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Rules of Disengagement:
Author, Audience, and Experimentation in Ukrainian and Russian Literature of the 1970s and 1980s

A dissertation presented

by

Oleh Kotsyuba

to

The Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

Slavic Languages and Literatures

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Abstract

Is there a direct correlation between the degree of an artist's participation in ideologically defined discursive practices and the aesthetic value and expressive innovation of her or his work? How does the concept of the implied audience influence an author's approach to the creative process? How relevant is the author's own self-projection in her or his works to their aesthetic quality? Examining these and other questions, this dissertation studies the strategies of an artist's engagement with or disengagement from repressive political systems which are understood here as mechanisms of putting forward demands regarding the artist's creative output.

Questions of late Socialist Realism and its national variants, ideological art, kitsch, mass literature, *narodnytstvo* (populism), "chimerical" ("whimsical") prose, totalitarian culture, *shistdesiatnytstvo* (movement of the generation of the 1960s), and cultural heritage define the theoretical framework of the dissertation. The study discusses the period of the 1970s and 1980s in the Soviet Union, focusing on Ukrainian literature and its dynamics during the Stagnation Era and perestroika. Examples from Russian literature test the argument and provide opportunities for comparative analysis. Within Ukrainian literature of the 1970s and 1980s, the dissertation examines the prose works of Valerii Shevchuk and Volodymyr Drozd and poetry of Petro Midianka and Oleh Lysheha. Within Russian literature, the study discusses Liudmila Petrushevskaia's prose works and Elena Shvarts's poetry. The authors and their works illustrate the range of possible

attitudes towards participation in the system of Soviet cultural production. Close readings of the authors' representative works demonstrate how complex negotiations with the system are reflected in the aesthetic quality and expressive ability of literary works. The dissertation shows the significance of the author's concept of the implied audience and her or his own self-projection as an author for the creative process and its outcome.

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Introduction

The primary interest of my study lies in examining the strategies of an artist's engagement with or disengagement from a repressive political system that imposes restrictions onto the artist's creative autonomy. These restrictions are often imposed either as formal demands to the content and style of artistic production or as a more abstract set of expectations towards the artist's engagement in the affirmation of the political system, while a range of intermediary phenomena exist as well. Depending on the kind of restriction, its enforcement can occur in forms that range from coercion and prosecution to censorship and exclusion from the public domain. Artists often develop different strategies of dealing with such demands: while some conform (fully or only partially, frequently exercising self-censorship) and thus engage in a dialogue with the repressive system, others resist participation and seek alternative forms and modes of existence as an artist. I believe that the nature of such strategies has far-reaching consequences for the aesthetic quality of the artist's work. The question I seek to answer is whether there is a direct correlation between the degree of an artist's disengagement from the political system and a higher aesthetic quality of her or his works of art. In examining this question, I focus on literature and literary process.

This question necessarily touches upon the nature of the ideological art, which I discuss by turning to the theoretical elucidations of the representatives of the Prague School - Mojmír Grygar and Jan Mukařovský (see Chapter Two on Volodymyr Drozd). I frame this discussion through the concepts of literary consciousness (or poetic self-consciousness) and literary norm. Equally important are discussions of the strive for

expressiveness as the main force for artistic development, autonomy of the artistic developmental "series" vis-à-vis other developmental series (that is, for instance, ideology, politics, economics, and science), and aesthetic and developmental value of the work of art.

Further, I am interested in the significance of an author's concept of implied audience and the impact of her or his self-positioning in relation to this audience on the aesthetic quality of a literary work. The range of possibilities for such concepts can go from as broad as mass audience and to as narrow as the author's closest circle of friends, or the author herself or himself. In accordance with the concept of the implied audience, the author can assume a position that projects the monumentality of a prophet who addresses her or his faithful believers with an apocalyptic message, or reflect the concrete physicality of a close friend who engages in a self-reflective conversation in an intimate setting. I examine this authorial stance by a combination of close readings of prose and poetry that indicate respective concepts of the authorial self-understanding and the implied audience. Where relevant, I also include interviews, memoirs, and recollections.

