



Writing Between the Lines: Formal Discontinuities in Autobiographies of Ukrainian Writers, 1890s-1940s

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*Writing between the lines:
Formal discontinuities in autobiographies of Ukrainian writers, 1890s-1940s*

A dissertation presented
by
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to
The Department of Slavic Languages & Literatures

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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in the subject of Slavic Languages and Literatures

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Abstract

My dissertation treats life-writing in Ukrainian literature from the 1890s to the 1940s. These texts are often marked by radical discontinuities: temporal, stylistic, ideological, linguistic, etc. Autobiographies tempt readers to imagine narrators in a straight teleological progression towards self-actualization. However, my research focuses on cultural and historical periods that render such teleological readings unattainable. Unable or unwilling to render intelligible or to impose totalizing cohesiveness on the tensions within the tradition, writers often put discontinuities in the forefront thematically and formally.

Chapter 1 offers an overview of the history of life writing in contemporary Ukrainian literature from the latter third of the 19th century to the present, with special attention to inconsistencies and breaks in continuities. **Chapter 2** focuses on how Soviet questionnaires shaped authorial self-fashioning in the 1920s, and the avant-gardists creative responses to the form, based on the so-called Plevako Archives and the editorial crypto-autobiographies of the journal *Literaturnyj Iarmarok*. **Chapter 3** delves on the pronoun trouble in *The Enchanted Desna* by Oleksandr Dovzhenko and in the short

stories by Vasyl Stefanyk. Oleksandr Dovzhenko probes the boundaries of life writing as a genre, contending that a writer's biography encompasses not his or her individual biography, but rather the history of the writer's literary tradition. Therefore, first person singular pronouns incorporate a multitude of occasionally contradictory voices. Vasyl Stefanyk's short stories, meanwhile, enact the drama of the narrator's disappearance, pointing to the fact that his authorial positioning was rife with conflicts that he had for a while sought to reconcile through the medium of life writing. **Chapter 4** offers an analysis of experiments with temporality in *The Princess* by Olha Kobylianska and *The Master of the Ship* by Iurii Ianovskii. Both of the novels are meta-autobiographical: they follow protagonists engaged in the act of life writing and explore the specificity of autobiographical texts. Kobylianska focused on the instability of identity constructs over time, questioning the possibility of a totalizing cohesive vision of selfhood. Meanwhile, Ianovskyi's *The Master of the Ship* explored the possibility of life writing as the synthetic and collective art form, combining the expressive possibilities of fiction, cinema, and more.

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Introduction

My research project treats various forms of life-writing in Ukrainian literature from the late 1890s to the 1940s. These texts are often marked by radical discontinuities: breaks in the temporal planes of narrators and their past narrated selves; conscious style shifts where style is treated as a constituent of identity; attempts and refusals to reconcile one's life story with the Soviet questionnaires meant to define a model Soviet citizen, and more. Autobiographies can tempt us to imagine narrators in a straight teleological progression towards a fuller self-actualization of a somewhat essentialized notion of identity. But some cultural and historical periods render such teleological readings unattainable, and it is precisely those moments on which my research focuses.

The earliest texts analyzed here were written at the time when Ukraine was divided between two empires (Austria-Hungary in the West, Russian Empire in the East); the latest were created during the Soviet times. All the autobiographers I treat had a choice between several cultures, literary traditions, historical narratives and languages, which often resulted in hybridized inter-linguistic and inter-cultural identities. The tensions or mediations between these choices were often realized on the formal level as well, resulting in tense shifts, changing rhetorical registers and styles, and ironic engagements with often conflicting places of memory. Although such moments of discontinuity in autobiographical texts are occasionally treated as signs of fictionality, I do not intend to analyze such instances through the prism of the fact/fiction dichotomy. I

am interested in these formal devices as meaning-generating mechanisms within the context of life writing, the spaces of artistic ambiguity that encourage new articulations of identities (particularly in relation to the preexisting cultural tradition as perceived by each writer). They serve an important function in structuring authorial self-fashioning, figuring the place of writing and sources of authority, exploring through non-linear narration the new interrelations between the narrating personae, the narrated personae, and the implied or explicitly described addressee, and more.

The first chapter offers a concise overview of the history of life writing in contemporary Ukrainian literature from the latter third of the 19th century to the present, with special attention to inconsistencies and breaks in continuities, whether thematized or unacknowledged by their authors. While the texts that I find particularly emblematic for any given era are analyzed in detail, additional examples from other works of the period are offered where illustrative or necessary. The earliest included writer is Panteleimon Kulish (1819-1897): although not the first autobiographer in modern Ukrainian literature, he was among the first to make explicitly autobiographical articulations an integral part of his culture-building project. In his autobiographical texts, he often thematized the disconnect between the oral folk tradition (in his vision, the sole repository of Ukrainian culture) and the needs of creating a written high culture for educated urbanites. The modernist period is represented by Mykola Sadovskyi (1856-1933), a choice that might raise a few eyebrows: commonly associated with populist theatre and deeply unfashionable in contemporary literary criticism, he still produced a little-known war memoir that aptly demonstrates a search for a new language to adequately convey new

experiences of the traumatic modernity. The early decades of the Soviet rule are analyzed in Chapter 2, so I will not be focusing on them in this chapter in particular, whereas the later years of the USSR are represented by Iurii Smolych (1900-1976). His works of fiction had largely slipped from the literary canon, but his multi-volume memoir conceived during the Khrushchev Thaw remains widely read to this day; it is emblematic of the strategies survivors of the Great Terror employed to smuggle in the proscribed figures back into the literary history under the guise of tracking the impact of revolution through life writing. The 1990s mark a very belated dialogue with the long-excised modernism and the emergence of archaic figurations of selfhood adopted from much earlier epochs. This subchapter focuses on Oksana Zabuzhko's model of self-fashioning, largely modeled on Taras Shevchenko's image and, more broadly, on the Romantic topos of a national prophet-bard.

Chapter 2 focuses on the so-called Plevako Archives and the editorial crypto-autobiographies of the literary journal *Literaturnyj Iarmarok* [Literary Marketplace]. Based on these sources, I seek to outline how Soviet questionnaires shaped authorial self-fashioning in the 1920s, and the avant-gardists creative responses to and appropriations of the form. Plevako Archives (1922-1933) are a large-scale and largely unpublished collection of autobiographies of writers, poets, translators and educators solicited by the literary scholar and historian Mykola Plevako during the crucial decade when figurations of selfhood were shifting by the day, and the unwillingness to catch up to the current rhetoric could spell the difference between life and death. As such, this collection demonstrates the changing and emerging topoi of self-representation of a vibrant decade

that disappeared into silence with the Great Terror of the 1930s, as well as creative attempts to undermine the progressively codified practice of autobiography writing.

Chapter 3 delves on the pronoun trouble in several widely different corpuses of texts. In his explicitly autobiographical novella *The Enchanted Desna* (1956) describing his childhood in a Ukrainian village at the turn of the century, Oleksandr Dovzhenko probes the boundaries of life writing as a genre. His conceptualization of a writer's biography (at least as expressed in *The Enchanted Desna*) encompasses not only, and not even primary his or her individual biography, but rather the history of the writer's literary tradition and the history of his or her generation. Therefore, first person singular pronouns in fact are radically unhinged to incorporate a multitude of occasionally contradictory voices, in order to provide witnessing to the multiple historical traumas of the generation and to equate writer's biography with the literary tradition that he inscribes himself into. Vasyl Stefanyk's autobiographical writing began from a premise not altogether dissimilar from Dovzhenko's (the quandaries of representing the traumas of the group one does not quite belong to, and the necessity to reconcile aesthetical and ethical dimensions of artworks). The notion that Stefanyk's writing is markedly "impersonal" had been a scholarly commonplace at least since the 1920s, yet it is undermined by the fact that many of his ostensibly "impersonal" short stories are steeped in his autobiographical vignettes in familial letters. As such, the subsequent versions of the short stories enact the drama of the narrator's disappearance, offering a better understanding of Stefanyk's notion of what literature is, and what it should do. Stefanyk's eventual disappearance from the literary world at the peak of his fame points

to the fact that his aesthetics and his authorial positioning was rife with conflicts and inconsistencies that he had for a while sought to reconcile through the medium of life writing, but did not find any of these projects viable.

Chapter 4 offers an analysis of experiments with temporality in *The Princess* [*Tsarivna*] by Olha Kobylianska (1895) and *The Master of the Ship* [*Maister Korablia*] by Iurii Ianovskii (1928). Although dissimilar in many other respects, both of the novels are meta-autobiographical, in that they follow protagonists engaged in the act of life writing and explore the specificity of autobiographical texts as opposed to fiction. Additionally, they exhibit formal parallels: namely, both mediate between present and past tense and between first and third person narration, although they do so to engage with divergent narrative purposes. Kobylianska focused on the disconnect between self-perception and self-construction, especially in the case of women writers in a provincial and deeply patriarchal society, and on the instability of identity constructs over time, questioning the possibility of a totalizing cohesive vision of selfhood. The particular challenges of representing essentially mutable identities prompted stylistic and thematic innovations that lay the foundations of Ukrainian literary modernism. Meanwhile, Ianovskyi's *The Master of the Ship* explored the possibility of life writing as the coveted synthetic and collective art form, combining the expressive possibilities of fiction, cinema, and more. It also glorified life writing (as opposed to fiction) as an open form that laid bare the technical means of textual construction, leaving spaces of ambiguity that readers were invited to collaborate in filling.

As can be seen from this brief overview, formal discontinuities stemming from particular challenges of life writing often pushed these works to the forefront of literary history of their respective eras. They often lay the groundwork for emergent artistic and literary movements, tracing the tension lines within culture that would eventually change the course of literary history.

Chapter 1

Autobiographies in Modern Ukrainian Literature

Serhii Zhadan, a prominent contemporary writer with an unprepossessing biography, once quipped that biographies of Ukrainian writers of certain periods tended to be more of a page-turner than their novels. This juxtaposition of art and life fails to take into account the essential fact that, with the disproportionate visibility of life writing in Ukrainian literature, the separation of the two is nigh impossible, and is bound to be a messy and overall not too critically productive affair.

Life writing (in different modes, styles and forms) occupied a prominent position in modern Ukrainian literature since its inception. Despite the temptation to push the chronological boundaries of the genre as far back as possible into the treacherous mists of time, the present overview will not extend past the latter half of the 19th century, covering only the history of Ukrainian literature in its modern permutation, once its practitioners started to conceptualize their project as a living historical unity. While there are earlier texts that might be described as precursors or early examples of life writing (for example, the nobility's multigenerational home chronicles known as *silva rerum*), their primary functions, concerns and conventions do not necessarily align with the issues that I would like to explore at present. Since the evidence of formal continuity between the two clusters, once the most tenuous connections are discarded, is scant, the distant roots of life writing in Ukrainian literature need not be explored at this juncture.

Therefore, the periods that are of most direct relevance to the problems posed in my dissertation cover the times when Ukrainian writers and cultural activists, on the one hand, professed an awareness of continuity (albeit adversarial at times), imagining an extensive literary genealogy for their preferred themes and forms. On the other hand, to render intelligibility to the tensions within the tradition and to historical hurdles they faced, writers often had to put discontinuities in the forefront, both thematically and formally, and nowhere is this more prominent than in their autobiographies. To a degree, drastic shifts that challenge or undermine the traditional procedures for ascribing lives and texts meaning *become* meaning themselves.

The present abbreviated overview of the history of life writing in modern Ukrainian literature makes a particular emphasis on discontinuities and thematized inconsistencies as the loci that reveal the key tension lines within the culture at any given point in time. Writers of **the 1850s-1890s** were plagued by prohibitions against publishing in Ukrainian and left with little but folk culture in lieu of easily accessible precursors. They balanced precariously between an orientation towards the past inherent in their status as collectors of folklore (a source of themes, formal elements, and useable national symbols) and between their professed future-oriented goal of creating a new national literature and a new national community it would serve. Their autobiographies often offer an exercise in justifying their decision to write in a marginalized language and meticulously construct a narrator's persona distinct from an empirical writer, whose integration into the imperial social structure could be at odds with his or her writerly choices. As the new generation of writers took center stage in **1890s-1917**, replacing

socially engaged, populist, folklore-oriented writers of old, autobiographies or heavily autobiographical fiction became a testing ground for new philosophies and ideologies. The project of creating a new, urban, formally sophisticated literature attuned to pan-European aesthetic and cultural movements was underpinned by a search for a new way of living, creating a larger performative complex spanning fiction, life writing, and behavioral models. In **the 1920s**, the catalogue of available images and narratives used to ascribe life forms and meaning was supplemented with and greatly influenced by the new Soviet codified ways of self-description, intended to help Soviet citizens navigate the new society and to pinpoint their position in the class system. In a society where “speaking Bolshevik” was a prerequisite for social mobility, success, and, occasionally, survival, many a writer clambered to develop a model biography of a Soviet writer. Avant-garde experiments with form, too, did not stop at fiction and reached life writing: texts that, in effect, deconstructed the structures of conventional autobiographies coexisted with autobiographies steeped in official Soviet questionnaires, often within the oeuvre of one writer. After several decades of enforced near-silence, the **1960s-1970s** brought a cautious liberalization in the sphere of culture. It was marked, among other phenomena, by a proliferation of memoirs about or autobiographies featuring the writers’ milieu of the 1920s, mostly wiped out during the Great Terror. Much like their predecessors from a century ago, despite an ostensible orientation towards the past, the writers who hazarded a lavish description of the 1920s sought to outline a paradigm for the future: a future which would allow a broader archive of creative experimentation, expanded freedom of expression, and more. Of course, their suggestion had to be

couched in the rhetoric sanctioned by the authorities to make their modest proposal more acceptable: the marked disconnect between their idioms and themes is a tribute to their boundless optimism masquerading as a pragmatic plan. Like all times of social upheaval, the **post-1991** years saw a search for a new literary canon, cultural hierarchy and a model writerly biography, prompting a new generation of writers to engage in life writing. The prompt return of the formerly proscribed writers to circulation and, in due time, to the national literary canon meant that many autobiographies of the 1990s-2010s were in dialogue with texts written some 70 years earlier and manifested a curious *mélange* of earlier tropes with topically relevant concerns of the late 20th – the early 21st century.

The present overview uses the most typical or provocative texts as starting points for outlining broader cultural concerns of each respective period.

1.1 1850s through 1890s.

The images and motifs that defined the face of life writing in modern Ukrainian literature until the 1920s (and, arguably, even after that, with slight modifications) were codified during the earliest period in its history. Familiarity breeds spectacular blind spots: defining the features unique to this period may prove quite a challenge precisely due to the ubiquity of the era's offshoots. The themes and institutional particularities that seem most salient to the issue of formal discontinuities in autobiographies of the time, in effect, can be encapsulated as follows:

* the dichotomy between written culture and its oral sources became pivotal for many writers' self-fashioning: initially steeped in or enamoured with the latter, they had

to transcend its clout and scope, which proved to be a sensitive matter to many artists of the generation;

* this dichotomy informed many writers' attempts to negotiate bilingual and/or bicultural identity configurations as they sought or refused to reconcile their Ukrainian identity with their identity as subjects of the Russian Empire. Autobiographies (and fiction) written in different languages, even synchronously, would often follow divergent rules and routes;

* at that stage, periodicals were the most prominent venue for Ukrainian literature and Ukrainian studies, serving an important role as a mobilizing factor for many activists and affecting the genre of autobiography (the choice of venue might have invited writers to adopt a more polemical stance or to cultivate an ethnographic aspect of life writing to better fit the editorial program and stated goals of the most prominent Ukrainian magazines of the time; the implicit or explicit – in the form of prefaces, commentaries or selection choices – presence of editors also made life writing a collaborative and dialogic venture, making texts more open than they might have been otherwise).

The community-forming role of multiple periodicals that emerged at the time contributed to the fact that the 1860s saw the tipping point in the attempts to revitalize Ukrainian culture and to shift the center of literary production from an occasional ethnographic publication or a romantic poetry collection (also informed by the style of folk songs) toward a more universalist culture, with more genres and styles, that could inspire increasingly urban educated population. The 1860s-1890s were dominated by a search for this “high culture” that might take its origins from folk culture but was not

limited to it. This ambiguity of devotion and resentment was often framed through the metaphor of dressing up peasants:

The popular metaphor provided a catchy image of "dressing" the overwhelmingly peasant nation with the "clothes" of a modern high culture, aptly expressing the essence of the intelligentsia's conscious construction of the new Ukrainian high culture in the name of the peasantry and from the rudiments of folk culture. (Yekelchuk 2001: 230)

One cannot underestimate the role played by two prominent journals in laying the foundations of this project: first came the Petersburg-based *Osnova* (1861-1862, edited by Vasyl Bilozerskyi and, unofficially, by Panteleimon Kulish), and subsequently the Kyiv-based *Kievskaiia Starina* (1882-1906, edited by Feofan Lebedyntsev in 1882-1887, Oleksandr Lashkevych in 1887-1889, Ievhen Kyvlytskyi in 1890-1892 and Volodymyr Naumenko in 1893-1907).

Osnova was the largest initiative of the Petersburg-based Ukrainian circle, which in the 1850-60s was the center of Ukrainian cultural, public, and national movement. The journal was published largely in Russian, with some fiction and ethnographic records included in the original Ukrainian. Its editor, Vasyl Bilozerskyi, maintained that a bilingual Ukrainian-Russian edition was to provide "training wheels" for its audience: it was meant to encourage readers who forgot their native tongue ("родной язык") or doubted whether it was suitable for describing public life to learn more about their homeland and possibly even to use Ukrainian more extensively. Bilozerskyi believed that a periodical published exclusively in Ukrainian would alienate many readers at that stage, either because the reminder about the ongoing language shift would make them feel guilty ("упрек совести"), or because they would find such a publication outright incomprehensible (quoted from Dudko 2012). Bilozerskyi's description implies that the

limited functional sphere of Ukrainian was a temporary stage, and language shift was essentially reversible. This optimistic program posed a drastic departure from the rather more commonly envisioned program (possibly best known as Mykola Kostomarov's idea of “literature for home use”) of

the parallel development of Ukrainian- and Russian-language literatures in Ukraine - the former using the villagers’ dialect to describe peasant life and the latter discussing elevated subjects as part of an ‘all-Russian’ literary discourse.” (Yekelchuk 2001: 232)

To a large extent, *Osnova*’s implied goal was to develop a figuration for a discrete cultural Little Russian/Ukrainian identity that wouldn’t collapse into the central imperial narrative; the realization of the project entailed both a prompt canon-formation, and a search for usable historical symbols. As was typical of nascent nationalist movements of the time, particular attention was paid to proving the independence and distinctness of Ukrainian language and its ability to serve all functional spheres.¹ This implied goal informed its editors’ selection of autobiographies that were published in *Osnova*, and many authors’ strategies when it came to life writing. Many of the journal’s contributors articulated the dichotomy that ran through the majority of autobiographies of the period: that is, the uneasy and unequal coexistence of Ukrainian culture, described as largely oral, folk-based and hence “authentic,” and Russian (learned, artificial and acquired by choice rather than born to as an essential part of the writer’s identity). The most daring

¹ At that stage, the authorities were not yet opposed to occasional publications of literary works or historical sources in Ukrainian; to a certain extent, it could legally be used in primary schooling, with children who had not yet mastered Russian. However, the matters took a different turn when the team behind *Osnova* (among others) started to emphasize the symbolic role of language in identity formation and national representation (see Miller 2013: 93-5). This prompted the secret Valuev Circular of 1863, prohibiting the vast majority of publications in Ukrainian in order to quash “Little Russian separatism” and vehemently insisting that “no separate Little Russian language ever existed, doesn't exist, and couldn't exist.” The irony of the need to prohibit a phenomenon that purportedly never existed seemed to have been lost on the Minister of Internal Affairs Pyotr Valuev.

description of this juxtaposition is contained in the programmatic editorial “Zametka o narodnom iazyke” (#4/1861: pp. 21-29) which sought to legitimize Ukrainian language as a literary medium, contrasting the natural folk language as a “truly national phenomenon” (“явление чисто-народное”) with a more artificial Russian literature, which “diluted” vibrant and diverse folk forms with foreign loans. The editorial invites the conclusion that, far from being a groundless affectation (a common accusation by imperial critics who found it a waste of talent and effort), Ukrainian literature is legitimate venue by virtue of its connection to the folk element.

Some of the autobiographies, however, were more cautious and conservative than daring editorials. For example, the first year of the journal’s existence saw the publication of the pseudonymous «Отрывки изъ автобіографіи Василя Петровича Белокопытенка» (№3-1861, pp. 50-77), in actuality penned by the noted ethnographer Matvii Nomys (a pseudonym of the writer, ethnographer and educator Matvii Symonov, 1823-1900). To a large extent, it documents the ambiguities of an identity of a loyal political subject of the Russian Empire who still harbors a cultural loyalty to all things Ukrainian. On the one hand, the autobiographer subverts his readers’ expectations about which culture is the default, and which is the marked departure from the norm. Although not averse to using the pejorative terms *Khokhlandiia* and *khokhliionok* for self-description (for example, on p. 66), which demonstrates that Nomys must have internalized the perspective of a representative of the dominant nation, it is the representatives of the imperial administration that are consistently shown as comic figures that have little knowledge about the local specificity and fail to understand the

symbolic and real knowledge of the communities ostensibly in their care. The narrator made light of Russians' prejudices in a scene describing an officer who accused Ukrainians of harboring "Mazepa's spirit" (p. 67) – an accusation seemingly so absurd that derision was the only answer it merited – and ridiculed the linguistic inadequacy of another officer who spoke no Ukrainian, causing multiple petty misunderstandings when he was stationed at the narrator's family home (pp. 61-2). The decision to describe Ukrainian speakers as the default (the officer is comical in his not understanding Ukrainian, not them in their not understanding Russian) radically reverses the accepted linguistic hierarchy. Nomys's occasional reminders that the two languages are not mutually intelligible are in tune with the editorial decision to append a short dictionary of Ukrainian words at the end of each issue of *Osnova*, underscoring the status of Ukrainian as a separate language with distinct vocabulary and grammar that require and deserve serious studies.

Matvii Nomys, however, clearly outlined the spheres within which Ukrainian ought to function. The autobiography features multiple dialogues transcribed in Ukrainian, but the narrator consistently uses Russian: while characters, particularly from the less educated strata, may speak Ukrainian, an educated narrator should not (this mirrors the linguistic ambiguity of the 1819 drama "Natalka Poltavka" by Ivan Kotliarevskyi, widely recognized as the "founding father" of modern Ukrainian literature: even if the drama was in Ukrainian and used language mixtures for comic effect, authorial asides were in Russian). In Nomys's autobiography, Ukrainian is used within a rather limited scope, largely associated with folk customs. Life writing is little more than

a pretext for compiling detailed folkloristic write-ups conveniently occasioned by protagonist's travels and experiences: for example, the narrator meticulously documents Ukrainian technical terms for preparing sledges (p. 54).

This privileging of the ethnographic mode at the expense of the new topics pertaining to the broadly conceived modernity is occasionally used for comic effect: Ukrainian-speaking characters not only speak the language that was not well-integrated into the schooling system, they were not at ease with rational scientific knowledge as such. For example, the narrator's father brushed off his son's explanations about the structure of the universe with fairytale-esque denials: "See," he said, "what they learn!.. Their silly parents waste their money!.. What beast stretched your chain up to the sun so that you know how many versts away it is? Did they ask crows?" ["Бач", говорить, "чому вони вчятця!.. А дурні батьки гроші тратять!.. Який же вамъ гаспидъ цепь тягавъ до сонця, що знаєте, скільки туди верстовъ? Хіба чи не воронъ просили?"] (p. 52). Ukrainian might be described as a language that serves all spheres of life in its territory and should be learned by visitors and officials from other corners of the Russian Empire, this life does not easily incorporate scientific progress, urban life, sophisticated discussions and, most likely, literature.²

² It is telling that the first work of fiction to explicitly thematize the issue of terminology as connected to regimes of knowledge was written by a writer who was doubly marginalized: as a woman and as a representative of a colonized nation. The 1887 novella "Girlfriends" [Товаришки] by Olena Pchilka explores the overlap between (/not) being able to name and (/not) being able to know, and traces various ways of knowing. The novella's protagonist, a young woman by the name of Liubochka, discovers her interest in sciences through probing folk riddles ("Oh, what grows without a root? From that song, Liubochka knows that a stone grows without a root, but how is it possible? How does it grow?"). Her progression from the knowledge that can be inscribed in folklore to scientific knowledge (she proceeds to get education in Zurich) unfolds as she ponders the challenges of coining scientific terminology in Ukrainian, searching for or creating a language to describe thus to ratify her experience.

The anonymously published “Moi vospominania” (1861, №7, pp. 44-56) curtails the usage of Ukrainian not only to certain thematic fields, but also to certain temporal planes: namely, to the past. The very first line declares that the text belongs to the nostalgic discourse, with the narrator trying to recreate the homeland he barely knew to begin with: “I left Little Russia as a nine-year-old boy, and since then, for 12 full years, I haven’t seen my motherland” (p. 44). Language is described as the cornerstone of this separate identity, the kernel of his otherness: the narrator rejoiced in hearing Ukrainian when his family visited because “I was happy to understand who I was and whence I came, and not to get lost among the other nation [народность]”. Of course, even in this passage the narrator is but a recipient of the speech acts of others: a figure of a passive if enthusiastic reader, much like the imagined audience of *Osnova*. Step by painful step, however, the narrator comes to realize that his image of his motherland is a textual construct based on songs about the past that he heard from his servants. It is not steeped in anybody’s lived experience or any objective knowledge about the contemporary region. Essentially, it no longer exists in any space that can be found on a map, and it is unclear whether it ever did:

Eventually I had to acknowledge the impossibility of the fact that in 500 versts there lived an ever-celebrating, raucous nation that dedicated its life to fighting non-Christians to defend their faith and freedom. From the books I learned that freedom was long lost, and that the formerly militant and wily Tatars became peaceful traders ... I also learned that although Little Russia has its own language that differs greatly from the Greater Russian, only the simple folk, the *muzhiks*, speak it, whereas the noble gentry avoids it as something unseemly and unworthy, and understands it only because peasants know no other language, and one has to force them to work. (p. 47)

The narrator is disappointed to discover decidedly more pedestrian types occupying the lands that he had come to associate with heroic figures from folk songs.

His anguish is somewhat assuaged only by reading the stories by Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko (1778-1843), one of the most prominent Ukrainian writers of the first half of the 19th century: they almost make him believe that his “motherland is a wonderful land.” Modern literature thus mediates between the idealized past gleaned from folklore and the political realities that fail to live up to the expectations conditioned by romantic visions of battlefield glory. However, an autobiography that best encapsulated attempts to mediate between idealized ethnographic past and the conflicted present, as well as between the oral folk culture and aspirations to the literary high culture, is not this anonymous text but rather the 1868 autobiography by Panteleimon Kulish.

Without a doubt, Panteleimon Kulish (1819-1897) was one of the most formidable figures in Ukrainian cultural and literary life for almost half a century. His activities were so multifarious as to beggar belief: he edited periodicals and proofread literary works of most everybody who was anybody (few Ukrainian writers of the time escaped unscathed), translated a wide range of literary works, competently if not always brilliantly (from the *Bible* to Shakespeare, Goethe, and Byron), collected and published folklore, normalized Ukrainian orthography and prepared a grammar primer, organized public campaigns (for example, a 1858 campaign against anonymous anti-Semitic articles in *Illustratsia* magazine) and wrote fiction (he penned the first social historical novel in modern Ukrainian literature, among other, less prominent works). Indefatigable, impassioned and opinionated, he lacked only one thing: a gift for writing; had he been a more than mediocre poet, Ukrainian literature might have taken a very different course.

However, without venturing onto stormy waters of alternative history, it is safe to say that he did establish the generic conventions for early Ukrainian autobiographies.

Kulish wrote his autobiography in third person. In all likelihood, the marked uncouthness of extolling one's modesty and virtues in first person must have been a factor in this decision,³ but the distance implied in this choice of focalization also underscores another crucial aspect of his self-fashioning: namely, the fact that his persona as a Ukrainian writer is a textual construct that did not necessarily fully correspond to the biographical Kulish. Many events of his life are mentioned only as fodder for Kulish's later autobiographical works: "His father celebrated his birthday precisely as it is described in Kulish's novella *Another Man*" (Kulish 1989: 24); "In the novella *Uliana Terentievna*, Kulish himself described how hungrily he listened to poetry, how he copied it because books, aside from textbooks, never reached the town" (ibid., p. 29), and more. Kulish, therefore, seems to acknowledge that the literary reworking of events retroactively comes to redefine their meaning: biographical facts are important only insofar as they succeed in becoming a literary fact. Perhaps even more pertinently, the biography of his mother, who is described as the writer's source of inspiration, plots, symbols and the knowledge of folklore, is summed up as a song ("[his parents'] life was like in that old song about a Zaporizhzhia Cossack, often sung in Ukraine," etc., p.24). Not quite a flesh-and-blood figure, Kulish's mother is central insofar as she initiates the

³ "He gave a ruble where others wouldn't offer more than a coin. Petro Chuikevych told us how he once met an old wizened man in Kyiv. Without interrupting his conversation with Chuikevych, Kulish took 54 silver rubles out of his pocket and handed to the old man as if it was small coin. (His salary didn't exceed 300 a year at the time.) And it wasn't just boasting," wrote Kulish in 3rd person to ensure that nobody suspected that it was just boasting (Kulish 1989: 53-4).

writer into the world of Ukrainian folk songs, and rendering her biography as one encapsulates her role.

While Kulish's mother is stand-in for the Ukrainian element, his father metonymically represents the connection with the Russian Empire. The autobiography opens with a description of Kulish's genealogy that emphasizes his family's integration into imperial life. Following the reforms instituted during the reign of Nicholas I, petty nobility that had not held a rank in two generations had to join a taxed estate: hence, Panteleimon Kulish's paternal grandfather, who did indeed come from a long line of Cossack officers, identified their family as Cossacks (*ibid.*, 23). The detailed account of bureaucratic history of Kulish's family documents the essential ambiguity of the writer's identity: even if he traces his heritage to the pre-colonial days and aims to create an identity construct distinct from if not quite independent of the empire, his position is still defined by the empire's authorities and bureaucracy. The father – an authority figure of whom the boy feels apprehensive – is juxtaposed to the loving and attentive mother; hence, Ukrainian culture in which she is steeped is described as the nurturing element. (This dichotomy that was first introduced by Kulish runs through many autobiographies of Ukrainian writers in the latter half of the 19th century: another typical example is Ivan Nechui-Levytskyi, who similarly described a distant father who was so stern that the young Ivan avoided his study – and, by extension, his field – altogether, choosing an alternative route represented by his mother and her folk songs in Ukrainian. See Nechui-Levytskyi 1989: 229-30.)

As described in this autobiography, Kulish's eventual choice to become a Ukrainian writer is underpinned by his emotional closeness to his mother, who, although illiterate, knew countless folk songs: "everything she had in her head she took not from books but from live folk speech ... Khmelnytskyi's uprising reached her without interference of foreign songs" [що мала в голові, все те взяла не з книжок, а з живої народної речі ... Хмельниччина дійшла до неї не перепинена чужоземними співами] (p. 24). Again, much like in the editorial in *Osnova* quoted above, Ukrainian works get equated with the folk element (spoken, vibrant, authentic works), whereas foreign culture (literary, serving higher classes, artificial) obstructs [перепиняє] one's unmediated knowledge of history. Even whenever Kulish encounters folk culture in written form, he seeks to reinstate it to the original medium. For example, when he chanced upon an edition of Ukrainian *dumas* (epic folk tales) collected and published by Mykhailo Maksymovych, Kulish proceeded to learn them by heart so that he would never be parted from the poems, but also, implicitly, to return them to their primary medium as oral tales (p.31): much like autobiographies, *dumy* are apparently inalienable from their performance. Indeed, the autobiography describes the young Kulish wandering from village to village and stunning his new acquaintances with his knowledge of folklore. This performance makes Kulish a *kobzar*, a folk singer figure that became a rallying symbol for the emergent Ukrainian culture: in this way, the writer implicitly grapples with the overarching legacy of Taras Shevchenko, who secured the title for himself in popular imagination with his eponymous poetry collection.

Kulich was not well served by temporal proximity to Taras Shevchenko, whom he could neither surpass nor imitate or ignore. Eventually he stopped writing poetry until after Shevchenko's death, although those who hoped that the rivalry might end there were sorely mistaken. In Kulish's autobiography, the rivalry is partly connected to the essential ambiguity about the usable past and the "low" folk oral tradition as opposed to the high literary culture that he sought to establish:

They represented the two half of the Cossacks [...] Kulish stemmed from the Cossacks that joined czar's boyars ... that helped Catherine pen "The Order" and introduce colleges instead of old seminaries in Ukraine. One poet learned history straight from Haydamak leaders, read it from the wounded Cossack heart that was breaking and languishing in bondage to Poles, Cossacks' enemies; the other thought his way to Ukrainian tales from the family that had never known servitude, that once protected the borders of South Rus', Lithuania and Poland with knights Lanckoronskis, Pretvychs and Vyshnevetsky's, and then willingly came to defend Muscovy.⁴ (p. 42)

Kulich outlines two discrete cultural continuities: one is essentially aristocratic and stands for order, protecting the status quo, rationality and high culture; the other, more explicitly egalitarian, privileges oral culture and spontaneous mass movements. Kulish's debates with Shevchenko about the dangers of uncritically glorifying Cossacks are well-documented, and they were largely informed by his rationalism: the "determining feature of [Kulich's] perspective on the Cossack past is not "merely" historical, but a historicist debunking of myths, specifically of Sevchenko's myth" (Grabowicz 1981: 173). After Kulish developed his own voice and identified a selection of preferred themes that would constitute the universe described in his texts (following an

⁴ "[В]они представителі двох половин козащини ... Куліш походить з того козацтва, що радувало з царськими боярами ... помагало цариці Катерині писати "Наказ" і завести на Україні училища замість старих бурс. Один учився історії просто від гайдамацьких ватажків, читав її з ураженого серця козацького, що рвалось і томилось у підданстві в козацького ворога ляха; другий дорозумувавсь української бувальщини від такого коліна, що з предку-віку не знало панщини, що стояло колись на узग्रаниччі поруч із лицарями Лянцкоронськими, Претвичами, Вишневецькими, обороняючи Полуденну Русь, Литву і Польщу, а потім волею пішло обороняти Московщину."

initial period of apprenticeship when he, too, engaged actively with folk texts), he sought to develop a more critical take on folklore. This choice, however, must have put Kulish in a bit of a bind, because at that stage, the choice of Ukrainian culture by necessity entailed identifying with folk sources and taking an active anticolonial stance. This point is underscored in Kulish's introduction to his Russian translation of his historical novel *The Black Council* (originally written and published in Ukrainian): "In translation, I examined the subject as a person of a certain literary milieu. [In the original] I complied, whenever possible, with the tone and taste of our folk minstrels and storytellers; here I remained a writer of set literary taste" (Kulish 1989: 458). Therefore, Kulish associated writing in Russian with adopting literary and historiographical conventions of the time, whereas writing in Ukrainian is connected to performative oral storytelling forms steeped in lived experience. This posed a problem, because this conceptualization created a disconnect between the issues and styles he was interested in and between the literary scene he chose. The genre of autobiography, in which Kulish described his life as a literary phenomenon, allowed him to mediate between the two poles by doing the double work of first performing actions and then introducing them to written form.

1.2 1890s until 1921

The next period in the history of life writing in modern Ukrainian literature is characterized by two trends: the growing quantity of autobiographical works as modernist subjectivism took center stage, and prompt canon formation intended to provide basis for emergent new aesthetic orientations.

The years following the revolution of 1905 brought a slight liberalization when it came to publishing in Ukrainian on the territory of the Russian Empire. Lviv and other cities of the more liberal Austrian-Hungarian Empire ceded the distinction of being the center of Ukrainian public life and publishing to Kyiv. Those years saw a dramatic increase in the number of Ukrainian periodicals, including, though not limited to the first Ukrainian-language daily *Rada*, a monthly literary journal *Nova Hromada*, the reformatted *Kievskaiia Starina* which was renamed *Ukraina* as it switched to Ukrainian, and many more, covering the entire spectrum of political and aesthetic orientations. These periodicals, serving the interests of diverse groups, took to outlining their divergent visions of the history of Ukrainian literature to provide genealogies for their versions of it, and to provide it with the necessary trappings of a mature literature (awareness of its history, vibrant criticism, etc.).

For example, *Nova Hromada* followed in the footsteps of *Kievskaiia Starina* in documenting the early days of Ukrainian theatre, which for a longer time remained one of the few venues for Ukrainian public life. In 1906, it published the memoirs of the playwright Mykhailo Starytskyi (*Nova Hromada* #8, pp. 60-80) entitled “Зо мли минулого. Уривки спогадів” (“From the Mists of the Past. Excerpts of Memoirs”). The very title is indicative of Starytskyi’s understanding of the purpose of life writing: his memoirs follow in the long line of ethnographic autobiographies, preserving olden-day customs that are fast retreating into the “mist of time.” His detailed description of the layout of his grandparents’ house would put the efforts of many an architect to shame, whereas his lavish descriptions of folk feasts harken back to the Gogolian tradition of

describing Ukraine as the land of milk and honey (p. 75). The next issue of *Nova Hromada* featured the memoirs of the director Marko Kropyvnytskyi “За тридцять п’ять літ” [Over Thirty Five Years] (1906, #9, pp. 47-65). Marko Kropyvnytskyi (1840-1910) was as controversial as he was influential: widely credited with modernizing the repertoire and scenography of Ukrainian theatre, he was legendary for his myriads of quarrels and grudges. His memoirs, however, do not quite reflect the image of the painfully ambitious man who did not leave a single other Ukrainian theatre activist unoffended: in his account, his individual biography is subjugated to his public role in the service of the people and Ukrainian art. The role of art is defined not by its aesthetic impact but by its public importance in buttressing the anticolonial struggle. In this memoir, Kropyvnytskyi described his role as one of supporting

the theatre of the ‘weeping people,’ whose right to independent spiritual development was long recognized by all scholars and academies of the ‘rotted’ West, all historians and ethnographers; whereas its sworn enemies do all in their power so that ‘all rivers would flow into one sea,’ even if they have to flow uphill. (p. 47)

At the same time, the artistic validity of his theatre group is supported by descriptions of favourable reception and raving revues in Moscow and Petersburg: even the anticolonial fight required acknowledgement of the colonizer as a measure of its success (p. 54).

Neither the two autobiographies mentioned above nor many others of this period would have looked drastically out of place in the era several decades prior to their publication. Writers often recreated the autobiographical model established during the earlier period (for example, the structure vividly shown in Kulish’s autobiography), which often looked like a striking anachronism against the backdrop of innovations

happening in fiction. The function of these texts was historiographical rather than aesthetic, and self-reflection was not their strongest suit.

This text corpus paradoxically coexists with the fact that modernism brought a veritable explosion of autobiographical writing to Ukrainian literature. Many Ukrainian modernist writers resorted to more or less explicitly autobiographical elements as a way to introduce new, “not normative, often socially or culturally taboo and highly subjective” themes, from homoeroticism of Ahatanhel Krymskyi’s prose, neuroses in Lesia Ukrainka’s plays or Ol’ha Kobylians’ka’s explorations of women’s sensuality (see Hundorova 2002: 25-7). Tamara Hundorova maintains that this “subjectivist” turn marks a departure from the 19th century positivist narrative models. For all that, no matter how formally and thematically innovative their fiction might have been, autobiographies of many writers of the era succumb to the inertia of the genre and display much more archaic narrative models and imagery (the changes set in for good in the 1920s).

The most emblematic, although not the best known, example of a modernist autobiography in Ukrainian literature comes from a somewhat unexpected source. Mykola Sadovskyi (1856-1933) was primarily known as a theatre director (theatre played a colossal role in consolidating Ukrainian national movement at the end of the 19th century in the face of limitations imposed by censorship). What is less known is that he penned interesting memoirs about the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878 (published in 1917), for which he volunteered as a young idealist. (The experience became of use much later, when he would obtain censors’ permissions for plays by dangling his St. George’s Cross for Courage in the face of authorities; moreover, Mykhailo Drahomyrov, the Kyiv

governor at the time, was his commander during the Russo-Turkish War, and thus predisposed to show leniency to the director.)

Sadovskyi's memoir *Спомини з російсько-турецької війни 1877-1878 р.* [Memoirs from the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878] follows his time in the army, from the beginning of the war to his victorious return home; on the formal level though it grappled with the search for a new language to describe experiences outside of the usual catalogue of plots, and tried to render individual biography intelligible outside of conventional explanation schemes. The conventional idioms and ritualized formula adopted by authorities to instill in the diverse group of recruits the sense of belonging to a community bound together by shared experience are described as incongruous with their lived experience and insufficient for describing it. The failure to explain the new realities and the staggering, uncertain search for alternative meanings starts with the very purpose of war: it is never described to most characters' satisfaction, which results in the troops coming up with comically incongruous explanations of their own:

“If the Turk agrees to hand us the Burgar without bloodshed, there'll be no war, but if he digs in his heels, we will go and take Burgars by force.”

