSTENKO

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Annotation. Drawing on the lyrics of prominent contemporary Ukrainian poet Lina Kostenko, this article examines the strategy of artistic modelling of a historical and cultural epoch through the prism of its emblematic representatives. Among diverse cultural periods, particular attention is paid to the fin de siècle, the threshold of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, understood as a time of aesthetic rupture and the search for a new artistic language capable of expressing shifts in worldview and religious experience. In Kostenko's poetic interpretation, the "faces" of this epoch are primarily writers – Knut Hamsun, Arthur Rimbaud, Guillaume Apollinaire, and Marcel Proust. By rethinking their lives and creative paths, Kostenko delineates the most characteristic tendencies of the epoch's cultural life and reflects upon the nature of artistic creation in general and her own work in particular. Biographical facts and artistic works of these writers serve as a cultural intertext in Kostenko's poetry and constitute the foundation of her anthropocentric artistic thinking.

Keywords: Lina Kostenko; poetic biographism; anthropocentrism; cultural intertext; intertextuality; fin de siècle.

Introduction. All major scholars of Lina Kostenko's oeuvre (M. Boretskyi and N. Onyshchak, V. Briukhovetskyi, V. Panchenko, T. Salyha, V. Saienko, L. Tarnashynska, among others) agree that the imagery of her poetry is organically inscribed into a broad cultural context of global significance. This feature is one of the constants of her individual style. As V. Saienko aptly notes, "the undeniable dominant is the mythopoetic line traced throughout her poetry, which is conditioned

not only by the transhistoricity of myth and legend, their capacity for reproduction, dissolution, and reanimation in new artistic structures, but also by the very nature of Kostenko's individual creativity, which drives and continually nourishes this process" [2, p. 227].

A powerful source of intertextuality in Kostenko's work is the epoch of the *fin de siècle*, a historical and cultural threshold between centuries. As models for self-reflection, as a means of contemplating the nature of artistic creation, and as a "lens" for viewing contemporaneity, the images of artists of this epoch are incorporated into Kostenko's poems, forming a distinctive artistic and intellectual pattern.

Aim. The aim of this article is to determine how Lina Kostenko's poetic interpretation of writers of the *fin de siècle* constructs an authorial mosaic of the epoch and shapes the image of the artist at the cultural threshold.

Materials and Methods. The objects of analysis are Kostenko's lyric poems from different periods, united by a shared conceptual focus on artistic figures or works emblematic of the *fin de siècle*. The study applies intertextual, mythopoetic, and hermeneutic methods to reconstruct a poetic image of the threshold epoch as a unique period in world cultural history.

Results and Discussion. In world cultural history, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries constitute a special epoch marked by a transition from traditional to modern worldviews. This period witnesses profound shifts in philosophy, science, art, and public consciousness. The human being of the threshold finds themselves caught between faith in rational progress and a sense of spiritual crisis, between materialism and the search for new spirituality. The vision of the world and of the human changes: the harmonious cosmos gives way to chaos and fragmentation; certainty in scientific reason yields to doubt and intuition; and *fin de siècle* becomes an age of both expectation and anxiety.

In art, which is itself transitioning from realism to modernism, the *fin de siècle* cultivates individualism, psychologism, symbolism, and—significantly—the cult of the creative personality. These tendencies become motifs of the artistic imagination

and shape the work of many writers and artists who turned to the epoch's heritage, including its biographical material.

For Lina Kostenko, the "face" of this epoch is first and foremost the writer. She chooses emblematic figures whose creative and personal biographies reflect both the ascents and the crises of the fin de siècle. Her poetic biographism belongs to the tradition of transpositive lyric poetry, a literary phenomenon in which poetic reception of historical-literary facts produces a new syncretic artistic text that incorporates elements of literary criticism or publicistic reflection.

Among such works are *The Little Boy Came from Charleville*, *A Ballad about Smoke*, *The Shadow of Marie*, and *The Tall Norwegian, Fjords of Pure Reason...* These poems, united in the cycle *Siluety* ("Silhouettes"), reimagine some of the most legendary figures of fin-de-siècle literature: Arthur Rimbaud, Marcel Proust, Knut Hamsun, Guillaume Apollinaire. In each poem, the author employs a different strategy of biographical interpretation: in some ("The Little Boy Came from Charleville," "The Shadow of Marie"), she offers an expanded poetic biography; in others ("The Tall Norwegian..."), she isolates a single biographical fact that embodies the ideological focus; and in yet others ("A Ballad about Smoke"), she evokes only the precedent name, expanding a complex of motifs centred on creativity, solitude, and the changeability of public acclaim. Regardless of the intertextual strategy, each poem reveals key concepts of the fin-de-siècle worldview.

In *The Little Boy Came from Charleville*, Kostenko turns to the figure of Arthur Rimbaud, interpreting his life as a challenge to the bourgeois ("mouldy") society of his time. The title signals both his birthplace (Charleville) and his youth ("little boy"). Yet in the poem's finale, these markers acquire a different valence within the antinomies "province – capital" and "child – artist," where "artist" and "martyr" become near-synonyms: "The little boy came from Charleville.