The period which I consider for these questions encompasses the 1970s and the 1980s. The former is known for the return of the repressive censorship as the Stagnation Period under Brezhnev. The latter was marked by a gradual liberalization and relaxation of the political climate that concluded with Gorbachev's *perestroika* and later culminated in the collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishing of the former Soviet republics as independent nation-states. I am primarily interested in the particular cultural situation in Soviet Ukraine and in the possibilities for its critical assessment that a comparison with Soviet Russia provides. For this reason, I examine four Ukrainian and two Russian

writers and poets. I consider primarily those authors whose contribution to the development of their respective literature was remarkable, as well as those who enjoyed or continue to enjoy influence and popularity as writers and poets. Therefore, for the Ukrainian context I analyze the works of the prominent prose writers Valerii Shevchuk and Volodymyr Drozd and outstanding poets Oleh Lysheha and Petro Midianka. For the Russian context, I read the prose of Liudmila Petrushevskaia and the poetry of Elena Shvarts: they are considered today in Russia and abroad as two of the most interesting and influential Russian writers. Additionally, discussion of Petrushevskaia's and Shvarts's works allows me to examine the validity of gender question in the late Soviet context: while Petrushevskaia is strongly concerned with the fate of women, Shvarts focuses more on issues that are shared by all artists. These two provide different models of the woman writer, then, both of which have relevance to my readings of Ukrainian literature.

The question of aesthetic quality of a literary work is frequently connected with the extent of the author's experimentation in the face of the heritage of the predecessors she or he turns to. For this reason, I examine sources of inspiration and influence of each author. The extent of focusing on domestic literary tradition varies in the authors I study: while some rely predominantly on past achievements of their native literature (such as Valerii Shevchuk, Volodymyr Drozd, and Elena Shvarts), others turn to a wide canon of domestic and foreign authors (Petro Midianka and Liudmila Petrushevskaia), and yet others draw their inspiration primarily from foreign sources (Oleh Lysheha).

It is important to underscore that all writers who are discussed in my study see themselves as innovators within their given framework. Indeed, all of them were

innovators, but the extent of their innovation was significantly defined by the limits of the framework within which they were situated. As I show in my analysis, this framework for Valerii Shevchuk and Volodymyr Drozd is primarily delineated by the boundaries of Socialist Realism and populism, despite or perhaps because of their active engagement in an ideological struggle with the Soviet system in the 1970s and the 1980s. Using diverse strategies, all other authors that I consider disengage from the Soviet system to a varying degree. Oleh Lysheha stands out in this respect as he withdraws most radically from the Soviet society and culture: he looks for inspiration to American and English poets and thinkers (although he is also well-read in Ukrainian and Russian literature), and chooses life away from urban civilization, seeking employment that would allow him to satisfy his most basic material needs and which would simultaneously leave enough freedom for poetic creation. Elena Shvarts, too, withdraws from the public discourse but to a lesser extent: looking to poets of Russian modernism, she publishes her works in *samizdat* publications, participates in readings of her works in small circles in St. Petersburg, and manages to publish her works abroad when she is banned from publication in the Soviet Union. Liudmila Petrushevskaia believes in the importance of her works for a wide audience and undertakes a number of arduous efforts to get at least some of her works published in the Soviet Union. She does not fail entirely but nonetheless, eventually she turns to playwriting to reach a wider audience, and here she succeeds. Growing up in a family of Russian *intelligentsia*, she relies on a wealth of Russian and international literary models. Petro Midianka publishes later, already under the conditions of perestroika but even so he has to make concessions to the publisher to include marginal references to communist ideology in his poems. He creates a system of references that

includes Ukrainian modernist writers and poets who come from Transcarpathia, as well as Western artists and key Ukrainian thinkers, poets, writers and other cultural figures. Valerii Shevchuk joins the Ukrainian Writers' Union and gets his works published in the Soviet period, but makes significant concessions in terms of their ideological content. In their ideological impetus his works are most connected to the phenomenon of populism in Ukrainian literature. Similarly, Volodymyr Drozd, formerly a member of *shistdesiatnyky* (generation of the 1960s), capitulates before the demands of Socialist Realism and writes works that largely conform to the Soviet ideological agenda. The trajectories of these poets and writers exemplify a range of possibilities of participation or withdrawal from the "official" Soviet discourse, and those authors who manage to disengage from the system turn to alternative sources of artistic inspiration. These frameworks define the form and extent of their respective innovation.

A number of other questions underpin my discussion of the contribution of the authors named above. The most immediate questions concern the Ukrainian version of Socialist Realism and the Ukrainian *shistdesiatnytsvo*. A crucial feature of Socialist Realism was – and continues to be in its post-Soviet forms – the fact that ideological considerations came to dictate the artistic practice to an unprecedented degree. Thus the principle of artistic expressivity that usually motivates the process of artistic creativity was transposed by the "ideological principle" into the realm of political demands, severely limiting artistic freedom and possibilities. Expressivity and innovation, therefore, were considered within this truncated selection of poetic devices, as other devices were largely deemed "politically incorrect." Additionally, the Soviet state created conditions in which Russian literature dominated the canon (Parthé 291). Under such

conditions, expressivity was understandably defined by deviation from the ideological and Russian-centered discourse. Both the Ukrainian Socialist Realism and Ukrainian *shistdesiatnytstvo* cautiously tried to expand these boundaries, while at the same time not directly challenging the system that imposed them. The rare exception in this regard were some dissidents, such as Vasyl' Stus, who suffered severe repressions as a result.