“Well, brother, if we are fighting because the Turk doesn't eat pork, we'll never be done fighting, because many don't.” (Sadovskyi 1917: 10)⁵

This bilingual passage is untranslatable in the fullness of its connotations. The scene makes full use of the common conventions of 19th century Ukrainian literature (quasi-ethnographic recordings of folk superstitions, phonetic rendition of Russian and macaronic passages) for comic relief. The narrator's irony documents the fact that this

⁵ “Коли ежелі турок согласен будет без кровопролітія отдать бургара нам – войны не будет, а ежелі заартачиться – пойдьом сілою брать” – “Ну, брат, коли воювать за те, що він свинини не їсть, то се треба те й робить, що воювать, бо багато є таких, що її не їдять!”

trusted skillset of 19th century realists fails to describe the experience of people entering modernity, often through participation in military engagements. Stuck between languages and never fully proficient in either, juggling several idiolects to no avail, individuals are unable to offer a coherent account of their lives. The narrator tracks several narratives and formal choices that might stand in for meaning (from epic conventions to religious justifications), leading his readers to the conclusion that only incongruous shifts and pluralities of possibilities could encapsulate modern experience. Only that which is discordant, not uniform, uncertain, shifting can be trusted.

Early on in the memoir, the czar visits his troops and declares war with Turkey. This episode is a telling example of the disconnect between public discourse and private experience, a pervasive motif in the memoir. Collective speech fails to signify: it interrupts, imposes and heckles, defying intelligibility, expression devolving into empty noise.

The loud “Hurrah” of the officers drowned the last words of the czar and rolled like a ball to the rows of soldiers. The regiments roared “Hurrah” without the slightest clue about what was going on. On April 12, 1877 the war on the Turks was declared⁶. (Sadovskiy 1917: 14)

The rallying cry, therefore, is described as a ritualized form emptied of all meaning. Collective ritualistic utterances that signify unity and the subjugation of an individual to the collective are repeatedly described as an abject failure: they break into a cacophony of individual voices and demonstrate that the ready-made clichés fail to measure up to the new reality. The failure to speak meaningfully as a group becomes a refrain of the memoir: when a company commander orders his soldiers to sing a patriotic

⁶ “Гучне “ура” офіцерів покрито останні слова царя, клубком докотилось воно до вояцьких рядів і всі полки заревіли “ура”, не відаючи навіть, у чім діло. 12 квітня 1877 року об’явлено війну Туркам”

song as the men dig trenches, lashing rain interrupts their efforts (p. 8); collective prayer dissolves into a discordant voices, with each company saying a different line (p. 33). Religious framework as a mechanism of meaning production fails to account for the soldiers' experience, too, partly because the tenets of the religion conflict with the demands of the moment:

During the service the soldiers prayed honestly, and made the sign of the cross even more often without knowing what they were thanking God for. The priest appealed to God in a dramatic voice, asking for a victory over our foe and enemy, forgetting this very God's commandment: "Thou shalt not kill."⁷ (p. 74)

Within *The Memoirs from the Russo-Turkish War*, religion fails to counter the dehumanization imposed by war and/or death and denies the soldiers dignity in not recognizing their individuality. In a telling episode, the fallen soldiers are "put into holes in layers, like firewood" [почали складати в ями один на другого, як дрова] (p. 82) after a priest reads the last rights. This passage reads like a dark parody of the familiar convention of the Great War poetry that seeks to reconcile readers with war losses by bedecking them with Christological imagery.

When contemporary modes do not offer satisfying narrative models for the modernity he was drafted into, the narrator turns to more archaic epic imagery (similar evocations of folk epic poetry was later employed to great effect by Oleksandr Dovzhenko in his *Ukraine in Flames*, among other works). The epic framework is explicitly introduced as a product of the narrator's trouble with doing the events justice:

I don't know if I will manage to get close to reality.

⁷ "На молебні солдати щиро молились, а ще частіше хрестились, не знаючи навіть за що вони так щиро дякують Бога. Під драматичним голосом звертався до Бога, просячи від нього побіди над ворогом і супостатом, забуваючи заповідь того ж таки Бога: 'Не убивай.'" Note that the commandment is rendered in imperfective aspect (perfective "Не убий" in canonical translations).

The man who wrote *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, when he had to paint his paintings with uncommon colors, turned for them to the Bard Boyan. I'm no poet, so have mercy and pardon me if I fail to find colors to do justice to this march and to the battles for the Shipka Pass. I will start the way the folk starts its *dumas*:

It is not thunder roaring in the steppe, it's not
A cloud covering the light,
It's a great multitude of Turks
Surrounded us at the Shipka Pass.⁸ (ibid., 41)

(“That’s not Noun X but Noun Y” is a typical syntactic structure of Ukrainian historical folk songs, e.g. “То не хмара світ закрила, — / То татар велика сила / Козаченьків обступила” [That’s not a cloud covering light / That’s a great mass of Tatars / Surround the Cossacks] in a famous *duma* “Oi Moroze, Morozenku”).

This, and other such passages that introduce the epic framework seem to serve a twofold purpose. First, they render the described events somewhat less random: the pragmatic justification of the war might escape the majority of individual soldiers, but the war with Turkish forces might still gain legitimacy as a literary allusion if not as a political step. What was first described as pointless drudgery and loss of life is reintegrated into foundation myths of national history through a trick of circular time (and formal repetitions). Second, *dumas* had played an important role in the early- to mid-19th century Ukrainian national movement, when collection and publication of folk songs helped to rally the efforts of Ukrainian activists; at the time, folk singers became an overarching symbol for preserving the cultural continuity. Although the overall trajectory

⁸ “Не знаю тільки, чи з’умію хоч близько підійти під дійсність.

Той, хто писав Слово о полку Ігоря, коли приходилось малювати малюнки надзвичайними барвами, звертався за ними до Віщого Бояна. А я не поет, то вже ласки прошу, вибачте, коли не знайду барв, якими достойно було-б змалювати сей марш і Шибкинські бої. Почну так, як народ починає свої думи:

То-ж не грім в степу горгоче, то-ж не
Хмара світ закрила,
Ой, то-ж турків страшна сила нас на
Шибці обступила.”

of Sadovskyi's memoir seems to emphasize the collapse of traditional narratives that could provide a framework for individual biography, this aspect of his authorial self-fashioning as a folk bard could not be any more traditional, especially in view of the fact that his closest predecessor in terms of creating a collage of different styles in an account of war was the much earlier long narrative poem *Haidamaky* by Taras Shevchenko (1839). In this poem, Shevchenko made wide and conscious use of preexisting literary conventions, engaging with the issue of generic definition and often ridiculing genre-defined expectations (Grabowicz 2013: 126-7) in lengthy digressions belonging to different styles and thematizing switches between them. David Sloane argued that perhaps the most important function of these digressions was "that they create an image of the poet as a dramatized persona ... While in narration the poet's subjectivity remains quite apparent and we do not see him as separate from his narrative function, in the digressions he emerges as a discrete entity" (Sloane 1978: 331). I would venture a guess that they serve a similar function in Sadovskyi's memoir, and a text whose unity is guaranteed by the ostensible identification of the narrator, protagonist and empirical writer, as well as by grammatical first person, offers fertile ground for a plurality of linguistic strategies. They counter the homogenizing pressure of modernity, the army and the empire. Style becomes the event, search for a voice *is* the plot.

1.3 Soviet times

The early Soviet years can be described as the era of autobiographies. The reasons for and ramifications of the proliferation of autobiographies at that time will be explored in more detail in Chapter 3, so I will not delve on it in too much detail at this point. It is, however, worth acknowledging the vectors that would come to define these years in the history of Ukrainian autobiographies.

From writers' autobiographies to autobiographies each citizen had to pen when applying for a job or to a university, many autobiographical practices existed primarily to teach the newly minted Soviet subjects the key tenets of a Soviet identity. These narratives were highly codified, and the ability to reproduce them fluently testified to one's readiness to "speak Bolshevik," that is, to adopt the new analytical categories to frame one's personal experience in terms of the new dominant ideology. Writers often reproduced these tropes even without explicit invitation. For example, the *Universalnyi Zhurnal* magazine (November 1928 – August 1929, edited by Iurii Smolych and Maik Iohansen) published writers' answers to questionnaires starting with issue 2 (December 1928). The questions sought to elicit responses about writers' creative trajectories rather than their biographies, but they gave writers freedom to include whatever information they themselves deemed relevant. Their answers often betray the vision of creative work as an equivalent of or a weapon in class struggle. For example, in issue №2 (December 1928) writers were invited to recount the story of their first publication. The poet Vasyl Sosiura described how his emergence as a writer coincided with his formation as a Soviet subject: he carried the first edition of his poems through the Civil War like a banner, and "my first poem like my first shot" (Sosiura 1928: 32). Similarly, the playwright Ivan

Mykytenko described his writing as a way of communing with the people and the revolution. The pinnacle of his literary career, in this account at least, comes when a reader recognizes him during the celebration of the 5th anniversary of the October Revolution in Odessa: “The entire world became near and dear to me... I wanted to hug all the doctors, Red Army soldiers and workers” (Mykytenko 1928: 32-3). Literary works, therefore, are described as a force of cohesion, creating a social unity between a writer and his or her revolutionary-minded contemporaries, even if the questionnaire did not explicitly request a description of writers’ connection to the revolution. These autobiographical accounts posit that writing is a way of creating a new, socially desirable type of identity, and not only that of the writer, but also that of the reader.

For issue № 4 of *Universalnyi Zhurnal* (February 1929), writers received the prompt “Me about my works.” The responses, however, were so diverse that the editor made a last-minute decision and renamed the section “Each about what strikes their fancy” [Кожний про своє]. Despite the editor’s consternation, the offered essays did have an overarching motif: namely, they all engaged with the theme of criticism, emphasizing the fact that Soviet literature existed in dialogue with, on the one hand, the powers that be, and on the other, with the readership that took cues from fiction about the desired identity. For example, in his vignette entitled “About the winged one...” [Про крилату...] Volodymyr Kuz’mich describes his novel about aviation as engaged in the grand project of social transformation. The vignette is prefaced with an anecdote in two quotes: Leonardo da Vinci promising that he will talk about nothing but wings in the 1460s, and Leo Tolstoy quipping “Aviation? What nonsense! God had not given humans

wings to fly” in 1909. Thus, implicitly, Kuz’mich’s novel is integrated into a teleological panorama of the progress of humankind, its fight with religious superstitions and plight for technological achievements. Writing a novel about aviation allows Kuz’mich to occupy a subject position that offers a bird’s-eye view of an archaic rural Ukraine dotted with huts under thatched roofs, occasionally interrupted by eruptions of futuristic high-tech landscapes. From the high vantage point of this theme, the writer ostensibly has a clearer view of the goals and invites his readers to share his perspective (“acquire wings”): “About our winged Republic I’m writing my novel” (p.56).

Issue № 6 (April 1929) brought a somewhat oxymoronic request to describe “the book I will never write,” inviting contributors to create a vignette in the style or on the theme which they swore to avoid. Oles Dosvitnii described a scene at a barber’s: the narrator (ostensibly identified with the writer) was so incensed with overhearing petty speculators that he went on a long rant about the need to continue the revolution by all means necessary.

You cannot fight philistinism [обивательщина] with your pen or propaganda, only with force ... because a wild beast, a predator deserves nothing but bullets ... Half jokingly, half earnestly I offered that we should set writing aside for a time, and organize hit squads [карні загони] instead. (Dosvitnii 1929: 24-5).

Plagued by a writer’s block, the narrator grasps at this impassioned rant as a possible topic for his contribution to the next issue of the journal, only to realize that he was commissioned to describe a book that he would never write. Therefore, what was first framed as serious criticism of the new economic policy that had let the revolution languish uncompleted eventually comes to verge on the parody of the genre: after all, the vignette falls under the rubric of “what I would never write.”

Texts that establish continuity between the nascent Soviet Ukrainian literature and the earlier tradition constituted another distinct group of autobiographies of the early Soviet years. The brief Soviet honeymoon with nativizing policies (korenizatsia), intended to help foster sympathy for the newly established Soviet authority, meant that activists and writers of the older pre-Revolution generation were invited to write autobiographies, often as a part of their lavishly celebrated jubilees. These texts followed well-established formula, describing a teleological progression from the tsarist bondage to creative and national freedom in the Soviet Union. The director and actor Panas Saksahanskyi (Panas Tobilevych) is a model example of this subgenre with his *On the Road of Life (Po shliakhu zhyttia)*. Prepared on the occasion of his 75th birthday (and 50th year of artistic career)⁹ in 1935 and prefaced with his speech on the occasion of these celebrations, the text focused on the juxtaposition of the tsarist censorship and the Soviet-era freedom of creative expression. Among other important motifs are the passing of the baton to the next generation that will build up the Soviet culture, and ritualistic expressions of gratitude to the authorities who oversaw this process:

I will not be the first to traverse our wide fields, but I don't want to die yet. I want to live and rejoice with you in the swift development of the cultural life of our Soviet country. Long live the joyous art! Long live the leaders of the Soviet power! Long live the leader of the world proletariat, the great Stalin! (Saksahanskyi 1935: 20).

⁹ Celebration of jubilees as occasions for national mobilization were a long-standing tradition in Ukrainian culture, starting with the 1894 joint jubilee of 25 years of literary work by the writer Ivan Nechui-Levytskyi and by the playwright Mykhailo Starytskyi (the date was highly provisional and not reflective of the actual bibliography of either writer - see Tarnavsky 2014: 80), followed by the 35th jubilee of the creative work of the composer Mykola Lysenko (1903) and more. Therefore, in another nod to cultural continuity, the Soviet authorities were relying on an institutional tradition that the older generation of writers recognized and respected.

It is assumed that the revolution retroactively informed all earlier experience and recast it as a prelude to the new life, or, as the narrator had put it, “War and revolution had given my story new meaning” (ibid., 230).

Moi teatral’ni zhadky (*My theatre memoirs*) by Mykola Sadovskyi (first installments published in *Literaturno-Naukovyi Visnyk* in 1906 to commemorate the 25-year anniversary of Ukrainian theatre in the Russian Empire, but the ultimate 7 chapters did not appear until 1929) follow a similar pattern. The finale described the approaching revolution in a triumphalist mode: “And my entire soul trembled with joy that the time we dreamed of was approaching: the cloud will draw closer, the terrifying thunder will strike, and you, oh Ukraine, you will be free!” Although the text was completed well after the 1917 Revolution, its concluding paragraphs are written in the future tense to underscore the sense that the Revolution was always perceived as imminent, casting the liberation as a prophecy rather than as a completed historical event.

In a dispiriting instance of life failing to imitate art, the hopes expressed in these rose-coloured accounts were cut short by the Great Terror. The next distinctive subgenre of autobiographies in Ukrainian Soviet literature focused on overcoming the long shadow of silence that the repressions of the 1930s had cast on the literary canon. Iurii Smolych was the founder and the most emblematic representative of the genre, laying the path for successors and imitators.

Iurii Smolych (1900-1976) was best known for his murder mysteries and early science fiction novels that remain compulsively readable to this day (the latter were recently republished in the series of 1920s pulp fiction entitled *Our Twenties* [Наші 20-

ti] – see *Postril na skhodakh*. Kyiv: Tempora, 2016). No less readable were the denunciations he penned about most everybody in his milieu, including Oleksandr Dovzhenko (see Aheieva 2014: 29-30). (The fact that he survived the Great Terror, however, is attributable to blind luck rather than collaboration, as the experience of other writers who chose to collaborate but didn't make it amply demonstrates.) However, Smolych was and remains best known for his memoirs about literary life of the 1920s, spanning from the comical to the tragic. His active participation in a number of key literary organizations, including “Hart” and VAPLITE (The Free Academy of Proletarian Literature), as well as his involvement with some of the most emblematic publications of the time (including participation in the editorial committee of *Universalnyi Zhurnal*), make Smolych's autobiographical texts an invaluable source for exploring both the quotidian life and group affiliations and literary politics of the 1920s.

Importantly, the series penned by Iurii Smolych's was the first large-scale published memoir about the 1920s; it includes *The Tale of Unrest* (*Розповідь про неспокій*, 1968), *The Tale of Unrest Continues* (*Розповідь про неспокій триває*, 1969) and *The Tale of Unrest Has No Ending* (*Розповіді про неспокій немає кінця*, 1972); followed up by lesser-known *I Choose Literature* (*Я вибираю літературу*, 1970) and the posthumously published *My Contemporaries* (*Мої сучасники*, 1978). There was not a later scholar or memoirist, either in Ukraine or abroad, who could avoid mentioning or extensively using Smolych's influential and comprehensive oeuvre which became a major document for students of the era in the near absence of easily available primary sources. Initial near-universal acceptance, however, has eventually bred widespread

skepticism about the factuality of certain episodes. It is worth remembering that these texts, although focusing on the 1920s, are a product of a much later era, with its radically different idiom and a set of literary expectations. Conceived during the brief Khrushchev liberalization, they were published during the less vegetarian times, when a wave of arrests had already swept through Ukrainian intellectuals. Petro Shelest, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Ukraine and no liberal himself by any stretch of the word, was demoted in 1972, apparently because

his treatment of historic relations between Ukrainians and Russians had violated well-established 'Marxist-Leninist' interpretations, which hold that the USSR is a kind of commonwealth of fraternal nations historically established under Russian leadership. (Tillett 1975: 752-3)

It was during these times of fast-shifting expectations and largely unknown risks and norms that Smolych was preparing his texts for publication. Multiple drafts of the manuscripts and editorial comments demonstrate that the writer was experimenting with what would be deemed acceptable during the Brezhnev era (see Tsybal 2010: 232). In his afterword to *The Tale of Unrest*, Smolych justified his endeavor with the imperative to record the early stages in the development of Ukrainian Soviet literature, so that future scholars would know how, and with whom this tradition originated. The importance of life writing, therefore, lies with its function as a factographical endeavor: "For some reason – I don't get it – [autobiographies] are out of fashion, this precious genre, the most important literary genre: descriptions of lived experience, the living word of a participant" (Smolych 1986: 256). Himself a long-time functionary in several of the key cultural institutions (for example, he was a long-time head of the Union of Writers of the Ukrainian SSR), Smolych knew how to exploit the known anxieties of the authorities: he

insisted that the revolutionary and pre-revolutionary iconography would not be complete without numerous I-sources of the time; therefore, autobiographies are one of the few things that thwart “the enemy – counterrevolutionary nationalist immigration abroad” – who would otherwise “falsify” historical knowledge and substitute Soviet accounts with their own narratives (ibid., 256-7). Smolych could not fail to notice that the competition between Soviet and émigré Ukrainian literature was at its peak at the time: for example, the publication of the 12-volume edition of Lesia Ukrainka’s works in New York in the 1950s prompted the National Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR to prepare their own 12-volume edition, published in the early 1970s (see Zabuzhko 2014: 98). Therefore, Smolych’s message resonated with the *Zeitgeist*: unless local authorities permitted to publish accounts about the lives of repressed writers who were not rehabilitated until the late 1950s and hence were little known to the public, the gap would be filled by émigré writers, possibly with catastrophic effect. Smolych’s autobiographical texts, therefore, were to ensure the proper continuity in Ukrainian Soviet literature, creating a readership that would pick up the torch of the revolutionary generation:

The responsibility to shed the true light on the processes of the past for a contemporary reader, and to eliminate the ‘blank spots’ in describing the post-October period, lies on us. Without our direct or indirect help literature scholars of younger generations cannot hope to grasp the scope and depth of the emergence and formation of Ukrainian Soviet literature. (Smolych 1986: 525)

The topos of passing the torch to a younger generation of Communists gained popularity in the Socialist Realist literature in the mid- to late 1930s and did not cede center stage until well after World War II: the relationship between a young Communist and his or her mentor served to ritually mediate inconsistencies between ideological

tenets and their implementation in practice, and symbolized initiation through acquisition of collective rather than individual identity (see Clark 1981: 133). Thus, Smolych legitimized his unconventional and potentially subversive subject matter by bedecking it with the most conventional rhetorical flourishes at his disposal, signaling his continued loyalty to the symbolic system offered by the party.

Smolych, however, openly refused to toe the party line when it came to his defense of individual subjective accounts of the past. Autobiographies as a genre fit his programmatic defense of subjectivity as the guarantor of the unhindered transmission of knowledge and tradition:

You might denounce my notes as subjective. Well, so be it! There's nothing worse than cold, alienated, uninvolved, "fish-eyed" objectivity. May each participant of the literary process add his own subjective reflection – and then a historian of literature, collecting, reviewing and studying everything that can be collected and reviewed – may he analyze the process and recreate it comprehensively and fully¹⁰. (Smolych 1968: 285)

Smolych's Tales of Unrest trilogy offers a veritable catalogue of strategies used to smuggle in the names of the recently rehabilitated artists who were executed during the Great Terror. Although some of these strategies may smack of naïveté, they must have afforded the writer a degree of plausible deniability, should he fall afoul of the authorities. For example, he described the facts unflattering to Soviet power as outrageous rumours that had to be promptly disproved, relying on the cultural competence and finely tuned paranoia of readers well trained in the formal art of reading

¹⁰ “Ви закинете мені, що мої записи – суб’єктивні? То й добре! Хіба є що гірше від холодного, стороннього, безучасного – з “риб’ячими очима” – об’єктивізму? Хай кожний учасник літературного процесу дасть своє, суб’єктивне висвітлення – і тоді історик літератури, зібравши, оглянувши й вивчивши все, що можна зібрати й оглянути, - на цьому й проаналізує процес та відтворить його всебічно і повноцінно.”

between the lines. For instance, Smolych's description of the death of the poet Vasyl Svidzynskyi served the dual purpose of informing the readers and assuring the authorities of the narrator's continued allegiance with the Soviet power: "Toadying to the Hitlerists and slinging mud and slander at all things Soviet under their auspices, Ukrainian nationalists spread the silly and contentious rumour that Svidzynskyi was 'burned by the Soviets,' or so they said [МОВЛЯВ]." (Smolych 1986: 644) (note the double distancing from the report, both by the parenthesis and by the emphatic "МОВЛЯВ"). Additionally, Smolych often attributed to his fellow writers denunciations that went against their documented aesthetic or political beliefs. For example, he described the writer Oleksa Slisarenko (1891-1937) repenting of his earlier affiliations and gratefully accepting the tenets of Socialist Realism: "I'm glad that I passed the cold fire of symbolism, the swampy water of modernism and the bronze tubes in the futurist orchestra: at least now I know what stinks." Should a reader doubt if Smolych could remember long stretches of dialogues word for word several decades later, the narrator cautiously added: "This is not a direct quote, and it's possible I'm not quite precise in retelling his speech" (ibid., 541). Observance of these official clichés might not have improved a less venerated writer's chances during more dangerous eras, but Smolych, with his prominent position and willingness to wait for the opportune moment, seemed not to have suffered any adverse consequences and laying the ground for subsequent waves of memoirists and autobiographers.

1.4 Contemporary Ukrainian Literature

Autobiographies in contemporary Ukrainian literature are represented not only, or, arguably, not even primarily by texts written in the decades after Ukraine gained independence, but also by much older works that were not published (or were not widely accessible) under Soviet rule. For the third time over the course of the century, there arose a need for a revision of literary history and canon, bringing a rather drastic change in the cast of canon, and, in the case of writers that remained on the pedestal, of scholarly lenses and interpretative frameworks. The canon was fast expanding to incorporate new names: the writers and cultural activists of the 1920s (known variously as either the Executed Renaissance generation or the Red Renaissance, depending on one's stance on victimization complex as a part of national identity, among other factors; see Tsymbal 2016): mostly repressed and barely mentionable until recently, they became the most fetishized and pervasively present period in Ukrainian literature. Their prominence both in the canon and in the popular imagination extends past the global penchant for modernism as the period to which all present-day creative experiments ultimately date back: with the nativizing policies of the time, the 1920s easily represent the only available model when Ukrainian culture was supported by the state, covered all functional areas, and offered opportunities for free artistic expression and experimentation, providing a genealogy. Free access to archives, both in Ukraine and abroad, made possible multiple large-scale publication projects, such as 6-volume full edition of diaries and memoirs by Ievhen Chykalenko (1861-1929), an editor, philanthropist and publisher who footed the bill for the first Ukrainian-language daily (*Hromadska Dumka* of 1906, *Rada* of 1906-1914) and famously quipped that it doesn't

matter if one loves Ukraine to the bottom of one's heart, as long as one loves her to the bottom of one's wallet.¹¹

Therefore, Ukrainian literature of the independence era, and most notably of the 1990s, was marked by the reintroduction of purged names and banned books, and maintained a vibrant dialogue with the modernist generation, skipping the intervening Soviet generations altogether (as the direct result, the reevaluation and comprehensive studies of Ukrainian Soviet literature had not yet occurred). This encouraged autobiographical modes that might seem curiously dated, if not for the broken continuity of Ukrainian literature. This trend is probably most prominently represented by Oksana Zabuzhko, whose self-fashioning is largely based on 19th century Romantic model, with a poet as a vehicle of national salvation. Her model gained the most programmatic articulation that synthesizes all the initially discrete themes in her *Ukrainian Palimpsest*, a book-length interview with the Polish scholar Izabella Chruślińska (published in the original Polish in 2013, and in Ukrainian translation in 2014).

Oksana Zabuzhko's authorial self-fashioning is cast in the mold of the symbolic autobiography Taras Shevchenko and other "poet-prophets" of East European romanticism; whether this archaic model can gain new wings in the stultifying air of another era altogether is not entirely clear, but nobody can fault Zabuzhko for lack of persistence. Shevchenko, along with the Polish national bard Adam Mickiewicz, among

¹¹ While admirable in an editor, in personal life Chykalenko's pragmatism skirted the boundaries of good taste. For example, when the Odesa-based educator and activist L.A. Smolenskyi fell ill and retreated from public life, Chykalenko publically bemoaned his friend's abject failure at dying at an opportune moment when the nascent Ukrainian movement could really use a large-scale funeral as a mobilization effort and public event (see Chykalenko 1955: 219-220).

others, positioned himself in his works as a national prophet bearing the word of a new creed. Since the national community that he vowed to serve and speak for both in life and posthumously, interceding for it with God, was still in the process of becoming and largely lacked self-awareness and a cohesive identity, his message was millenarian and mythological, devoid to a considerable extent of any concrete political implications (about Shevchenko's self-fashioning, see Grabowicz 2000: 52-67). Adopting the motif of speaking for the trampled people, Zabuzhko justifies her right to do so by sketching out her genealogy – across multiple texts, both autobiographical fiction and nonfiction – as a symbolic encapsulation of the major tectonic shifts in Ukrainian history of the 20th century. Her grandparents hailed from different regions (at the time divided between different empires), but could have met in the throng in Kyiv on January 22, 1919, during the proclamation of the unification of the People's Republic of Ukraine and the People's Republic of Western Ukraine. Thus the reunification of Ukraine becomes a part of family history, a condition without which the family would not have existed. Much like Zabuzhko the writer relies on the tradition of Ukrainian resistance and dissent, her autobiographical texts insists that Zabuzhko the person wouldn't exist without this lineage either. For example, in the late 1950s, her dissident father was sentenced to a term in the camps followed by several years of exile. During his period in the North, he was accosted by criminals who were ready to kill him, but slinked away when they recognized him as “a political” [політичний]. Their newly discovered respect for dissidents and political prisoners is explained by recent memories of the Kengir Camp uprising of 1954, the biggest uprising in the GULAG during which political and criminal

prisoners cooperated to hold the camp for 40 days. Among its lasting effects was apparently the survival of the man who later became Zabuzhko's father. Zabuzhko goes on to speak for those who perished in the uprising: "So, in a sense, I can consider myself a child of Кенгір [дитям Кенгіру, a parallel to the Soviet status of a "child of war"]" (Zabuzhko 2009: 11-14). With historical losses and accomplishments encoded in her genealogy, the protagonist of Zabuzhko's autobiographical works is described as raised in the tradition of a unified [соборна] Ukraine instead of a particularized local version, with no dialectal or regional preferences, lending her voice universality (Zabuzhko 2014: 141-2). Due to this claim of speaking for everyone, her refusal to cooperate with the KGB, and to stay silent about the offer of cooperation, apparently destroyed "the general conspiracy of forced silence that remained mandatory in the USSR for decades" (ibid., 81-2). The writer's voice metonymically stands in for the voice of the entire silenced community, and in this vision there's little differentiation between words in literary works and words spoken in other contexts.

The idea that a writer's words are coterminous with his or her life, too, has a very recognizable genealogy in the form of reception of Taras Shevchenko. In her *Shevchenko' Myth of Ukraine: An Essay at a Philosophical Analysis* [Шевченків міф України: Спроба філософського аналізу], Zabuzhko argues that Shevchenko's oeuvre constitutes an inalienable unity with the author's life in a myth-like syncretic form, creating a model life for the entire community as a collective individual (Zabuzhko 2000: 14-18). This belief in the importance of overarching autobiographical structures informed

her own choices in self-fashioning, in selecting certain formal features in her works, and in her corpus of recurring motifs.

Zabuzhko's first novel *Field Studies in Ukrainian Sex*, became one of the first Ukrainian literary media sensations: partly because it had very few parallels as an early attempt to offer an explicitly feminist perspective on Ukrainian culture, partly due to a well-selected title and a savvy promotion campaign. It was not universally well received, sparking a robust, if not necessarily polite debate about gender expectations, the role of feminist criticism in Ukrainian culture, and whether postcolonial and gender criticism could dovetail. Following a Ukrainian writer's sojourn in America and her rocky love life, the novel explores how gendered experience intersects with and informs the postcolonial experience (and, more particularly, the experience of a writer from a postcolonial nation who tries to deal with an interrupted national literary tradition), emphasizing the reality of an embodied subject:

Zabuzhko sees national identity not as something that is confined to public political and cultural debates, but as being inscribed in the intimate, private spaces of the home and the body. The struggle with the demands placed on the gendered, embodied subject by the national culture, and the discourses of power, dominance, and resistance that surround it, provide the central tension in much of Zabuzhko's work. (Blacker 2010: 487)

This theme lends itself well to the conceit of autobiographic narration, mediating between the public and the private and seeking common ground between representing authenticity and framing it within recognizable literary conventions. Zabuzhko, however, offers a different justification for casting her first novel as a heavily autobiographical text (it is written in first person, the protagonist shares Zabuzhko's name and many of her experiences, etc.). Since the novel dealt with themes that were previously either ignored

or taboo, it needed, Zabuzhko maintained, the added legitimization inherent in autobiographical mode:

[I]f the novel was to articulate certain things which Ukrainian literature has never articulated before, and be heard, all these dark and dirty secrets HAD to be pronounced "in the first person," as a part of the author's most personal existential experience. Or, to put it briefly: to win the readers trust, you sometimes need to pay with your own blood. (Zabuzhko 2001: 20)

It seems safe to assume that Zabuzhko evokes the memory of the genre in its local romantic permutation, as described in her reception of Taras Shevchenko's autobiographism: instead of articulating the vagaries of individual psyche, this type of autobiography is tasked with creating a unifying archetype for the community. Mirroring that on the formal level, *The Field Studies in Ukrainian Sex* are written mostly in 2nd person singular, with only occasional lapses into 1st and 3rd person singular. You-narrative presupposes the impossibility of internal identity: it exists only in its public performance where the boundary between the narrating subject and the narrated object is blurred, and individual agency is checked by an orientation towards social expectations and roles. This heightened awareness of the presence, if not necessarily the agency of an addressee is described as being informed by the postcolonial and posttotalitarian condition:

“[Y]ou are unfamiliar with subjugation to limitless, metaphysical evil, where there's absolutely nothing in hell you can do—when you grow up in a flat that is constantly bugged and surveilled and you know about it, so you learn to speak directly to an invisible audience: at times out loud, at times with gestures, and at times by saying nothing.”¹²

While it's not quite clear in the translation, the 2nd person pronoun in this passage refers to two distinct subjects. While the singular/informal “ти” signifies the writer

¹² “[В]ам невідома підвладність необорному, метафізичному злу, де від вас ні чорта не залежить, - коли зростаєш у квартирі, яка постійно прослуховується, і ти про це знаєш, так що вчишся говорити - одразу на невидиму публіку: де вголос, де на мигах, а де й змовчати”

protagonist, the formal/plural “Ви” in the original signifies her audience: both her Western audience that is “unfamiliar with ... metaphysical evil,” and, by extension, the “invisible audience” that the protagonist had come to expect. Intended or not, the text relies on this unsettling effect quite a lot for its impact: this is not the unique instance of this ambiguity. The pervasive “you” in the novel, thus, encompasses a duality: the dissident and the authorities, the persecuted and the persecutor, the subject and the object, the autobiographer and her audience. Refusal to commit to a single subject position for each pronoun makes the novel more provocative and less ethically black-and-white, mirroring attempts to create an account of the gray zones of totalitarianism on grammatical level.

Each era in Ukrainian autobiographies is characterized by its typical conflict, be it written versus oral culture or totalitarian culture versus stylistic experimentation. These conflicts often produce formal discontinuities in texts, reminding readers about the constructed rather than predetermined nature of life writing: experience is conditioned by rhetorical conventions and relies on them for intelligibility. In a word, formal discontinuities serve as lighthouses steering readers away from perilous shallows of reductive readings of autobiographies as strictly mimetic texts, as well as from the dangerous reefs of leaving literary conventions unexamined. An intrepid reader, therefore, would do well to delve on these discontinuities more in detail.

Chapter 2.

Questioning autobiographies:

Soviet questionnaires and other crypto-autobiographies

in Ukrainian literature of the 1920s

Much of the popular discomfiture with autobiographies stems from the category's notorious resistance to classificatory impulses. Autobiographies are that contentious third cousin of fiction that one never quite knows where to seat at weddings or funerals. Indeed, how do autobiographies fit into the overall system of literature of any given era? After all, there are few if any textual attributes that would mark a text as an autobiography (e.g., first person singular pronouns and intra-textual promises of veracity can be donned and doffed in any genre, while many a self-reported autobiography resorts to third person singular, first person plural, or even more fanciful pronominal configurations). Therefore, in order to define a text as an autobiography, one has to look past the text's immanent traits and turn towards a largely extra-textual matter of what Philippe Lejeune calls the autobiographical pact: the writer states that the author, the narrator and the protagonist are identical, and the reader accepts the claim about the referential nature of the text (Lejeune: 14-15). Questioning Lejeune's structuralist approach to defining the genre of autobiography, Paul de Man quipped that such an understanding relegates the reader to the role of "the judge, the policing power in charge

of verifying the *authenticity* of the signature and the consistency of the signer's behavior" (de Man 1979: 923).

Hence, autobiography as a genre implies a set of practices rather than a set of narrative strategies; and in certain eras (primarily the ones that are conceptualized as the times of great changes by those who survived them), the very assumption of an active role for a recipient, implicit in the definition of autobiographies, brings the genre to the forefront. For an autobiography doesn't merely describe an identity: it forges one (at the very least, an identity that exists as an aesthetic phenomenon), indoctrinating both writers and readers in the motifs and imagery that would, for example, better describe their position in the changed system of social relations. In his essay in *Rethinking Narrative Identity*, Martin Klepper underscores that any act of constructing "a comprehensive, self-attributed individual story" should be historicized, for each era has its own "institutionalized forms of self-examination and confession," which sociologist Alois Hahn proposes to call "biography generators" (see Klepper 2013: 15-16). Such "biography generators," distinct to their particular eras, are constituted of (a) a social institute or practice that encourages subjects to engage in life writing; (b) a set of rules that define what topoi, tropes, and narrative strategies should be used when conceptualizing the self. In the first years of the Soviet Union, "personal files" (*lichnoe delo* in Russian, *osobova sprava* in Ukrainian) "became the most widespread and authoritative account of an individual life in Soviet times" (Vatulescu 2010: 8), making them one of the most important "biography generators" of the time. Personal files usually included a questionnaire and a short narrative autobiography, to be filled out and updated

at multiple points in life (when applying to universities, for a job, etc.). Sheila Fitzpatrick makes a persuasive argument that, at the initial stages of the existence of the Soviet Union, these files largely performed a propedeutic function, and this purpose also defined the set of questions: personal file questionnaires were meant to teach the newly-minted Soviet citizens to establish their position vis-a-vis and to navigate their way around the new system of the social strata, which defined both their identity and their perspectives. Since the boundaries between the strata were not necessarily clearly delineated at the time, one could try to better one's prospects by writing an autobiography that better aligned with the Soviet master narrative; this helped to instill the idea that biographies were something to be written and rewritten, as the situation required (see Fitzpatrick 1997: 16-36).

Over the course of the present chapter, I would like to explore the influence of such largely pragmatic genres of self-representations on writers' self-fashioning. What were the tropes of writers' self-fashioning in an era when was the personal file questionnaire, or, progressively, a police dossier became increasingly prominent genres of self-representation? How did the writers of the time legitimize their authority, employing, appropriating or outright resisting the new conventions? How did they envision the demands, possibilities and limitations of the genre of autobiography? In the era during which Paul de Man's metaphor of the reader of autobiographies as a policing presence verifying the writer's authenticity acquired an ominously literal dimension, how did writers describe the situation of reading, the tasks and strategies of their implicit reader? I will approach these questions through the prism of the so-called Plevako

archives (1922-1934), and editorial quasi-autobiographies of the literary magazine *Literaturnyi Iarmarok* (*The Literary Marketplace*, 1928-1930). I choose this little-explored material because the extent of collected texts (up to 200 autobiographies of writers belonging to different groups and espousing differing aesthetics) written during the crucial years of swift cultural shifts allows me to trace the changing rules and topoi of self-representation in the early decades of the Soviet rule.

2.1.1 Plevako's Archives: Overview

At some point in the early 1930s, Mykola Plevako – at the time, a member of the Contemporary Literature commission of the Free Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, and the director of the Office for Bibliography of the Kharkiv Taras Shevchenko Institute – jotted down in his notebook: “[name illegible] said that it is time to lose all letters ... one ought to destroy all letters, no matter how dear they are, no matter how painful parting with them might be” (IR NBUV, 27/9: fol. 1). Indeed, it was sound advice, as Plevako doubtlessly understood. Plevako would soon be fired, committed to a psychiatric ward (in an eerie illustration to an old Soviet joke that a diagnosis of paranoia is no guarantee that one is not indeed being followed), and, eventually, sentenced to exile, from which he would never return. However, the fact that he didn't heed the advice ensured the preservation of an interesting corpus of several hundred autobiographies, ranging from short and formulaic to detailed 50-page manuscripts, that provide ample material for analyzing the shifting conventions of self-fashioning during that tumultuous era.

In 1922, Mykola Plevako, who already had experience compiling anthologies with a meticulously edited bibliographical apparatus, started gathering materials for a *Dictionary of Ukrainian Writers*. The project never came to fruition, although Plevako worked on it intermittently until at least 1932, when the office of the Ukrainian Soviet encyclopedia paid him a quite substantial honorarium of 12,001 rubles for compiling the dictionary (see IR NBUV, 27/100, fol. 1). He started out by sending a request for a detailed narrative autobiography to writers, translators and scholars; the request came with a questionnaire meant to aid his respondents in compiling their autobiographies. The questionnaire is a curious document marked by the trends, anxieties and contradictions of the era. It aims to strike an uneasy balance between soliciting the strictly biographical information (such as the date or place of birth), asking for the writers' literary history (such as their literary influences), but also expecting them to navigate the new categories that came to define the identities of Soviet subjects.

On the one hand, Plevako's respondents were expected to provide the information about their careers as writers:

The start of literary activities and their subsequent development (this "literary biography") is of particular importance and interest: the information about the first stimuli towards creative work, about lit. schooling, about the presence and changes in literary influences, about the actual history of literary work, about membership in literary organizations, views on writing, etc." (TsDAMLM, 271/1/12: fol. 1)

Hence, writers are prompted to describe the factors that contributed to the formation of what would be best described as their image as "career authors," the composites of the implied authors of all their works (Booth 1983: 431). One might

contend that by marking this information as being “of particular interest and importance,” Plevako seems to privilege, for the purposes of the dictionary, “the career author” over the biographical author.

Yet Plevako’s questionnaire also prominently features the standard categories, all too familiar for the newly-minted writers of personal files, such as the “nationality and social status [соціальний стан]” of the writer’s parents or the writer’s “public activities, in particular cultural-educational and politically-revolutional [громадська діяльність, надто культурно-освітня й політично-революційна]” (ibid.). Judging by the responses, the writers who did answer the question tended to frame the vague term “cultural-educational activities” as agitation work and the inculcation of the Soviet ideals. Of course, this covered a lot of ground, from teaching miners to read as part of the Likbez campaign (see Mykola Dmytriev’s autobiography in TsDAMLM, 271/1/59, fol. 1) to writing articles in favour of Prodravvyorstka (see Ivan Shyliuk’s autobiography in IR NBUV 27/1041, fol. 1). Parenthetically, the broadness of the category led many writers with less than stellar Soviet credentials to use their responses as exculpations: for example, Prokhor Voronyn, who retreated to the south with the White Army, maintained that he used his position as a library administrator under Pyotr Wrangel to covertly disseminate Bolshevik literature in Crimean libraries, the claim made somewhat less credible by his earlier political trajectory (IR NBUV, 27/914, fol. 4).