The martyr returned to Charleville" («Хлопчик прийшов із Шарлевілю. / Мученик вернувся в Шарлевіль» [1, p. 228]). Kostenko evokes the pivotal episode of Rimbaud's life – his arrival in Paris at seventeen and his fateful encounter with Paul Verlaine, which shaped two years of wandering, creative flight, and painful

personal relations. In the poem, Rimbaud emerges as a rebellious, extraordinarily gifted youth, unable to “grow accustomed to humiliation.” His “colour vision” of the world – “His dreams were not yet black and white / His heart still indignant at the mould!” («Сни у нього ще не чорно-білі, / Серце ще обуреє на цвіль!» [1, с. 228]) – underscores his poetic gaze. Kostenko captures Rimbaud’s antagonistic relationship with his surroundings, who perceive him as “unbearable,” “rude,” “mad,” thereby foregrounding the concept of the *poète maudit*, central to the fin-de-siècle sensibility.

In *The Shadow of Marie*, Kostenko focuses on two motifs of Guillaume Apollinaire’s biography: the military (Thanatos) and the love (Eros). The poet’s participation in World War I, his injury, and his famously tumultuous love stories (with Marie Laurencin, Lou, Madeleine Pagès, and Jacqueline Kolb) form the biographical background against which Kostenko unfolds a lyrical drama of memory, betrayal, and longing.

Kostenko interprets Marie Laurencin and Lou as archetypes of Apollinaire’s “confessional aesthetics of pain,” while Madeleine Pagès embodies spiritual tenderness, and Jacqueline Kolb – the late-life calm “on the threshold of death.” The intertwining of these “faces of love” allows Kostenko to present Apollinaire’s biography as a poetic diary of European modernism.

Most striking is her reading of the poet’s final solitude, symbolized by the grave as “the last trench”: “And again alone. The gravediggers will be paid. / They will depart. No visions, no more verse. / And over the last trench of his life – / Only the shadow of Marie...” («І знов один. Заплатять гробокопам. / Розійдуться. Ні віршів, ні видінь. / І над останнім у житті окопом – / лиш тінь Марії, тінь Марії, тінь...» [1, p. 235]). Eros and Thanatos collide, yet Eros remains the more resilient force.

In *The Tall Norwegian, Fjords of Pure Reason...*, Kostenko addresses the tragic paradox of Knut Hamsun, the brilliant modernist prose writer and the political collaborator. Kostenko deliberately avoids the sphere of personal relations and instead concentrates on the writer’s catastrophic moral fall during World War II.

She juxtaposes the young Hamsun – the author of *Victoria, Pan, Mysteries* – whose works radiated northern purity and enthralled readers worldwide, with the elderly writer who supported the Nazi occupation of Norway. The poem evokes the historical episode when Norwegians returned Hamsun's books to him, tossing them over the fence of his house.

Kostenko, who experienced censorship and refused compromise, rejects any middle ground: “Great – or two-faced. There is no in-between” («Великий або дволикий. Середини тут немає» [1, с. 253]). The ideological betrayal for her is tantamount to artistic death: “People walk by and simply throw away your books – / As simply as shoveling earth onto a grave” («А люди проходять, проходять, і просто кидають книги. / Так просто, як у могилу кидають грудки землі» [1, с. 253]). Thus, Hamsun becomes a tragic warning: the artist must remain an integral moral personality.

Lina Kostenko reflects on the loneliness of the artist as his fate in *Ballad of Smoke*. Although the poem is about the tragic and sudden death of a writer from another historical and cultural era – Ingeborg Bachmann, who died in 1973 from burns caused by an unextinguished cigarette – Lina Kostenko introduces the name of the modernist artist Marcel Proust into the context of the poem. The author personifies smoke, which, bringing death to the poet, tries to wake up the residents of the house, still hoping for her salvation: “Wake up, people! – he told them. But the people slept on” («Просніться, люди! – так він їм казав. А люди спали» [1, р. 421]). Lina Kostenko contrasts the “crowded house” in the center of Rome with a lonely writer who even “already played chess / with herself,” and human indifference with Bachmann's dramatic works: “She burned in the bonfire / Of her own poems” («Вона ж згоріла у тому багатті / Із власних віршів» [1, р. 421]). It is known that the leading themes in the Austrian writer's work were destructive love, trauma, physical vulnerability, and patriarchal violence. So her death seems to tragically echo the fates of her heroines. But Lina Kostenko draws another parallel, recalling Marcel Proust in a rhetorical question: “Was Proust, Marcel, more lonely / In his ivory tower, like a ship's hold?!” («Чи Пруст, Марсель, був більше самотній

/ В слонової башті, схожій на ладдю?!» [1, с. 421]). We see in this an allusion to the loneliness of one of the greatest modernist writers, the author of *In Search of Lost Time*, which was determined by biographical, psychological, and aesthetic factors. For him (and for his hero), loneliness is the only way to understand the deep mechanisms of the human soul, but a painful, personal, and civilizational opportunity for a writer who saw a different world after World War I. Thus, in the fates of these two writers, Lina Kostenko sees a dramatic pattern of the existential loneliness of artists of any era.

Conclusions. Lina Kostenko constructs an image of fin-de-siècle artistic life by turning to the biographies of emblematic writers. Her poems acquire features typical of transpositive texts: reliance on recognizable biographical facts; identification of time and place; concise, often paraphrastic characterization of an author's *magnum opus* or stylistic affiliation. Her lyrical heroes are not merely generalized artistic figures but historically grounded personae who become symbolic "mirrors" in which the poet reflects upon her own creative path and ethical choices.

Kostenko's anthropocentric rethinking of Rimbaud, Apollinaire, Hamsun, and Proust reveals not only her interpretation of the fin de siècle but also her meditation on the timeless destinies of artists – their solitude, temptations, moral trials, and enduring cultural voices.

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