Although the social, political, and economic reality of the world in which artistic activity was situated drastically changed with the establishment of Soviet rule in Ukraine and Russia, and these changes resulted in a shift in the expressive potential of the previous artistic epochs, the main change consisted in a significant distortion of and a shift *away* from the artistic value as the guiding principle of the artistic process. As Grygar notes, "[t]he egocentrism of a certain type of Realist aesthetics has attained its extreme expression in the official artistic doctrine of the Soviet Union – the aesthetics of Socialist Realism. According to this conception, any non-realistic tendency in the history of art represents a secondary or, in some cases, decadent developmental line" ("The Possibilities of a Structural Analysis of the Literary Process" 392). This, of course, is a change of a decisively different nature from the one seen before in transition from one to another artistic or literary developmental stage where the shift *within* the artistic sensitivity and thus expressiveness was the primary factor.

The introduction of Socialist Realism split literary production in two (if not more) parallel realities: in the foreground, there was politically motivated and state-sanctioned literature governed by the ideological doctrine, while in the background the artistic expressiveness retained its validity (at least for the writer), but was not allowed to dominate artistic production. The style of Socialist Realism, sanctioned and supported by

the state, dominated the state-run literary scene, while any diverging artistic experimentation was seen as an ideological challenge to the regime. Clearly, the separation between the two was never entirely complete and indeed a process of negotiation did take place (especially in the post-Stalin period) – cases of crossing over from one into another (usually, artistically outstanding works with a political message prone to ambiguous interpretation) were quite frequent. Tracing the origins of the Ukrainian form of Socialist Realism will crucially contribute to our understanding of late-Soviet and post-Soviet Ukrainian literature, and thus it is a question I treat in some detail. It is situated within the larger context of the existence of national forms of Socialist Realism and their relation to its all-Soviet/Russian form. As I show in my discussion of this phenomenon, there is a close connection between Ukrainian Socialist Realism and the Ukrainian populism (*narodnytstvo*) which crucially defines the development of the late Socialist Realism in Ukraine, especially approaching perestroika and independence (see Chapter One on Valerii Shevchuk).

Shistdesiatnytstvo played an important role in the process of reconfiguring of the Ukrainian Socialist Realist doctrine. Historically, this was the time of destalinization and Khrushchev "thaw" (the Thaw) that allowed for more artistic freedom. In the Ukrainian context, it translated into the emergence of a number of young writers with works that emphasized national topics – Ukrainian language, history, and culture in particular. Although they mostly remained within the constraints of Socialist Realism, their work represented artistic innovation within the Soviet system and a step away from the socialist realist style of writing. From this perspective, the extent to which the works of *shistdesiatnyky* represented a break with the literary tradition of Socialist Realism

provides insight into the question of continuity between Socialist Realism and the literature of the 1970s and the 1980s that was greatly influenced by *shistdesiatnyky* (both in terms of influence and rejection). This wavering continuity necessarily also invites an examination of the very term and its application to the group of people it came to represent. The definition of *shistdesiatnytstvo* is primarily rooted in the movement's members' political opposition to the Soviet regime. As early as 1962, however, due to increasing pressure from repressive agencies of the state, many writers begin to change their position and accommodate the Party's demands to return to the "riverbed of Socialist Realism." Most importantly, political opposition was not always realized as artistic freedom – or, to be more precise, artistic production that was directed against the Soviet regime was not less politically engaged (i.e., ideological, even if subscribing to a different – national – ideology) than literature encouraged or enforced by the regime.

In my study I engage this discussion primarily by problematizing the generational categorization of the Ukrainian literature after *shistdesiatnyky* (since such a categorization begins with them) (see Chapter Five on Petro Midianka). The generation of post-*shistdesiatnyky* was the only one that actively reacted to *shistdesiatnytsvo* (by rejecting it) by emphasizing aesthetic criteria for artistic production. Oleh Lysheha assumes a position on the border of this phenomenon (see his clandestine publication in *Skrynia*), but disengages entirely from it later. *Simdesiatnyky,* writers of the generation of the 1970s (if we were to follow the generational categorization), mostly poets who were either entirely banned from publishing their works until 1980s (Gorbachev's perestroika), represent a further challenge for analysis if viewed from the perspective of the chronological continuity. Their works were only partially published in the late 1960s (and

then again in the 1980s), and/or were published sporadically as *samvydav*.[1] These circumstances raise the question of the writers' participation in the literary process, of continuity, and of reception and legacy for the later generation of writers. Their works almost simultaneously reentered the literary process in the 1980s and significantly contributed to the overall enlivenment of the literary process. They also crucially influenced the young generation of the 1980s, the so-called *visimdesiatnyky*.