Much like their prototypes from the personal files, these questions aim to pinpoint each writer’s position in the new system of social interactions, framing their standing in the literary woods not only in terms of their literary output or textual influences, but also

in terms of their class origins, their reaction to the Revolution, and their participation in the indoctrination of the new values. These questions implied that the literary pedigree or individual artistic choices no longer sufficed to define a writer's position in the new Ukrainian Soviet literature; one also had to examine the writer's position in the new system of social relations.

In semiotics, it is believed that “the dictionary model [of semantic representation] is expected to take into account only those properties *necessary and sufficient* to distinguish that particular concept from others” (Eco 2014: 3). While Plevako's project certainly didn't adhere fully to this platonic ideal (in fact, few dictionaries do), the selection of questions implies that this work was meant to actualize, to an extent, the implicitly understood normative function of organizing and representing linguistic knowledge. To define one's belonging to the cohort of Ukrainian writers, the mere fact of writing and publishing no longer sufficed; at the time, to be a contemporary Ukrainian writer implied to have participated in the revolution and to have taken part in the “cultural-educational” activities, or at least to be able to explain the absence of any such involvement. No longer confined to the sphere of the purely serendipitous biographical data, these facts become factors in (the more semantically charged) artistic biography. By actively adopting and recreating this biographical pattern writers are to become active subjects complicit in maintaining the ideological trappings of the regime rather than passive objects. Therefore, Plevako's Dictionary was not so much describing as it was creating a new Ukrainian Soviet literature as a more or less coherent entity with shared goals, sources of authority and tropes, instilling in the writers a set of categories that they

had to navigate when describing their biographies, careers and texts. Coincidentally, the contemporaries of the project keenly picked up on its foundational aspirations. For example, in 1929 one S. Chernov wrote an ecstatic letter to the Free Ukrainian Academy of Sciences (at that point, the dictionary was being compiled under its aegis), boldly comparing Plevako's project to *Kobzar* by Taras Shevchenko, widely acknowledged as the founding father of contemporary Ukrainian literature: "Much like T.H. compiled the previously ungathered precious artistic material of folk arts in his *Kobzar*, supplementing it with more of his own making, so will *The Dictionary* of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences gather the ungathered creators of Ukrainian letters into a single family" (IR NBUV, 27/502, fol. 1).

Starting in 1922, dozens of writers were sending their autobiographies to Plevako's residence at 3 Tsvyntarna Street in Kharkiv (the street name – Cemetery Street – is darkly ironic in light of the fact that many of his respondents, and, indeed, Plevako himself didn't survive the purges of the 1930s). The campaign was most active in 1922-24, and when the project was picked up again under the aegis of the Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences in 1928-29; the correspondence did dry up somewhat in the 1930s, yet the last autobiographies arrived as late as 1934. These texts, spanning the critical decade of rapid changes in the historical and cultural landscape, demonstrate an uneasy dialogue between several competing models of configuring identities, some already with a venerable tradition behind them, some markedly new. They allow us to establish the shifting fashions in self-fashioning (at the time, even a year or two could make a drastic difference, especially after Stalin came to power in 1927): the fact that these

autobiographies are often the only data we have on a given writer only underscores the importance of the rhetorical component of these texts.

2.1.2 Taxonomies of Self-Representation in Plevako's Archives

The autobiographies included in Plevako's archives can, roughly, be divided into three major genres, based on the key plots and topoi of the texts. While few texts would include all the elements that I describe as being characteristic of the group, the thematic constellations are rather marked.

The first large group is steeped in the autobiographical tradition of the latter half of the XIX century, namely by such populist writers (*Narodnyky*) as Panteleimon Kulish, Ivan Nechui-Levytskyi or Olena Pchilka (more on them in chapter 1). This group that I will hereafter describe as populist is prevalent in the texts from the early 1920s, and changes substantially, or falls out of fashion, as the decade progresses. The texts of the group are organized around the following topoi or motifs:

1) Depictions of writers' childhoods are the key part of populist autobiographies, both quantitatively (in terms of the amount of space that they are accorded) and qualitatively (these early scenes set the framework for writers' later careers and views on literature). However, these autobiographies could hardly be termed a *Bildungsroman* proper, because writers' individual biographies serve primarily to ease transitions between ethnographic set pieces from the history of their villages, various descriptions of local folk customs, overviews of traditional animal husbandry, etc. Autobiographers seem to have little interest in their changes as they age, or in their transitions between the

various social groups: the primary impetus behind these autobiographies seems to be to the desire to demonstrate their knowledge of folk culture and customs. For the XIX century, such a knowledge might have been an important part of the credentials of a Ukrainian writer, since such ethnographic endeavors, as well as the language in its spoken form, were viewed as the primary source of Ukrainian national identity under the influence of the Romantic movement of the 1830-40s (for a concise overview of the uses and abuses of the notion of peasants as the repository of national symbols in Ukrainian national movement of the XIX century, see Portnova 2015).

The writer's family history is often described in more vivid detail than the writer's childhood experience, and this history is often defined in terms of the key Ukrainian historiographic narrative of the time. At the time, Cossacks and Cossack uprisings were treated as the pivotal points in Ukrainian history, and writers seek to establish their ties to these events (the autobiography of Taras Shevchenko might have served as their inspiration, lending further legitimacy to such an autobiographical gesture). For example, Hanna Berlo¹³ pays little mind to her literary pedigree, yet takes great pains to trace her family history three centuries down, seeking the crucial connection to Bohdan Khmelnytskyi, who appears to have been married to Berlo's ancestor's sister, and was himself married to the daughter of a Left-Bank Ukraine Hetman Iakym Somko, executed in 1633 (TsDAMLM, 271/1/29: fol.1).

¹³ Hanna Berlo (1859-1942) – a Ukrainian linguist, historian and educator; a member of the commission tasked with compiling the biographical dictionary of Ukrainian historical figures, a member of the permanent commission for compiling the dictionary of contemporary Ukrainian of the Free Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.

Occasionally, writers also provide the folk etymology of their family name, making even the most immediate signifier of their identity contingent on folk narratives. For example, Valeriian Polishchuk¹⁴ opens his autobiography with a story that makes his last name a metonymy of a particular late XIX century understanding of Ukrainian history, centered around peasants and, more specifically, the serfs: “Earl Soltan traded a dog for my great-grandfather Iakiv and brought him here from Berestechko (a town in the Polissia region), hence the last name Polishchuk” (TsDAMLM, 271/2/15, fol. 1). The lack of individual agency implied in ethnographic accounts of childhoods is further underscored by this account of the origins of the last name, which documents what was done to the writer’s ancestors rather than what they chose to do.

The autobiographical subject of populist autobiographies is jarringly passive, a mere observer to folk customs, prompting the readers to retrace his or her steps and to become collectors of ethnographic data by proxy. One could claim that the choice depict writers as passive objects of the tumults of history could, as a matter of fact, be conditioned by the writers’ experiences (many of them were of modest peasant origins, so their life prospects were indeed somewhat limited), yet the model persists in case of writers of other social backgrounds. An interesting case is presented by the autobiography of Mykhailo Kochura¹⁵ (pseudonym Mykhailo Odynokyi), the son of a titular councilor who owned 200 *desiatynas* of land and serfs (one of the few of

¹⁴ Valeriian Polishchuk (1897-1937) – a Ukrainian writer, literary critic and poet of the constructivist circle, founder of the *Avanhard* group (Kharkiv, 1925), member of the *Hart* literary organization, editor of the almanac *Hrono* (1920). Executed during the Great Terror.

¹⁵ Mykhailo Kochura (1851-1932) – a Ukrainian writer, poet and cultural activist. Contributed to journals *Syn otechestva* and *Khutorianyn*, to the poetry collection *Persha Lastivka*. Collected and published information about folk customs in medicine.

Plevako's respondents to unapologetically admit to such origins). Despite a somewhat unconventional social background, Kochura models his autobiography according to the same pattern: the childhood becomes the centerpiece of the autobiography, taking up 6 out of 8 handwritten pages (which is somewhat startling in view of the fact that Kochura is at least in his 70s at the time of writing). The description of his childhood follows the same structure: it is comprised of a number of static set pieces, united by the figure of the child observer. Kochura depicts multiple gruesome scenes of the serfs being flogged or flogging each other, or of a serf being sprinkled with honey and placed in an anthill (a display which the guests of the manor ostensibly enjoy with malicious glee) (TsDAMLM, 271/1/95, fol. 2-3v.). When the child narrator asks why the serfs wouldn't revolt, he is told that such is the legal order established by the tsars (*ibid.*, fol. 3). Hence, even the groups that were privileged under that social order remain helpless in the parameters set by the state.

2) Writers' autobiographies are, by necessity, not only the story of their lives, but also the story of their styles. The progression of a protagonist of a populist autobiography implies the accumulation of ethnographic experiences rather than the development of a discrete identity; likewise, his or her development as a writer often implies not an elaboration of an individual style, but, rather, the accumulation of folkloric knowledge (even if the writer's actual output was not folksy in style). This is often metonymically represented by the writer's proximity to his or her mother as the ward of folkloric knowledge, and to nature. To a certain extent, this motif was later coopted by Socialist Realism: for a time, the evocations of folk genres were used as means to legitimize the

Soviet ideology, and Bolsheviks were depicted as superhuman folk heroes (see Clark 2000: 148). But in the cases analyzed here, dating back to the 1920s, this imagery is not yet used to legitimize the regime.

At the beginning of his 50-page autobiography, Oleksa Kyrii¹⁶ described the seasonal agricultural work with the care and precision that many an agricultural textbook could have envied (TsDAMLM, 271/1/84, fol. 12-13). He takes the same care when describing how his mother would lead him out of the house at night to admire the skyline and to teach him the folk names of constellations: “Those stars there are called ‘Volosozhar’¹⁷ ... That pile over there is ‘Viz,’”¹⁸ that one is ‘Chepiha,’¹⁹ and the one there is ‘Koromyslo’²⁰” (ibid., fol. 12). The emphasis on language acquisition makes the image of his mother instrumental to ways in which he mediates experience through language, and, by extension, to his life writing.

The mother doesn’t only help to fill the extra-verbal world with linguistic signifiers, but also encourages the protagonist to read narratives into the natural phenomena, and to treat them as discrete subjects:

“Listen to the pines whispering to each other, to the forest murmuring,” she said as we entered a dense pine forest.
I listened in on the murmurs of the forest, and I felt joyful.
“Do you hear it?” My mother asked.
“I do,” I answered, and then we turned towards the meadows. (ibid., fol. 11)

¹⁶ Oleksa Kyrii (1889-1954) – Ukrainian poet and playwright who moved to Kuban seeking employment, wrote in Ukrainian and Russian. Published collections of Cherkess folklore.

¹⁷ The Pleiades.

¹⁸ Ursa Major.

¹⁹ Orion.

²⁰ Also Orion, which implies that Kyrii was less assiduous in his ethnographic studies than he would like his readers to believe.

(The scene is repeated in the meadows, with minor variations.) Hence, the narrator is set up as a figure that mediates between the world of culture and the world of nature, between the natural and the man-made. Although naïve, the scene introduces the motif of ventriloquized speech, central, I would argue, to populist autobiographies as a group.

Valerian Polishchuk draws a similar connection between his mother and nature as his artistic influences:

“Bilche [the writer’s home village] is situated in such a poetic part of Volhynia that one couldn’t dream of a better place; legends, songs, spring ritual songs were the source at which I gorged on the substance of Ukrainian word ... Nature and my mother, with their songs and fairytales, had an artistic influence on me [Художній вплив робили природа та мати своїми піснями й казками].” (TsDAMLM, 271/2/15, fol.1)

I find it particularly telling that there’s little differentiation between the mother and nature in the last sentence, where there’s no telling grammatically which of them the possessive pronoun “своїми” is referring to. (This stance might seem paradoxical in the case of Polishchuk, whose futurist experiments make him an unlikely candidate for such populist self-fashioning; more on the disconnect between narrative strategies in fiction and in life writing later.)

To sum it up, populist autobiographies posit that the mother, as the repository of traditional folk culture, was the primary formative influence. This might have been factually true in the case of the populist writers of the XIX century, who, as Maxim Tarnawsky glibly noted, owed an enormous debt to their mothers and/or nannies: at the time when education implied acculturation into either Russian or Polish culture, only uneducated mother figures could offer both thematic and linguistic material for writers

who still chose to write in Ukrainian, and the emotional support for this unconventional choice (Tarnawsky 2015: 26-27). By the 1920s however such claims seem like a worn metaphor, smelling of ink and book dust rather than the lovingly evoked groves and meadows. When applied to a writer's biography, this plot seems to entail a radically anti-individualist stance. The autobiographical pact implies the unity of the author, the narrator and the protagonist. In populist autobiographies, meanwhile, the narrator is expected to represent the ventriloquized voice of the community, taken as a totalized entity whose authenticity is vouched for by the evocations of nature; the protagonist is there to prove the authenticity of the voice. However, the author only exists as such by virtue of his or her disconnect from the community and its forms of creativity that are described as existing in the archaic world that predates written language and that has little space for such contemporary hassles as the publishing industry, the modern understanding of narrative strategies, or indeed literature in the modern understanding of the word. In light of this fact, the next topos, traumatic separation from the community, shared by many populist autobiographies is quite a logical step.

3) In populist autobiographies, the protagonist is often encouraged to start writing by a trauma and/or the separation from the community. For example, Polishchuk maintains that the day when, as a 10 year old, he hurt his hand in a threshing machine was just such a formative experience. The boy had to spend several winter months in a hospital in a nearby town, only barely escaping amputation; the forced separation from his family both afforded exposure to more folk stories told by other peasants confined to a hospital, and an excuse to pursue a career outside agriculture: "I didn't lose a hand, so

now I write poems with it; otherwise I would have probably become a shepherd, because my father was never a rich man, we didn't even have horses" (TsDAMLM, 271/2/15, fol. 2). In reality, the family was invested in giving Polishchuk the best education that they could afford, even at the price of selling their meager plot of land, yet Polishchuk glosses over his time in the Lutsk Gymnasium in favour of this more dramatic account of a literary initiation.

The protagonist of Oleksa Kyrii's autobiography also didn't start writing in earnest until after he moved to Kuban in search of a job. The description of his childhood and adolescence concludes with a poem that he wrote as he was departing his home village: "I will never forget / As long as I dream / My home village / Its white huts / Its charming forests / The meadows / The field / The vegetable gardens / Those lovely gardens / those carnation / under fences / bright as flames" (TsDAMLM, 271/1/84, fol. 29-30). While not exactly high poetry by any stretch of imagination, it is, regardless, an interesting illustration of the construction of nostalgia. Technically, all the nouns are in the accusative case as direct objects of the verb "to forget," yet, since they are all either neuter singular or plural, their accusative form is identical to the nominative case (*Село, Хатки, Гаї, Луги, Поле*, etc.). The long nominative list of the objects that mark a conventional idealized image of a traditional Ukrainian village resounds with the belief that naming implies creation. The lost village of the protagonist's childhood is transposed into the safe realms of his poetry; or, no longer constrained by the demands of literal referentiality, the narrator feels free to create the idealized images, which have the downside of usually being nonexistent in reality.

Therefore, the situation is somewhat paradoxical: on the one hand, autobiographers' subjectivity in populist autobiographies is defined by their ability to speak in the language of their community. This subjectivity can only become an object of description once the link to the community is no longer as immediate, and the separation is described as traumatic. On the one hand, the necessity of the separation is implicit in the irreconcilable tension between the oral folk narratives and literature. On the other hand, Kyrii's account implies that the emphasis on traumatic loss might be described as a textbook example of the phenomenon that Svetlana Boym described as restorative nostalgia: the type of nostalgia that "attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home" and "does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition", conceptualizing an absence as a loss (Boym 2008: xviii). Unlike the Soviet project, which was firmly millenarian in its belief in the coming communist utopia that was moving ever further into the future, the populist framework places this utopia firmly in the past, in the pre-modern, pre-urban, pre-industrial, pre-technological chronotope that is described as the source of national symbols, creativity, and firm moral beliefs.

4) One wouldn't be too wrong to assume that this pre-modern, pre-urban, pre-industrial, pre-technological utopia would, for a variety of reasons, have little space for schools. By the mere fact of their existence, schools imply the forcible incursion of the modern, an integration into a far broader community that transcends the boundaries of familial world of folk customs, they emphasize the man-made as opposed to the natural; in populist autobiographies, school years are uniformly described as a traumatic experience.

At least in part, this interpretation of school years must have had something to do with the fact that all respondents who were old enough to be filling out Plevako's questionnaire in the 1920s must have experienced the education system of the Russian Empire, notorious for both its retrograde character and the pressure to acculturate the students into a Russian cultural and/or national identity. Hence, school years offer a model of identity that would have rendered the writer's choice to become a *Ukrainian* writer nigh impossible, or at least so indicates the many writers' choice to describe this experience as traumatic or abhorrent in their autobiographies. For example, Liudmyla Staryts'ka-Cherniakhivs'ka²¹ describes her tumultuous first years in a Kyiv boarding school (with the Russian language of instruction) after being homeschooled (in Ukrainian) at her parents' estate: while other students bullied her for speaking Ukrainian, she would lie awake through the nights, crying and fantasizing about repaying them violently before she was transferred to a more liberal Vashchenko-Zakharchenko First Private Ladies' Gymnasium (TsDAMLM, 271/1/165, fol. 5).

Oleksa Kyrii also emphasizes that schools served a constitutive function when it came to a national identity in the essentially pre-national world of far-away villages, where identity would more commonly be defined in terms of religion or belonging to a certain locality. The students in his school, all village children whose parents were likely not even literate, "didn't even know who we were, what nationality [національність] we belonged to", until a teacher explained it to them:

²¹ Liudmyla Staryts'ka-Cherniakhivs'ka (1868-1941) – a Ukrainian writer, playwright, translator and cultural activist who also left a number of important memoirs about the turn-of-the-century Ukrainian cultural milieu in Kyiv (about its institutional background, the first decades of Ukrainian theatre, etc.). A member of the Free Ukrainian Academy of Sciences in the 1920s.

“Children, there are many a people [народ] in the world. There are the Germans, the French, the English, the Chinese, the Japanese, the Russians- Do you know who we are?”
We all stayed silent.
“So, you don’t know who you are. I see. I’ll have you know that we are all Russians. Remember that well.” (TsDAMLM, 271/1/84, fol. 14)

It is worth noting that the teacher’s words are rendered mimetically, in Russian, while all other characters speak Ukrainian, somewhat undermining the claim to a shared national identity in an era when national belonging was largely defined in linguistic terms. Indeed, the teacher’s claim is juxtaposed as artificial to the natural world of the village: Kyrii states that the students forgot their teacher’s words immediately after the classes for the day wrapped up, and they left school.

However, even in cases when writers don’t emphasize the fact that they would have been strongly encouraged to acquire a new national identity, schools are still seen as being inherently tied to violence. For example, Pavlo Temchenko²² describes the confusion accompanying his first day in school:

When my gaze dropped on the picture on the wall, I was petrified. On the picture (as I later learned) Abraham was angrily wielding a giant blade at Isaac. I don’t know if it was the picture or the pernicious influence of something else in the school, but, as I said, I dropped out in two weeks’ time. (TsDAMLM, 271/1/168, fol. 5)

So, Temchenko’s first forays into the broader society of the Russian Empire, as exemplified by his early school days, are marred by the image of a child sacrifice, stripped of its original Biblical context (he describes the men in the picture as “bandits”); this could be an early prefiguration of his later participation in the Russo-Japanese War

²² Pavlo Temchenko (1882-1946) – a Ukrainian writer, participated in the Prosvita education movement before World War I.

(1904-1905), in which Temchenko fought and was imprisoned – the experience that prompted him to start writing.

To sum it all up, populist autobiographies reproduce the discourse of restorative nostalgia, idealizing the pre-modern, pre-urban, pre-industrial, pre-technological village life in an undisclosed moment in the past. The authenticity of this moment in time is bolstered by introducing the binary of the natural versus the artificial: the narrator tells a story in a ventriloquized voice of this “natural” community, and his or her biography is structured as a quest to collect ethnographic experiences that readers are expected to follow and recreate.

The second large group of autobiographies seems to seek the perfect biography of a Soviet man who, through a series of doubts and mistakes, reaches an epiphany tied to the Revolution. In this, these “revolutionary” autobiographies are similar in form to the master plot of the later Socialist Realist novels, in that in them, “the phases of [the protagonist’s] life symbolically recapitulate the stages of historical progress as described in Marxist-Leninist theory” (Clark 2000: 10). Clark also notes that, much like the subject of a ritual, the protagonist of a Soviet novel undergoes a series of changes that codify the culture’s major categories. While the narrator of a populist autobiography scorns changes and presents the return to the preindustrial utopia as a restorative rather than a transformative project, narrators of “revolutionary” autobiographies stress both the changes that they undergo, and the changes that they expect to effect on their readers.

“Revolutionary” autobiographies often share the following motifs and topoi:

1) In populist autobiographies, the writer's heritage and identity are defined in terms of his or her access to a certain quantity of ethnographic materials and experiences. Meanwhile, in revolutionary autobiographies the protagonist's heritage is defined by the new categories that the boundaries between the various social strata. For example, a reader would be hard-pressed to find a contemporary autobiography detailing the precise square footage of the writer's apartment, yet such details seem omnipresent in revolutionary autobiographies, where the size of the plots of land are meticulously detailed. For example, Ivan Shyliuk claims 0,75 *desiatyna* for a family of eight (IR NBUV, 27/1/1041, fol. 1), Spyrydon Musiiak 5 *desiatyna* (TsDAMLM, 271/1/121, fol. 1), Roman Hutsalo²³ 2 *desiatynas* for a family of seven (TsDAMLM, 271/1/57, fol. 1), while Oleksandr Kovin'ka²⁴ carefully explains "I had to work as a hired hand: my father might have had ten *desiatyna*, but then, there were eighteen of us" (TsDAMLM, 271/1/86, fol. 1). Kovin'ka probably feels compelled to provide such details because 10 *desiatyna* places his family among the *seredniaky* (middling peasants), the arbitrary cut-off line for poor peasants being either 6 or 8 *desiatyna*; had the Kovin'ka family been hiring workers to work their land, their social background could have hampered the writer's prospects, so he takes care to explain that economically and socially, they were much closer to the poor peasants than to *kulaks*.

Writers who could claim proletarian origins were even luckier, and they seldom passed up on the opportunity to present their family connections in a teleological light.

²³ Roman Hutsalo (1894-1938) – a Ukrainian writer and educator, member of *Pluh* literary union of proletarian writers and the head of its regional Uman branch. Executed during the Great Terror.

²⁴ Oleksandr Kovin'ka (1900-1985) - a Ukrainian writer, published over 30 volumes of satire and comedy.

For example, Oleksandr Vedmits'kyi²⁵ claims that his father was “a peasant turned proletarian [спролетаризований] (illiterate) ... he joined a firefighters' brigade, where he was paid 8-15 rubles a month” (TsDAMLM, 271/1/37, fol. 1), which made Vedmits'kyi naturally predisposed towards taking up the revolutionary cause. Mykola Iashyk makes this teleological connection even more explicit:

My father worked at the railroad for about 40 years ... He earned very little, averaging at about 50 rubles a month ... I remained close to the working lives of railroad workers throughout my childhood and youth, up until my graduation from university ... this fostered an affinity for the ideology of the working masses. (IR NBUV, 27/1048, fol. 2)

It is worth noting that, despite Iashyk's attempts to depict his family as disenfranchised, at the time the salary of 50 rubles a month implied a comfortable middle class life. Indeed, it couldn't by any stretch be described as living in the lap of luxury, but the workers of the one Ukrainian daily of the time, *Rada*, had the same salary, while its editor-in-chief earned a hundred rubles a month.

In conclusion, in populist autobiographies, depictions of protagonists' childhood allow narrators to introduce quasi-ethnographic endeavors that serve to foster a national identity (in the absence of a separate political life and in the times of a vigilantly policed public life, the ethnographic was by necessity equated with the national). In revolutionary autobiographies, meanwhile, childhood experiences tend to foster class consciousness instead, affecting both protagonists' choices during the revolution and their views on literature.

²⁵ Oleksandr Vedmits'kyi (1894-1961) – Ukrainian literary scholar (wrote a number of monographs and articles on T.H. Shevchenko) and poet, chair of the Department of Russian Literature at the Stavropol Institute of Pedagogy in 1939-1950. Often published under the pseudonym “Oleksandr Meteornyj.”

2) In populist autobiographies, school is often depicted as a traumatic experience that robbed protagonists of their private narratives and identities. In revolutionary autobiographies, schools are constructive rather than destructive when it comes to identities, empowering workers to develop a fuller “consciousness.” The autobiographies from the Plevako archive were written in the times of the all-Union Likbez campaign, and they make use of its rhetoric, legitimizing the state policy as “the people’s will.” For example, H.M. Balenko states that his father wanted to grant his children a better education because only education could guarantee liberty and empowerment: “while wandering about and occasionally working as a hired hand, my father realized that, in order to be freed, a poor man needs education-knowledges [sic: the ungrammatical “знаннів” instead of “знання” in Ukrainian, treating an uncountable neuter noun as a countable masculine noun]” (TsDAMLM, 271/1/22, fol. 3v.). The choice of the rhetoric of empowerment, rather than of the improved economic prospects (which were probably easier to grasp for a semi-literate peasant), is most likely conditioned by the propaganda materials of the time. Hence, this subgenre of life writing is structured as an exemplum: the narrator reenacts the model biography of a proletarian who is empowered by means that happen to coincide with the most recent state policies, and through them rises to the heights of revolutionary consciousness (Balenko proceeds to actively participate in the revolution, see *ibid.*, f. 5-6v.).

The school system of the Russian Empire might have had its repressive elements, yet even that facet of the school experience often got treated teleologically in revolutionary autobiographies: the writers posit that circumnavigating the hurdles set up

by the school administration helped them to acquire the skill set that would come in handy during the Revolution. Iurii Zhytko²⁶ produces a fairly typical account of the school years that provided experience of self-organization and informal circulation of information that would come to good use after 1917: “the official boredom [казенщина] of the life in gymnasium urged some students to protest, which occasionally resulted in the appearance of illegal handwritten newspapers that we produced under strict secrecy” (TsDAMLM, 271/2/2, fol. 2). Even a seminary – ostensibly an unlikely alma mater for a good Soviet citizen though it might be – could be depicted as a school of a young revolutionary. Many seminary students in Ukraine of the time came from priestly families, since they were guaranteed tuition-free schooling; as if to atone for the fact that he was once a seminary student, and likely was the son of a priest, Ivan Iurkovych (pseudonym Vereshchaka) emphasized the revolutionary rather than the spiritual aspect of his schooling: “In the seminary, I soon came to lead a revolutionary-nationalist group, edited an underground newspaper and circulated prohibited literature, such as Drahomanov, Franko, Darwin” (TsDAMLM, 271/1/38, fol. 2-3). The experience of offering his fellow seminary students with alternative sources of information helped Vereshchaka to find his life calling, and after the revolution he promptly became “a village teacher, an agitator, a village correspondent” and joined the ranks of the Pluh literary organization (ibid., fol. 3-4), whose professed goal was to educate “the broad peasant masses in the spirit of the proletarian revolution.”

²⁶ Iurii Zhytko (1898-1938) – Ukrainian poet, educator and journalist, co-founder of the Poltava branch of Pluh Organization of Rural Writers (1922). Executed during the Great Terror.

Schools, even in their pre-Revolution form, were described as performing much the same function that revolution did: they undermined the older modes of self-understanding and self-representation (or taught students not to eschew these, if a student happened to come from the disenfranchised background of a largely pre-national rural community), and taught them new models of social interactions and self-expression. For example, H.M. Balenko appropriates the revolutionary rhetoric to describe his school years: “While studying at the Ministry school, I read Shevchenko’s *Kobzar* and other such books, and since then my intrinsic nature [нутро], formed by privations and destitution ... was fired up with the wrath at such indigence, and searched for ways towards liberation” (TsDAMLM, 271/1/22, fol. 3-4). It is quite telling that the respondents of the early to mid-1920s often combine their initiation in the rhetoric of social justice with their exposure to Ukrainian literature, which was not necessarily readily available in the schools of the Russian Empire. The canon of writers that Plevako’s respondents elevate as their models for a revolutionary consciousness is also much broader and more diverse than the definitive canon that ossified by the mid-1930s (for example, Ukrainian philosopher and sociologist Mykhailo Drahomanov, whom Vereshchaka mentioned among his formative reads, wasn’t published in Ukraine until the dissolution of the Soviet Union). As late as 1928, Spyrydon Musiiaka boasted a knowledge not only of Drahomanov, but also of the historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky and the writer Volodymyr Vynnychenko (TsDAMLM, 271/1/121, fol. 2-3), both widely criticized in the Soviet Union as leaders of the short-lived Ukrainian People’s Republic (1918-1920).

3) The charges of nationalism came into vogue in the mid-1930s; concomitantly, Russian yet again started to suffuse all spheres of public discourse (with short periods of liberalization tied to attempts to mobilize the population for the war effort). However, the autobiographies from the Plevako archives document the short period of the mid- to late 1920s when to speak Bolshevik meant to speak Ukrainian. In populist autobiographies, the choice of language is seldom problematized: most writers had to be at least bilingual, so there must have always been an element of choice, yet when writing is depicted as a direct, unmediated product of folk tales and nature, little space is left for contemplating the literary market, analyzing the sociolinguistic implications of any linguistic choice, and for any other rational considerations. For protagonists of revolutionary biographies though the choice of Ukrainian seems to figure as a part of the series of epiphanies, akin to grasping their class identity or choosing a side during the Revolution, that leads to their eventual becoming a model member of the new Soviet society.

Autobiographies that comprise the core of Plevako's archives were written during the time of the policies that led Terry Martin to describe the Soviet Union as the first "Affirmative Action Empire." Apprehensive of national movements in the new Soviet republics, the Soviet government attempted to defuse some of the tension and decolonize the peoples comprising the Soviet Union while preserving the borders of the Russian Empire, promoting national languages in all public spheres, including government and education, which were formerly the exclusive domain of Russian (see Martin 2001, chapter 1; pp. 75-124 concern linguistic Ukrainization in particular).

For writers of the “suspect backgrounds,” such as sons of priests, their choice of Ukrainian could offer, it appears, a measure of expiation. For example, Oleksandr Arbatov, who translated a score of operas into Ukrainian, counterpoints the account of his heritage (he was a son of a priest) with the fact that he “[s]witched to Ukrainian [Українізувався]: graduated from 2nd lev. Ukrainian studies courses and the seminar with the best professors” (TsDAMLM, 271/1/17, fol. 2).

Hence, the Revolution and the Ukrainian national cause appear to be closely linked in the life writing of the time: for example, Oleksandr Vedmits’kyi mentions both in the same breath (“I developed views on the revolutionary cause and on the Ukrainian question” in 271/1/37, fol. 1), and maintains that he started writing because he didn’t have ready-made Ukrainian plays about the Revolution that he could produce with an amateur theatre in his village (*ibid.*, fol. 4). The value he places on dramatic forms in particular offers a hint at the perceived importance of literature in the early post-Revolutionary years: for many writers of the group, it seems, literature was of value insofar as it offered new identity and behavioral models for the masses, and nowhere was the phenomenon as fully realized as it was in staged plays.

Reading Ukrainian literature is often depicted as the catalyst for accepting the goals of the Revolution. For example, Spyrydon Musiiaka noted that, after reading Pavlo Tychyna, Mykola Khvyliovyi and Volodymyr Sosiura, he “felt the new grand powers arise from the thicket of the people, these former slaves, the Great Mute of the bygone centuries, and that these powers will educate the new cadres of the new potent people” (TsDAMLM, 271/1/121, fol. 4). (The irony, of course, lies in the fact that Tychyna’s

writing from the early 1920s were soon prohibited, while Khvyliovyi was struck from the history of Ukrainian literature altogether and had only escaped arrest by committing suicide in 1933.) So, in this statement resonant with the Soviet rhetoric of emancipation, Musiaka posits that the primary goals of literature lay in empowering the formerly disenfranchised population (“these former slaves”), primarily by teaching the “Great Mute” to speak. The corpus of autobiographical works from the era suggests that the latter implies offering said masses a new figuration of the self. By reading and then recreating the new biographical formula, be it in questionnaires, plays or other forms of life writing, the new Soviet citizens were meant to become emancipated from the constraints of the pre-Revolutionary life and, at the same time, to demonstrate their allegiance to the new state by depicting a series of choices and epiphanies through which their class consciousness emerged. Writing, and, all the more urgently, life writing came to be viewed as a transformative act.

4) The renewed faith in the transformative role of literature, as well as the heightened awareness of the fact that identity and self-knowledge depend on language and rhetorical forms used to evoke them, gave rise to more urgent discussions of what genre would be most relevant in the new era. The traces of this anxious search for the dominant genre can be found in some autobiographies in Plevako’s archive too. For example, when answering the question about his view on writers’ role, Petro Kryzhanivs’kyi²⁷ explains: “I believe that the writer’s primary job is to uncover the blunders of the old village life and to supplant it with the new Soviet way of life [по́бут;

²⁷ Petro Kryzhanivs’kyi (1885-?) – a Ukrainian writer, member of the Pluh Organization of Rural Writers.

быт in Russian]. For this reason, most of my texts belong to satire” (TsDAMLM, 271/1/97, fol. 2). The choice might seem somewhat unexpected, since satire was not really accepted as part of the repertoire of Socialist Realist creative writing that crystallized later (see Clark 2000: 147-9). In analyzing the various types of emplotment in historiographical texts, Hayden White lists satire as one of the four possible categories. He maintains that the archetypal motif of satire is “the apprehension that man is ultimately a captive of the world rather than its master,” and the belief that human consciousness and will are not adequate to the task of overcoming its hurdles (White 1975: 9). Such a formula would explain why the genre ultimately didn’t sit well with the programmatic optimism and bathos of the mature Socialist Realism, and the preference for satire as the mode of describing the historical changes might point towards a darker undercurrent in the literature of the time. This pessimist implication is more apparent in the 1929 autobiography by Kost’ Hordiienko²⁸, who similarly privileges satire as the genre that could potentially fulfill the demands of the new regime most fully:

“Lately, an inclination towards satire surfaced in me. It seems that, dialectically, satire should have no grounds in the Soviet state. In capitalist countries satire may be directed against the ruling strata, system, norms, mores, culture, etc., satire revolutionizes the masses like nothing else. And what about us? Do you think the process of revolutionizing is already complete? Didn’t we inherit all the dreary bourgeois sludge that poisons, literally, all the spheres of our life even after the victory of the social revolution?” (TsDAMLM, 271/1/151, fol. 8-9).

This definition too underscores the transformative function that is assigned to literature (satire is valuable insofar as it fosters the revolutionary consciousness in the masses), yet the concentration of clichés of public discourse, generally uncharacteristic of

²⁸ Kost’ Hordiienko (1899-1993) – a Ukrainian writer, member of the Hart Organization for Proletarian Writers. Laureate of Shevchenko National Prize for Literature.

the writer who has elsewhere satirized the cliché-ridden newspeak, encourages us to question the text. It is rather telling that the description of the new Soviet society is proffered not in declarative sentences, but rather through a series of questions, no matter how rhetorical they might be: the burden of the verdict is thus relegated to the implicit reader, who is thus placed in the position of being an expert on all matters ideological, despite reminders about the didactic role of literature.

Hordiienko insists that the times require “sharp social shock-work” [ударність] rather than “weakling aestheticism” of the writers (ibid., fol. 9). The fact that he chooses to frame the genre choice in these terms in 1929 is telling: the terms are indeed a direct echo of the literary debate of 1925-1928 that polarized the Ukrainian literary scene and produced thousands of texts, ranging from brief reviews and pamphlets to novels. Prompted by Mykola Khvyliovyi’s essay that condemned “party-minded” yet only semi-literate writers who were at the time being promoted by proletarian literary organizations, the debate grew into a large-scale discussion on the orientation of Ukrainian literature, and resulted in a slew of ideological accusations, and in several literary organizations being prohibited (for a detailed overview of the discussion, see Myroslaw Shkandrij’s book-length monograph *Modernists, Marxists and the Nation: the Ukrainian Literary Discussion on the 1920s*). Hence, it seems probable that an autobiography written in 1929 for an officially sanctioned dictionary would be used for a performance of loyalty, a demonstration of the writer’s ability to speak fluent Bolshevik. The ability to pinpoint the incongruous elements and to police the ideological landscape – that is, the practices inherent in the kind of satire that these autobiographers are describing – seem to perform

the function of demonstrating the writer's party-mindedness. However, if accepted uncritically, this mode of writing contains an evident self-destructive drive: if the writer's primary goal is to enforce the society's transition towards the Soviet future, successful writers are writing themselves into obsolescence. It cannot be conclusively demonstrated whether such claims are to be accepted at face value, or if they were rhetorical exercises intended to demonstrate the writer's fluency in Bolshevik.

5) In later, more carnivorous years of mature Stalinism the wrong allegiance during the Revolution and the subsequent years of the Civil War could have serious repercussions (for example, Oleksandr Dovzhenko's brief stint in Petliura's army never ceased to haunt him). However, the autobiographies of the 1920s seem to treat a long and thorny path towards joining the Red Army with more leniency. Many writers describe joining several armed groups in increasingly unlikely configurations before casting their lot with the Communists, treating this search as an important part of the development of a political and class consciousness. In an archetypal example, H.M. Balenko maintains that it was his participation in the White Army's Halai's troops that encouraged him to mobilize the local rabble towards "self-organization and the uncompromising class struggle" (TsDAMLM, 271/1/22, fol. 5v.), and prompted him, one assumes, to join the Communists afterwards. This creates the lasting impression that actual allegiances and choices or actions undertaken during the Revolution mattered far less than the choice of rhetorical devices used to describe the experiences. Sometimes this produces an

unintentionally comical effect, as in Volodymyr Sosiura's²⁹ fiery admission that: "I deeply regret that I was executed [sic] ... not for Communism, but for 'mother Ukraine'" (TsDAMLM, 271/2/19, fol. 1). He is referring to the episode when he was captured by the White Army as he was still serving in Petliura's troupes: Sosiura stated that he "participated in the Revolution at first, spontaneously [стихийно], in Petliura's army, before I consciously [свідомо] switched to the Reds" (ibid.). The стихийно/свідомо, or conscious/spontaneous, dichotomy that Sosiura introduced in the passage provides the basis for the master plot of mature Socialist Realist works, as described by Katerina Clark maintains (see Clark 2000: 15-16). Key to the Leninist historical narrative, the dichotomy is depicted as the driving force of historical progress that has to culminate in the emergence of a classless Communist society. Since the protagonist's individual biography is offered as a smaller-scale model of the biography of the Soviet Man, the untimely execution before Sosiura achieved full consciousness and joined the ranks of Communists would have cut short the trajectory of history.

The protagonists of revolutionary autobiographies often mediate between several social strata due to their fluency in several symbolic languages: they are inculcated with the principles of the public discourse of the Russian Empire at school, yet they describe practicing the emancipatory rhetoric of the Bolshevik revolution in private, then join the various warring factions during the Revolution and the Civil War before casting their lot in with the Communists. The authenticity of this final choice is supported by their willing

²⁹ Volodymyr Sosiura (1898-1965) – a Ukrainian poet and an author of an interesting memoir *Tretia Rota*, a member of Pluh Organization of Rural Writers, Hart Organization of Proletarian Writers, VAPLITE (Free Academy of Proletarian Literature). Laureate of the Stalin Prize for Literature (1948).

adherence to the party's rhetorical conventions (such as explaining one's biography through the prism of the spontaneous/conscious dichotomy, or describing one's identity through one's belonging to a certain social strata, defined by the new criteria like the size of the plot of land, etc.), and is further underscored by their early "spontaneous" affinity with the rhetorical principles of this side (early signs of the nascent class consciousness in the descriptions of the protagonist's childhood). The assumption that such plots were codified and ossified into a formula very early on is supported by the fact that they were vulnerable to parodies from the very beginning. For example, "My Autobiography" by Ostap Vyshnia,³⁰ a notable humorist of the time, was published as a brochure in 1927 in a Kharkiv-based coop publishing house Knyhospilka, specializing in cheap short books for largely rural audiences. In it, Ostap Vyshnia parodies the conventions of both populist and revolutionary autobiographies; since the text was written with a broad and not necessarily the most erudite audience in mind, it can be safely assumed that by that time the masses were expected to have been familiar enough with the new conventions of self-fashioning (probably through the need to fill out questionnaires for personal files) to recognize a parody of them. The protagonist, growing up on the outskirts of an estate in the 1890s, professes that his "class consciousness was somewhat murky": on the one hand, he kissed the landlady's hand in an "obviously counterrevolutionary" act, yet he also stomped all over her flower beds in a "blatantly revolutionary act" (Vyshnia 2015: 93). This imitates the accepted convention of pilfering early childhood memories for

³⁰ Ostap Vyshnia (1889-1956) – a Ukrainian writer who worked mostly in satire, co-edited *Chervonyi Perets* (later *Perets*) comic magazine, was a member of Pluh Organization of Rural Writers and Hart Organization of Proletarian Writers.

proof of affinity with the Communist ideology *avant la lettre*; the subversive and comic effect of the scene stems from the obvious disconnect between the narrator who, from his vantage point of the 1920s, has already learned to speak Bolshevik, and the protagonist, who was not yet aware that his mundane acts might be combed for ideologically charged meanings. Later in the same episode, the protagonist is described cowering under the porch of the landlady's house after being excoriated by her, and murmuring, "Just you wait, exploiteress [експлоататоршо]! The October Revolution is coming! I'll show you for the way you've treated us for three hundred years, etc., etc. [Я тобі покажу, як триста літ із нас і т.д. і т.і.]" (ibid.). The protagonist's prescient knowledge about the coming October Revolution seems to poke fun at the Communist teleological vision of history, while the choice to break off the last utterance mid-sentence with an "etc., etc." indicates that such utterances were guided by formulaic conventions that anybody could fill in, and were not an individual expression of beliefs or emotions.

While populist autobiographies are more prominently present in the early 1920s (and among the older writers who were socialized in the literary milieu of the late XIX century), they are largely supplanted by revolutionary autobiographies towards the late 1920s-early 1930s. Once Stalin came to power in 1927 and the aesthetic and ideological demands of writers started to solidify, more and more writers from "ideologically suspect" backgrounds, such as the sons of priests, started turning towards this master plot to clear their reputations. As Stephen Kotkin noted, beliefs were hard to gauge and seldom at stake: it wasn't necessary to believe, as long as one reproduced the dominant Bolshevik discourse as if one did; accepting the rules of the new identity game was sufficient proof

of allegiance (Kotkin 1995: 220). This gave rise to a number of self-conscious attempts to reconcile one's flawed autobiography with the Communist historical vision playing out in an individual revolutionary biography.

As early as 1918, the Chairman of the Cheka in Ukraine Martin Latsis instructed his underlings to conduct investigations not by gathering evidence on whether the subject did indeed commit any acts against the Soviet state, but rather by ascertaining "what class he belongs to, what is his origin, education, profession. These questions should determine his fate" (Vatulescu 2010: 32). Yet the boundaries between classes were permeable and malleable to manipulations, or, at the very least, such were the expectations of the citizens involved in revisionist life writing.

Among the samples offered by Plevako archive, the autobiography of Marko Fedorovych Hrushevsky³¹ (1932) is particularly telling. In the early 1930s, belonging to an ancient priestly dynasty, having a successful priestly career himself and being related to Mykhailo Hrushevsky, the head of parliament of the short-lived independent Ukrainian People's Republic, could each spell doom for the unfortunate boasting such pages in one's biography; combining all three, as Marko Hrushevsky did, was particularly ill-advised. At the autobiography's time of writing, Hrushevsky could already feel the storm clouds gathering: he already had to renounce his clerical office in 1930, and the purges were well underway. For all these reasons, his autobiography demonstrates what

³¹ Marko Hrushevsky (1865-1938) – a Ukrainian ethnographer and educator. A graduate of the Kyiv Theological Seminary, he taught in the parochial school in his native village in the Kyiv Governorate. Anointed priest in 1897, became a bishop of Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church in 1922. Forced to renounce his priestly rank in 1930, arrested and executed in 1938.

rhetorical means one could use to improve one's chances of passing as a conscientious communist.

The description of the protagonist's origins aligns with the motifs typical for populist autobiographies in its emphasis on the ethnographic description of the region, yet in this case it might also serve to: (1) ascertain the protagonist's affinity with the lower classes; and (2) to supplant the allegiance to his family and class with detached ethnographic interest. The very first sentence of the autobiography – “In the Chyhyryn region nearly every village was home to a member of the Hrush family, and for quite a while at that” (TsDAMLM, 271/1/56, fol. 1) – is evocative of the XIX century ethnographic style, and shifts the emphasis from an individual biography to the history of a community. Marko Hrushevsky uses the version of the family name that has the benefit of sounding more Ukrainian and more lower-class than the official, slightly Polonized spelling (“Hrush”), and further distances himself from it by eschewing 1st person possessive pronouns (consistently uses the form “this family” instead of “my family”). Rather than being set apart from or being placed in direct opposition to the dispossessed classes, as the Soviet historical narrative would describe them, the Hrush family is described as experiencing all the vagaries of history with the people rather than impending the course of history:

This family, which never held itself apart from all peasantry, including the peasants of Khudoliivka [Hrushevsky's native village], and merged with it with its entire being, experienced the fallouts of political changes like the entire Ukrainian people ... this family featured many a notable person, one way or another, but their crucial feature was their adherence to the customs of the simple folk [простонародність]. (ibid.)

While underscoring his family's affiliation with the peasants, Marko Hrushevsky also tries to undermine the stark dichotomy of the exploiters and the exploited by drawing the readers' attention to the fact that socioeconomic backgrounds were usually less clear-cut than that: "the priests, for example, were not averse to occasionally trading in salt [чумачка], while councilors of His Majesty's court (that happened too) also dabbled in agriculture, if on a limited scale" (ibid.). If heritage sufficed to seal one's fate, highlighting the diversity to be found in most families was one way to redress the issue, short of coming out as a virulent opponent of the system. In this, Hrushevsky also departs from the populist vision of the village of the days of yore as the idealized monolithic space, which could hardly accommodate the plurality of experiences described here.

Hrushevsky further contends that his family didn't exploit the dispossessed since his father only "acquiesced to the begging of the villagers and of the eparch" and took on the responsibilities of a village priest so that his sons would have the right to study, which peasants didn't "under the laws of the time." The lofty goal of educating one's children fits the Likbez rhetoric, and shifts the blame to the Russian Empire, which offered few opportunities of upward social mobility for peasants. Meanwhile, Hrushevsky's father ostensibly relegated his priestly responsibilities to a sexton (who also took the payments and could thus be cast as an exploiter in this class drama), and proceeded to live as a simple peasant off his plot of land, measuring 4 desiatynas (ibid., fol. 2). Whether a plot of land that size would have sufficed to raise and educate 8 sons is beyond the point here: more importantly, it places the family amongst the poor peasants (those who had fewer

than 9, or, by other standards, 6 desiatynas), which was a much more propitious socioeconomic background.

So, the writers who had damning pages in their biographies could airbrush their autobiographies by (1) demonstrating that their heritage also includes proletarians; (2) stressing the proximity to the workers or poor peasants; (3) resorting to the state-sanctioned rhetoric of emancipation and education; (4) privileging those elements of their biographies that do fit the model Soviet biography.

At the time, autobiographies were largely a formulaic genre, and broad swathes of the population were aware of and fluent in their conventions, to the extent that they could recreate them at will and recognize parodies of the conventions as such. Under such conditions, one wouldn't miss the mark assuming that the choice of a certain autobiographical model was a poor predictor of aesthetic choices in creative writing (not all writers who left populist autobiographies practiced the Ukrainian brand of populist realism, etc.). Even more saliently, some writers left several biographies, belonging to radically different genres (Valeriiian Polishchuk probably holds the record, having left autobiographies of all three types, some written in the same year: hence, the differences are unlikely to evidence any drastic changes in his ideological or aesthetic beliefs). This allows us to question some of the conclusions of the so-called Soviet subjectivity school. Using life writing (primarily diaries) from the 1930s as his source material, Jochen Hellbeck comes to the conclusion that personal documents do not substantiate the Western methodological assumption that Soviet subjects can be treated as "individuals in pursuit of autonomy who cherished privacy as the sphere of free self-determination";

instead, he maintains that they shouldn't be juxtaposed to the totalitarian state as a controlling instance (Hellbeck 2009: 2). Hellbeck posits that the writers of personal documents "sought to realize themselves as historical subjects defined by their active adherence to a revolutionary common cause ... it seemed to obliterate any distinction between a private and a public domain" (ibid., 5); in my opinion, this is a somewhat reductive reading that glosses over the tensions that make the texts of this kind such interesting sources. It is patently obvious that Soviet citizens were at least as conscious of the generic conventions of self-representation as their Western counterparts (if not more aware, actually, since the stakes were higher). The fact is evidenced, among other things, by the writers who freely switched between several modes of self-fashioning, and by the fact that mass readership was expected to recognize the laws of the genre when they were being parodied. In my opinion, this facility with multiple genres of life-writing warns scholars with an interest in the era against making any rash assumptions about what the writers might have believed their true self to be, and privileges the codified rhetorical side of autobiographies over the referential. The warning is relevant for autobiographies of all eras, but all the more so for the times when non-compliance with the officially sanctioned tropes and motifs in self-representation could cost a tone-deaf writer his or her life. The third group of autobiographies that I intend to analyze here explicitly draws readers' attention to the fact that autobiographies are conditioned by generic conventions rather than any extra-textual reality that they might reference.

To sum up the overview of the first two models of self-representation, "populist" autobiographies are defined by their orientation towards (a particular essentialized

ethnographic vision of) the past. The protagonist's biography serves as connecting tissue between the episodes describing folk legends and customs; the implicit reader is thus cast as an amateur ethnographer called on to make sense of the collected materials. Populist writing of this type seems to imply speaking in the perennial quotation marks, with the ventriloquized voice of "the folk," which is equated with a certain vision of the peasants. Since the members of the community cannot write for themselves (if they could, their primeval ethnographic state, one assumes, would have been learned with "artificial," as opposed to their "natural," cultural artifacts), the narrator goes through convoluted textual acrobatics to prove his or her intermediary status, both belonging and not belonging to the group that they posit to conserve in its original purity.

"Revolutionary" autobiographies, to the contrary, are oriented not towards preserving the past, but towards producing a different future in a millenarian vision typical of the Soviet historical narrative. Protagonists' biography emphasizes not the acquisition of an already existing symbolic language, but a search for a new model of speaking about oneself, and for a new way of existing in a changed social system. Thus, this group of autobiographies privileges not the conservationist but rather the transformative, as the case might be, nature of the genre (a new way of describing an identity produces and validates a new identity). Both "populist" and "revolutionary" autobiographies boast extensive machinery of legitimizing and essentializing their visions of, respectively, the past and the future. The third group, that I would here tentatively call avant-garde (although, as I have said, the choice of an autobiographical genre is not necessarily an indicator of any given writer's aesthetic preferences in other forms), is the

only one that explicitly demystifies the mechanics of producing identities as textual constructs. More pertinently, they also probe and explore what is the author.

Since the form of brief questionnaires for biographical dictionaries (or for personal files, for that matter) is not really conducive to deconstructing the emerging topoi, motifs and conventional imagery expected of life writing, I will provide a brief overview of the few examples found in the Plevako archives, and then segue into the analysis of the editors' quasi-autobiographies found in the *Literaturnyi Iarmarok* magazine (1928-1930), probably the most interesting example of the sort in Ukrainian literature of the time.

2.2.1 Unwriting Life Writing

Questioning the need for the ever-proliferating institutionally sanctioned autobiographies was an endeavor hardly exclusive to professed modernists or avant-gardists: for example, Liudmyla Staryts'ka-Cherniakhivs'ka, an avowed traditionalist in her aesthetics, opens her autobiography in the Plevako archive with the following passage: "I cannot stand all these biographies and autobiographical data of all kinds, etc. There are the published works, and works always reveal both the worldview and the truest autobiography of a writer" (TsDAMLM, 271/1/165, fol. 2-2v.). Given that this autobiography was written at some point between 1926 and 1928, there is little doubt that the "autobiographical data of all kinds" that she so resented was solicited in the form of numerous questionnaires intended to establish the class credentials and the social status before and after the Revolution of a given citizen. Staryts'ka-Cherniakhivs'ka was quick

to admit that such questioning would instantly mark her for a second-rate citizen: “Archbourgeois ancestry ‘branded with a curse’, and not a single ‘bench worker’ in the family!” [архибуржуазне «проклятьем заклеїчене» походження і ні одного “рабочего от станка” серед родичів!] (ibid., fol. 2over.-3). Forcefully encouraged to assemble a self-representation from the alien building blocks of the new Soviet categories, Staryts’ka-Cherniakhivs’ka cannot resist the urge to mark their foreignness not once but twice: by the prohibitive quotation marks, and by the choice to include them in Russian while the rest of the text is in Ukrainian. However, occasional complaints seldom result in formal experiments that subvert, defamiliarize or creatively question the demands of this institutional form of self-representation. The third section of this chapter is devoted precisely to the rare cases that draw the readers’ attention to the fact that identities, like all textual identities, smell of ink.

This category is smaller and more variegated, yet some shared motifs do emerge. For one, writers who were not necessarily on the best of terms with one another independently came up with the notion of broadening the agreed-upon temporal range of autobiographies to include the protagonist’s death. For example, a prominent avant-garde poet Mykhail’ Semenko³² ends his otherwise formulaic and conventional autobiography with the line that reads “Died in ...” (TsDAMLM, 271-1-159, fol. 1). The ellipsis invites

³² Mykhail’ Semenko (1892-1937) – a Ukrainian poet and the founding father of Ukrainian Futurism. Debuted in 1913 with a poetry influenced by earlier Ukrainian modernism, he soon switched to more experimental poetics and problematized his relationship with the preexisting literary tradition (famously stated that he’s burning his volume of Shevchenko: a rhetorical gesture similar to “Let us chuck Pushkin, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky off the steamship of modernity” of the Russian Cubofuturist manifesto). Founder of Aspanfut (Association of Panfuturists, 1922-24) and *Nova Heneratsia* [New Generation] Futurist organization with an eponymous magazine, which he edited. Chief editor of Odessa Film Factory (1924-1927). Executed during the Great Terror.

a future reader to become a cowriter of this autobiography, undermining the unity between the writer, narrator and protagonist that most readers have come to expect of autobiographies. In his 1923 autobiography, Ivan Dniprovskyi³³ frames his life thusly in an interesting textual gesture:

I started my conscious life under the “Mothers of Ukraine and their faithful children” rubric, but now I’m under the aegis of “Steel Days.” This is where it will come to an end [Свідоме життя почав під рубрикою «Матері України й вірні діти», зараз перейшов у шатро «Сталевих днів»] ... P.S. Born in 1895. Will die with my class. (TsDAMLM, 271-1-60, fol. 2)

Having relegated the date of birth to the far recess of a post scriptum as a fact of meager importance, Dniprovskyi describes his biography in terms evocative of a library catalogue, complete with book titles and rubrics. The titles he mentions do not refer to any actual editions, penned by him or his colleagues: rather, they seem to denote certain discourses. “The Mothers of Ukraine” conjures up the imagery typical of populist works, analyzed earlier. “Сталеві дні” (“The Days of Steel”), meanwhile, appears to be a play both on Stalin’s name, and on the industrial imagery that got actualized with the revolution. Writing in particular was often described in terms of industrial output in “revolutionary” autobiographies: for example, one Oleksa Dihtiar likened the throes of inspiration to the “blazes in a Siemens-Martin furnace” [це справжнє горіння та ще й не аби-яке горіння, а мартенівське] (TsDAMLM, 271/1/58, fol. 6).

³³ Ivan Dniprovskyi (1895-1934) – a Ukrainian writer and translator (translated Gorky, Tikhonov).

A similar gesture can be found in Maik Iohansen's³⁴ autobiography in *Literaturnyi Iarmarok*, where he optimistically states that he will die in 1942 (in reality, he was executed in 1937). To sum it all up, the choice to include the protagonist's death in an autobiography seems to perform several interrelated functions. It runs counter to the essentializing strategies of populist or revolutionary autobiographies, strongly encouraging readers to reflect on the constructed rather than straightforwardly referential nature of life writing. It also implies a more open structure of the text by encouraging readers to add the date of death (and, one is tempted to assume, any other relevant information). Moreover, it privileges the narrative level over the plot level: not being subject, unlike life, to the tyranny of the accidental, the text that is an autobiography demands a conclusion that would encourage the production of meaning. One way to offer it is to impose on the text a structure that brings to the forefront the "fictive concords with origins and ends" (Kermode 2000: 7), drawing the death, either individual or the death of the class, into an autobiography.

The origins can also be redefined in terms of literary influences instead of class heritage, as we have already seen in the autobiography of Dniprovskiy. Olel'ko Korzh,³⁵ who cheekily offered Plevako an autobiographical poem in lieu of answering the questionnaire, also defined his lineage in terms of literary trends: "I don't know who I am

³⁴ Maik Iohansen (1896-1937) – a Ukrainian writer and poet, cofounder of Hart Organization of Proletarian Writers and VAPLITE (the Free Academy of Proletarian Literature). Coeditor and cofounder of *Universalnyi Zhurnal* and *Literaturnyi Iarmarok*, some of the most important literary periodicals of the 1920s. Having debuted as a poet, he wrote the novel that became the symbol of formalist experiments in Ukrainian Prose (*Travels of the Learned Doctor Leonardo and His Future Lover, the Beautiful Alcesta, in Slobzhanshchyna Switzerland*, 1928-1932). Executed during the Great Terror.

³⁵ Olel'ko Korzh (1903-1982) – Ukrainian poet and writer, member of the Hart Organization of Proletarian Writers.

// I would only say that Mykhail' and Geo are my family // And that I have lice in my shirt" [Хто я не знаю // Тільки скажу що мої родичі Михайль і Гео // І що в мене в пазусі є блохи] (TsDAMLM, 271-1-92, fol. 1v.). Mykhail' and Geo of the second line are, of course, the writers who influenced Korzh's poetics: Mykhail' Semenko, already mentioned in this chapter, and Geo Shkurupii (1903-1937), prominent Ukrainian panfuturist poet. So, instead of providing the information that would have helped to establish his and his family's social strata before and after the Revolution, Korzh opts for outlining his literary influences, questioning the easy identification of the writing subject with the biographical subject.

The random mention of the shirt-dwelling lice, which wouldn't have been all that startling in a longer text, draws the eye in a short and programmatically formulaic autobiographical subgenre. Maik Iohansen also compiled his autobiography of similarly random elements, transforming the Soviet bureaucratic questionnaire on which Plevako's questionnaire was modeled into a kind of a salon questionnaire: "As for the writers, I like Khvyliovyi. I like chess. I don't like people with bourgeois tendencies" (TsDAMLM, 271-2-5, fol. 1). The randomness of these elements seems to imply that the arbitrary selection of categories that comprised a typical Soviet autobiography was similarly a matter of conventional agreement rather than a matter of immanent human characteristics. And, once it is agreed that the form of autobiographies is dictated by arbitrary categories, the fact of having lice might be no less important than, say, the size of the writer's plot of land (quite predictably, not specified in either Korzh's or

Iohansen's autobiography), although emphasizing one fact or the other likely implies different modes of self-fashioning.

These strategies, and more, are all the more prominent in the crypto-autobiographies of editors of the *Literaturnyi Iarmarok* journal, probably the most interesting experimental literary periodicals in the history of Ukrainian literature. I will look at them more extensively in the latter part of this chapter.

2.2.2 Putting Question Marks into Auto(?)bio(?)ographies: Editorial Crypto-Autobiographies in *Literaturnyi Iarmarok*

With the abolition of limitations on publishing in Ukrainian, which were incumbent up till the very last days of the Russian Empire, the Ukrainian literary scene of the 1920s saw a swift proliferation of literary journals of all imaginable aesthetic and political orientations, proving correct a truth universally acknowledged that a young writer in possession of considerable skill must be in want of a literary journal. *Literaturnyi Iarmarok*, or *The Literary Marketplace*, which appeared from December 1928 to February 1930, became a hub for the writers and public intellectuals primarily, but not exclusively, associated with the VAPLITE – Вільна Академія Пролетарської Літератури, or the Free Academy of Proletarian Literature – which, in reality, was neither an academy nor all that proletarian, for which crime it got disbanded earlier in 1928. For the sheer percentage of works that went on to enter the Ukrainian literary canon, *Literaturnyi Iarmarok* is unprecedented among the literary periodicals of the time.

Most issues of *Literaturnyi Iarmarok* offer a confounding web of texts: fictive introductions by long-dead scholars, *intermedia* in the vein of a baroque ludic tradition, etc. These paratexts form an overriding plot or argument, almost turning the journal into a unity in which individual works become utterances in a lively ongoing conversation. It is important to keep in mind that the journal appeared right after the literary debate of 1925-28 concerning the tasks Ukrainian Soviet literature had to fulfill, the reconfigurations of the literary canon, the role of Ukrainian language as a cultural medium, etc. *Literaturnyi Iarmarok* is part and parcel of its time, and these paratextual interjections occupy a semantically privileged position that defines the strategies reserved for the implied reader. As Gerard Genette noted in his *Paratexts*,

the paratext is, rather, a *threshold* ... as Phillippe Lejeune put it, 'a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text' ... a privileged place of the paradigmatics and a strategy of an influence on the public. (Genette 2001: 2)

This holds true for the editors' autobiographies in *Literaturnyi Iarmarok*: by their authors' intent as well as by the very nature of the genre, they raise a set of questions that affect the readers' strategy: what is authority, textual and otherwise? How is the right to speak legitimized, who confers it on writers, who has it? How is the writer who is also the writer of an autobiography positioning himself against the preexisting literary tradition, and on what terms does he tackle it? The generic expectations are further confounded by the fact that the texts are presented as having been written by somebody other than the protagonist of autobiography, which makes the problem of authorship all

the more pressing: Maik Iohansen's by Ivan Senchenko³⁶ (February 1929), the autobiography of Leonid Chernov³⁷ by Valeriian Polishchuk (March 1929), the autobiography of Ostap Vyshnia by Ivan Senchenko (May 1929), and the autobiography of Edvard Strikha written by Kost' Burevii³⁸ (July 1929). The last case is relatively straightforward (Edvard Strikha was Kost' Burevii's literary persona); as to the former, to the best of my knowledge, no documents that would allow us to definitively establish the authorship survive. Vyshnia's autobiography gets the number of his siblings wrong, allowing us to assume that it was probably written by Ivan Senchenko rather than Vyshnia himself; Iohansen's autobiography misspells his father's name, whether due to the lack of knowledge or due to an unfortunate typo; for other autobiographies, there are no such easy tells. However, I am far less interested in establishing the authorship than in outlining the textual situation under which "an autobiography written by another writer" came into being as a valid narrative strategy. For brevity's sake, I will refer to these autobiographies by their protagonists' names (i.e., Iohansen's autobiography rather than "Iohansen's autobiography, ostensibly penned by Senchenko"), but this nomenclature doesn't imply a pronouncement on ultimate authorship.

³⁶ Ivan Senchenko (1901-1975) – Ukrainian writer and journalist (reported on the construction of the White Sea-Baltic Sea Canal), a member of Pluh Organization of Rural Writers, Hart Organization of Proletarian Writers, VAPLITE (Free Academy of Proletarian Literature). A regular contributor to the influential *VAPLITE* and *Literaturnyi Iarmarok* literary magazines.

³⁷ Leonid Chernov (1899-1933) – Ukrainian writer and poet, member of *Avanhard* literary group (leader and founder: Valerian Polishchuk). Having traveled in the Far East of the USSR and in India, he wrote a number of memoirs and adventure novels based on the experience, cultivating the image of a daring adventurer who never parted with his motorcycle and camera.

³⁸ Kost' Burevii (better known under the pseudonym Edvard Strikha), 1888-1934 – Ukrainian writer and literary critic. Best known to readers for his standoff with Mykhail Semenko resulting in a number of poetic parodies which Semenko initially did not recognize as parodies and published in the journal he edited. Executed during the Great Terror.

The conventions of these texts were first laid out in the autobiography of Maik Iohansen, ostensibly written by Ivan Senchenko, featured in the 3rd issue of the journal (February 1929). The layout of these autobiographies at one remove differs from other pages of the journal: the text is stylized as hand-written (Iohansen's, Ostap Vyshnia's) or typed (Burevii's, Chernov's). Therefore, the writers' authority is framed as not purely textual (the authority of a persona that manipulated a set of rhetorical devices), but also as physical, encompassing the creation of the cultural artifact as a whole. This graphic decision reinforces the idea of a literary journal as a consistent organized unity, but also ostensibly presents these autobiographies as indexical signs of their authors' physical existence, seemingly reminding the readers that autobiographies are defined by lived experience. However, this decision to underscore to the writers' empirical existence problematizes the texts in question on two levels: first, in view of the concept of an autobiography written by somebody else, and second, in view of how authorship and authority are constructed within the texts themselves.

Iohansen's autobiography begins with a genealogical overview that makes a mockery of the typical question about the writer's social origins. Following a strategy similar to the one employed by Dniprovskiy, who defined his lineage in terms of discourses or literary traditions, Iohansen ties his family history to literary history:

Дід її діда не був у дружніх стосунках із Тарасом Бульбою і разом з ним не ясирував українських дівчат до Кефи і Стамбулу. (Йогансен 1929: 2)

The grandfather of [Iohansen's grandmother's] grandfather was not on friendly terms with Taras Bulba and, together with him, he didn't take Ukrainian lasses to Kafa and Istanbul.

Obviously, this account is suffused with the two contradictory concerns. The narrative progression of an autobiography tends to be charged with first establishing and then gradually, as the plot progresses, eroding the distance and the difference between the I-past of its protagonist and the I-present of its narrator. In autobiographies concerned with establishing the protagonist's link to either the national or the class background (see, for example, the conventions of populist autobiographies that Iohansen is emulating and parodying here), this progression typically extends to the protagonist's family history. By choosing to narrate parts of his family history through negations, Iohansen not only creates a certain comical effect, but also, by stressing the endless potentialities rather than historical facts, emphasizes the rhetorical scaffolding and the constructed nature of the motif that is often used to lend authenticity to the strategies of protagonists in autobiographies. Moreover, the mention of Taras Bulba relegates the historical past to the domain of the literary. Chronological identification gets processed through literary allusions throughout Iohansen's autobiography: the events in his family history are described as having happened «коли, за словом поета, на Україні ревіли гармати» (“when, as the poet put it, the cannons were roaring in Ukraine,” *ibid.*). The passage from «Ivan Pidkova» by Taras Shevchenko quoted in this line is followed by «Минулося — осталися / Могили на полі» (“that is all gone; what we have left are the burial mounds in the fields”): hence, the literary if not actual historical continuity implied in incorporating Shevchenko as a chronological marker promptly gives way to yet another reminder of discontinuity. Further down, Iohansen's account of his family's history includes Cervantes's (obviously fictional) sister, referred to as “*donna Anna*,” who was

purportedly freed from captivity by a Ukrainian Cossack. This motif is probably meant to invoke a particular idea of mimetic interactions with literature embodied most recognizably in *Don Quixote*. In his *Theories of Mimesis*, and following in a long and distinguished line of scholars who have read the fiction-making gestures of *Don Quixote* as foundational for modern culture, Arne Melberg observed that it was *Don Quixote* that started “a long and far-reaching tradition of interchange between person and fiction” which involves at least two of the notions that are prominent in both the editors’ autobiographies and in larger complexes of paratexts in *Literaturnyi Iarmarok* (Melberg 1995: 51-53): (1) the problematizing of the proper names which become, first and foremost, the markers of literary allegiances (emblemized, as will be demonstrated later, in the very practice of autobiographies penned by another writer); (2) the ideal of reviving the Golden Age through the imitation of literary texts, while in this case stressing the textual and fictive nature of said Golden Age, privileging the practice over the goal.

It can be safely posited that Iohansen’s autobiography exists on the fault line between maintaining a tradition and detaching from it by emphasizing its acquired, literary, make-believe elements. In a strategy opposite to the one espoused by Iohansen in his autobiography, both “populist” and “revolutionary” autobiographies depict past experiences in a teleological connection with the present, emphasizing the continuity between the present narrator, the protagonist of the autobiography as his past self, and his family history (either as the repository of ethnographic information that the writer will come to use, or as representatives of the social strata that the writer will come to defend

during the Revolution). Meanwhile, Iohansen emphasizes not only the absence of continuity between the narrator's and his family's past and present, but their belonging to different orders altogether. The rift between them, I would contend, lies along the lines between memory and history, as described by Pierre Nora in his article "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*." Nora maintains that history and memory are the opposite insofar as memory remains a practice embedded in the present, changing and actualized as society sees fit, while history is "the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer" (Nora 1989: 8-9). As such, history, no longer laying claims to a connection with the sacred, is much more resistant to totalizing accounts than memory could ever be. It is likely that, by emphasizing the mediated nature of historical knowledge, Iohansen questions the possibility of a totalizing historical and/or cultural narratives, and instead privileges the individual ironic play with discrete cultural artifacts that can be rearranged in new ways. Just one example of this would be the genre of *intermedia* that lends structure to *Literaturnyi Iarmarok* (each issue featured lengthy intermedias penned by their respective editors, which served as frames for other texts). It is obviously an allusion towards the Baroque ludic tradition, but, while the form retained some of its original connotations (it was likely chosen to begin with because, as Paulina Lewin contends in *Ukrainian Drama and Theater in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, intermedias encouraged audience participation (Lewin 2008: 174)), the writers updated both the cast of characters and the catalogue of plots (on intermedias in *Literaturnyi Iarmarok*, see Hryn 2005: chapter 5).

The temporality of Mike Iohansen's autobiography is never uncompromised to begin with: the events marked by the past tense, the narrator implies, belong not in another time but in another mode of existence altogether, that of the literary phenomena. The temporal positioning of the narrator becomes even more ambiguous towards the end of the text, when it is proclaimed that,

Отже, я, Майк Йогансен, умру в 1942 р. І, оселившись в царстві тіней, буду вести розумну бесіду з Гезіодом, Гайне і Мігуелем Сааведро Сервантесом. Але я буду з ними говорити українською мовою. (Iohansen 1929: 3)

So, I, Mike Iohansen, will die in 1942. And, when I settle in the vale of shadows, I will lead learned conversations with Hesiod, Heine and Miguel Saavedra Cervantes. But I will converse with them in Ukrainian.

On the one hand, this sudden imposition of omniscient narration juxtaposes the predetermined linear progression of a biography with the arbitrary reading time and narrative time, that is, the plot time with the narration time, and it clearly privileges the narration (which allows any temporal shifts in the organization of events, including this instance of storytelling from beyond the grave). On the other hand, of course, it places the protagonist of the autobiography, once his death is ensconced in the safety of the future perfect for the narrator in a temporal point beyond that, on the same order as his ancestors, and writers: on a different level of referentiality.

The protagonist Leonid Chernov's autobiography, penned by Valeriian Polishchuk (whose autobiography submitted to Plevako's archives was mentioned earlier in the chapter), is similarly decentered. In a gesture similar to the one in Maik Iohansen's autobiography, the first page is stylized after a typed sheet: an indexical sign of the

author's presence, seemingly emphasizing the role of the empirical author. The text even starts with a physical description of the writer:

Коли ви на вулиці побачите людину міцного й високого тіла, здоровила з короткою присадкуватою шиєю, могутнім торсом і бойовим виглядом (туберкульоз 3 стадії), з крутим лобом і високими осяйними добрими очима блакитно-сірої води, то знайте, що то я. (Chernov 1929: 1)

Should you see a man of sturdy and tall stature with a short red neck, a herculean torso and belligerent look (3rd stage tuberculosis), with a high forehead and big beaming kind eyes the colour of grey-blue water, you should know that it's me.

The choice to place the ekphrastic portrait of the writer in the semantically privileged position of the opening paragraphs of the text seems to serve much the same function as the decision to stylize the first pages of these autobiographies as hand-written or typed. It dramatizes the issue of the identity of the writing subject, questioning not only the identity of the author of an autobiography purportedly penned by somebody else, but also the notion of authorship more broadly, should readers acknowledge the validity of the generic definition of “an autobiography purportedly penned by somebody else.” And, indeed, the narrator immediately modifies his initial claim: not a full paragraph later, he acknowledges that “no, this is not yet everything you might need to know to recognize Leonid Chernov” (ibid.). This admission triggers a description of the protagonist of Leonid Chernov's travelogues, a sea captain with a typewriter in his suitcase, albeit with a certain ironic distance towards the exaggerations often associated with travel writing. For example, the narrator is quick to admit certain blunders: “Читайте мою книжку «125 день під тропіками». На кондорів не вважайте. Он у Лермонтова в запалі писання і левиця з косматою гривною стрибає” (“Read my book *125 days in the tropics*. Never mind the condors. When Lermontov got carried away, he

described a lioness with a shaggy mane”) (ibid., 3). That admission, of course, emphasizes that the book, while not necessarily veracious, nonetheless adheres to the conventions of literary verisimilitude; it should be understood that its signified lies not within the realm of positivist knowledge (which would have included the information about condor habitat), but rather within the realm of certain exoticizing literary motifs.

Contradictory descriptions of Chernov’s appearance, which are to be supplemented by the knowledge of his works, and, indeed, the privileging of the works regardless of their failure to be veraciously referential, deny the importance of the purely physical locus of narration invoked by the hand-written first page. Writers are to be treated as a function of their texts.

The idea of the writer as a function of his works is even more prominent in the autobiography of Edvard Strikha written by Kost Burevii (published in the 8th issue of *Literaturnyi Iarmarok*). Kost’ Burevii created the persona of Edvard Strikha, a communist zealot and a diplomat traveling from Moscow to Paris while writing propagandist poetry in the futurist vein, for the purposes of parodying and establishing a dialogue with the Ukrainian panfuturists united around the *Nova heneratsiia* magazine (edited by Mykhail’ Semenko) and with the constructivists of the *Avantgarde* magazine (edited by Valeriian Polishchuk).

The autobiography of Burevii/Strikha in *Literaturnyi Iarmarok* follows the pattern established earlier by Iohansen and Chernov, with the authorial persona becoming a function of his texts; if anything, it is all the more explicit in the case of the persona that was indeed a literary mystification. The autobiography opens with a claim that “Едвард

Стріха – геній ... Писати Стріха почав ще в утробі своєї матері” (“Edvard Strikha is a genius ... Strikha started writing while still in his mother’s womb”) (Burevii 1929: 1). Technically, the claim is somewhat more veracious than Iohansen’s description of his family history: after all, the persona of Edvard Strikha, insofar it is endowed with a biography and oeuvre distinct from those of Kost’ Burevii, couldn’t predate the texts ascribed to him.

The autobiography proffered in *Literaturnyi Iarmarok* is a condensed prose retelling of *Zozendropiia*, the long narrative poem parodying Ukrainian futurism that Burevii earlier sent to *Nova heneratsiia*. It presents an eclectic mixture of topoi of model Soviet biographies with the sentimental/sensationalist tropes: as a young man, the protagonist is sent to Siberia for setting a count’s palace on fire and for kissing his daughter (Burevii 1929: 1 for the *Literaturnyi Iarmarok* autobiography, and Strikha 1955: 99 for *Zozendropiia*); the count’s daughter is shot, and, once her body is drained of her blue blood, the protagonist donates his class-appropriate red blood for a transfusion and thus saves her (Burevii 1929: 2 and Strikha 1955: 123-4). In *Zozendropiia*, this plot was explicitly presented as an attempt to navigate between the major styles of the time:

киньмо сосюр’янство / покиньмо / всякий зеровізм! / Покиньмо / ваплітянське
чванство / і шовіністський хвильовізм! / Бо / нетерплячий наш читач / без дії / довго
/ так / не влечить, / бо він практичний, / не партач, - / йому / давай / кінець пожежі!
(*ibid.*, 100)

Down with Sosiurianism, / down with / all manners of Zerovism³⁹! / Down with /
vaplitean snobbery, / and the chauvinist khvyliovism! / Because / our impatient reader /

³⁹ Mykola Zerov (1890-1937) – Ukrainian poet, literary critic (wrote several extensive overviews of Ukrainian literature, the first to focus primarily on formal matters; extensively commented on new editions) and translator, primarily of poetry of the Classical Antiquity (*De Rerum Natura*, *The Aeneid*, Catullus, Horace, and more). Belonged to the NeoClassics group of poets, which privileged adherence to traditional

just / won't sit / without action / for long, / since he is pragmatic, / not a bumbler, / he /
urgently / needs a conglagation!

Hence, the biography of the protagonist of Edvard Strikha's autobiography penned by Kost' Burevii is presented as (1) relational and defined by an attempt to strike a balance between the major literary trends; (2) subject to negotiation: the narrator posits that he anticipates the generic expectations of his readers (whether those expectations predate the claim is, of course, irrelevant: the text presents a bricolage of motifs from so many genres and styles that the deconstruction of any predetermined plot seems rather the point). The implied readers are expected to actively recognize the topoi and set images which are being manipulated throughout the autobiography, reclaiming control over storytelling.

The decision to preface some issues of the journal with editors' (auto)biographies seems to emphasize the role of authorial agency which shapes the work as a whole (after all, the system of paratexts that starts with these autobiographies sets up the framework for all the texts included in the journal), yet everything in these autobiographies points to the dissolution of the genre. Michel Foucault pointed out the conundrum of the existence and functioning of the author's proper name: namely, these names are doomed to always balance precariously between designation and description (so, for example, the empirical existence of the man by the name of Aristotle does not affect the veracity of the statement "Aristotle is the creator of ontology") (Foucault 1980: 121-123). The editors of

poetic forms and meters, emotional detachment and grounding in the literary canon. Executed during the Great Terror.

Literaturnyi Iarmarok clearly use names primarily as means of description: the place and date of birth of one Leonid Chernov, for example, are less relevant than his works, of which he becomes the sum total. I would contend that it is precisely this shift that lends validity to the label of “an autobiography penned by another writer”: obviously, it falls to the presumed addressee to reconstitute the authorial persona, diffused though his or her multiple works. As such, these autobiographies thematize procedures by which the author’s persona is established, and encourage readers to take on a more active stance than would be implied by the nascent (at the time) Socialist Realist doctrine. In these autobiographies, the tense relationship between the real author, the implied author and the narrator (and the protagonist which is supposed to be identical to some of these roles) is explicitly problematized and becomes the pivotal point of the texts. Authorial persona is envisioned as a projection not of biographical facts, political affiliations or belonging to any given social strata, but rather of his or her literary output, an extension of preferred motifs and tropes (somewhat, but not quite coterminous with the implied author). Moreover, it is implied that this persona does not exist outside reception, and requires an active reader who would not only follow the clues laid in the text, but appropriate its imagery and stylistic features and claim the subject position of a narrator. The editorial autobiographies at one remove in *Literaturnyi Iarmarok*, therefore, implicitly call for a horizontal organization of culture as a dense network of co-authors and co-conspirators, in marked contrast with the top-down structure that was being set up at that time.

Chapter 3.

Pronoun Trouble in “Enchanted Desna” by Oleksandr Dovzhenko and

Short Stories by Vasyl Stefanyk

Personal pronouns that switch from first person singular to first person plural, raising questions about the identity of the speaker; style shifts further problematizing any concrete identification of the speaker; personal pronouns disappearing altogether: all these might seem like an intriguing narrative choice in fiction, and outright confounding in life writing. Elevating a formal quirk that might initially pass unnoticed to one of the central organizing principles of the text, these issues lie at the center of the (different) strategies defining the works I will focus on in the present chapter.

In earlier scholarship on life writing, the “conventions and practices one associates with creative writing – such as structure, poetic or literary descriptions of people and places, ordering of events to create certain effects” in autobiographies were often treated as a suspect sign in fictionality (see Gudmundsdóttir 2003: 4). Hence, when read reductively through the prism of the fact/fiction dichotomy, autobiographical works that exhibit complex narrative structures or more intricate styles can be treated as “lesser” works that depart too drastically from the tenet of referentiality. There have been multiple strong attempts to reframe the discussion: notably, Roy Pascal contended that the narrative structuring of events in life writing is inherently more informative than the events themselves, and hence it would be productive to replace “the familiar correspondence norms of truth with those of coherence” (see Fleishman 1983: 11).

Similarly, in his essay ‘The Style of Autobiography,’ Jean Starobinski argued against treating style in autobiographies as a matter external to the development of an identity described (or formed) therein:

Every autobiography – even when it limits itself to pure narrative – is a self-interpretation. Style here assumes the dual function of establishing the relation between the ‘author’ and his own past; but also, in its orientation toward the future, of revealing the author to his future readers. (Starobinski 1980: 74)

To treat style as a cognitive mechanism seems to be a productive stance when working with autobiographies, memoirs or other forms of life writing that either display drastic shifts in style (different parts of the text privileging different tropes or images, shifting focalization, etc.), or else those that do not display the stylistic features that one expects through earlier familiarity with other works of the writer, or with other works of that period or movement (for example, Stefanyk’s short stories are outliers among the prose works of the time in avoiding free indirect discourse). Rather than treating such complications as lapses of judgment or fictional impositions on an otherwise factual narrative, it might indeed be worth looking at them through the prism of their interrelation with the narrating and narrated persona.

In this chapter, I will look at the “impersonal narration” and the shifting narrator in Vasyl Stefanyk’s short stories that were inlaid in his familiar letters, and at the style shifts in Oleksandr Dovzhenko’s memoir *The Enchanted Desna*. To resort to the terms promoted and expounded by Gerard Genette in his *Narrative Discourse*, autobiographies seem to most commonly imply an intradiegetic homodiegetic narrator, that is, a narrator in the first degree who is narrating his or her own story (Genette 1983: 248). The

narrative situation of a familiar letter implies an intradiegetic / heterodiegetic narrator (if the writer is recounting the events that he or she heard about or witnesses), if not actually a homodiegetic one (if he or she is described as an actant). However, the vignettes that Stefanyk inserted into his familiar letters in lieu of accounts of his life often do not betray the presence of either. In *The Enchanted Desna*, meanwhile, an intradiegetic homodiegetic narrator is explicitly introduced at the outset, yet, on closer reading, this figure appears to splinter into a number of subject positions conditioned by different forces: a complication to the ostensibly straightforward narration that usually goes unnoticed. Hence, it appears that the challenge causes somewhat similar lines of tension in both Stefanyk's and Dovzhenko's works, yet they offer different solutions. I would contend that, both for Stefanyk's epistolary short stories and for Dovzhenko's memoir, departures from or problematizing of this expectation are connected to peculiar quandaries of representing the suffering of others. Both writers grapple with the imperative to and the impossibility of fully representing the plight of groups that they are affiliated with (Ukrainian civilians who stayed in Ukraine under Nazi occupations in Dovzhenko's case, impoverished peasants in Stefanyk's). Despite their affiliation with the groups (both writers are describing, roughly, the milieu that they grew up in), they did not fully share the traumatic experiences that became the centerpieces of their works. Moreover, experiencing them in full could have entailed the impossibility of witnessing (either because witnesses mostly didn't survive, or because they had neither the knowledge nor reliable access to media to offer first-person accounts). Therefore, in order to offer a coherent account that would be interpreted as veracious, the figure of the

narrator has to be blurred enough to potentially accommodate a multitude of subjectivities.

3.1.1 Vasyl Stefanyk: Quandaries of an Unwitting Ethnographer

Vasyl Stefanyk (1871-1936), one of the most prominent representatives of expressionism in Ukrainian literature, prided himself on being a jack-of-all-trades. A medical doctor by training, a member of the Austrian parliament from the Ukrainian Radical Party by chance (or so he insisted), and a writer by vocation, mediating between several languages and cultures before choosing to codify a language very much his own (a peculiar dialect of his home village, absent from literature before and, largely, since⁴⁰), Stefanyk donned and doffed different roles with consummate joy and ease.

Importantly, Stefanyk was also a prolific letter-writer, aiming for the same felicity of expression in his epistolary output as he did in his works of fiction. He often blurred the line between life writing of the type that is usually practiced in familiar letters and his “conventionally literary” output, stating even that his literature is contained in his letters (quoted from Lutsiv 1972: 344). Stefanyk continuously used his letters as springboards for later short stories by either sending detailed outlines to his various friends, or eventually publishing letters wholesale. Meanwhile, the majority of works on Stefanyk,

⁴⁰ One of Vasyl Stefanyk’s largest lifetime editions, *Synia knyzhечка* [Little Blue Book], even opens with editorial notes on the dialect in lieu of a foreword (Stefanyk 1914: 1-9), creating an illusion that a reader is about to approach an ethnographic treatise. This antiquated mode of representation that equates the importance of a literary text with its presumed veracity and grounding in folklore is at stark odds with other authorial strategies exhibited in the short stories.

insofar as they cover the letters at all, tend to concentrate on their political dimension. This is true not only of Soviet criticism (Kryzhanivskiy bemoaned the fact that some of them “manifest a naive tendency towards separating literature from politics” – quoted from Lutsiv 1972: 363), but also of diaspora writing that was free of ideological constraints (those critics would often mine Stefanyk’s letters for information about the Radical Party and the political scene in the part of Ukraine that at the time belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire).

Doubtlessly inconvenient for his social life, this writerly strategy sheds light on some of the less discussed aspects of Stefanyk’s works. First, the fact that some of his short stories, and many vignettes indistinguishable from his short stories, were first conceived and functioned as life writing embedded in Stefanyk’s letters problematizes the critical commonplace that privileges Stefanyk’s “impersonal narration.” Second, the transition between mediums entails changes in the figure of the addressee, not much less obscure than the figure of the narrator. Third, the expectations about the audience highlight Stefanyk’s tortured exploration of the uses and abuses of literature dealing with a disenfranchised population, and the generic and formal choices entailed therein.

3.1.2 The Daring Disappearing Act of a First-Person Narrator

The number of scholars who make offhand remarks about Stefanyk’s “impersonal narration” (the iterations of the term are many) far exceeds the number of scholars who pause to examine what stylistic features create this effect, or what purpose it actually serves. To their credit, the stereotype, if overused, was initially suggested by the writer

himself: Stefanyk maintained that, in order to create an original and strong literature, Ukrainian writers had to produce “impudent naked images from peasant life” (“безлично голі образки з життя мужицького”), as opposed to “declarations” (“декларації”) which imply a writer proclaiming his or her views rather than offering snapshots from life (Stefanyk 1970: 402). The image took: the cliché about depersonalized narration has ultimately followed Stefanyk’s reception since the earliest days to the most recent works across several linguistic and methodological divides, from “Stefanyk hides behind his characters like a dramatist” in an early, largely positivist monograph (Nenadkevych 1927: 101) to “Stefanyk, save for a few atypical autobiographical pieces, stayed out of his creations” in a much later and otherwise more sophisticated study (Struk 1973: 15). The latter claim is undermined by the fact that the line between Stefanyk’s autobiographical pieces and fiction was not writ in stone, and a significant corpus joyously straddles the fence between the two categories.

The absence of a character that can be easily identified as a narrator is occasionally thematized in letters and short stories. A number of Stefanyk’s stories, and especially their trajectory from epistolary life writing to publication as works of fiction, enact the drama of disengagement. The narrator’s disappearance, or the figure of absence in place of a narrator, as the case might be, offers a valid subplot in several stories and is informed by Stefanyk’s understanding of the role of fiction. In this subchapter, I will examine the tension inherent in the inconsistent and intentionally ambiguous usage of pronouns in Stefanyk’s letters and short stories, and the cases when the absence or exclusion of the narrator is a thematized part of a short story.

The short story “Funeral” [“Pokhoron,” first published in February 1901 in the collection *The Road (Dorooha)*] and its epistolary predecessor (1896) are probably the most telling example of Stefanyk’s treatment of the autobiographical protagonist.

“My conscience ached today,” Stefanyk wrote in a 05/17/1896 letter to his friend Waclaw Moraczewskyi, the erstwhile recipient of works that straddled the line between epistolary life writing and fiction.

So, I walk along the street and ‘excogitate’ that, see, it pours like from a rain gutter, but it’s no skin off my nose! I may run into any passageway and wait out the downpour. Fat chance of that if I were in Beleluia or Sianik! To a Beleluian lady of the house (her man, of course, is getting drenched in the field under a wagon), I’d have to say, ‘Glory to Jesus! Eh, when it rains, it pours, like a bucket, at least it’s clean!’ – “God protect us from hail, and where are ye coming from?” etc. You have to pay with an entire ‘rain dialogue’ for shelter”.⁴¹ (Stefanyk 1952: 69)

The narration, therefore, opens with a tongue-in-cheek celebration of the fact that, in the writer’s changed circumstances, he is absolved from the pressing need to narrate. The snippets of the imagined “rain dialogue” with which one has to pay for shelter in small towns are much more coloured by dialectal forms than the rest of the text. This code-shifting implies that the narrator, therefore, is no longer asked to produce a verbal performance of belonging. A vignette that follows, ostensibly glimpsed from the narrator’s shelter under a roof, was later developed into the short story “Funeral.” Hiding under an awning and rejoicing in his newly-found freedom from storytelling, the narrator is confronted with a scene of a funeral. The letter sets up a certain ambiguity about whether the vignette is steeped in observation, or whether it’s the narrative doled out to

⁴¹ “Нині мене сумліне заболіло ... Йду вулицею та й “філософую”, що, бач, дощ лє, як з цівки, а мені нема біди! Позволено мені забігти в будь-які сїни та й перечекати зливу. А будь я в Белелуї або в Сяноці та й не то! Треба би зараз газдині белелуйській (газда звичайно в полі під возом мокне) сказати: “Славайсу! Ет, то-то вцідило, як з коновки, коби хоть чисте!” – “Сохрань, господи, лиш від граду, а ви відтвїв?!” і т.д. За сховок треба в нагороду цілого “діалогу дощового””.

buy the narrator's way out of a "rain dialogue," his shelter bought at the price of having to observe the suffering of others: "The drama of an ordeal, with weary people in key roles, rose up before my eyes, before my soul, before my entire being" ("Перед очима, перед душею, перед цілим мною станула драма муки зо змученими людьми в ролях"). The narrator observes the funeral procession of a small child; morbidly fascinated by an icon of Jesus on the small coffin, by meager flowers, barefoot children and gaunt crones, he tries to join the procession:

I, too, am weary, so I follow my people. But a crone tells me to clear off and not make a joke of their funeral. I backed off, because a crone knows who's weary and who isn't. See, I lied holding myself for a weary man. And the crone says that there's no role for me in the drama! Jesus is weary because he saved people, boys are the martyrs of our system, crones are martyrs who birthed martyrs, and where does that leave me? I wanted to be a martyr without going through an ordeal! What a liar! And so, my conscience ached!⁴² (ibid.)

Despite a somewhat unbecoming youthful proclivity for exclamation marks, the epistolary, ostensibly autobiographical version of "Funeral" is an interesting early indication of the writer exploring the contradictions inherent in his public persona, and their possible impact on his catalogue of motifs and tropes. The story seems to describe the following trajectory: in the opening paragraph, the narrator rejoices in the fact that he no longer has to perform the rhetorical rituals of belonging. No longer integrated into communal storytelling, however, the narrator yearns to reinforce his belonging through a more solitary act of observation. This chimaera-like and somewhat grotesque role, partly

⁴² "Змучений і я, тож йду за своїми. Та одна баба каже мені забиратися і не робити сміху з їх похорону. Я відійшов, бо баба добре знає, хто змучений, а хто не змучений. А я, дивіть, обріхував себе і мав за змученого. А от баба каже, що ролі для мене в тій драмі ще нема! Христос змучений, бо людей спасав, хлопчики – мученики нашого ладу, баби – вони мучениці, бо зродили мучеників, а вітки я тут взявся?! Хотів бути мучеником, не протерпівши мук! От брехун! Та й заболіло сумління!"

an urban flâneur and partly an engaged and mourning participant, is then described as untenable: the narrator, much to his shame, is denied participation in the last rites.

The final version of “The Funeral” is, without a doubt, both a better work of fiction and a representative of a markedly different mode (while the letter is best described as sentimental, the short story gives credence to Stefanyk’s reputation as one of the most prominent expressionists in Ukrainian literature). Insofar as the plot of the epistolary version was based on the narrator’s expulsion from the community, the final version realizes this on the formal level. The published short story no longer features the framing device of a monologue of an unwilling narrator who both resents and yearns for belonging: readers confront the scene of the funeral *in medias res*. In that, readers – ambiguously positioned observers of the scene – are invited to occupy the space left in the wake of a first-person narrator. Unlike the epistolary version, which doesn’t include direct speech (even the old woman’s outrage is offered as reported speech, that is, the narrator’s exile is largely self-imposed), the published short story devolves into direct speech with no connecting descriptive narration immediately after the first two paragraphs that set the scene. A baker from the procession of mourners describes her alms (“every day I picked up stale bread and called him to my kiosk ... May God remember me those loafs I gave him;” “кожного дня я вибирала черствійші булки і кликала его до будки ... Най Бог запише міні лишень ті булки, що я ему надавала” – Stefanyk 1901: 55). The failings of insufficient and self-congratulatory charity work was a preoccupation of Stefanyk’s at the time, especially in connection with the ethnographers’ failure to engage with or to create adequate support networks for rural

communities that they ostensibly idealized (see, for example, his multiple letters about the absence of humanitarian relief efforts for peasants stranded at train stations on their way to Canada). “The Funeral,” it appears, features a rare thematization of this concern in Stefanyk’s fiction. The emphasis on the failure of a community is underscored by the fact that the baker instantly redirects blame for the boy’s death from people around him to something altogether more fatalistic: “It was autumn, autumn that had done him in, wet air and chill” (“Осінь, осінь его доконала, сирий люфт і студінь”). Another woman ventures a guess that the boy was killed by “his father’s legacy,” a sofa that the man left behind when he moved out: “he must have been killed by that sofa ... As God is my witness, it’s like a coffin of shabby cloth. Even a healthy man could die on such a sofa” (“він умер відай від тої канапи ... Бігме, така як гріб з подертих міхів. На такій канапі може здоровий умерти”). The paucity or near absence of descriptive narration connecting direct speech rich in dialectal forms presupposes that a reader would act as an ethnographer, recording and contextualizing witness accounts. Whereas the epistolary version of the short story has a diegetic narrator eager to offer both descriptive passages and moral judgment, in the published version it is altogether up to the reader. The first draft sets up a Manichean panorama in which the entire procession is comprised of innocent victims, whereas the uninvolved onlooker is guilty by default, of the failure of empathy inherent in laying claim to experience that does not belong to him, if nothing else. In the published version, the mourners are no longer absolved of all guilt by the fact of their suffering; at the same time, they become active agents rather than static figures of grief, and the reader is invited to make sense of their incongruous accounts of the events

preceding the boy's death. The choice to remove the first-person narrator when transforming epistolary life writing into fiction reinforces the stereotype that Stefanyk's prose is somehow more impersonal than was expected at the time. This notion is likely supported by the fact that Stefanyk, despite writing in a dialect very different from the literary norms of the time (and even more so from contemporary literary norms) and using his life writing as a laboratory for fiction, does not resort to "skaz," an imitation of an oral narrative with an implied or explicit diegetic narrator. That device would presuppose a narrator who is an active participant in the community, and make the act of storytelling a part of the plot. Stefanyk, however, seemed to be ever cautious of the ambiguities of both his biographical position (between rural customs and fin-de-siècle urban culture) and of possible narrator figures he could fashion, and what kind of plots could accommodate their storytelling acts as a pivotal event. Ultimately, Stefanyk seemed to be grappling with the notion of describing the other as an object or subject in storytelling. In this sense, life writing has certain appeal, insofar as the narrating subject and the narrated persona seem to coincide.

Another telling example of pronoun trouble is "Novyna" ("The News"), one of Stefanyk's most iconic short stories, prominent in the institutionalized canon of Ukrainian literature as enshrined in the high school curriculum. The plot revolves around an impoverished widower, who, unable to offer his daughters anything but a destitute subsistence, decides to spare them their suffering by drowning them. He drowns the younger one, but the older one begs to be spared and lives to tell the tale. "Novyna" has its origins in an update about Stefanyk's life in a village that he recently moved to. The

first account of the event comes from the letter to Ol'ha Kobylans'ka of December 16, 1898, the second from a letter to Vladyslav Morachevs'kyj (late December, 1898). The final published version of the short story poses an interesting conundrum when it comes to focalization. While some passages can only be explained by internal focalization (sentences like “The girls were not listening to him” or “It came upon him as if somebody placed a heavy boulder on his chest”), they are rare – Stefanyk usually eschews internal monologues – and imply different internal focalizations each time. There are also indications that the short story might be written in zero focalization by way of a collective narrator: the culmination is preceded by the sentence “And then he became the talk of the entire village,” which implies that the account (mostly in dialogue) might be a rendition of village rumours. However, yet other passages are irreducible to any of these options, for they indicate the futility of meaning-producing efforts to shape the events into a coherent uncontradictory account:

Бог знає, як ті дрібонькі кісточки держалися вкупі? Лише четверо чорних очей, що були живі і що мали вагу. Здавалося, що ті очі важили би так, як олово, а решта тіла, якби не очі, то полетіла би з вітром, як пір'я. Та й тепер, як вони їли сухий хліб, то здавалося, що кістки в лиці потріскають.

Does even God know how those tiny bones stuck together? Only their four eyes were alive and carried weight. Those eyes must have been heavy like lead, and if not for them, the bodies would have been scattered to the winds like feathers. Even now, as they were chewing bread, it seemed like the bones in their faces might crack.

The first sentence here defamiliarizes an interjection “God only knows” [Бог знає] by transforming God into an addressee, and an interjection into a question. Further similes (eyes like lead, bones like feathers) are Stefanyk's preferred trope: his short stories feature an average of 5 to 10 comparisons per page, and comparisons usually go across ontological boundaries (human/non-human, animate/inanimate). This implies a

collapse of the selection function: language is no longer fit to fully represent a world of crumbling norms, and weak incompetent language becomes, arguably, a separate protagonist. Once the short stories are placed back into the context of life writing, from which they originated, it foregrounds the presence of an implied narrator voicing those doubts about possibilities of representation and meaning-creation.

Both versions of the short story that were included in the letters emphasize the facticity of the account (precise geographic coordinates are provided in both letters, but are excised from the final published version, lending it a more universalized air of a parable). The account is presented in reported speech (“So the eight-year-old told ... I later filled in the details with what she told me”); the version from the letter to Morachevs’kyj heavily implies a collective village narrator – minimized in the published version (“**we** saw Handzunia and **we** heard that”). The version from the letter to Morachevs’kyj concludes on the following note: «Such stories and the like [«Якісь такі» - note the unwillingness to ascribe them an explanatory category] happen a lot in villages, which suck out blood like vampires. All this fuels ‘news sections’ in our newspapers. Oh, how it hurts». The phrase “it hurts,” which, tellingly, does not require an object, is left ambiguous: it is not explained if the speaker is pained by the events themselves or by the genre that they are molded into (criminal chronicle, with its attendant implication of titillation derived from the misery of the dispossessed). Thus, the choice of an appropriate/ethically valid genre for relaying lived experiences becomes part of the story, problematizing of the interrelation between the empirical writer as the participant of events and the ideal writer as a meaning-generating construct.

The account in a letter to Kobylians'ka is also introduced through a discussion of style: Stefanyk comments on Kobylians'ka's latest short story, damning it with false praise swaddled in cloyingly sentimental imagery that is uncharacteristic of him ("You can write so. Once I read your little work, my eyes become kind like a child's"), and immediately switches to an update on his life, which just happens to be "Novyna". The elusiveness of both a narrator and an addressee (other than God, in that one interjection) signals the communicative breakdown, for any choice of narrator would pin the story down to a certain communicative situation:

To speak in the first person is to identify oneself as the immediate source of the communication, and to make of this a focal issue of that communication. A speaker or writer may also choose to focus upon the intended receiver of his communication, invoking "your" presence and explicit participation. (Bruss 1976: 21)

To recapitulate, Stefanyk's preferred subject matter (the same in fiction and more apparently autobiographical texts) seemingly makes him unwilling to commit to any fixed narrator. The evolution of his short stories through several versions, some of them framed as autobiographical set pieces, exhibits constant uneasiness with the narrator's position: the awareness of his ambiguities lead Stefanyk to explore various pronoun combinations, as well as to do away with the figure of the narrator altogether, first as part of the plot, than on the level of style as well. The image of an addressee, presumed in correspondence, implied or explicit in fiction, is involved in this situation as well.

3.1.3 Addressee as an Unwitting Ethnographer: Challenges and Responsibilities

In 1899, Vasył Stefanyk gave Ievheniia Hamorak-Kalytovska, with whom he was hopelessly infatuated at the time, an introspective piece entitled "Confiteor" as a birthday

gift in a last-ditch, if not necessarily well thought-out attempt to lure her away from her husband. It was eventually published as a short story in *Literaturno-Naukovyi Visnyk* in 1901 (volume XIII, book 2, pp. 15-17) under the title “Moie slovo” (“My Word”), and gave a title to Stefanyk’s 1905 collection of short stories. The decision to publish the piece, however, did not come until later, and took some prodding. Ievheniia Hamorak-Kalytovska’s sister, Olha Hamorak, who would eventually become Stefanyk’s wife, encouraged him to edit it for publication: “To give people that which you wrote for one person must be galling ... will they know? Surely, they will not know for whom you wrote it, or in what state of mind. They will only marvel at the beauty of poetry” (quoted from Lesyn 1970: 270). This allows us to infer that not only Stefanyk himself, but also his correspondents were aware of the crucial importance of the figure of an addressee in his writing. “My Word” is extremely aware of the addressee, and not only because of the pragmatics of its function as an attempt to court another man’s wife: the short story is the young writer’s attempt to configure his position between very different social strata, and to engage with his critics. He is stuck between the rural world that he left behind (denoted as pure and often modified by the adjective “white”: the narrator’s white lips, his white peasant shirt, the narrator walks quietly like a white cat lest he draws unwelcome attention, etc., etc.), and the “new and black” world that neither accepts him nor recognizes the truth of his accounts.

I left my mother wearing a white shirt, and I myself was as pure [у біленькій сорочці, сам білий]. My white shirt was laughed at ... I took my mother’s shirt off. My childhood world and ancestral peasant background [далеке покоління мужицьке] was left behind me. Before me was a new world, new and dark ... I found friends. They had reconciled with the new world. I told them about the one I left and about the new one, which

wronged us. They said I was lying ... And when I wept, my mother lamented: “Why don’t you be yourself, for the gentry [пани covers anyone of higher standing than a peasant and not necessarily gentry] won’t accept you. You shouldn’t have deserted me!” (Stefanyk 1988: 100-101, transl. Marko Skrypnyk)⁴³

Eventually, unwanted in either world, the narrator sets out to create “a world of my own,” which for writers necessarily entails training a readership that recognizes the value of their tropes and validity of their narratives. Many of Stefanyk’s short stories model recipients’ reaction. They also shed light on Stefanyk’s quandaries as an unwilling (auto)ethnographer, torn between the imperative of objectively recording the elements of a culture recognized as different by the majority of his intended readers, and between the pragmatics of creating a literary work.

In his self-fashioning as a writer, Stefanyk’s short stories occupy an uneasy position between witnessing, ethnography and works of art (the emphasis shifts over the years and depending on his addressee at the moment). Their moral and aesthetic functions are occasionally presented as being at odds with one another. This, for Stefanyk, raises the issue of acceptable forms for engaging with the experience of others, which, implicitly, outlines the protocol that his readers are expected to follow. Insistence on autobiographical vignettes allows a reader to venture a guess that for Stefanyk life

⁴³ The dichotomy of no longer belonging to the old world but not being accepted in the new world, which ridicules him for his non-belonging, is a recurring motif that Stefanyk carries through the years like a badge of honour. See, for example, his 1926 “Autobiography,” in which he describes being ridiculed in a Sniatyn school for being dressed like a peasant. A teacher lifts his peasant shirt: an identity is revealed like a body hidden by clothes, which underscores the ostensible authenticity of his peasant experience. When he returns to school in his new urban garb, he fares no better: “When I appeared in class in my new clothes, I was met with a hurricane of laughs ... now I think that I would be a different man if that shame hadn’t poisoned me” (Stefanyk 1953: 13). However, this implies that violence is constitutive of the narrator’s identity: without the other, he wouldn’t have reflected on the specificity of his experience. See also his letter to Morachevskyi of August 12, 1895, written from prison, which implicitly equates the judge’s verdict with being convicted to one’s identity: “My father took /taking?/ me to town, said: they’ll make a gentleman [пан] of you ... Young gentlemen and teachers abused the unwashed boor” (Stefanyk 1954: 40).

writing was a space where the conflict between aesthetics and ethics could be reconciled, at least partially.

Ostensibly, Stefanyk's short stories aspire to a mimetic status: after all, his early works were published in *Literaturno-Naukovyi Visnyk*, the most influential literary and cultural Western Ukrainian periodical of the time, with the subtitle "Photographs from life,"⁴⁴ and with an editorial note that stressed their representational nature ("The characters of these vignettes [образках] speak in the Pokuttia dialect ... [readers] should note that all dialects have equal rights when a writer seeks to offer a real vignette from folk life," p. 129). It was implied that educating readers about the mores and customs of rural communities and fostering a sense of continuity between peasants and urban intelligentsia were among their goals. In fact, Stefanyk's image of a writer who returns to rural communities for usable materials is in dialogue with the earlier populist (*narodnyk*) tradition. The intelligentsia's quest of rapprochement with the peasants became of paramount importance after the serfs were emancipated and started to participate in the life of society; for Russian intellectuals and writers, it became a source of symbols of their culture's identity and history:

Getting to know the peasant was also a process of cultural self-definition. While those individuals who engaged in the effort to explore and describe village culture consciously and explicitly referred to it as a separate and strange culture, they also judged the world they discovered in terms which revealed they were searching for an acceptable image of Russia that issued from the seedbed of her past and future. (Frierson 1993: 8)

For Ukrainian writers, in the absence of a country that would extend its auspices to their culture, ethnographic outings of this sort were not *a* source of national identity:

⁴⁴ ЛНВ. Засіданє; фотографії з життя. — 1898, т. 2, ч. I: 129 - 135. 3 міста йдучи; фотографії з життя. — 1898, т. 2, ч. I: 135 - 140. Вечірна година; фотографії з життя. — 1898, т. 2, ч. I: 140 - 142

they were *the* source. This dictated the pragmatics and style of depictions of peasants until the late 19th century. Stefanyk, however, is widely credited with overcoming the ethnographic idealizing heritage of early populists and their sentimental mode of describing village life (Pavlychko 1999: 89). Moreover, his letters exhibit continuing unease with ethnographic endeavors of urban educated intellectuals who commodified peasants' voices while showing little interests in peasants' practical needs: their actions are repeatedly described as stealing. In his April 23, 1899 letter to a fellow writer Olha Kobylanska, Stefanyk described the local nativist intelligentsia as "invalids that veer around [peasants] like spiders to take their voices and become Ruthenian ambassadors or overhear a folk song and publish ethnography"⁴⁵ (Stefanyk 1954: 180). Similarly, in the letter to V.K. Hamorak of March 29, 1899, Stefanyk characterized them as "two-bit exploiters that demand now a hen, now a jar, now a scrap of leather or a peasant's voice, and shed sticky tears when demanding it"⁴⁶ (Stefanyk 1954: 13). In both cases, derogatory descriptions of homegrown ethnographers are followed by an observation that many peasants emigrate to Canada, receiving no assistance from the activists whose interest in peasants does not extend past appreciation for their folk songs: "I'm not sorry for them, because those big, black hands search for ploughs to plow. And all the intelligentsia will do nothing but sing 'Our fate is dimmed' and will do nothing to at least

⁴⁵ "Бачу тих калік, що увихаються як шевці, аби з них взяти голоси і стати рускими послами або підслухати співанку і видати етнографію."

⁴⁶ "Се такі маленькі визискувачі, що деруть, котрий курочку, котрий баночку, котрий шкірочку або голос мужицкий і, деручи, липкі сльози проливають".

show them the way to that plough”⁴⁷. This repeated motif (peasants in movement, ethnographers static in their ossified ideas about folk culture) subverts one of the most common tropes of modern ethnography: namely, that ethnography “did not simply require travel, it depended upon the metaphor of knowledge *as* travel; conversely, the subject of ethnographic study (the native) ... was a stay-at-home” (Buzard 2003: 62-3). Stefanyk’s life-writing aimed to bridge the gap between the folk culture (no longer localized, static and rooted but shifting, transforming, migrating and disappearing through uneasy encounters with modernization and mass emigration) and urban intellectuals that cultivated a highly artificial version of folk culture. Although not swept up in the *Völkerwanderung* and forced to mine childhood memories for images of his participation in folk life, the narrator occupies the liminal spaces of train stations and market squares, tracking the migration. Unlike other urban ethnographers (and people who relied on folk culture for themes and styles) whom he so liked to hate, Stefanyk, by virtue of being a witness has to account for his situated position which informs both his perspective and his selection of information. Therefore, his knowledge is admittedly partial and situated, as opposed to a totalizing image of an unchanging folk culture. Moreover, even his own works are put into question in an uncharacteristically self-critical vignette in an April 22, 1896 letter to Morachevskyi. The letter opens with Stefanyk’s (rather good) translation of Paul Verlaine’s “Chanson d'Automne” in lieu of describing his emotions: “I don’t have the words for it. Verlaine might tell you what I cannot, if only in part” [“І слів бракує. А от хіба Верлен може хоч в частині Вам скаже то, чого я не

⁴⁷ “І не жалую їх, тому що то великі, чорні руки шукають плуга, аби орати. А всі інтелігенти будуть співати “Помарніла наша доля” і нічо не зроблять, аби їм хоть дорогу показати до того плуга.”

рапен”]. Without any transitions, the translation is followed by a vignette that is typologically indistinguishable from his short stories: a first-person direct speech account of a peasant woman doing her pre-Easter shopping and dressing up her young daughter (close proximity to the quoted poem underscores the illusion that this is a work of fiction). However, this image is revealed to be a hallucination of a woman dying at a Krakow train station, flooded with Ukrainian peasants on their way to Canada. Her husband tries to interrupt her raving about an idyllic image of orderly folk life: “You are no landlady but a Roma, and so am I. These days, Ruthenians pass for the Roma” [“Ти не газдиня, а циганка, та й я циган. Тепер на руснаків настав такий час, що вони на циганів сходя”] (Stefanyk 1954: 62-3). This is probably the most damning Stefanyk has ever been about his works: he enjoys the images from village life, but he is forced to acknowledge that these images do not take into account the most recent experience of the groups they purport to represent.

Moreover, he does not spare himself the metaphor of stealing that he repeatedly used to describe ethnographers’ actions (ethnographers and intelligentsia ostensibly “steal” peasants’ voices and stories for their own purposes). In a March 19, 1899 letter to Olha Kobylianska from Krakow, Stefanyk draws parallels between his appreciation for images from peasant life and the actions of children that admire toys in shop windows and grow up to be thieves:

I like to stand with poor children by beautiful store fronts and listen to their powerless words and watch their outstretched hands and dirty fingers indicating the toys that they will never have ... In a couple years or so these faces will be thieves, drunkards or inmates ... I like to go out into the fields and watch the spring and remind myself how I, a young boy, went to plough the fields with my dad for the first time ... These are old

dreams from the blue spring fields, the far fields I left behind. And now I go and watch spring but don't make spring myself⁴⁸. [Stefanyk 1954: 177]

The narrator reaches for a grounded and active life, much like children reach for trinkets in the window. It is rather telling that the structural equivalent of his remembered images from peasant life is a shop display: an artificial, constructed, idealized tableau turning pedestrian consumer goods into a coveted commodity. Much like older urchins who avoid store fronts lest the police chase them off, Stefanyk feels that he is suspect: he, too, steals that which no longer belongs to him. The third subchapter is dedicated to his uneasy attempts to substantiate his right to peasants' lives as his subject matter.

3.1.4 Between ethnography and fiction

Stefanyk's habit of using letters as his literary laboratory must have occasionally been trying for his correspondents. For example, in lieu of wishing his friend Morachevskyi well on the New Year in 1897, Stefanyk wrote him a dejected letter that is little more than an exercise in authorial self-fashioning:

For my neighbours and me, the New Year began today, but not joyously. The forest, the village's long-time neighbour, woke early, as if it came down with a fever last night, black and emaciated. It bent down to the village and whispered so dolefully that all our houses burst out in tears.⁴⁹ (Stefanyk 1954: 85)

⁴⁸ “Люблю з бідними дітьми ставати перед гарними виставами склеповими і слухати слів безсильних і бачити протягнені руки і забрукані пальчики, що показують забавочки, котрих ніколи не будуть мати ... Десять за кілька років ті лиця будуть злодіями, пияками і арештантами ... Люблю йти в поле і дивитися на весну і нагадувати собі, як я колись малий перший раз ішов з татом орати ... То давні мрії з піль, з синих, з весняних, з тих далеких, що лишилися поза мною. І я хожу тепер і дивлюся на весну, але весни не роблю.”

⁴⁹ “У мене і сусідів зачався сьогодні новий рік, але сумно. Ліс встав рано, як коли би змарнів від вчора - зчорнів цілий і схуд. Почав нахилитися до села і шепотіти, але так жалісливо, що всі хати наші розплакалися.”

The image of a forest whispering its forlorn stories to the village becomes a framing device that connects other vignettes describing acts of storytelling: the wind blowing through the wood brings news about a coming war or plague “from worlds far away, from beyond waters deep;” Old Woman Tymchykha, weaving with young women after dark, scares them with stories about the coming calamities that will decimate the population of their village; a girl, impressed by her stories, retells them to her dad and dreams uneasy dreams. Violence, therefore, is no longer a vague rumour of uncertain provenance: it becomes a part of communal life, part and parcel of the storytelling practices that bind communities together. In documenting these instances of storytelling, the writer, therefore, relays the tropes through which the community ascribes meaning to its life, and implicitly initiates his addressee(s) into the group as yet another listener hungry for tall tales. The narrator, however, is sensitive to the fact that a new context changes the meaning of stories, and that addressees are free to apply interpretative frames that would change the horizon of meanings quite dramatically:

And hence, this is how we all, with our forest and our Old Woman Tymchykha, with our girls and our fathers, create that which a village calls life, and outsiders call poetry [...] Here, have a slice of life from our village. You will probably call it poetry and think us happy. Well, that we are, up to a point. But when calamities and grief befall us, we will write you about it, and you should call that suffering and grief, not poetry.⁵⁰ (ibid., 86)

For Stafanyk as for others, rural communities exist as more than immutable symbols; ascribing to them solely an aesthetic function is reductive at best. But where exactly does Stefanyk draw the line between poetry and the forms that he finds

⁵⁰ “Так ми усі разом з лісом, з бабов Тимчихов, з дівчатами і татами творимо то, що житем називаєся в селі, а що поза селом називають люде поезією ... От Вам окраєць життя нашого в селі. Ви певне назвете его поезієв і будете нас мати за щасливих. Добре, ми щасливі до якогось часу. Але як нас сум спіткає і горе, а ми Вам про нього будем писати, то Ви не називайте того поезієв, але муков і горем.”

acceptable for conveying the experience? What, for him, are the differences between the two, and how does that inform the narrator's position or the readers' procedures when approaching texts of either category? Stefanyk's multiple letters and critical essays leave enough breadcrumbs for his readers to follow him into these literary woods, even if his stances are mutable and not necessarily consistent.

It bears repeating that, unlike the *narodnyky* who sought to establish a sense of communality and continuity between the educated upper classes (largely assimilated into other cultures) and peasants (a source of national symbols), Vasyly Stefanyk emphasized the differences between the various strata. He haughtily dismissed the pretences of commonality, often underscoring what he described as an exploitative nature of instrumentalized versions of peasant culture that homegrown ethnographers recorded and preserved. His stories rely and insist on his readers recognizing both the otherness and the humanity of their protagonists. The descriptions of their calamities should elicit an ethical rather than an aesthetic response, making a reader suspect that the condition of the short stories' success undermines the condition of their possibility as works of art.

To this end, Stefanyk insisted on writing his stories in the way that he felt was the most "true to life," or, as a more pragmatic reader might describe it, choosing the tropes that defamiliarize the milieu to the readers who have grown to expect a different set of literary conventions:

[Stefanyk] is quoted as having said that although he would like to have written in verse ... (he felt that the poem by its very structure does not allow for reader alterations ...), he could not write verse for people do not speak in verse. He maintained that in order to write in verse he would have to write about himself ... Being concerned not with himself but with people, he chose prose. (Struk 1973: 15)

It is highly doubtful whether the anti-individualism in the quoted passage is worth taking at face value. Stefanyk's professed preference for mimetic works and for structures that are not open to alterations, however, seems to offer a more productive path, dovetailing with his usage of dialect. Non-standardized language serves as a marker of ethnographic records, underpinning the image of the writer as a (sometimes reluctant) listener who gives up his own voice to record someone else's. (Just how important the matter of dialect was is proven conclusively by surviving drafts of Stefanyk's short stories: they amply demonstrate that the vast majority of changes pertains to code-shifts between literary and dialectal forms rather than any structural changes.)

Offering veracious representation or "photographs from life" is juxtaposed to adhering to the generally known style. Literary conventions, in Stefanyk's opinion, existed exclusively to protect the reader's sensibilities and to uphold the illusion of an immutable social order, under which each actor is forever affixed in the class he or she was born into ["ті естетичні заокруглення, то є на то, аби їх читач борзенько минав, або на то, аби запліснілому мозкови не дати ніякої роботи. Навіть такої, аби він не пізнав, що як хтось змалку свині пас, а потім нагадує то жите"]. He, therefore, would reject literary conventions, so that when the public "devours [the short stories], let it feel that they scratch and tickle" [Як ме їх пожирати, най чує, що дре або скобоче] (Stefanyk 1953: 73-4). The implied reader is therefore encouraged to retrace the trajectory of the autobiographical narrator, acknowledging his humble origins and questioning the monolithic idealized image of folk life and culture.

Autobiographical narratives, it appears, are the only space that could undermine ethnographic narratives about “folk culture”. After all, the “problem of voice (‘speaking for’ and ‘speaking to’) [which] intersects with the problem of place (speaking ‘from’ and speaking ‘of’)” is crucial for anthropology, and power relations inherent in it (Appadurai 1988: 17). Life writing allows one to merge, or at least to set up meaningful ambiguity between the two positions.

A traveling Western Ukrainian theatre “Zahrava” had once staged a play entitled *The Earth* based on Stefanyk’s short stories. In his 1937 review of the play, Stefanyk noted that the portrayal of dialect on stage was his primary concern, and it was proven well-founded: “Each dialect, much like each language, has to belong to a whole person, from childhood till old age, or has to be learned specifically, otherwise it becomes a buffoonish jargon or a mockery” (Stefanyk 1953: 83). Listing autobiographical sources of the short stories used in the play, Stefanyk rejects attempts to engage with parts of this culture (dialect as used in the play) while not having experienced it firsthand. Therefore, his short stories must strike a fine balance: on the one hand, they are validated by their autobiographical nature, but on the other, the narrator should not become the focus of the story.

The explicitly autobiographical short story “Вечірня година,” originating from a January 1898 letter to Waclaw Morachevskyi (Stefanyk 1954: 134-5), described the focal character trying to remember a crucial part of his childhood. Stefanyk consistently omits the grammatical subject of the sentence, leaving only masculine verbs in past tense. This creates a slight ambiguity about the narrator: it could mean either first, second or third

person narration, leaving unclear whether the subject and object of the search actually coincide:

[He] Searched for the end of a song heard from mom in childhood ...The end of the song will not come! His song, meanwhile, continues. He went out into the world, to study. Did he forget all his mother's songs, or lose them? He never sang to people.⁵¹

Earlier on, the short story describes the narrator's sister learning to cross-stitch, and the narrator learning a song: both learn skills that integrate them into the tradition. By the end of the story, the sister is dead, whereas the narrator has moved away from his home village and forgotten his childhood songs: a break only slightly less definitive than death. The structure of the short story then implies a perceived continuity between life and a song, which Stefanyk so ardently rejected in the New Year letter to Morachevskyyi (quoted at the beginning of the present subchapter).

In the published short story, the somewhat unsettling ambiguity about focalization is even more pronounced, because it implies a narrator not identical with the man who does not remember his childhood song, or rather the radical disconnect between the different temporal versions of the self. Each discrete version cannot be fully known to another, but then, as Judith Butler quipped in her *Giving an Account of Oneself*, "life might be understood as precisely that which exceeds any account we may try to give of it" (Butler 2005: 43). This notion of the excessiveness and plurality of life that resists the reductiveness of intrinsically consistent accounts aligns with Stefanyk's unease with offering definitive representations of the lives of others.

⁵¹ "[Ш]укав кінця співанки, що малим хлопчиком чув від мами ... Нема кінця співаночки! А его співанка так далі йде. Пішов у світ, на науку. Чи забув, чи сховав усі співанки мамині? Не співав людям."

One of the key problems, it seems, lies in the vagaries of reconciling representations of grief with offering aesthetic experience and performance. Stefanyk's September 1898 letter to the indispensable Morachevskyi likens the writer's position to that of a mother who lost a child but does not limit herself to the conventionally sanctioned forms of grieving:

I wanted to give the noisy wind my quiet tears ... I started to sing some melodies. Then I turned my back to the window and danced, danced. And then I saw a mother. She had one child, a son ... Sometimes the mother would go outside to watch her little boy play through the window. She ran back into the house and sang, sang, thinking: whosoever casts a glance at him, cannot help laughing ... One night a child fell ill ... Then one day a beggar woman with a child stopped by her window and played a happy aria on her barrel organ. The mother jumped up, left the sick boy and started to dance. The barrel organ played, and the mother danced in wild jumps ... After the funeral, women said: what kind of mother is she, to not even screw up her face for her child?⁵² (Stefanyk 1954: 148)

Dance is that much-coveted beast, an art form in which the embodied experience fully coincides with the work of art: "in the dance, there is no disunity of being; 'the body is the soul'" (Kermode 2004: 58). Stefanyk seemed to seek a similar effect in his autobiographic vignettes, and in his insistence on experiential/mimetic nature of his stories.

To sum up, Stefanyk often framed his short stories as quasi-ethnographic records of various facets of rural life in Western Ukraine at the time, and his editors and publishers followed suit. At the same time, the writer problematized the ethnographers'

⁵² "Я хотів дати шумному вітрові свій тихий плач ... Я став співати якісь мелодії. Потім відвернувся від вікна і танцював, танцював... А потім я видів одну маму. Мала одну дитину, одного сина ... Часом мама виходила на вулицю і навмисне дивилася крізь вікно, як синок грався. Прибігала назад до хати і співала, співала, гадкуючи: хло лиш глипне на него та й мусить засміятися ... Одної ночі дитина заслабла ... В одно полудне станула перед вікно бідна жінка з дитинов і грала веселу арію на катаринці. Мама сфатилася, лишила хорого хлопчика і пустилася в танець. Катаринка грала, а мама танцювала дикими скоками ... Жінки по похороні говорили: що ж то за мати, що й не скривиться за дитинов?"

disregard for actual tensions and shifts in folk life in those years. The autobiographic mode allowed him to turn ethnography into auto-ethnography, depicting his knowledge as partial, and his speech as coming from the community rather than coming from the outside and reductively fashioning it into the shapes of the ethnographer's choosing. The emphasized figure of an addressee, moreover, frames this communicative situation as a dialogue rather than a top-down monologue. Inconsistent, ambiguous or intentionally obscure focalization problematizes the entire ethnographic endeavor, drawing the addressees' attention to the impossibility of fully knowing the other, and stressing the embodied/situated nature of knowledge.

3.2.1 "The Enchanted Desna" Cross-examined

Oleksandr Dovzhenko's later works were largely defined by his negotiations with the prescriptive criticism of the time, up to and including Stalin as the ultimate authority in all matters literary and cinematographic. Nowhere is the dialogue more pronounced than in Dovzhenko's numerous autobiographies and memoirs: life writing was a typical locus for demonstrating personal engagement with the Soviet ideology in a bid to clear one's name. It was implicitly assumed that autobiographies, both as a part of official personal files and as literary works, would be occasionally rewritten to reflect the subtly shifting demands, and Dovzhenko's life writing maps this probing of boundaries.

Dovzhenko's career had its ups and downs, boasting the number of plot twists that would have sufficed for more than one film of his. Having been accused of "fascism,

pantheism, 'biologism,' 'Spinozaism,' and even 'Perverzevism'" for his film *Ivan* (1932), Dovzhenko was dismissed from the Kyiv Film Studio (see Carynnyk 1973: xxii-xxiv). This did not preclude a later invitation to work in the ostensibly more controlled environment of Mosfilm, and from receiving the Stalin Prize in 1941 for *Shchors*, apparently filmed precisely to Stalin's specifications. Further symbolic official acknowledgements were not long in coming: on November 6, 1943, Dovzhenko was included in the Book of Honor at Mosfilm Studio, and was awarded the Order of Red Banner (see Latyshev 1990: 87). Not three months later, everything changed.

On January 31, 1944, Dovzhenko was brought to the Kremlin to discuss his latest movie, *Ukraine in Flames (Ukraina v Ohni)*, a chronicle of the fight against the Nazi occupation in Ukraine. The discussion must have been brutal enough to merit a diary entry a full year later: "Today marks a one-year anniversary of my death ... I was hacked to pieces, and the bloodied chunks of my soul were scattered for derision and delectation of all crowds" (Dovzhenko 2013: 333). Long unknown except in most general terms, the stenograph of Stalin's speech at the meeting was published in 1990 under the title of "Ob antileninskikh oshibkakh i natsionalisticheskikh izvrashcheniakh v kinopovesti Dovzhenko 'Ukraina v ogne.'" In it, Stalin contended that the work "offered a platform for narrow, limited Ukrainian nationalism, hostile to Leninism, hostile to the policies of our party and the interests of Ukrainian and the Soviet peoples" (Latyshev 1990: 94); other charges included slander against Ukrainian women, a lack of historical discernment in the matter of collective farms, and more. Dovzhenko's eschewing of the prescriptive triumphalism and the emphasis on the experience of Ukrainians as distinct from the

universalizing Soviet narrative clashed with the vision promoted by the ideologists at the time; so did the tragic mode of the film. During the war years and well into the mature Stalinism, “patriotism required belief in Soviet strength, not the mourning of Soviet losses” (Yekelchik 2014: 19), to the extent that mourning was dwarfed by ritualized expressions of gratitude to Stalin in all public demonstrations.

Despite a much later publication year (it wasn’t published until a much less carnivorous year of 1956), *The Enchanted Desna* largely belonged to the same period as *Ukraine in Flames*, and was conditioned by similar concerns. As such, it maps a subtle negotiation: Dovzhenko attempted to frame his concerns in a way that would make them dovetail with the official ideologists’ account. The imagery or even entire passages that would eventually find their way into the work start cropping up in Dovzhenko’s diaries as early as March of 1942. For example, the description of his grandfather “who looked like God” and would interrupt his grandson’s prayers with coughing from his vantage point up on the stove goes back to 1942 (see Dovzhenko 2013: 80 for the diary, and Dovzhenko 1994: 546 for *Desna*). Similarly, Dovzhenko first ascribed his discontents with the system to his late father in the diary. In November 1944, he described his father, who was stuck in Kyiv under the occupation, cursing Stalin for failing to prepare for the eventuality of the war (a stance for which Stalin later castigated Dovzhenko). In the final published version of *The Enchanted Desna*, the criticism was softened to “he blamed every last one of us” (Dovzhenko 2013: 270 for the diary, and Dovzhenko 1994: for *Desna*). Aside from concerns with depicting trauma during the era of the predominant Stalinist triumphalism, the novella also seems to seek to outline an authorial role that

diverged from the normative function of “the engineer of souls,” and predicated narratorial authority not on his contribution to the class struggle or the anti-fascist struggle, but rather on his grounding in his literary tradition (a stance supported by stylistic shifts throughout the *bildungsroman*).

The Enchanted Desna, a novella which is often read a rose-tinted description of Dovzhenko’s childhood years by the river Desna, has two distinct temporal planes that problematize this common perception. The main plot unfolds at the turn of the 20th century, following the protagonist’s childhood years in rural northeastern Ukraine up to his enrollment in a primary school (marking his departure from the family and folk customs in favor of integration into a broader community). The second time frame, not introduced explicitly at first but gaining prominence as the novella progresses, is associated with the grown-up narrator recounting events in the aftermath of World War II. The first temporal plane (the protagonist’s childhood) draws disproportionately more readers’ attention: after all, the second one culminates in grandiloquent loyalist pronouncements intended to make Dovzhenko’s thematic preferences more palatable within the context of the Soviet ideology, despite his attention to local and national specificity:

А чи не занадто вже я славословлю старих своїх коней, і село, і стару свою хату? Чи не помиляюсь я в спогадах і почуттях? Ні, я не приверженець ні старого села, ні старих людей, ні старовини в цілому. Я син свого часу і весь належу сучасникам своїм. ... Безбарвна людина ота [яка не має сентименту до свого дитинства], яку посаду не посідала б вона, і труд її, не зігрітий теплим промінням часу, безбарвний. (Довженко 2001: 51)

Might my praise for these old horses of mine, and for the village, and for my old hut be excessive? Could I be misguided in my memories and feelings? No, I’m no apologist of the olden-day village, nor of the old people, nor of the olden days. I’m a son of my time, and I fully belong to my coevals ... No matter what job these colorless men [who feel no sentiment

for their childhood] might perform, their work, untouched by the warm glow of time, is shorn of colors. (*here and further, translation is mine, - I.S.*)

The past is defused, presented in the most benign and bucolic terms (“the warm glow of time”). It is another country, with little bearing on the present, other than as a source of inspiration for the toiling workers, and in the paragraphs that follow, Dovzhenko attempts to further “rehabilitate” his *topoi* through emphasizing that earlier generations were honest hard-working people, good Soviet people *avant la lettre*. The foundational myths of the country of the past no longer apply, chased off by general education or displaced by the newer ones (“Нема ні таємниць на річках, ні спокою. Ясно скрізь. Нема ні Бога, ані чорта, і жаль мене чомусь бере” – “[Now] Rivers offer neither mysteries nor solace. It’s all clear. Neither God nor the devil exists, and I’m somehow sorry,” Dovzhenko 1996: 586). Such relegation of religious beliefs and ethnic customs, alongside most markers of national specificity, to the domain of the past that is no longer connected to lived experiences, was one way to avoid accusations of nationalism (not necessarily effective, yet widespread nonetheless).

The framework of these closing paragraphs casts a new light on the early pages of *The Enchanted Desna*, reminiscent of early 19th century Ukrainian literature (when Ukrainian language was the domain of a strictly limited range of styles and genres). It might appear that the national tradition is being confined to the past and interpreted in narrow ethnographic terms. However, I would like to argue that this reading, while not completely unfounded, is nonetheless reductionist: *The Enchanted Desna* might offer a less cohesive and more ambiguous picture than what initially meets the eye. Whether the self-exculpatory Socialist Realist ending and the second temporal plane to which it

belongs are taken at face value or discarded as a merely pragmatic addition external to the substance of the text, there's a strong risk of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. It is precisely the tension between the two temporal levels with their distinct styles, I would argue, that generates the meaning in the text, and organizes it structurally. The coexistence between them and the modulations of imagery and style allow Dovzhenko to set up an intertextual environment that recounts not only his biography, but also his genealogy as a writer, juggling the recognizable imagery from several major literary styles, some of them proscribed at the time (for example, that of the 1920s generation of Ukrainian avant-garde writers with whom Dovzhenko often collaborated).

This duality and general ambiguities that constantly encourage readers to question the identity of the novella's narrator might have another source as well: they might be partly steeped in Dovzhenko's hesitant attempts to describe the trauma suffered by civilian population on occupied territories during World War II. There were few ready-made, culturally acceptable templates for expressing mourning available to Dovzhenko at the time of writing. Many of Dovzhenko's works created during or after World War II (*Ukraine in Flames*, the diaries – recently published in full, *The Enchanted Desna*, and more) depict delayed, not fully controlled repetitions of the catastrophic events that then had to be retrofitted to the dominant paradigm of triumph and gratitude. The concern is less pressing for *The Enchanted Desna*, which was published at a later date and more liberal time, yet it, too, evokes the classical conundrum of witnessing. That conundrum was articulated influentially by Cathy Caruth, who claimed that at the core of witness accounts lies “the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*:

between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival” (Caruth 1996: 7). These conflicting drives result in stories that can neither be fully expressed verbally, nor left unspoken. *The Enchanted Desna* seems to map Dovzhenko’s grappling with this problem, and several irreconcilable levels of narrative time lay the foundations for representing survivor’s guilt and the identification with the dead. The difference between the narrated past persona and the narrating present persona is emphasized to the dramatic effect. The figure of the narrator, already fragmented by that choice, is further complicated by the need to provide the accounts of those who are no longer present. The last subchapter on *The Enchanted Desna* will deal with animal imagery and animals as narrators. Several discrete concerns in the text (the impossibility of witnessing, the impossibility of mourning, identification of the writer’s subjectivity with his literary tradition), I would argue, are tied together by scenes that ascribe speech to nonverbal subjectivities. Animals, conventionally placed outside of the logocentric rational regime that had historically been used to justify dehumanizing and inhumane atrocities Dovzhenko attempts to describe, provide a symbol of reaching across all sorts of dividing lines to reclaim the marginalized and silenced or unspoken experiences.

3.2.2 Speaking the Unspeakable

The very first sentence of *The Enchanted Desna* sets up a stark juxtaposition between the mundane world of the present and the past experiences: “в його реальний

повсякденний світ, що не день, то частіше, починають вторгатися спогади” (“his real mundane world would be invaded by memories, increasingly more often with each passing day”) (ibid., 7). These are no fleeting recollections or visitations: the present and past experiences are marked as different enough to merit the usage of military terms (“вторгатися / to invade” instead of the expected idiom “приходять спогади” / “memories come”; memories “fill the entire house,” irrespective of its owner’s wishes). Hence, the first paragraph outlines the narrative situation on the following terms: the memories are no product of the narrator’s agency: they come unbidden and seemingly unprovoked (he cannot identify any concrete reasons for their sudden appearance); the narrator has little, if any control over this incursion of memories; they are of a different cloth than his present experience, and cannot be easily assimilated into its day-to-day flow. This description of involuntary memories is contiguous with contemporary conceptualizations of trauma, which emphasize unmotivated and uncontrollable memories that break the mundane temporal flow and take over the psychological life of the subject:

[M]ost descriptions generally agree that there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event ... The event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated ‘possession’ of the one who experiences it. To be traumatized is to be possessed by an image or event. (Caruth 1995: 4)

The opening sentences of *The Enchanted Desna* describe the “unassimilated” memories (they forcibly intrude on the present, the narrator is unsure what prompts them, etc.), yet there’s a deliberate protracted ambiguity as to what those memories are referring to. Until much later in the novella, it appears that the memories are referring to

the narrator's childhood years in a village by the "enchanted" river Desna: while not traumatic *sensu stricto*, they strike a discordant note in the textual identity of a Soviet writer that is being set up in the opening and concluding paragraphs. They might appear incongruous with the ready autobiographical template for a Soviet writer for a number of reasons (they privileged individual experiences over collective, they were steeped in Ukrainian culture at the time when many of its artifacts were branded nationalist, they offered an alternative belief system, etc.). As such, they, of course, might be described as disruptive and poorly incorporated into the narratives promoted by the memory politics of the time, hence the imagery of competition or even a battle between the present and the memories.

However, there is also the second level of recurring memories that is subsumed in the first, masked and not immediately apparent. It is first mentioned in passing in the description of the icon of Last Judgment in the protagonist's family home: "Спочатку я просто жахався цієї картини, а потім поволі звик, як солдат на війні звикає до грому гармат" ("At first the painting horrified me, but later I grew used to it the way a soldier at war grows used to the thundering of cannons") (Dovzhenko 2001: 14). At first reading the simile, insofar it draws any attention at all, appears to be mediated through literary imagery: the protagonist, at the time a young boy, cannot boast lived first-hand experience of war and cannons. However, on rereading, we see that this turn of phrase appears to be the first prefiguration of the introduction of the third temporal layer, referring to the experiences lurking between the past narrated persona of a young boy and the present narrating persona of the older artist. In concord with the assumption that

autobiography's "significance is indeed more the revelation of the present situation than the uncovering of the past" (Pascal 1985: 11), these instances point away from the protagonist's childhood as the semantic center of the text. This invasion of a second order, seeping into the initial host of intrusive memories, remains a ghostly ambiguous presence for a significant part of the novella, breaking the narrative flow first by similes that introduce concepts with which the protagonist had little familiarity, then by progressively longer vignettes. The situation is evocative of the suggestion that traumatic experiences create a narrative tension by both demanding and defying knowledge and representation (see Caruth 1996: 5): on the one hand, this layer implies and demands a new framework and, hence, a new horizon of meanings for the novella, yet on the other, it tears the narrative apart.

Initially the references to Dovzhenko's later experiences during the Soviet times are used primarily for comic purposes. For example, the young protagonist pauses, mesmerized, in front of the icon of Last Judgment and tries to guess what punishment he deserves. The idea of justice based on self-recrimination and self-imposed penance, presaging later practices, is juxtaposed to the justice administered from without: "Тоді в газетах ще нічого не писали про мої аморальні вчинки" ("Newspapers were not yet writing about my amoral behaviour") (Dovzhenko 2001: 16). Thus, what appears as an offhand joke broadens the temporal extent of the memoir past its projected scope of describing the childhood years, since it refers to the campaigns of either the early 1930s or of 1944. Similarly, when the narrator mentions a certain episode that is either a memory or a dream, he sums up the comment on the unreliability of his perception with

“не злякає мене вже Страшний Божий суд, якщо вже не злякав людський” (“I won’t quiver before the God’s Last Judgment if I didn’t quiver before the judgment of men”) (ibid., 22). The notion that the veracity of fiction awaits the judgment of men also, obviously, refers to the experience of a later date.

The recurring mentions of harsh judgments and of a war steadily accumulate. World War II is first mentioned explicitly within the context of the protagonist’s father rebelling against God after his sons died:

В великім розпачі прокляв він ім'я боже і бог мусив мовчати. Явився він тоді йому у всій своїй силі, напевно, батько кинувся б і прохромив його вилами або зарубав сокирою [...] Подібний вибух розпачу і гніву, вже не на бога, а на нас, дорослих, бачила мати в нього над Дніпром, через півстоліття, коли вдруге плакав він на покинутих київських горах. (ibid., 22-23)

In great despair, he cursed the name of God, and god had to stay silent. Had he appeared to him in all his might, father probably would have lunged at him and pierced him with his hayfork, or hacked him with his axe [...] My mother witnessed similar explosive despair and rage, not at god anymore but rather at us, the adults, over Dnieper, half a century later, when he wept for the second time on the abandoned hills of Kyiv.

Having grazed against a dramatic experience, the narrator instantly backs off towards the safer waters of childhood years. A fuller, and much more dangerous, account of his father’s wartime experiences can be found in Dovzhenko’s diary entry from 26.XI.1943, a description that is of a piece with *Ukraine in Flames*, which brought trouble on its creator. Beaten and evicted from his apartment by the Germans, his father

... проклинав Сталіна за невміння правити і воювати, за те, що мало готував народ до війни і віддав Україну на розорення Гітлеру, нагодувавши перед тим Німеччину і помігши їй перед тим підкорити Європу. (Довженко 2001: 281-282)

... cursed Stalin for his inability to rule and to fight, for not preparing the people for the war, for abandoning Ukraine for Hitler to plunder, to feed Germany and to help it to conquer Europe.

Given that communication with Nazi-occupied territories was intermittent at best, it seems safe to assume that Dovzhenko used the image of his parents, who stayed behind the enemy line, to vent his own fears. For example, he stated twice that his parents must have starved in the occupied Kyiv (ibid., 181, 213): “А мої нещасні батько і мати загинули, певно, уже під німцями. З голоду” (“And my poor father and mother must have already perished under Germans. Of hunger”). Various means of death were the one thing that was not a scarcity under the occupation, so the stubborn insistence on starvation as the worst available option was likely born of the recent memories about Holodomor, the man-made hunger of 1932-1933 in which an estimated 2.5 to 7.5 Ukrainian villagers perished. While Dovzhenko is recounting his father’s curse after he was reunited with his mother, it doesn’t seem too far-fetched a guess to assume that Dovzhenko is still ventriloquizing his own opinions, framing them as a quote for a feeble illusion of safety. Indeed, in his criticism of *Ukraine in Flames* Stalin answered this accusation by stating that “[o]ur socialist state did not prepare, nor could it prepare for grabbing foreign land” (Stalin 1990: 90). No matter how stringently Dovzhenko insisted on putting quotation marks around certain claims, their attribution remained rather unambiguous. Safety concerns, however, are not the only reason for relegating one’s pronouncements to the dead: Dovzhenko describes the writer’s role as bearing witness for those who can no longer do it themselves. First person singular pronouns are twisted to encapsulate unseen multitude speakers. As the protagonist’s native village is razed to the ground, it has to become a literary fact to persist, at least in some shape.

The most explicit depiction of the eventual fate of the village that the protagonist grew up in is not introduced until about midway through the novella, on p. 33:

Загинуло й щезло геть з лица землі моє село не від води, а від вогню. І теж весною. Через півстоліття. В огні теє село згоріло за допомогу партизанам, і люди, хто не був убитий, кидалися в воду, обняті полум'ям.

My village perished, wiped off the face of the earth, not in water but in fire. That was in spring too. Half a century later. The village burned because it helped partisans, and men, the ones who survived, leaped into water, engulfed by flames.

The destruction of the village is dramatically juxtaposed to the cyclical symbolic renewal of seasonal floods, both through their consecutive positioning in the text and on the stylistic level. The story of the flood, like all childhood scenes, is rife with similes, while the description of pillage has nothing but incomplete sentences by way of rhetorical flourishes, syntactical structures cut short, receding into silence.⁵³

Dovzhenko had no first-hand experience of the occupation, yet he posited that speaking for his community was his duty as a writer (Dovzhenko 2001: 35). He emphasized this as the one point in which his insistence on mourning and eschewing the triumphalist militarist narrative paradigm eventually dovetailed with the job description of a Socialist Realist writer. If writers were tasked with tracing and/or modeling the history of humankind in its evolution towards socialist consciousness, both in their works and in their self-fashioning alike, then the job description could conceivably be stretched to accommodate descriptions of civilian casualties, at least as long as it was mentioned that they were killed for actively helping Soviet partisans.

⁵³ It is worth noting that, contrary to the mainstream Soviet approach (that remained apprehensive about those who stayed on occupied territories), Dovzhenko provided only civilian voices and perspectives, thus trying to make them as valuable as soldiers' narratives privileged under the Socialist Realist militaristic paradigm. He used a similar strategy in *Ukraine in Flames* (see Захарчук 2008: 144).

Горів і я тоді в тім вогні, загивав усіма смертями людськими, звірячими, рослинними: палав, як дерево чи церква, гойдався на шибеницях, розлітався прахом і димом од вибухів катастрофічних. З м'язів моїх і потрощених кісток варили мило в середині ХХ століття [...] І сталось так, що я не стримався одного разу і, вигукуючи з полум'я бойові гасла й заклики до лютої помсти ворогам, гукнув: "Болить мені, болить!" (Dovzhenko 2001: 34)

I, too, burned in those flames, I was dying all the human deaths, and animal deaths, and plant deaths, burning like a tree or a church, swinging on gallows, scattering like ashes or smoke after catastrophic explosions. These muscles of mine, and broken bones, were used to make soap in the middle of the 20th century [...] And it so happened that, once, when shouting out battle cries and calls to take violent revenge on our enemies, I cried, "It hurts, it hurts me!"

The appropriation of the voices of the dead, on the one hand, allows Dovzhenko to circumvent the obvious lacuna in witnessing, which by necessity privileges the survivors. Therefore, a writer's autobiography is equated not with an individual's formation as an artist, but with the history of his generation, staking out the nonverbal and unspeakable absences left behind by various atrocities of the 20th century. Appropriating the voices of the dead might also be an attempt to map the meeting place of the two inextricably interconnected meanings of the concept of witnessing: "the person who, in trial or lawsuit between two rival parties, is in the position of a third party" and "a person who has lived through something, who has experienced an event from beginning to end and can therefore bear witness to it" (Agamben 1999: 17). The narrator of *The Enchanted Desna* might be trying to combine the two roles, although they require rather different positioning.

The verb-based list of the multitude of possible deaths (a narrative that does not naturally yield to first-person grammatical forms) might be steeped in the first, legal definition of witnessing. Similar instrumentalized lists of Nazi crimes were being compiled and published for the eventual post-war trials starting on the day when Kyiv

was liberated on November 6, 1943 (see Yekelchik 2014: 11). However, the narrator stresses that identification with the survivors and with the dead, which would bring the second definition of witnessing to the forefront; that kind of narratives was strictly policed, and generally best avoided. Indeed, Dovzhenko's autobiographical protagonist hastily stated that a writer's job was to glorify the joys of life, and returned to depictions of childhood memories immediately after this paragraph.

There is another dimension to the choice to present speech as the locus occupied by the dead (narrator's opinions are relegated to his late father, he speaks for the dead, etc.) in *The Enchanted Desna*. Relegating the narrative to the dead is a long-time custom in modern Ukrainian literature, which in its two hundred years' history had not had a day when it wasn't emphasizing the perils it faced. Starting with the Kharkiv Romantics (the early 1830s) and culminating in the works of Taras Shevchenko (1814-1861), modern Ukrainian poetry was densely strewn with burial mounds in the steppes as the one part of the landscape capable of speech and memories, with the roaming undead platoons of Cossacks that rise from the burial mounds to tell their tales (e.g., "Za bairakom bairak" by Taras Shevchenko), and with the bards whose work is depicted as making the burial mounds speak (e.g., "Banduryst" by Levko Borovykovskyi). The relationship with the preexisting literary tradition appears to be an integral part of the novella, and it, too, appears as a haunting that gradually takes over the narrative. The writer's autobiography dovetails with the history of his generation in all its traumas; his biography is also indistinguishable from the history of his literature in all its changing styles and plots.

Autobiographical conventions get stretched to their limits in order to accommodate this new definition of what constitutes a writer's biography.

3.2.3 Literature as Trauma

The first pages depicting the protagonist's childhood years are defined by a number of stylistic features and iconic images that are associated with a certain recognizable style that gained popularity in the early days of modern Ukrainian literature (roughly, 1798 through the first half of the 19th century).

One of the first paragraphs of the novella lovingly describes the protagonist's blooming garden:

До чого ж гарно й весело було в нашім городі! ... А що робилось на початку літа – огірки цвітуть, гарбузи цвітуть, картопля цвіте. Цвіте малина, смородина, тютюн, квасоля. А соняшника, а маку, буряків, лободи, кропу, моркви! ... Город до того переповнявся рослинами, що десь серед літа вони вже не вмщалися в ньому. (Dovzhenko 1996: 543)

Our vegetable garden was a marvel and a joy! ... And what was happening in the early summer! Cucumbers bloom, pumpkins bloom, potatoes bloom. Also blooming were raspberries, currants, tobacco, beans. Not to mention sunflowers, poppies, beets, goosefoots, dill, carrots! ... The garden was overflowing with plants that by mid-summer would no longer fit its confines.

The opening list is followed up by several more in quick succession, extending the catalogue of edible flora of the edenic garden to rival the length of the Catalogue of Ships. A propensity for long lists of nouns is not the only syntactic peculiarity in the passage quoted above. Its syntax is rife with inversions, rhetorical exclamations, and sentences with elided predicates. These features are consistent with the conventions that were accepted to denote the syntax of oral speech in 19th century Ukrainian literature.

One of the main practitioners and proponents of this style in prose was Ivan Nechui-Levytskyi, who in 1878 argued that

Синтаксис її мови буде шашкований, повний викрикників, нерозвятий граматично, але живий, іскряний. Для літератури взірцем книжного язика повинен бути іменно язык сільської баби, з її синтаксисом. (Nechui-Levytskyi : 12)

The syntax of her speech [of a village woman] would be chopped up, full of exclamations, grammatically unsophisticated yet lively, sparking. Literary language should be based precisely on the speech of a peasant woman, with her recognizable syntax.

It is irrelevant whether this style was indeed consistent with the actual speech patterns of 19th century peasants in central Ukraine. As conventionalized as all other major styles, this style, with its “chopped” syntax and rhetoric exclamations, has come to serve as an instantly recognizable signifier of a particular strand of Ukrainian populist prose that was as affected by the tenets of literary realism as it was by the peculiar Ukrainian literary tradition of the early 19th century.

Importantly, it is notable in its anti-individualist style: to be a writer of this group, one has to write in the name of the community, and not in one’s own voice but rather in the voice of someone else (or, using the conventions commonly ascribed to that someone). The principle was later joyously adopted in Soviet literature, with the one crucial difference that writers were encouraged to adopt the voice of workers as repositories of class consciousness (compare peasants as repositories of national consciousness in earlier literature). Yet Dovzhenko also delineates the limitations of the style. For example, the description of the garden on the first page is concluded with the protagonist’s mother stating that “Нічого в світі так я не люблю, як саджати що-небудь у землю, щоб проізрастало” (“There’s nothing I enjoy more than planting

something or other, so that it'd vegetate") (ibid.). The lexical riches of the enumerations of plants, their open structure allowing for the potentiality of the list stretching into infinity, are offset by the verb "проізрастало," a lexical portrait of a naïve peasant creating a comic effect. A Russian verb (albeit in Ukrainian spelling), moreover, with a distinct Old Church Slavonic flair connoting a higher style, jars with the imitated oral folksy narration. Furthermore, the pathos of the fullness of being and overflowing vivacity evoked by the lists is contrasted with human actions that appear not to have any concrete goals (the mother likes to plant "що-небудь," "just about anything").

To sum up, the key recurring image of the first pages is a list of vegetables and edible plants; the key syntactic feature is the adherence to conventions that have come to be associated with folksy *skaz*; on the lexical level, the narrator mixes words from different stylistic levels to comic effect. Taken in concert, these particularities are associated with *kotliarevshchyna*, so named after the mock-epic *Aeneid* by Ivan Kotliarevskyi (1798).

The Aeneid by Ivan Kotliarevskyi, a travestied retelling of Virgil's epic poem and, more immediately, of Nikolai Osipov's *8 pesnei Eneidy, vyvorochennoi naiznanku* (1791), is widely heralded as the first published work in modern Ukrainian, and credited with introducing accentual verse that soon supplanted the older syllabic verse of folk poetry as the dominant verse in Ukrainian literature (*The Aeneid* is written in iambic tetrameter). One of the most influential works in Ukrainian literary tradition, it inspired a generation of imitators, not all of their works being unproblematic. While often limiting the scope of Ukrainian literature to the so-called "low genres," *kotliarevshchyna* was also

an attempt at subverting the prescriptive hierarchy of genres and the imperial literary canon, and was instrumental to establishing Ukrainian literature as a distinct entity rather than a regional variant of the imperial Russian literary panorama (for a concise overview of the uses and abuses of *kotliarevshchyna* and its reception, see Грабович 1997: 316-332). Paradoxically, this style, with its recognizable purposes and tropes, became newly relevant in the late 1940s, when Dovzhenko resumed working on *The Enchanted Desna*. At the time, the class struggle was ostensibly over (at least in official parlance), and ethnicity was fast becoming the “principal category of Soviet political taxonomy” (partly due to the fact that the witch hunt for nationalists which raged during the Great Terror was suspended for the duration of World War II to capitalize on national devotion in large-scale mobilization efforts). It was often noted that

historical narratives of the post-war period remained in essence “national histories” disguised by the superficial rhetoric of class and amalgamated into the imperial grand story. The notion of the Russian-Ukrainian friendship inescapably involved the constant affirmation of the Ukrainians’ ethnic difference. (Yekelchuk 2007: 187)

That Dovzhenko, in the 1940s, should resort to the same figurations of Ukrainians’ ethnic difference as the writers of over a century earlier is rather telling. Again, Ukrainian culture was being relegated to the domain of the ethnographic, and the concerns surrounding it prompted writers to evoke similar imagery. A certain ethnographic thrust, with a focus on recording folklore and folk customs rather than the production of new works, had been a prominent part of Ukrainian literature until the late 19th century, with some venues for publication preserving the trend into the 20th century (for example, a historical and ethnographic monthly *Kievskaiia Starina* was published continuously through 1882-1906, despite being interpreted as an outdated relic by the

younger generation of activists for most of its existence). The propensity for long catalogues of food, folk customs, and the desire to include as many synonyms as possible in works of fiction seems to be of a piece with the ethnographic desire to document the vanishing world. Catalogues have been a disproportionately common feature in Ukrainian literature since Kotliarevskyi's *Aeneid*, which includes a twenty lines' worth description of feast (Котляревський 1969: 47-48), quickly followed up by ten lines of folk games (ibid., 50), in the very first chapter. The style is especially prominent in works by writers who envisaged their audience as outsiders, not belonging to the culture. The same case can be made for *The Aeneid*, which includes a short dictionary, implying that the intended audience was not a part of the linguistic group and the culture in which it is steeped. The feature becomes even more pronounced for writers writing in Russian. For example, despite using the linguistic medium of Russian, Nikolai Gogol's *skaz* is informed by the strategies and tropes characteristic for Ukrainian literature at the time. The opening paragraphs of "The Tale of How Ivan Ivanovich Quarreled with Ivan Nikiforovich" include (1) catalogues of foods, both recreating linguistically the world with which the readers were expected to have little familiarity, and stressing its vitality through the subject matter of the catalogue; (2) somewhat at cross-purposes with the ethnographic slant, which implies that the audience does not belong to the community depicted in the text, the short story is rife with rhetoric exclamations and questions that imply the presence of an audience and its belonging to the same affective community: "а посмотрели бы, что у него в саду! Чего там нет! Сливы, вишни, черешни, огорода всякая, подсолнечники, огурцы, дыни, стручья, даже гумно и кузница" (1835). Над

The Enchanted Desna persevered with similar imagery and tropes (catalogues, eclectic mixtures of words from different styles, and with the folksy syntax), it would probably have connoted the same phenomena: the assumption that the audience and the protagonist belong to different cultures, attempts to create an affinity between them through imitating oral narration with appeals to the audience, etc. Yet *The Enchanted Desna* is hardly homogenous in its imagery and style, and this *kotliarevshchyna*-inflected discursive complex does not reach past the first pages.

Pragmatically, the changes might have been explained by the fact that the novella was long in writing (the first vignettes appeared as diary entries in 1942, and Dovzhenko would intermittently work on the text throughout the late 1940s and the early 1950s). However, the shifts appear to follow a certain pattern, and are thematized in the novella: “аби не впасти змалечку в символіку чи біологізм, перейду краще на побутову прозу, тим більше, що вона вже сама наближається” (“lest I fall into symbolism or biologism in my earliest years, I’d do well to move on to realist prose, especially since its turn is coming anyway”) (ibid., p. 26). This passage directly references the accusations leveled against Dovzhenko in the early 1930s, serving as one of the earlier indications as to the nature of the traumatic experiences that are being revealed and concealed in the novella; it also bespeaks the structure behind the stylistic shifts. The changes appear to follow a certain order (“вона вже сама наближається” implies a preexisting structure); I would contend that the narrator parades the imagery typical for consecutive periods of Ukrainian literature from 1798 to the 1920s. The plot depicts the protagonist’s progression through the ever-larger communities (family – village – society at large,

exemplified by the school system), while imagery documents the writer's progression through historical styles of Ukrainian literature.

The beginning of the novella follows the development of Ukrainian literature through the early XIX century, with the long shadow of Ivan Kotliarevskyi stretching Ivan Nechui-Levytskyi. Consecutively, *The Enchanted Desna* includes the anti-theodicy imagery strongly associated with Taras Shevchenko. Having learned about the deaths of his three young sons, the narrator's father

В великім розпачі прокляв ім'я Боже, і Бог мусив мовчати. Явися тоді йому у всій своїй силі, напевно, батько кинувсь би і прохромив його вилами або зарубав сокирою. (ibid., p. 23)

In his great despair he cursed the name of God, and God had to stay silent. Had he appeared in all his might, father would probably have lunged at him, pierced him with a pitchfork or killed him with an axe.

The focus of this lament, quoted in full in the previous subchapter, broadens to encompass a lament for Ukraine as a whole, making the imagery even more evocative of Shevchenko's iconic and oft-quoted stanza from the long poem "Сон": "я так люблю / Мою Україну убогу, / Що проклену святого Бога, / За неї душу погублю" ("I love / this poor Ukraine of mine / enough to curse the holy God / destroy my soul for her"). Dovzhenko mediates experience of grief through readerly experience in his autobiography: writer's autobiography is, in essence, his experience of grasping, appropriating and reusing his literary tradition, even in the most apparently private moments of family tragedy.

The markedly unsentimental description of the death of the protagonist's great-grandmother ("коли б хто знав, яка то радість, коли вмирають прабаби, особливо

зимою, в стареньких хатах! Яка то втіха! Хата враз стає великою” / “If you only knew what joy it is when greatgrandmothers die, especially in winter, in ancient houses! What marvel! The house immediately grows spacious”, p. 25) is evocative of Ukrainian expressionism, following the overall trend of biographical progression as the progression through historic styles of Ukrainian literature. In Ukrainian literature, the thematic fodder of expressionism was to a large extent provided by the dissolution of cohesive olden-days rural communities under the pressure of the spreading modernity (represented, variously, by the military draft, by the drain of immigration or relocation to urban areas, growing poverty, and the changing demographic structure). The growing anomie and eventual disappearance of these communities is expressed through repeated unsentimental descriptions of the deaths of old people, which earlier exemplified traditional lore and social cohesion (see the short stories of Vasyl Stefanyk, “The Death of Makarykha” by Liobov Ianovs’ka (1901), “What is written in the book of life” by Mykhailo Kotsiubyns’kyi (1911), etc.). “Що записано в книгу життя” (“What is written in the book of life”) by Mykhailo Kotsiubyns’kyi is likely the most direct influence on *The Enchanted Desna*. At the time of its publication, the short story was an instant success, despite causing much ire among the older populist generation of writers and cultural activists⁵⁴. The protagonist of “What is written in the book of life,” driven to despair by poverty, initially agrees to leave his elderly mother to die in the forest; the jubilation of

⁵⁴ A fairly typical response of the populist group was offered by Maria Hrinchenkova in 1911: “it’s in vogue and is much lauded, yet it shouldn’t in any case be published, because it represents horrible slander against our people” (IR NBUV, 27/231, fol. 3). It is little wonder that the group that still looked to traditional rural communities as repositories of uniting national symbols did not look too kindly on Kotsiubyns’kyi’s interpretation.

the protagonist of *The Enchanted Desna* appears to mirror closely the reminiscences of the protagonist of the short story: “Ще було гарно, як тато померли ... Тоді він наївся” (“It wasn’t too bad when his father died too ... He got enough to eat”) . As Dovzhenko’s autobiographical protagonist is about ready to grow up and move outside the boundaries of the community he was born to and to acquire knowledge that is not limited to folk customs (the novella leads up to his enrolment in primary school as an initiation into the new social and epistemological order), the writer employs this conventional imagery instantly evocative of the discontents and shortcomings of the traditional way of life.

The above-mentioned writers and periods were, generally speaking, integrated into the Soviet canon of Ukrainian literature (barring a few texts each). The artists of the 1920s fared much worse, and as Dovzhenko’s progression through styles moves further, the conceit gets trickier and requires new dissimulation strategies and unconventional focalization.

A number of images in the latter half of *The Enchanted Desna* have direct parallels with the motifs that gained prominence in the 1920s, or were virtually absent in the immediately preceding literary periods. For example, the narrator relays the fights that erupted over contested haystacks with surreal hyperboles of violence:

Кров лилася з них казанами. Вони одрубували один одному голови, руки, врубалися в ропалені груди [...] дід устигав якось розмахнутися знизу і так хряснуть Самійла сокирою по лисині, що голова в нього розвалювалася надвое, як кавун, і тоді Самійло... Ці страшні побоїща закінчувалися десь аж під вечір, проте завжди щасливо. Всі оказувались цілі і живі (Довженко 2001: 38)

They would lose vats of blood. They would chop off each other’s heads, arms, hack into fiery breasts [...] the grandfather would manage to get in a hot from below and hit Samiilo over his bald skull, and his head would fall in two like a watermelon, and then Samiilo would... These horrifying battles won’t end until nightfall, yet they always ended well. Everyone was alive and well.

From Pavlo Tychyna's poems "Зразу ж за селом" (1920) or "Загупало в двері прикладом" (1921), Hryhorii Kosynka's short story "Голова ході" (1923) to Maik Iohansen's novel *Подорож ученого доктора Леонардо і його майбутньої коханки прекрасної Альчести у Слобожанську Швайцарію* (1928-1930), Ukrainian literature of the late teens through the 1920s is permeated with the imagery of dismemberment. The imagery is not limited to a single genre or style (its habitat spans everything, from realist prose to poetry in amphibrach, which is not a staple of Ukrainian verse). These images are not referring to a single event (the samples that did enter the canon, as enshrined in the high school curriculum, reference the War of Independence of 1917-1921 and the cases of cannibalism during the famine of 1921), and some do not represent any real event at all. These images do not seem to be conditioned by mythological patterns, like the Orphic myth, either; their semantics vary from text to text, but the image itself recurs with some insistence.

The comically reversible violence of *The Enchanted Desna*, bespeaking its rhetorical and symbolic rather than purely physical nature, might parallel a scene in *Подорож ученого доктора Леонардо* by Maik Iohansen, set against an identical backdrop of haystacks, where the professional tyrant-fighter Jose Pereira, also known as a member of the district executive committee Dan'ko Pererva, is killed in a similar fashion, and then, similarly, gets up unscathed to walk off into a narrative in a different genre, reverting to a different identity and name (Йогансен 1929: 53-55). Dovzhenko was a friend and a one-time collaborator of Iohansen: in 1928, Iohansen penned the script for Dovzhenko's film *Zvenyhora* (co-authored with Iurii Tiutiunnyk). In his 1939

autobiography, Dovzhenko made a point of denouncing his coauthors, who were no longer a part of the literary scene (Titiunnyk was executed in 1930, Iohansen in 1937; their works were not republished until Ukraine gained independence): “Their script was a load of nonsense [чертовщина] and obvious nationalist tendencies. For this reason, I rewrote 90% of it, and the writers made a point of striking their names from the titles” (ДОВЖЕНКО 2014: 424). Yet the publication of *Подорож ученого доктора Леонардо* falls on the years of their cooperation and Dovzhenko’s belonging to the Kharkiv literary circles, making it likely that he was familiar with the novel.

The surreal Jose Pereira/Dan’ko Pererva chapter in Iohansen’s novel is a metatextual comment, only loosely connected to other parts of the text on the plot level. With the murder scene, and the transformations leading up to it, explore the catalogue of characters that were acceptable in early Soviet popular literature, and engage critically with the belief that, having attained basic literacy, “a proletarian” will create sophisticated literary works. A “professional tyrant-fighter” Jose Pereira, who ventures into Ukrainian steppes, comes with the trappings of an adventure novel, a genre not indigenous to Ukrainian literature. Seduced by the landscape, he spontaneously turns into a Ukrainian, who is then killed by kurkuls, and rises again, back to his Jose Pereira identity (Йогансен 1929: 33, 36-37)⁵⁵. The fight scene with reversible violence in *The Enchanted Desna* initiates the description of a trip that allows the narrator to thematize

⁵⁵ The novel was first published in *Literaturnyi Iarmarok*, one of the leading, if short-lived, literary journals of the time. In a volume published after *Literaturnyi Iarmarok* was banned, the 11-volume *Литературная энциклопедия* (1929-1939) explicitly criticized the journal for the fact that over a 100 out of 120 works published therein featured intellectuals, bourgeoisie or educated peasants as protagonists; the Jose Pereira chapter was singled out as an example of “the faulty understanding of the class structure of villages”. Novitskii, Nikolai. “Literaturnyi Iarmarok.” *Literaturnaia Entsiklopediia*. <http://feb-web.ru/feb/litenc/encyclop/le6/le6-4471.htm> [accessed December 13, 2015]

similar genre concerns, mirroring the structural conceit employed by his one-time collaborator. Bodily fragmentation – a metonymic symbol of the fragmentation of previously more or less cohesive culture – can be read both as a trauma, and as an opportunity to introduce new styles and plots in spaces of ambiguity left in the wake of the old culture and catalogue of motifs. To this end, Dovzhenko’s narrator dreams of an exotic experience that is brought to life through the act of narration:

“Явися на березі лев!” – появляється лев [...] мені так палко захотілось розвести левів і слонів, щоб було красиво скрізь і не зовсім спокійно ... Мені наскучили одні телята й коні.

“May there be a lion on the shore!” – and a lion did appear [...] I yearned for lions and elephants, so that everything would be marvelous and not completely safe ... I was bored of calves and horses.

In a low staging of a cosmogony, narration summons an entire new world into being: naming is creating. It is telling, however, that the choice to unsettle the expected realistic catalogue of plots (“calves and horses”) is conceptualized as dangerous, both to the narrator and to the images that he had conjured up:

ненадовго пощастило тому левові звільнитися з клітки ... догнали його, оточили його з усіх боків і вбили, бо він був лев ... Його ж у віз не запряжеш, яка з нього користь. Коли б ще вмів він гавкати чи мукати, - голос не годиться: гукає так, що листя в’яне й трави стеляться... Ну добре... Ой, що ж це я пишу! ... вже почувається якась непевність у пері: вже наближаються редактори до мене (ibid., 44)

the lion didn’t have much luck staying out of the cage ... they hunted him down, surrounded him from all sides and killed him, because he was a lion ... If you cannot yoke him into a carriage, is he even of any use? Maybe he’d do if he could at least bark or moo, but he didn’t have the voice even for that: his roar made leaves wither and grasses bend... Well then... Oh my, what am I writing? ... I can feel a certain hesitation in my pen: the editors are closing in.

To sum up this first instance of storytelling that the protagonist of *The Enchanted Desna* engaged in, he (1) professes the desire for unconventional and new images; (2) expresses the belief that storytelling affects the reality (while its existence remains

ambiguous, the lion does appear after being invoked by the protagonist); (3) expresses fear of “the editors” who police the narrative; (4) outlines the assumption that the works that do not serve any immediate pragmatic function are unwelcome (“is he even of any use?”), to the extent that they might be eliminated; (5) insofar as storytelling affects reality, bringing in new elements into it, so must the editors, who edit out the images and styles for which they see no use.

The narrative situation thus outlined aligns with repressions and the constant experience of prescriptive criticism. In *The Enchanted Desna*, the motif of creative writing gets processed through the imagery of animals and hunting. The choice of animal metaphors, with the concomitant tradition of parables and Aesopian speech, enabled the discussion of the experience that could not be depicted directly, at least during the mature Stalinism.

3.2.4 How can we know the hunter from the hunt?

Before the 1920s, hunting was absent from Ukrainian literature (a gap made all the more conspicuous by the relative prominence of the image in both Polish and Russian literature, with which Ukrainian writers were generally familiar). A significant portion of Ukrainian literature was written from the perspective of / about those social classes that did not hunt for leisure. In the 1920s, hunting and hunters emerged in the works of writers from different circles: the Kyiv Neo-Classics (for example, “У горах, серед каменю й снігів” or “У хутрі лисячим мене одвідав гість” by Maksym Rylskyi), in the popular comic short stories by Ostap Vyshnia, in the works of Maik Iohansen, etc. The

image immediately signified the broadening of the catalogue of available character types, and often was tied to emphasizing the belonging to Western literary tradition (for example, in “У горах, серед каменю й снігів,” Rylskyi compared his characters in the hunting hut to Manfred). Adopting an image with an easily traceable pedigree, Dovzhenko makes a conspicuous choice to narrate the hunting scene from the point of view of the ducks rather than that of the hunter, privileging the experience of the persecuted:

Зробити це доведеться не так для краси стилю, як для більшої правди, бо він же качок убивав, а не вони його.

I will have to do it not for the sake of a beautiful style, but for a higher veracity, because he was killing ducks, not vice versa.

The ethical and narrative choice to highlight the subjectivity of the persecuted, even and especially those who are incapable of speech (because they are on the wrong side of the alive/dead divide or animal/human divide) further unsettles the already porous boundaries of autobiography in *The Enchanted Desna*. By setting the stage that is radically inclusive of these subjectivities, Dovzhenko also counters the procedures of exclusion that had long been defining the normative Soviet identity formation. The uneasy interface between humanness and animality had long been the cornerstone for identity formation in the Western civilization, and the identities that were marked as undesirable or unassimilatable into the dominant social order were often marginalized as beastly. In her exploration of the divergent configurations of humanness throughout history, the scholar Joyce E. Salisbury noted that

As people began to define humanity by behavior, it seems to have opened the possibility for redefining people who had previously been accepted as human ... As the boundaries between humans and animals became increasingly blurred, marginalized groups seemed to slip below the human boundary. (Salisbury 1997: 15)

Humankind was defined as rational, speaking, possessing history; concomitantly, to adopt an animal act was to choose the “flight from the humanistic definition of man,” to configure a new symbolic language outside the subject/object relations (see Senior 1997: 1-2). In giving animal the right of speech, Dovzhenko ushers in the silenced identities that were deemed irrational and ahistoric (or conflicting with the Marxist vision of the history’s progression). Soviet society was built on a series of exclusions; its cohesion was predicated on determining who had the right heritage or credentials to belong to it. Those who were excluded (often physically, by relocations, arrests, or removal from such public spheres as education) were denied the right to speak, or even to be spoken of. Dovzhenko, like all other Soviet citizens, was taught the analytical procedures based on which the determination was made, and the catchwords used to deny others subjectivity (see his denunciation of Iohansen and Tiutiunnyk). At the same time, in *The Enchanted Desna* he makes a point of extending the right to subjectivity and agency to the category that is not usually allowed either: to animals.

Animals (with anthropomorphized traits) are ascribed as much direct speech as any of the human characters, with only the narrator himself surpassing them in loquaciousness. Animals also merit a somewhat higher style (from the somewhat comical “Ворона возсідала” or “пес возгавкнув,” prefix “воз-” evoking Old Church Slavonic, to the lyrical episodes with the lion or with the horses). They are given consideration as a point of access to a different knowledge (“I believed that horses and cows knew

something, they had some unpleasant knowledge, only they won't tell"); in this novella, the different and the excluded are privileged ("they were all apart from us [окремі], oppressed, condemned definitively and forever") (ДОВЖЕНКО 1996: 580-81). The animal imagery is steeped in the later part of the novella, and its stylistic context and the surrounding motifs associated with the 1920s allows one to assume that they refer not only to excluded subjectivities at large, but also to the concrete generation of the Executed Renaissance. Much like the animal speakers in *The Enchanted Desna*, they stretched the boundaries of what was considered knowable and tellable within the context of that stage in literary history, and they were eventually alienated and silenced, one way or the other.

At the same time, the roles of victims and perpetrators in *The Enchanted Desna* are not strictly fixed, and allow for ambiguity. For example, the whipped horse pardons his master: "It's not us he's beating ... he's beating his own ill fortune [...] In his eyes, I saw such deep, roiling, abysmal pain that we know not! And I thought: so you, too, are hurt, you poor damned sod" (ibid., 582). So, instead of a clear hierarchy of persecution (that would potentially allow for redemptive narratives), a darker picture of universal complicity in crimes and equally universal victimhood appears. This picture seems to be a self-exculpatory gesture in Dovzhenko's life writing, an expression of survivor's guilt that could not be expressed in more direct terms: the uneasiness of a writer who outlived the majority of his milieu, and had to renounce many of his trusted friends and colleagues in the process.

To sum up, Dovzhenko decenters the ostensibly solipsist definition of life writing by creating an autobiographical novella in which the writerly biography is equated, on the one hand, with the history of his literature, and on the other, with the history of his literary generation. A writer is described not as a biographical person, but as a meaning-producing mechanism defined in part but his literary and historic experience. The narrator's progression through various historical styles in Ukrainian literature seems to lead teleologically to Socialist Realism. However, this seemingly natural trajectory is problematized by the fact that the plot structure of *The Enchanted Desna* closely follows the Fall of Man. Early on in the novella, the protagonist is driven out of the orderly, structured, idyllic microcosm of his paradisaal garden into the wilderness teeming with vipers by his grandmother, who's angry with him for his having picked the fruit (including, of course, apples: literary traditions hold as fast as ever):

У малині лежав повержений з небес маленький ангел і плакав без сліз. З безхмарного блакитного неба якось несподівано упав він на землю і поламав свої тоненькі крила коло моркви. Це був я (Довженко 2001: 12)

Cast down from heavens, a small angel lay in the raspberries and wept tearlessly. He dropped suddenly from the clear blue skies and broke his thin wings by the carrots. That was me.

The unstoppable progression towards integration into society (metaphorically represented by the protagonist's matriculation, described, in the populist style, as a loss of a personal narrative), and eventually, one assumes, into the Soviet society, occurs in tandem with an equally unstoppable regression from the mythological level of the long-lived patriarchs (the protagonist's grandfather "lived about a hundred years under the sun," etc.). This questions the dominant Soviet narrative of history as a progress. Instead of a unified linear progression, *The Enchanted Desna* seems to offer a search of a score

of differing yet coexisting subjectivities, human and animal, privileging exactly the ones that were excluded from the catalogue of normative identities.

Chapter 4

Time travel by any other name: experiments with temporality in *Tsarivna* by Olha Kobylianska and *Maister korablia* by Iurii Ianoskyi

In his *Figures of Autobiography: The Language of Self-Writing* (1983), Avron Fleishman argued for the inclusion of the texts that he described as pseudoautobiographies into studies of the genre of autobiography on the grounds that, while they might be “autobiographies at one remove,”

a greater authenticity is made possible by this devious generic encounter. For the pseudoautobiography opens up the opportunity to dramatize not simply the author’s life but his activity as autobiographer, that is, to figure forth not only the protagonist but the narrator of life stories. (Fleishman 1983: 198-9)

Based on Fleishman’s selection of novels, to be described as a “pseudoautobiography,” a text has to satisfy the following criteria: (1) it has to be steeped in and engage with its author’s lived experience; (2) its protagonist, who can, but not necessarily should, be a narrator, is not explicitly identified with the empirical writer; (3) said protagonists are often engaged in the act of life writing. Therefore, “pseudoautobiographies” might allow writers greater flexibility in working through the quandaries, narrative possibilities and issues of life writing by thematizing the act, especially in the 19th century, when the act of writing an autobiography was not yet automatically conceptualized as a life experience.

In this spirit, I would like to include *Tsarivna (The Princess)* by Ol'ha Kobylans'ka (1895) and *Maister Korablia (The Master of the Ship)* by Iurii Ianoskyj (1928) into my analysis of autobiographies in Ukrainian literature. In many ways, it's hard to find texts more divergent stylistically and thematically than these two novels that, although separated in time by mere 30 years, belong to very different literary and historical eras, and are embedded in very different cultural contexts. However, I am grouping them in one chapter because they both engage with, albeit to different ends and in different ways, with some of the same problems raised by the act of life writing. Both novels make use of their authors' experiences and are often read as *roman à clef* (*Maister Korablia* more often than *Tsarivna*, primarily because the implied cast of characters milling about the Odessa Film Studio is much more dramatic, including, for example, Oleksandr Dovzhenko). Nonetheless, for the purpose of this chapter, I have little interest in determining the real life models for the characters; instead, I would rather focus on ways in which life-writing of the novels' protagonists is configured within the text. Particularly provocative are Kobylanska's and Ianovskyj's discordant treatment of the temporal break between their novels' narrators and their past narrated selves.

Given that "autobiography derives much of its interest from the complications generated by the interplay of I-past and I-present" (Fleishman 1983: 192), it stands to reason that the layering of various temporal planes becomes problematized in these novels that deal with the act of life writing. Both combine episodes written in the present and past tense (on occasions, this matter is further complicated by the issue of focalization, which appears intertwined with the matter of tense: knowledge and

perspective are temporal phenomena). These changes allow writers to explore and program several models of reception of autobiographical texts, and to explore the pragmatics of life-writing. In the present chapter, I would like to focus on semantic reasons for tense alternations or shifts, their connection to focalization and the presence of an explicit or implicit addressee (occasionally, although not necessarily signaled by second-person pronouns), and the authors' takes on the possibility of creation of a noncontradictory, continuous identity as a narrative construct.

4.1 Olha Kobylianska in the Nooks of Time

Olha Kobylianska felt most at home at the very margins of her community. The margins could be either geographical (save for a few short sojourns elsewhere, she has spent her entire life in small towns in the multicultural province of Bukovyna, belonging to the Austrian-Hungarian empire at the time of her birth and to the Ukrainian SSR at the time of her death) or linguistic (a daughter of a Polish-speaking mother and a Ukrainian-speaking father, Kobylianska received primary education in a German-language school and wrote her first novellas in German), among others. Her existence in the periphery, where the expected narratives and models give way to semantic openness and ambiguity, was due not only to the coincidence of birth, or at least not exclusively.

This choice of positioning is at stark contrast with Kobylianska's centrality in Ukrainian literary canon: paradoxically, she remained prominent in most of its reiterations, whatever other changes might have occurred. The importance and productive

innovations of Kobylianska's novels were recognized very early on. She was credited with laying the foundations of Ukrainian literary modernism from the very beginning: for example, Lesia Ukrainka's programmatic article about Ukrainian writers in *Bukovyna* (1899) singled Kobylianska out as the strongest voice of modernist individualism that came to replace the outdated collectivist populist cultural sensibility (see Pavlychko 1999: 39-40). Kobylianska was altogether too prominent to be ignored by the Socialist Realist literary canon, which coopted her, somewhat reductively, as a writer who, ostensibly, described the social conditions and class struggle of Bukovyna peasants. In the post-independence literary canon, the social dimension of Kobylianska's works was supplemented with the aesthetic, and she was recognized again as a key figure in Ukrainian literary modernism. The breakthrough studies by Solomiia Pavlychko and Tamara Hundorova, who traced the interrelations of modernism and feminism in this corner of literary woods, contributed to renewed interest in her oeuvre, making her one of the most celebrated and well-researched writers of the period.

The Princess (Tsarivna) is one of the most iconic novels by Olha Kobylianka. Published in serialized form in the newspaper *Bukovyna* between May and August of 1896, it was likely started in 1888, with the history of its shape-shifting titles reflecting the changes in the writer's priorities. The first draft, entitled *Lorelei*, was finished in 1891, the subsequent redaction was retitled *Uneventful*, for the final title to emerge around mid-1895 (see Pavlyshyn 2008: 431): the first title focuses on the romanticized image of the novel's protagonist as seen by others, the second on the ostensible paucity of publically significant events in her biography, and only the third title zeroes in on her

self-defined program. To an extent, *The Princess* is a *bildungsroman* that follows the biography of a young woman (whose circumstances have too many parallels with Kobylianska's biography to be altogether coincidental) in her quest for subjectivity: she explores the new models of femininity and new models of national identity as her region approaches modernity. The first 14 chapters are stylized as a diary written in the present tense (the style and themes are very similar to Kobylianska's diary that she kept when she was the age of her protagonist), after which the novel breaks off into more conventional third person narration for the last three chapters. These shifts allow Kobylianska to explore the opportunities afforded by divergent forms of life writing, as well as their limitations, in connection to the issue of tense and focalization.

Kobylianska's speech "Towards the Idea of Women's Movement," read at the meeting of the Bukovyna Society of Ruthenian Women in Chernivtsi in the late 1894, was written right as she was putting the finishing touches to *The Princess*, and it elucidated some of the novel's central themes. Both in the speech and in the novel, Kobylianska postulated her ideas about women's role in life:

Upon bringing a woman into the world, nature doesn't tell her, 'Here you are, and you are a wife of this man or that!' ... bringing her into the world, it tells her the same thing she tells to a man, 'Here you are. Live!'" (Kobylianska 1963: 154-5?)⁵⁶

The writer justified her opinions about women's right to education and profession by describing a hypothetical orphan who fails to secure an advantageous marriage, and thus must be given an opportunity to fend for herself: she should be offered not bread but

⁵⁶ "Уводячи жінку в життя, природа не каже: «Ось ти, і ти жінка того або того чоловіка!» ... природа, вводячи її в життя, говорила до неї те саме, що й до чоловіка: «Ось ти, і жий!»"

“an opportunity to earn it; scholarship and work would become their goal”. *The Princess* is, in a way, a large-scale illustration to the theme: its protagonist, Nataalka, is an orphan, lacking protection, but also free from limitations imposed by a close-knit community that would define her role and identity for her. Tamara Hundorova, one of the most prominent contemporary scholars of Kobylanska, described how this choice of heroine supported the search for new models of femininity:

[T]he melancholy of gender signifies the process of gender identification and the alienation of a “new woman” from her mother ... The desire for return to the mother psychoanalytically implies longing for a space imagined as harmonious, continuous, without breaks or separations. (Hundorova 2005: 168)

By removing the possibility of the protagonist’s identification with or struggle against a mother figure, Kobylanska sidelines the image of a woman as defined by her reproductive role, and, in the absence of a “continuous and harmonious” space to return to, creates a narrative situation in which her protagonist is encouraged to, literally, write her own story. Life writing as an act of taking agency becomes a metaphor for the entire enterprise. The protagonist’s diary—a solipsist form foregrounding her own articulation of her identity—covers a significant portion of the novel, providing a counterbalance to societally imposed roles and identities.

It is worth noting, however, that the life writing as practiced by the protagonist of *The Princess* is noticeably more radical than Kobylanska’s actual autobiographies (although not her letters), which often offered an exemplary picture compliant with societal expectations of the time. As Marko Pavlyshyn had described it, “autobiographies in large part told their addressees - men, behind whom stood either patriotic or Soviet literary establishments - the stories that they wanted to hear,” tailoring the writer’s

biography to fit populist tastes or the literary polemics of the time, and “plac[ing] herself in the tradition of socially committed realism” (Pavlyshyn 2000: 47). Unlike autobiographies, which instantly found a grateful audience, *The Princess* was as well-received by populist critics as could be expected, which is to say not at all, not least because it was read as decadent “art for art’s sake.” Kobylianska did not shy away from engaging with her critics, demonstrating that these issues extended far beyond the concrete text under discussion. For example, Mykhailo Hrushevskyi, an influential, if almost universally disliked, positivist historian (and the eventual first president of the short-lived Ukrainian People’s Republic in 1917-18), who was hardly the most subtle literary critic, interpreted *The Princess* as a modernized retelling of the Cinderella fairytale that bore little relation to the Ukrainian cultural context of the time, and could be easily transposed to any other country. This reading betrays the fact that Hrushevskyi was trying to fit the novel into the traditional populist or even ethnographic mold, despite the fact that it was written in polemics with this pervasive paradigm. It is little surprise that Kobylianska did not take this reading calmly, sending her friend Osyp Makovei a long irate letter:

How could he write something so old-fashioned? He made Natalka, a thinking woman, after all, a thinking woman from the beginning of the novella, into some kind of an *Aschenbrödel, die unter der Zucht der bösen Stiefmutter und der Stiefschwestern leidet und auf einen Königssohn wartet*, and he says that she was modernized by reading Nietzsche. Doesn’t this gentleman read anything but Little Russian literature, doesn’t he know that there are new types of women now? (Kobylianska 1963: 330)

Kobylianska’s distaste for the literary scene that refused to adopt or even consider the life models she was describing is underscored by her code-switching to German and

the usage of the pejorative designation “Little Russian.” Kobylianska proceeds to elucidate her point:

Natalka is a new type in the salon of Ruthenian literature, where women with old-fashioned ideas sit in folk costumes and sigh to the moon. Natalka reflects on herself and others and sees that it's work that grants life meaning. Intellectual work. (ibid., 332)

Natalka, that is, is juxtaposed to the sentimental folk-tinged image of a woman as a repository of national symbols (“folk costumes”) that is closer to nature than culture; this type of feminine image is often described as a writer’s muse, but seldom as a writer in her own right. Therefore, the choice to describe Natalka as an autobiographer is also an act of implicit polemics with this older tradition: no longer content with offering men vague inspiration, women are supposed to start writing.

Another effect of the diary stylization is a striking dramatization of the conflicting demands on a writer who is marginalized both as a woman in a patriarchal society and as a representative of a colonized culture in an empire. Many Ukrainian artists of the time dramatized their lot as colonized subjects: they often felt that they had to sacrifice their aesthetic pursuits in order to create more politically or socially engaged art (they often described the conflict through turning to the classical images of prophets who were for a while distrusted or ignored by their communities: e.g., the 1905 long narrative poem *Moses* by Ivan Franko or the 1903 drama *Cassandra* by Lesia Ukraiinka). Such pressure was even more acutely felt by Kobylianska, who came to Ukrainian culture by choice rather than by birth: before switching to Ukrainian, she wrote in German, and her self-

fashioning was hinged upon linguistic alienation till the very last days of her career⁵⁷. This choice was implicitly viewed as political, and came with the expectation that she would scorn more private concerns in her art (see the criticism of *The Princess* as trivial). At the same time, the marginalization of women at the time hinged upon the strictly hierarchical dichotomy of the public and private spheres, and a female writer engaging with identity issues could feel the need to legitimize her presence in the public sphere. Diaries – ostensibly markedly private documents – seem ideally suited for the exploration of the interconnections of the public and the private, and to mediation between the public and the private in self-fashioning of a female writer.

4.1.1 Uses and Abuses of Diary Stylizations

A young woman poised in front of a mirror in the stuffy hallway, barely daring to cast an apprehensive glance at her reflection and to acknowledge how she is perceived by others: thus begins the first part of *The Princess*. In the opening scene of the novel, the

⁵⁷ Kobylianska's statements on the matter are summarized in Olesia Palins'ka's article "Vplyv semilinhvalizmu na formuvannia osobystosti Ol'hy Kobylians'koi" (*Visnyk L'vivs'koho Universitetu* 2004, no. 33, part 2, pp. 214-218). Palins'ka traces Kobylianska's descriptions of her language proficiency from her early German-language diaries, in which Kobylians'ka famously maintained that "It's so hard for me to speak in Ruthenian that I doubt I'll ever master it" and wrote off many social occasions as a failure because "I could not say much since I don't know Ukrainian," through her later correspondence with her editors and fellow writers. For example, Kobylianska apologized to her editor V. Lukych: "Growing up in Bukovyna, surrounded mostly by Germans and Rumanians, I have failed to learn my native Ruthenian properly." However, Olesia Palins'ka interprets Kobylians'ka's code-switching as evidence that the writer's vocabulary in both languages was insufficient for her purposes, without delving deeper into the semantics of code-switching and without raising the issue of the possibly performative nature and function of Kobylianska's insistent statements about her inferior Ukrainian. I'd venture a guess that these were possibly meant not only to deflect her editors' critical comments but also to underscore her refusal to play by the rules of her highly socially conservative milieu, escaping linguistic, ethnic and gender essentialism at one stroke, but that is a topic for another discussion.

first-person protagonist recounts how her aunt – a figure out of a dark fairytale, unapologetic in her causeless callousness – taunted her for her big piercing eyes: jabs of “Why are you looking straight ahead as if you’ve never seen the world before?” [Чого це ти дивишся так перед себе, начеби перший раз світ побачила?] interspersed with “Those with uneasy conscience never look the righteous in the eye” [Нечисте сумління не глядить ніколи правим людям в очі!]. Unable to take these remarks anymore, Nataalka decides to check for herself and thus finds herself in front of a mirror: “[I]t wasn’t until then that I realized that they were right all along. Since that moment I hardly ever looked in a mirror, not casting a glance at it unless it was absolutely necessary” [аж тепер я пересвідчилася, що вони всі що до одного говорили правду. І я від тої пори не дивилася майже ніколи в дзеркало; а коли й кинула часом в його оком, то чинила це лише тоді, як було конче потрібно]. While a reader might be tempted to discard this unconventional character flaw as an homage to sentimentalism, along with such common romantic afflictions as locks too golden or complexion too fair, the scene’s placement in the strong opening position invites us to take a closer look at what it conveys: after all, the opening scene sets the horizon of interpretations and readerly expectations, defining the genre and thematic scope of the subsequent text. The evil aunt’s jabs, therefore, seem to be two-pronged. On the one hand, she is made uneasy by the fact that Nataalka seems unaware of or unwilling to acknowledge the epistemological axioms that are usually taken as a given and instead scrutinizes reality for herself (“as if you’ve never seen the world before”). On the other, Nataalka’s failing to look her family in the eye seems to imply a broader failing to acknowledge their subjectivity, and thus

subverts the aunt's intuitive assumption that her narrative has no valid alternatives. Both of these ostensible shortcomings stake out the thematic range of the novel, preoccupied with a young woman's search for a biography that is not limited to given scripts of supporting a patriarchal family as the primary ambition or the highest act of female self-actualization. Nataalka's fright at seeing herself in the mirror, meanwhile, limns out the tribulations of formulating a novel identity model for oneself. The external representation of Nataalka's physical self produces in her a mental concept of selfhood (in this context, as a social actor). Her identity, outside herself and, equally, outside her control, is contingent on her act of looking (cf. her aunt's anger at the fact that her niece never looks straight at her, thus never recognizing her); it requires that she learn to accept an image external to and alienated from her self as a veracious indexical sign of her identity. Trained to prioritize external and often hostile accounts, Nataalka is unable to reconcile them with the reflection she sees, and subsequently refrains from these specular engagements with her selfhood altogether, at least for the time being.

Similarly, the very first paragraph of *The Princess*, too, puts Nataalka at odds with external narratives, if in a slightly different sphere: her birthday, November 29, is perceived as an unlucky day, her fortune defined by social constructs and irrational biases beyond her control. The protagonist opposes these folk beliefs and superstitions with the force of rationality, calling for explorations of cause and effect in lieu of blind adherence to stereotypes:

Old people and dream catalogues [сонники] say that this day is unlucky ... But I'd rather not subscribe to this belief. I would be happy to explore each phenomenon to its very bottom, I crave to think clearly, to see clearly, because each event has its causes and

consequences, each follows strict laws, we just don't necessarily know them.⁵⁸
(Kobylianska : 21)

Refusing to meekly submit to the dire circumstances of her birth or to limit her account of selfhood to the readymade narrative offered, unbidden, by her meddling aunt, Nataalka chooses life writing, this “the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image” (Gusdorf 1980: 33), as the space where her identity can be constituted and reconstituted at will.

This thematic and structural choice in the early novel offers a reflection on Kobylianska's own biography and on her strategy of writing her way out of her stifling nook on the periphery, or, alternatively, to writing a (geographical, linguistic, and gender) periphery of the periphery into the most exciting and revolutionary place to be, both existentially and narratively. Much like Nataalka, who, in writing a diary, rebels against her family's and her community's preferred narratives, Kobylianska creates alternative models of femininity in her (often autobiographical, if in a veiled form) novellas and novels: a freedom that she did not always dare to reach for in more straightforwardly billed autobiographies written for specific publications. She is hardly unique in this though: it has long been observed that

it was the *novel* and not autobiographical writing that initially enabled women to make directly referential claims for the female self, for made through fiction these could be presented as less seditious, and less seductive for women readers, than seems actually to have been the case as witnessed by women's contemporary letters, journals and diaries. (Stanley 1992: 59)

⁵⁸ “Старі люди і сонники кажуть, що цей день – день недолі ... Однак мені не хочеться в те вірити. Я рада би приглянутися кожній речі до дна, я бажала би про все ясно думати, на все ясно дивитися, - адже кожда проява має свої причини й наслідки, все підлягає строгим законам, лише ми не дуже про це знаємо”

Coincidentally, even Kobylianska's biography, once stripped down to the bare bones of facts, is less subversive than her works: barring a few epistolary romances with fellow women writers (most famously with Lesia Ukrainka – see Pavlychko 1999: 83-86⁵⁹, but also much later with Khrystia Alchevska) and an offer to Osyp Makovei to move in with her skipping the formalities of marriage—an offer which he didn't take her up on—she led a fairly sheltered and conventional life, never receiving extensive formal education past several years in a gymnasium, having very limited engagement with public life and activism of the time (partly due to her geographic isolation from the cultural hubs), helping her family to cook and maintain the premises for their lodgers and ostensibly never rebelling against this routine. For her, writing was largely *the* sphere of free expression, and *The Princess*, which brings life back into life writing by emphasizing the writing process as a biographical fact and depicting writing as a sphere not divorced from but integral to any biography, is probably one of the clearest articulations of Kobylianska's perspective on the issue. Natalka in *The Princess* becomes the mouthpiece for Kobylianska's beliefs and preoccupations, intoning that

My history is not what I experienced but rather what I thought in my mind and heart. But soon I will reach the age in which young women are described as “old maids.” I will cease to interest anyone at all; then my history will have run its course.⁶⁰ (Kobylianska 1989: 212)

⁵⁹ Solomia Pavlychko was the first scholar to analyze these epistolary romances as fantasies in which sexual anarchy and a departure from traditional sexuality produces textual anarchy (p. 83). It is worth noting that they also contribute to constructing an alternative, somewhat utopian affective community of those escaping or excluded from the narratives of patriarchal culture, with independent modes of disseminating artworks, divergent sources of legitimacy, etc.

⁶⁰ “Моя історія — це не те, що я пережила, лише те, що я передумала головою і серцем. Але небавом вступлю у вік такий, у котрім дівчат називають уже “старими”. Тоді стану зовсім неінтересна для нікого; тоді скінчиться моя історія.”

This, of course, raises the issue of what constitutes “history,” that is, what an acceptable biographical narrative would look like in this community at this specific cultural and social juncture. Kobylanska, through her protagonist as her mouthpiece, emphasizes that these narratives are gender-specific, and that model female biographies are supposed to (a) exclude intellectual experience; (b) not be perceived as legitimate unless the subject conforms to patriarchal expectations. Natalka even doubts whether her writing serves any purpose: “I know my views, and others hardly care about philosophical conclusions of a young woman ... is the spiritual life of a woman less interesting than her body?”⁶¹ (p. 21).

Against this stark opposition, the choice to engage with life writing as the principal plot of the novel appears as an act of resistance: first, because autobiographies construct model life narratives; second, because it privileges creative and intellectual biography over biographical records *sensu stricto*. The choice of a diary as opposed to any other, traditionally less open-ended form of life writing is hardly a fortuitous coincidence in this curious mixture of revelation and concealment, or rather revelation in the guise of concealment (Natalka opting for a way to express her identity in a mode that is concealed, at least initially, from the prying eyes; Kobylanska creating shimmering processions of alter egos to reflect on her choices as a writer on the margins of a literature that was itself hardly central, the fact that brought its own set of preoccupations with it). The strategic difference between diaries and autobiographies has been fairly prominently outlined in the studies of life writing since the inception of the field; for example, this is

⁶¹ “Мої погляди мені звісні, а хто інший не буде дуже цікавий знати філософічні висновки молодої дівочої душі ... Чи жіноче духове життя менше цікаве, як її організм?”

how Georges Gusdorf formulated the difference in his seminal essay “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography” (1956, translated into English by James Olney in 1980):

The author of a private journal, noting his impressions and mental states from day to day, fixes the portrait of his daily reality without any concern for continuity. Autobiography, on the other hand, requires a man to take a distance with regard to himself in order to reconstitute himself in the focus of his special unity and identity across time. (Gusdorf 1980: 35)

In a word, autobiographies, it is widely assumed, “impose a pattern on a life, construct out of it a coherent story ... something that may be reduced to order” (Pascal 1985: 9). (Exceptions to the rule, of course, present a steadily growing cohort and in certain eras might as well outnumber the texts that cleave to this tenet; indeed, the present dissertation is largely dedicated to exceptions; yet one still expects autobiographies to adhere to the rule, by and large.) *The Princess*, however, marks distaste for just such a totalizing impulse (all events in their chaotic glory subjugated to a single ruling pattern or principle), for that would reduce the fluidity of lived intellectual life to a neat grand narrative. The first person present tense account stylized as a personal journal, to the contrary, creates several noticeable effects, including, although not limited to, (1) undermining the notion of the inherent stableness and consistency of one’s identity over time; (2) making the juxtaposition of imposed and self-produced narratives more marked. Kobylianska, a passionate diarist as a young woman (Ukrainian translation of her diaries can be found in the collection of 19th century autobiographies of prominent Ukrainian writers and cultural activists *Sami pro sebe*, 1989, compiled by George Luckyj), was well aware of the possibilities as well as limitations of the format. Her diary describes a lengthy procession of constantly shifting and mutually exclusive imagined lives, in which

every meeting unspools a potential alternative biography; this multitude might seem somewhat overwhelming, but writing as a space of openness that is always attuned to minute shifts might actually be the point of the exercise. As long as identity was fluid, it could not be held in thrall to any single codified narrative, and it demanded that its processual nature be acknowledged. The diary form as employed in *The Princess* allows Kobylianska to stay finely attuned to the minute consecutive shifts and changes. New scenes or chapters are often marked as “Later” or “Still later,” eschewing more concrete markers in favour of purely subjective markers, indicating both temporal sequencing and connections between the changing states, both continuity and discontinuity. Ellipses, indicating moments of pause and doubt, are the most often employed punctuation mark throughout the diary chapters: therefore, leaving spaces of ambiguity, moments that fail to signify and are worth recording precisely in their extra-verbal openness. Their relative sparseness in third person part of the novel indicates that this was a conscious choice of a device to convey the character’s experience rather than a consistent and overarching stylistic preference that occurs regardless of the immediate context.

Journals ostensibly offer a glimpse at a deeper authenticity unmediated by retrospective reconstruction; the chapters of *The Princess* stylized as diary entries undermine the notion of authentic identities as coherent and consistent, and imply that they cannot be truthfully rendered using conventional topoi. It is worth noting that unsettling the notion of a unified stable identity (and, consequently, undermining the fixed plots that were traditionally adopted to describe or constitute its trajectory) in connection to the issue of female emancipation was hardly unique to Olha Kobylianska.

Late Victorian suffragette writers had similar concerns and literary strategies to address them. In her *New Women, New Novels: Feminism and Early Modernism* (1990), Ann Ardis contended that the so-called New Woman writers (Ella Hepworth Dixon, Olive Schreiner, Sarah Grand, Mona Caird, and more) probed and transgressed the boundaries of Victorian realism and its catalogue of imagery, including the nigh inevitable marriage plot, to affirm more open and fluid identity constructs that would not be limited to conventional notions of femininity and female roles in society and literature alike:

In more subtle ways, the Victorian conceptualization of "character" or identity as something seamless, unified, and consistent over time is also shattered as these novelists demystify the ideology of "womanliness," an ideology that gives middle-class women "no life but in the affections." (Ardis 1990: 3)

In this, Ardis argued, the representatives of the New Woman movement might legitimately be interpreted as largely overlooked and forgotten precursors of literary modernism who ushered in new narratives that demanded new formal approaches to adequately convey them, making early feminism and early literary modernism merge. Unlike this largely forgotten cohort, Kobylianska, is indeed acknowledged as a writer who lay the foundations of modernism in Ukrainian literary canon: thus ambiguities, contradictions and opposition are inscribed in the canon, the very institution tasked with dispensing with these phenomena in favour of a cohesive non-contradictory panorama.

In this interpretation, quotidian life does not separate the subject from a deeper authenticity ostensibly accessible through liminal experiences: it is precisely the quotidian that is reflective of it. It is something of a scholarly commonplace that women's life writing is often associated with describing the "repetitive cumulative structure of dailiness", with diaries as its "classic verbal articulation". This immersive

writing in which “denouement [is] never reached” (Juhasz 1980: 224) is, of course, usually linked to diffuse and not goal-oriented nature of women’s daily tasks. In *The Princess*, however, it is not linked with frustrated expectations or purposelessness. The idea of describing a biography on a moment-by-moment basis allows the writer to change the structure of experience to open it to a multiplicity and multidirectionality of goals, treating each discrete preoccupation as equally important and self-sustaining, without imposing a strict and by necessity reductionist hierarchy. This approach is reminiscent of a tendency in later feminist autobiographies (e.g., Kate Millet) to decenter the self and to “position the self as an interactional process as well as product” (see Stanley 1992: 247-48). However, the quotidian-oriented approach does eventually come in conflict with the bildungsroman aspect of *The Princess*. Kobylianska seems to come to an impasse: privileging processual rather than goal-oriented, the non-teleological description of a life as a way to escape stable hierarchies cannot be easily reconciled with the bildungsroman tenet of tracing the protagonist’s trajectory towards self-actualization. As the result of that, Natalka’s diary cuts off about two thirds into the novel at a point that is best described as arbitrary, and gives way to more conventional third person past tense narration.

4.1.2 Utopia as a Third Person Job

A young woman poised over a lake in an autumn park, admiring her reflection in the still cold water: this scene that comes from the latter part of *The Princess* poses a striking change from the opening scene of the novel, where the protagonist was petrified

and repulsed by her reflection, unable to reconcile her family's vision of her identity with her own account or the specular image. By the latter part of the novel, marked by a shift to third person and past tense, the protagonist is willing to acknowledge that "'I'm beautiful!' spoke up a voice inside her ... 'A princess,' a thought struck her" (p. 265-6) ["Я гарна!" – заговорив в ній якийсь голос ... "Царівна", - навинулось їй на думку]. Despite passive constructions that relegate these realizations to an undefined voice or thought that appear regardless of Nataalka's will, seemingly unbidden, this scene is preceded by her acknowledging that "She felt so strong and capable of life that, it seemed, there was nothing she wouldn't be able to overcome!" (ibid.) [Вона чулася такою сильною і здатною до життя, що, здавалося, для неї не існувало нічого, чого не могла би побороти!]. Her empowerment is buttressed primarily by the fact that she had just completed the novel "into which she had put her entire soul," and on which "her entire future rested" (p. 262). This novel is isomorphic, it is strongly implied, with the diary entries in the first part of *The Princess*. The announcement of its completion follows in short order after the statement "This completes Nataalka's diary," and there are no other descriptions of the work that could contradict this assumption. If the two are not identical, there is nothing in the text to prove it.

The change, however, is not limited to Nataalka's self-perception. The backdrop against which these mirror scenes take place is transformed, too: a stuffy hallway in her family's unwelcoming home gives way to sweeping landscapes of a public park, reflecting the progression from private existential tribulations to an essentially public act of delineating an alternative mode of existence. As her writing seeps into the public

sphere, Nataalka is transformed by the act of writing and then reading (performing) her novel for her female friends: “she was changing, as if she was becoming something new and untouchable right in front of their eyes” [заходила з нею зміна, мов вона перед їх очима перетворювалася в щось нове, нетикальне] (ibid., 263). In an act of wishful thinking or modeling her intended audience, Kobylanska describes Nataalka’s friends being moved to tears by the change that occurred in the young woman: this change offers, it seems, a new model of life and a possibility of salvation for them too. Particularly moved is a young artist. In the diary part of the novel the artist argued against the necessity of marriage: in her opinion, each human “with outstanding mental capacities” [з незвичайними спосібностями ума] should in no way get bound to another human being and should instead grow and develop independently, avoiding external influences lest they become enslaved to them (p. 256). Nataalka’s novel and the affective community emerging in its reading, however, offers an alternative to hierarchical patriarchal relationships. This is yet another instance of an overarching motif in Olha Kobylanska’s oeuvre: the writer often models egalitarian female communities of artists (see her novella *Valse Melancholique* or her epistolary romances with other writers) based on passionate romantic friendships of the kind that Lillian Faderman defined as “love relationships in every sense except perhaps the sexual” (Faderman 1979: 16). These affective and creative communities both reconsidered the notion of what constituted an important relationship (same-sex friendship taking center stage instead of heterosexual marriage) and offered the background for new modes of being and expression, as well as a milieu for the functioning and dissemination of novel cultural artefacts.

Life writing in *The Princess* and projected readers' reactions described in the novel evoke one of the dominant functions of autobiographies. Autobiographers, it is assumed, often seek to provide "readers with exemplary lives ... [life writing] inscribes what 'a life' looks like, the form in which (written and spoken) tales of lives should be told and actual lives should be lived" (Stanley 1992: 12). The sphere of quotidian life, ostensibly circumscribed both by the social mores of a provincial town and by repetitive practical demands of managing a household, is set free by the act of writing. The quotidian acquires individualist overtones, no longer colonized exclusively by social expectations; crucially, it also provides impetus for new literary modes and motifs that lay foundations of what came to be known as literary modernism.

To sum up, the emergence of a female affective and readerly community cemented by her account of a new female subjectivity precipitated a marked change in Nataalka's self-perception (see the scene with her reflection in the lake), and prompted the realization that the apex of her life, her "noon" [полудне], as it is described in the novel, is drawing close. The term "noon" is borrowed from Nietzsche (Kobylianska was one of his most consistent proponents in Ukrainian literature, borrowing and adapting for her needs both his precepts and his imagery): "[Kobylianska] found evocative Nietzsche's image of midday that signified the achievement of human maturity and the fulfillment of human potential" (Pavlyshyn 2008: 424). Nietzsche was fairly central to Ukrainian modernism: while the intellectual engagement with his philosophy was not necessarily deep or particularly far-reaching, many writers felt obligated to at least pay him lip service. His name was often adopted as a byword for the philosophy of individualism, as

juxtaposed, in the local context, to the populist (“народницька”) socially-oriented aesthetics (see Hundorova 2009: 156-7). Some writers, it is worth noting within the context of the intermingling of literary modernism with feminism, found it important to engage critically with his antifeminist statements (Kobylianska’s friend Lesia Ukrainka was among the most famous writers to do so). The model of self-actualization that Kobylianska outlines in *The Princess*, however, is based on Nietzsche, often quoted by her protagonist (along with the writings of John Stuart Mill and others: the novel outlines a detailed syllabus of reading materials recommended for a young woman from a conservative background). Natalka adopts the Nietzsche-inflected adage “‘A man renounces greatness when he renounces struggle,’ a modern-day philosopher Nietzsche said somewhere” (p. 142) [“Чоловік зрікається великого життя, коли зрікається боротьби!” – каже десь новочасний філософ Ніцше] as her motto. Consequently, she sets out on a series of battles, emerging victorious from all: first against the suffocating philistinism of her surroundings (her aunt renounces both grand passions and the pernicious habit of reading as mere trifles for the idle-minded), then against her own national and biological limitations (outlining a detailed program of self-education, formulating a national program that she can get behind, and securing independent livelihood), eventually allowing the protagonist to attain the coveted “noon” existence. Marko Pavlyshyn’s description of Natalka’s idealized state of self-actualization and attainment of her fullest potential, both intellectual (as a successful writer) and social (eventually entering a happy marriage), would offer one possible explanation for the temporal shift in the novel:

Like all Utopias, this 'midday' is stable. Having reached it, Nataalka leaves behind uncertainties and conflicts, and the repeated need to clarify her relationships with others that characterized her earlier life. Time as process has ended, and time as midday has commenced. (ibid., 437)

Pavlyshyn does not draw the connection between the “noon” Utopia and the formal shifts in *The Princess*, but it seems a logical projection. The present tense, with its potential for movement and change, would imply the impending ending of this inherently static vision; therefore, it stands to reason that third person and past tense narration is more appropriate for conveying this idyllic tableau. However, one could also argue that it is hardly the only, or even the primary reason for the shift. The latter part of *The Princess* addresses the interplay between autobiographical confessions and their reconfiguration as they become a work of fiction, the reconstitution that facts undergo as they become fodder for a work of art. The first part of the novel (the diary stylization), framed by scenes that describe Nataalka gazing at her reflection, can be said to deal primarily with self-perception. The latter part of the novel (the third person/past tense narration), however, seems to have a different preoccupation: namely, it addresses the multitude of divergent rhetorical figurations that can erupt from the same basic set of perceived facts.

The latter part of the novel offers an eclectic catalogue of different characters' descriptions of Nataalka. The majority of these characters serve, in one way or another, as a counterpoint to what the protagonist represents.

A visiting Romanian “straw widow” represents the counterpoint to an alternative model of feminine identity constructed by Nataalka. The Romanian scandalized the local beau monde by flouting social conventions: she adopted such male-coded behaviors as

smoking, wearing trousers, playing cards, sexual promiscuity, and, most damningly in the eyes of the milieu, coffee-drinking (her maid ventures that “the coffee made her dark like a devil” [від неї стала чорна, мов нечистий]). At certain points, the Romanian seems to be as much of a mouthpiece of the author as Nataalka, and the two women’s opinions converged on quite a few issues. However, the Romanian’s view of Nataalka is indicative of her shortcomings and of her lack of discernment when it comes to the new roles for women (alternatively, one might suspect that the author found it impolitic to frame a character so unpalatable to her community as an uncritically positive figure, but such extratextual guesswork hardly helps to shed light on the workings of the text). Namely, the Romanian chides Nataalka for refusing amorous advances of an admirer and castigates her for her pride, which would prevent her from finding a spouse. In so doing, she sides with the patriarchal mores of the community that she ostensibly disavowed; her essential conservatism is further underscored by the fact that she echoes the sentiment of Nataalka’s aunt and says that she finds Nataalka’s eyes intimidating (p. 258). Therefore, the Romanian is depicted as being significantly less subversive than she appeared originally, and her enactment of male behavior turns into a wholesale adoption of the patriarchal male viewpoint as the default. Oriadyn, Nataalka’s one-time friend and suitor, sums up the Romanian’s lack of real subversion by describing her as “Sie sind eine Rose ohne Dornen,” “You are a rose without thorns” (p. 259). He counters that Nataalka doesn’t conform with the expectations not out of pride but rather because she has “too much blood of the future coursing through her veins” [В неї забагато крові будучності в жилах], implying that her program should eventually emerge victorious.

The above-mentioned Oriadyn poses a counterpoint to Nataalka's program in terms of fostering the evolution of the entire community (the national community of Ukrainians in this case). The similarities in their starting points (both are orphans mistrusted by their parents' relatives, both are passionately invested in improving the status of Ukrainians in Bukovyna and elsewhere, both seek to work out programs for self-improvement, etc.) imply that these two characters were envisaged as a way to trace alternative developments of the same program. They differ in one basic respect: Oriadyn is a Marxist who believes that all human beings as social agents formed and determined by their surroundings; therefore, he imagines his progressivist program in essentially collective terms of class exploitation and class struggle. Meanwhile, her early reading of Nietzsche encourages Nataalka to prioritize individual improvement as the essential building block for any collective projects. A reader recognizes these two divergent paradigms as a fictionalized reconstruction of the bone of contention between *narodnyky* activists and writers and the new generation of artists coming to succeed and eventually supersede them. As an early modernist, Kobylianska could hardly be expected to resist the temptation of affirming her side's superior prospects. Oriadyn embodied the inalienable conformism of collectivist programs: he ends up betraying the fight for self-actualization that he shared with Nataalka in favour of becoming more accommodating of the dominant forces in the community. Meekly stating that each person is "swept up by the mighty stream of life, and each year, moreover, each day leaves a mark, and he changes unwittingly" [пориває могутча струя життя з собою, і кожний рік, ба кожда днина відоб'є на нім своє п'ятно, і він зміниться несвідомо] (p. 278), he marries the daughter

of his boss to advance in his law firm and to regain the respect of his family, and adopts Polish language and cultural identity (this is framed not as an identity choice but rather as purely pragmatic dissimulation). These decisions, however, bring him no sense of accomplishment, in a marked contrast to Nataalka, who finds spiritual nourishment in steadfastly pursuing her program; ultimately, he acknowledges his defeat in recognizing that Nataalka is the one with future in her veins. Parenthetically, it is no coincidence that the program of personal evolution is represented by women (Nataalka and her friends): the clash between women's strength and men's weaknesses is a recurrent motif in Olha Kobylianska's works, particularly in the early novellas and novels (Pavlychko 2002: 80).

Finally, the catalogue of Nataalka's portraits in the latter half of the novel culminates and ends in her uncle describing her idyllic family life to her jealous aunt. The centerpiece of this idealized description is provided by the fact that Nataalka's husband champions her writing: when a piece took its time in finding a venue for publication, he secretly mailed the manuscript to a renowned writer, who subsequently sent Nataalka words of reassurance, stressing that she's talented and should never stop writing. Her husband takes great pride in her success and "tries to give her every opportunity for this work" [старається дати їй до тої праці якнайбільше спроможності] (p. 299). In a fairytale ending, the just are rewarded and the wicked are punished: Nataalka's evil nieces who always toed the line of societal expectations and resented Nataalka for not doing so end up trapped in a loveless marriage or as old maids. Her aunt rails against this cruel twist of fate:

What did Nataalka do to deserve this outlandish happiness? ...Did she listen to your and mine moral instruction and teachings? Did she work? Did she do the work befitting a woman, the work I did at my relatives' home as a maid and in my own home after marriage, to lend my home character and influence, and to raise my children honest and just? Tell me!⁶² (p. 307)

Nataalka's uncle refrains from answering, whereas the reader is tempted to say: indeed. This parable rewards individualism, distrust of patriarchal social mores and writing of autobiographies as an activity that lends itself well to combining and bolstering the first two preoccupations.

Life is experienced in the present tense, and Kobylianska maintains, at least so far as *The Princess* is concerned, that the quotidian presentness of this experience is not a barrier towards accessing authentic identity but rather an indexical sign of it; moreover, it decenters the self and renders hierarchical structures increasingly problematic, encouraging readers to acknowledge the irreducible multitude of facets of identities. However, to be transformed into a work of art self-perception needs to progress towards self-recreation or construction: one needs, as the case might be, a reflection external to the self, like mirror images with which Nataalka had such a complicated relationship. Kobylianska finds it important to emphasize the intrinsic disjunction between self-perception and the reconstruction of the self for aesthetic purposes. Demands of life writing, however, push the boundaries of aesthetic precepts of fiction and broaden its thematic and stylistic scope, encouraging the writer to embark upon narrative experiments that would eventually lay the foundations of Ukrainian literary modernism.

⁶² Чим заслужила собі Наталка на таке шалене щастя? ... може, послухом на твої і мої моральні науки і упімнення? Чи, може, працею? Такою працею, яка пристойть жінці, якою займалася я в своїх дівочих літах у родичів, а відтак, вийшовши заміж, і в себе, щоби своєму домові надати значення і характер, а дітей щоб випровадити на чесних і правих людей? Скажи!

4.2 *Maister Korablia* by Iurii Ianovskyi

The narrative uses of protagonists that engage in life writing are far and varied. The first part of *The Princess* by Olha Kobylianska (the diary stylization) is predicated on temporal unity of the I-subject and I-object that allows its protagonist to regain control over her identity, which no longer appears as an external, even alienated reflection. Eventually Kobylianska shift the novel's focalization to narration in third person and past tense, setting aside the structural conceit of life writing. In *Maister Korablia* [Master of the Ship] by Yurii Ianovskyi (1928), on which I will focus in the second half of the chapter, the quandaries around temporality are different, despite some ostensible similarities between the two novels.

Iurii Ianovskyi (1902-1954), a poet, novelist and scriptwriter, is not the most prominent figure in Ukrainian literary canon, but easily one of the luckiest. He made his literary debut in 1922, with a fairly imitative Russian-language poem "The Sea," which was equal parts propaganda clichés and variations on Kipling: it described the working class, armed with Leninist teaching, courageously guiding the republic through perilous seas. To a reader with contemporary literary sensibilities, the poem reads like the sort of work that surely earmarks the writer for merciful obscurity. However, the poem by the hesitant debutant was noticed by better-established writers Mykhail Semenko and Mykola Bazhan, who came to the unanimous conclusion that he might yet be of use, given some encouragement: thus began Ianovskyi's cooperation with the journals

Bilshovyk and *Chervonyi Shliakh*, when he switched to writing in Ukrainian. After Mykhail Semenko moved to Kharkiv (the then-capital of Ukraine) to work for VUFKU (Всеукраїнське фото-кіноуправління, the All-Ukrainian Administration for Photography and Cinema), he invited the younger writer to follow him, and then invited him to join him as an editor at the Odessa Film Factory in 1926. By then, Ianovskyi was a fairly seasoned writer, at least for his generation: his first short story collection *Mamutovi Byvni* [Mammoth Tusks] was published in 1925, with *Krov Zemli* [Earth's Blood] following in 1927.

Ianovskyi's luck did not stop at fortuitous literary acquaintances. He had a rather unpropitious biography: he fought in the ranks of the short-lived Ukrainian People's Republic, belonged to the largely repressed milieu of VAPLITE (he was an active contributor to *Literaturnyi Iarmarok* and *Universalnyi Zhurnal*, among other journals that were forced to close for failing to toe the party line), and developed aesthetics that strayed far from the increasingly dominant Socialist Realist art engagé, yet he not only survived the purges of the 1930s, but eventually came to occupy a prominent position in the Soviet Ukrainian literary canon through all its inconsistent permutations (with changing selections of texts). He even received the Stalin Prize in 1949 for a rather inferior work (in all likelihood, the prize was actually for lifetime achievement). The luck ran out in the 1950s, when a misdiagnosis led to his untimely death, but he had, all things considered, a career rivaled by few writers of his generation.

Ianovskyi's 1928 novel *Maister Korablia*, one of his most famous and most formally innovative works, evokes his experience as the chief editor at the Odessa Film

Studio in 1925-26, the setting which he later described as “the Hollywood on the Black Sea coast.” The novel, unencumbered by the trappings of a conventional plot, is somewhat hard to summarize. It consists, roughly, of two temporal planes (ruptured further by about a dozen framed narratives included in each part). It is bracketed with scenes in which the first-person narrator as an old man and a successful film director known only as To-Ma-Ki (*Tovarysh Maister Kino*, the Comrade Master of Cinema: the highest distinction in cinematography in this futuristic world) reminisces about his youth at the Odessa Film Studio in the 1920s. His sons occasionally visit and interrupt the narrative by adding their commentaries to the manuscript: one son is a writer, and his comments mostly explore the nature of autobiographical writing as opposed to fiction; the other is a pilot and is highly nihilistic towards traditional artworks. The memoir, meanwhile, follows the protagonist’s early years as a fledgling scriptwriter at the Odessa Film Studio, where he met an ambitious young director (widely believed to be modeled on Oleksandr Dovzhenko, who was shooting *Love’s Berries* and *The Diplomatic Pouch* in Odessa during Yanovskyi’s tenure there), unsuccessfully courted a glamorous ballerina (widely believed to be modeled on the actor and dancer Ida Penzo, who worked at the Odessa Opera and starred in Dovzhenko’s *The Diplomatic Pouch*), helped to film a movie (widely believed to be roughly modeled on *The Diplomatic Pouch*: see, for example, the episode with the visit of a Turkish dignitary to the set), was dragged into a somewhat operatic love quadrangle, saved a sailor lost at sea, and told as well as heard a number of picaresque framed stories about pirates, seafaring storytellers, daring escapes, thwarted lovers, and more.

Thematically, it is of interest to readers intrigued by the atmosphere of Ukrainian artistic milieu of the time, and, moreover, it has earned its place in the history of Ukrainian literature as one of the earliest and most prominent marine works. The poet Ievhen Malaniuk described it as the novel that “discovered and conquered the sea” for this literature (Malaniuk 1997: 325); parenthetically, it comes as no surprise that there was a revival of interest in *The Master of the Ship* after the annexation of Crimea in 2014: having lost access to a significant part of the country’s sea shore, Ukrainian readers craved symbolic reinforcements of Ukraine’s status as a maritime country. However, the thematic level is hardly the most interesting aspect of *The Master of the Ship*.

4.2.1 Memoirs as an Open Structure

In the very first lines of the novel, the narrating I and the narrated I are introduced as contiguous but hardly continuous: “Grey hair comes with obligations ... My life, rich in experience, lies in front of me like a map of my Republic” [Сиве волосся до чогось зобов'язує ... Багате досвідом життя лежить переді мною, як рельєфна мапа моєї Республіки] (Ianovskyi 1954: 9). While there is a certain contiguity between the identities functioning in these two temporal planes, continuity is lacking: with the protagonist describing his life experience as a map, it is implied that the past is externalized and alienated from, although still accessible to him; the difference between the narrator and his narrated persona, too, is stressed from the very start (obligations versus propensity for daring adventures, mature reflections versus jejune folly, etc.). In seeking to colonize the alien wilderness of his past by compiling a memoir, the

protagonist treats life writing as a mode of perception rather than a creative endeavor, with aesthetic or rhetorical considerations apparently being secondary to cognitive factors. Aside from analytical and rhetorical protocols aiding cognition of the past, another important theme of the novel is implicit in the mode of representing time through spatial metaphors (life like a map). Although not defined as such in those first paragraphs, it appears as homage to the cinematic medium, where duration of actions was customarily describes in terms of the length of film needed to shoot it. For example, in his later essay about cinematography Ianovskyi described a director discussing montage as follows: “Five meters of this emotion might kill a viewer ... an extra quarter of a meter destroys the entire rhythm of the episode” [П’ять метрів цієї емоції можуть убити глядача ... від зайвої чверті метра руйнується весь ритм епізоду] (Ianovskyi 2006: 307). Obviously, he is dealing essentially with a temporal experience, but the medium specificity dictates spatial imagery. Therefore, the novel is consistently preoccupied with (a) the influence of new (at the time) media on style as well as cognitive patterns; (b) the possibility of synthesizing expressive possibilities of different media.

The memoir describing the protagonist’s time at the Odessa film studio some half a century prior to the time of writing is narrated in the present tense, and implies relations of contemporaneity with the implied addressee (for example, the narrator often indulges in rhetorical questions that presuppose the presence of an audience).

In fact, the suspension of the need to provide a non-contradictory continuous chronotope is treated like one of the benefits of life writing as opposed to tenets of positivist realistic fiction. At one point, the memoir manuscript is interrupted by notes left

by the protagonist's son Henry, himself a writer. This character exists largely to justify additions of lengthy metatextual comments about the changing modes for dealing with gaps and discontinuities in the text's chronotope, and the divergent strategies of fiction writers and autobiographers in this regard. For example, Henry comments on the need to avoid artificial transitions between scenes:

At this point in the memoir you need to state that 'two weeks had passed.' But you have previous experience when you wrote real novels, and this experience might help you to avoid the blasted phrase. In your memoir, there's a ship being built. Two characters are in a hospital ... You need two extra weeks to figure out their health: will they die? Will they heal? Then you need time to either finish the construction of the brig or to destroy it ... You'll find a way around writing 'Two weeks had passed.' You might insert a chapter about the origins of water or the influence that the sea has on human psyche, a chapter on fishing in prehistoric peoples or the state of affairs at the film studio.⁶³ (p. 202)

(In point of fact, the memoirist inserts a lengthy treatise on the kinds of wood used in ship construction, although at a different, earlier point in the narrative, and largely as a way to synthesize different genres rather than to avoid stating that some time had indeed passed.) The protagonist, however, makes light of his son's suggestions about rendering the passage of time in a novelistic fashion. The son is preoccupied with obscuring the artificial constructed nature of the narrative; the father, by contrast, flaunts it, even if memoirs, with their ostensibly representational nature, might conceivably shy away from accusation in "constructedness." The structure of *The Master of the Ship* makes an argument that life writing, which allows the writer to thematize the mechanics

⁶³ "Саме в цім місці мемуарів треба написати: минуло два тижні. Але в тебе є попередня практика, коли ти писав справжні романи, і ця практика тебе може зарадить, як поминути прокляту фразу. У тебе будеться корабель. Двоє героїв лежать у лікарні ... Мінімум два тижні треба пільгових на те, щоб вияснити стан здоров'я героїв — помруть вони чи видужають. Тоді потрібний час на те, щоб будова брига закінчувалася, або, може, щоб цю роботу було знищено. ... ти якось скомбінуєш, щоб не написати фрази: "Минуло два тижні". Ти можеш дати розділ про походження води і про вплив моря на психіку, розділ про рибальство доісторичних народів, про справи на кінофабриці."

of story construction and, to a degree, to make its audience complicit in the work's creation, is more of an open structure than conventionally realist fiction. This resonates with Phyllis Frus McCord's argument in her article "A specter viewed by a specter:" she maintained that, due to their inherently metatextual dimension ("telling the story of how the text has come into existence"), autobiographies are implicitly a less positivist form than, say, biographies which rely on conventions of history as their precursor, dependent on realistic representation of the world as "objectively present to the viewer" and on the chronological causal progression of events (McCord 1986: 220-21). To an extent, the Ianovskyi's attempts to emancipate referential life writing from both literary and documentary conventions echo the contemporary discussions around cinema. At the time, Ukrainian cinema was largely dominated by panfuturists who prioritized and lionized facts, and valued cinema precisely insofar as it offered closer adherence to facts (see Tsymbal 2014: 199). Ianovskyi, however, seems to argue that referentiality is not straightforward as a naïve understanding would imply, and neither cinema nor life writing map past events on 1:1 scale.

Indeed, the perceived differences between life writing and writing fiction are one of the central themes of the novel. The protagonist often emphasizes distinctions between the two, often within the context of outlining the strategies he expected of his eventual readership:

I do not intend to bow to novelistic practices when writing my memoirs ... I'm not writing a novel now. I am writing a memoir ... Maybe I do not want to put an intricate

beautiful structure on display, but would rather offer building blocks that each reader could use to erect their own halls of artistic influence.”⁶⁴

He maintains that fiction writers are primarily preoccupied with imagining their readers’ reactions, and the works’ structure is dictated by the need to keep the readers’ eyes peeled to the page. This view presupposes a passive audience that follows authorial clues, whereas his idealized mode of life writing lays bare the semantic and pragmatic dimension of the text’s scaffolding, initiating readers as co-creators who can retrace the writer’s reasoning, decenter the work’s structure, and reconfigure its constitutive details into new structures, not necessarily predicted by the empirical author. (It is worth noting that Ianovskyi was not alone in formalist circles in this belief; in his 1929 review of *The Master of the Ship*, the critic Borys Iakubskyi mentioned that “One should honestly voice a sad but honest thought that lately memoirs, letters and diaries offer a better read than novels ... Utopian and adventure novels became trite and repetitive in their plots and structure;” Iakubskyi 2002: 264.) The work whose unity is predicated on the referential figure of autobiographical protagonist supposedly allows for generic multiplicity, offering the older memoirist an opportunity to deconstructs generic expectations and explore how recognizable topoi limit the parameters of readers’ engagement with the work. The image of the sea becomes a symbol of the difference between fiction and life writing. In a discussion with the director based on Dovzhenko, the protagonist mentions that the sea is gorgeous, “Of only it were not painted with blue paint and pretty epithets” [Коли б тільки його не змальовували синьою фарбою і красивими епітетами] (р.

⁶⁴ “Я не збираюся, пишучи мемуари, коритися практиці писання романів ... Тепер я не пишу роману. Я пишу мемуари ... Я, може, не хочу показувати красивої, витонченої будівлі, а хочу так дати матеріал, щоб у кожного читача виріс в уяві свій окремих будинок художнього впливу.”

52); both instantly start recounting the ready-made symbols meant to evoke the sea's magnificence (white sails, the cries of seagulls, "a bronzed and gentle sailor who absolutely has to fall for a tanned daughter of India") and limit it to a narrow set of conventions. This dialogue is a counterpoint to a slightly earlier episode when the narrator chides readers who might be losing patience with his perennial digressions:

May heavens forbid those who suspect me of constantly veering off the wide path. I never liked walking along roads. This is why I love seas, where each path is new, and every place is a path.⁶⁵ (p. 38)

So that no reader misses a metaphor, the paragraph is followed in quick succession by the renunciation of novelists' *métier* quoted above. The image of his sons who keep padding up the memoir manuscript with their meddling notes models the challenges in the reception of experimental prose by readers who are not yet schooled in its conventions. (It comes as no surprise to anyone with so much as a modicum of familiarity with the literary scene of the time that *The Master of the Ship* was not well-received by contemporary critics: the novel was critiqued for everything from "romantic psychological leanings" or the fact that the ballerina seemed to be modeled on "European bourgeois" novels to outright pretentiousness.) The protagonist's older son, a pilot by the name of Mike, offers "Зауваження пілота" (*Pilot's notes*): a bird's eye view of a naïve reader with little appreciation for the technical dimension of the text who follows the plot twists with baited breath and prioritizes the referential aspect of a memoir. He tries to guess whether the ballerina of the memoir could be his mother, and, having guessed that the prototype of one character has now been immortalized in a monument, states that "I

⁶⁵ "Хай простить тому небо, хто підозрює мене в постійному ухилянні вбік з широкої дороги. Я ніколи не любив ходити по дорогах. Тому я й люблю море, що на ньому кожна дорога нова, і кожне місце – дорога."

would like to finish reading your memoir, dad, I'm curious how bronze used to be a living body" [Я хотів би дочитати твої спогади, тату, мене цікавить, як бронза була колись живим тілом] (p. 89). The younger son, a writer by the name of Henry, offers "Зауваження письменника" (*Writer's notes*) discussed above; he manifests a higher awareness of the fact that even texts billed as referential are not straightforward representations of facts and require extensive reconfiguration, but is too prescriptive in his expectations⁶⁶. Unlike these two, the ideal reader envisioned in this metatextual passages is supposed to find joy precisely in grasping how the text is constructed, and how it operates with the facts for its own purposes.

Ianovskyi described a possible source of this affection for laying bare the scaffolding of narrative in his note entitled "My Latest Book," solicited by *Universalnyi Zhurnal* magazine (January 1929, #3) which regularly asked scores of writers to submit short essays on given topics pertaining to their works. Ianovskyi's contribution to the journal was written not long after the publication of *Master of the Ship* (Ianovskyi admits to not being quite happy with the published novel), and this appears as a commentary on the very issues that occupied him when working on the novel. In his writerly *profession de foi*, Ianovskyi insists:

I don't consider myself a writer. I feel more proximity to the job that only two years of studies separated me from: the job of a constructor engineer [he studied at the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute in 1922-23] ... As an honest worker, I want to be a master and a constructor engineer even now. I study the complicated formula of human relations, review the formula of advanced math and, to my horror, realize that we need even more

⁶⁶ It is not outside the realm of the possible that the sons might be a tribute to the writer Mike Johansen, a notoriously sporty figure known, among other things, for a treatise "Як будується оповідання" [How to construct a short story], reminiscent of the writer's notes yet in marked contrast with his much more experimental formalistic prose.

advanced math to bring the unbelievable equations of human ways to the lowest terms.⁶⁷
(p. 44)

These parallels between writer's *métier* and engineer's work can hardly be limited to purely biographical fact of Ianovskyi's time studying in the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute: they are also obviously evocative of the key precepts of literary constructivism. Indeed, Ianovskyi is often hailed as one of the most prominent representatives of the (relatively little-developed, compared to more extensive formalist experiments in Russia) Ukrainian literary constructivism, which inherited its aesthetic principles from futurists and expressionists, its most immediate predecessors (see Bila 2006: 213-5). Ianovskyi's proximity to constructivists is particularly prominent in *The Master of the Ship*. It bears traces of the constructivist search for synthetic genres, combining memoirs, literary and art criticism, aphorisms and short stories, in a mode similar to Valerian Polishchuk's works that consistently pushed the boundaries of well-defined genres (ibid., p. 237). Given Ianovskyi's (or at least his protagonist's) belief in the essential structural openness of life writing (as opposed to fiction, which is hedged in by conventions and readerly expectations), memoirs and autobiographies are offered up as a potential synthetic form of the future. The locus from which the narration comes in the novel is placed in the futurist panorama of the 1970s as imagined in the late 1920s.

In *The Master of the Ship*, Ianovskyi emphasized not only the technical dimension of text construction but also the craftsmanship of art, as opposed to romantic notions of

⁶⁷ “Я не вважаю себе за письменника. І мені ближчий той фах, від котрого мене колись відокремлювало лише два роки науки, - фах інженіра-конструктора ... Проте я, як чесний робітник, хочу і тепер бути майстром та інженіром-конструктором. Я вивчаю складні формули людських взаємин, я пригадую формули вищої математики і з жахом констатую, що треба математики ще вищої, щоб можна було спрощувати неймовірні порівняння людських шляхів”.

individual inspiration. The individual artist creates in tandem with the tools of his trade, with the technical means almost taking on the will of their own and eventually affecting the work:

Above all, I love the hands of artists. Oh quill and paintbrush, oh knife and axe, oh you, a talented hammer! Do you know that the hand holding you passes the fire of life through you? It will die, this restless hand, but its works will live on. It hastens on, implementing human will.⁶⁸ (p. 56)

This emphasis on the transformative and productive power of craftsmanship and the motif of the technical medium affecting the form and meaning of art works (such as introduction of stereotypically cinematographic tropes, like montage in the form of framed narratives, or contrasting planes, into fiction) underscores another important aspect of *The Master of the Ship*: namely, the pervasive parallels between life writing and cinematography.

4.2.2 Life Writing as Directing

Georges Gusdorf somewhat reductively argued that “autobiography is not possible in a cultural landscape where consciousness of self does not, properly speaking, exist” (Gusdorf 1980: 30): autobiographies require individualism, “a conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life.” I wouldn’t necessarily go so far as Jochen Hellbeck in *Revolution on My Mind*, where he maintains that Soviet subjects largely relinquished their pursuit of autonomy and privacy in favour of inscribing themselves into a transformative collective project, resulting in life writing that was in fact a sort of

⁶⁸ Найбільше мені до вподоби руки творців. Перо і пензель, ніж і сокира, талановитий молоток! Чи знаєте ви, що рука, яка вас тримає, передає через вас вогонь життя? Вона вмире – ця невгамовна рука, а витвори її житимуть. Вона поспішає, виконує волю людини.

self-abnegation, even in its most private forms (see Hellbeck 2006: 2-5). However, this trend, which, it is worth noting, preceded Stalin's coming to power, did in fact leave a mark, rendering older forms of autobiographies progressively less viable, both for symbolic and purely pragmatic reasons. The awareness of this drive towards literary collectivization is evident in Iurii Ianovskiy's contemporary attempts to reframe *The Master of the Ship* as something far more aesthetically innocuous than it actually was. Deeply conscious of the criticism leveled against his novel (and of its possible practical repercussions), Ianovskiy began his introduction to it in his foreword to his first collected works edition (*Rukh*, volume 1, 1932) with deeply loyalist statements that bear little generic resemblance to the work as such: "We are absolutely certain and firm in our belief that Soviet literature ideologically dwarfs all other world literatures. Becoming the literature of the triumphant proletariat class, it unfolds the banners that would stream over the world" (Ianovskiy 1983: 223). (His introduction to better-accepted works in the same collection does not feature such proclamations, hinting at a conscious strategy for a problematic text.) He carefully reminded his implied readers wielding red pens that the novel had received favourable, if not outright ecstatic reviews in the workers' newspaper *Proletar*. Anonymous readers apparently wrote in to say that the lovingly particular description of the construction of the ship in the novel is rife with so many details that it seems like the author himself had worked at carpenter's bench; another worker of the shipping department of a Kramatorsk factory apparently mentioned that he brought the novel to his workplace, and called on workers to work as passionately as the novel's protagonists (ibid., 226). Therefore, Ianovskiy seems to argue, rather than a highly

individualized aesthetic project, *The Master of the Ship* was a perfectly functional cog in the machine of industrialization (and engineering workers' souls).

However, this mode of coercive self-fashioning, of which Ianovskyi was well aware, is hardly the only reason for a programmatically fragmented life writing strategy outlined in *The Master of the Ship*. The novel, written soon after the writer concluded his tenure as an editor at the Odessa Film Studio, is affected by his experience in the cinema industry, which is both more collaborative than writing and introduces its own arsenal of technical means. Critics noted the parallels between Ianovskyi's prose and the formal repertoire of the 1920s cinema even before *The Master of the Ship*, where the parallels became programmatic and impossible to miss: for example, in his review of Ianovskyi's earlier short story, the critic Borys Iakubskyi compared it to a film shot in slow motion, where racing horses hover through the air like giant strange fish (quoted from Panchenko 2002: 289). Ianovskyi's first short story collection *Mamutovi byvni* [Mammoth's Tusks] already featured scriptwriters as its characters, and attempted to imitate montage in its prose. Ianovskyi was hardly unique in these attempts to combine the tropes of different media: many writers worked both on scripts and on novels, leading to the cross-pollination of the two (for example, Mike Iohansen co-wrote the script for Dovzhenko's 1928 film *Zvenyhora*), and some writers experimented with "кіноромани"/cinemanovels (see Leonid Skrypnyk's "filmed novel" *Intelihent*, framed with passages describing a viewer's experience sitting in the cinema and watching the ekphrastically described movie that follows the novel's plot). Panfuturists, led by the poet Mykhail Semenko (who worked as an editor at the Odessa Film Studio and invited the younger Ianovskyi to join

him), proclaimed the death of olden-day art, with gradual dissolution of outdated subsystems and the intermingling of the remaining media. For futurists, cinema became the much-coveted integral meta-art, balancing between photography, theatre and literature (see Tsybal 2014: 197-8). However, it is more than likely that nobody described the parallels between cinematic and autobiographical practices more insistently than Ianovskyi.

In many respects, Ianovskyi drew parallels between cinema's overall trajectory (as he imagined it from the limited vantage point of the mid-1920s) and the demands and possibilities of life writing. In an early scene in *The Master of the Ship*, the protagonist, then a fledgling scriptwriter and editor, had a tense meeting over an editing table with the director who had just finished shooting a movie based on his debut script. The meeting is rife with conflict: perceiving the director's interpretation as an offence against the integrity his vision as a writer, the protagonist described how he was tempted to get some actors drunk to make them drop their contrived manners, or to give yet others extensive instructions on how they should act (p. 31). He exhibited, that is, the behaviour that he came to condemn as the controlling grip of fiction writers, who do not endow their texts with spaces of indeterminacy which allow readers to become co-creators, or at least to gain deeper awareness of the text's functioning. These two conflicting impulses – the illusion of total artistic control versus allowing readers to build “their own palace of artistic influence” – are thematized in the discussion about the respective roles of directors and scriptwriters in the industry:

At the time this issue – director versus author – was very pressing. Proponents of each category fought hard. They didn't reach an agreement at that stage. Well, it wasn't an

agreement so much as understanding the laws of cinema. It might be strange to think about it now: didn't scriptwriters know what they were writing for?⁶⁹ (p.28)

The young scriptwriter who had not yet grasped “the laws of cinema” argued that art was solipsist by its very nature, and the imposition of a readerly (or director's, as the case might be) interpretation was imbued with violence: the director “twisted the head off his colt and tried to sew it on in a different position” (p. 29). However, the antagonistic and productive relationship between directors and scriptwriters eventually encourages him to reflect on the relationship between the contradictory impulses of a novel-writer and a memoirist as described in the novel, or between a writer and his readers (here represented by his meddling sons who keep adding suggestions to his growing manuscript). Like a director, a memoirist works within given parameters (the director has to contend with the script, whereas a memoirist is constrained by the factuality of events he is representing). Both life writing and films purport to be indexical signs of something that existed objectively, whether biographical facts or actors playing out the script. However, for these facts to enter a new medium (a film or a text), both the script as played out by actors and the biographical events have to pass through the lens of artistic interpretation which eventually determines the style of montage, composition, or the length of scenes, to name but a few choices. The issue lies primarily in whether the addressees would be made aware of the element of artifice inherent in the process, or if the mystification of veracity would be allowed to persist. Obviously, Ianovskyi

⁶⁹ “Тоді питання це — режисер і автор — стояло дуже гостро. Багато списів поламали прихильники однієї й другої групи. Але до згоди тоді ще не прийшли. Власне, не до згоди, а до розуміння законів кінематографії. Нам це дивно й згадувати тепер — невже сценаристи не знали, для чого вони пишуть?”

prioritized the former, which led to his discontent with the direction cinema seemed to have taken.

The writer often, and most notably in his 1930 essay “Hollywood on the Black Sea Coast,” professed nostalgia for silent cinema, where the set was permeable with outside life, the voices of workers, the shuffling of visitors, thus laying its making bare. In his opinion, the emergence of sound cinema meant that directors gained more power over how scripts would be recast in production, creating a more controlled experience for the addressee, and making the walls between the set and the world outside impermeable (Ianovskyi 2006: 301). In *The Master of the Ship*, Ianovskyi theorized that cinema would become progressively more life-like, banishing specifically those things that used to denote its medium specificity (lighting as its integral part, makeup as a mask), almost merging with a performance piece in a cunning illusion of authenticity:

The present [the imagined 1970s of the older narrator’s timeline] ‘film direction’ knows no lighting technicians and all the troubles they bring. Now actors inhabit decorations for the entire duration of the production, and the director’s team needs no prop masters or costume designers. Makeup specialists, too, became obsolete: sensitive film banned makeup.⁷⁰ (p. 35)

The whole subsequent text of *The Master of the Ship* implicitly argues against the sagacity of this totalizing performance. With the actors living on set and inhabiting their roles for the entire duration of the shooting process, films would, in a sense, document the actors’ lives. However, since the most obvious signs of creative artifice (makeup, lighting that constitutes the very medium of cinema) would be banished, the viewers

⁷⁰ “Теперішня “режисерія фільму” не знає зовсім освітлювачів і всіх неприємностей, що з ними зв’язані. Тепер у нас актор живе в декораціях під час усього ставлення картини — не треба костюмерів і реквізиторів до режисерської групи. Зайві також гримери, бо чутлива плівка заборонила грим.”

would supposedly be enthralled with an illusion, kept in the dark about its craft. The protagonist's memoir about the making of the movie in the 1920s offers a counterpoint to this technical trickery, demonstrating both the manipulations and constructions necessary to make a film, and the manipulations necessary for life writing, yet often unnoticed in it. By virtue of this insistence of unmasking the text's scaffolding, the memoir becomes an open structure; the relationship between the memoir and its imagined readership is akin to that of a writer and a director producing a movie version of his book.

Describing life writing as a form not altogether dissimilar from cinema in its ostensible although not altogether unproblematic referentiality, Ianovskyi created spaces for his readers to question their assumptions about the authenticity of either form. In examining the constitutive elements of each, readers were supposed to take on a more active stance in consuming and recreating artworks, becoming subjects of the aesthetic experience rather than a blank canvass across which it were to play out. This project, of course, does not quite align with the notion of a writer as an engineer of souls, which presupposes that readers are passive objects of manipulations: rather, if anything, it sought to raise a cohort of fellow engineers.

Conclusions

There is a strong temptation to envision the history of national literature as a cohesive continuity. However, under certain circumstances discontinuities, ambiguities and conflicts provide a much clearer and richer panorama of literary history. In my dissertation, I made just such an attempt to outline a history of formal and thematic landmarks in modern Ukrainian literature through the lens of formal shifts and discontinuities in various forms of life writing—familiar letters, memoirs, meta-autobiographical novels, and more—primarily from the first half of the 20th century (with necessary excursions into both the earlier decades and to the present-day situation). Certain patterns of discontinuities, repeatedly surfacing in texts of a given era to serve, for one, as beacons warning readers off the shallows of readymade grand narratives, map out the literary and intellectual scene of the time. I have demonstrated, I hope, how these enigmatic narrative strategies, ostensibly plunging texts into semantic indeterminacy, become the sites of meaning production, and, occasionally, the sites of resistance.

Far from being traumatic or destructive, textual fragmentation becomes a productive strategy, creating (otherwise scarce) spaces for hybridized identities and novel forms necessary for the cognition and representation of emergent or underrepresented subjectivities in the process of formation. These subjectivities might include women intellectuals discontent with traditional feminine roles and modes of self-expression (as in *The Princess* by Olha Kobylianska, chapter 4), writers repressed during the Great Terror

of the 1930s or civilian population that remained on Nazi-occupied territories during World War II (as in *The Enchanted Desna* by Oleksandr Dovzhenko, chapter 3). Formal discontinuities in autobiographical texts also invite their ideal addressees to explore the dominant narrative conventions that structure and define lived experience in any given era (as in *The Master of the Ship* by Iurii Ianovskyyi in chapter 4 or as in avant-garde responses to early Soviet bureaucratic forms of life writing, treated in chapter 2), making them more resistant to attempts to establish any grand historical narrative into which they might have been drafted or inscribed.

The volume of texts analyzed here might conceivably (and productively) be expanded; one obvious option is offered by protocols of interrogations from the 1930s, and their particular demands regarding genre, rhetoric and self-fashioning. For the generation of artists that largely perished during the Great Terror, genre choices were limited: no matter what genre or form they began in (sonnets, experimental formalist novels or plays), their last work, dictated by security officers, tended to take the form of a political thriller, with the artist perjuring him- or herself by describing their involvement in a (usually fictitious) terrorist organization colluding against the Soviet authorities. Iakiv Kalnytskyi, an otherwise stereotypical Socialist Realist writer, provided a rare exception, spinning a mystical yarn best described as alternative history (the full text of his statement can be found in Ushkalov 2010: 292-296). Unwilling to perjure anybody from his immediate surroundings, he described being approached by a foreign agitator by the name of Sabbatai Zevi: being less versed in Jewish messianic movements, his interrogators didn't recognize the teachings or the name of the 17th century kabbalist.

The obvious interpretative problem with this corpus of texts though is posed by the fact that, short of cameos of 17th-century messianic figures, it is not necessarily possible to determine to what extent any given text was generated by its signee; a significant portion might have been provided wholesale.

The texts produced by writers of other ethnicities (writing in Ukrainian or other languages of the region; Yiddish is the most immediately obvious example, especially given that Kyiv was the hub of Yiddish-language literary and artistic modernism in 1918-1920), too, might yield interesting examples this strategy as writers negotiated their position among neighbouring cultures, siding either with the dominant option (for the period under consideration, that was Russian) or with other marginalized groups as an anti-imperial choice (for interesting examples of Jewish writers negotiating a Jewish-Ukrainian identity, see Petrovsky-Shtern 2009: 1-23).

Contradiction- and discontinuities-ridden life writing mapped the spaces on the margins, where divergent cultural scenarios met, and clashed, and cross-pollinated, denying easy generalizations. The ambiguities inherent in these texts provided fertile soil for hybridized subjectivities that operate not on the principle of either-or, but rather on the both-and. The margins often prove to be the most dangerous place; yet it is equally true that they just might also be the most interesting.

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