General observations for genre division seem also very productive here. In the poetry I analyze, the quality of artistic production was higher and the search for artistic expressiveness more daring than in prose. The latter was represented by the emergence of the so-called *khymerna proza* ("whimsical," "chimerical" prose) and a revival of the historical novel. As some scholars have argued, whimsical prose harked back to the low-brow literary and drama production of *kotliarevshchyna* in the sense that it presented a comic, ridiculous image of everything Ukrainian which it located culturally on the periphery (Pavlyshyn). The stylistic freedom of the whimsical prose thus was bought with the price of reaffirming these stereotypes about Ukrainians. Important features that connected literary production of this style with the tradition of Socialist Realism were persistent pathos and positivism, as well as a collective consciousness that penetrated both poetry and prose. While some authors sought to counteract the marginalization of the Ukrainian culture and nation (Shevchuk in particular), others embraced and heightened their marginality as an opportunity for creative freedom. The latter strategy yielded the most prolific and aesthetically outstanding literary works.

[1] The Ukrainian version of the phenomenon of *samizdat*, clandestine publications in the Soviet Union.

By demonstrating the vibrant innovation that was taking place during the Stagnation Period and before perestroika, I seek to challenge the notion suggested by some Ukrainian scholars that in the 1980s a "crisis of social consciousness" (*kryza suspil'noï svidomosti*) occurred (Morenets 94). In my view, the cultural and political changes of the late 1980s were in no way a spontaneous phenomenon, but instead were to a considerable degree prepared by the invisible yet ongoing work of writers and poets who maintained a connection to the achievements of modernism and developed them further.

In the second half of the 1980s, the process of reintroduction into Ukrainian literature of formerly banned works and their authors intensified; works of previously persecuted authors became available (publications of works by V. Stus, M. Petrenko, M. Samiilenko, I. Hnatiuk, H. Kochur).[2] A similar process was going on elsewhere in the Soviet Union, particularly in Russia. In addition, works of "post-*shistdesiatnyky*," members of the "Kyiv Poetry School," entered the public domain: V. Kordun, M. Vorobyov, M. Hryhoriv (as well as S. Chernilevs'kyi, V. Ruban, V. Illia, M. Sachenko, and some others). Thus Morenets' and others summarize the 1980s as the birth (return) of the "subject of poetic conceptualization" (*sub"iekt poetychnoho osmyslennia*), the "individual in all unrepeatability of thought and perceiving the world" (ibid. 95; note the characteristic pathos of this statement). Other scholars pointed also to the event of the Chornobyl' catastrophe as one of the defining moments of the "new mindset"; for them, the new Ukrainian literature was a "post-Chornobyl" literature (Tamara Hundorova).

[2] Later, this will give rise to defining some of the post-Soviet Ukrainian literature as "neo-modernist."

Therefore, many literary scholars see in the 1980s the "return to the very artistic essence that presupposes the primacy of the aesthetic criteria" and a high variety of poetic genres (ibid.). This is true to some extent, yet prose works by influential Soviet authors structurally retained major characteristics of the style of Socialist Realism. Others looked back to their populist (*narodyts'ki*) precursors, introducing only some minor changes to their writing (mostly broadening the thematic scope that now included national history and myths of identity, but not significantly changing their style). For this reason a study of the works of the representatives of the late Socialist Realism – a period now largely abandoned in both Ukrainian and Russian literary scholarship – deserves our renewed attention. We simply do not yet understand, or much less appreciate the pathways of influence and continuity that were running alongside the many new forms of aesthetic innovation.

Turning to challenges of a study like mine, I would like to underscore that the Ukrainian authors discussed in my examination remain outside of the scholarly debate in Ukrainian literary study. On the one hand this is due to a deep crisis that the post-Soviet humanities experienced in all former Soviet republics. On the other hand, most active and productive literary scholars have turned their energy to analyzing works that were previously excluded from the Ukrainian canon, most notably by representatives of the Ukrainian modernism. As Taras Koznarsky writes, Ukrainian literary scholarship turned its attention to filling the "blank spots" in the study of Ukrainian literature: the Ukrainian Baroque and generally early modern culture; revision of major "classics" such as Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko or Lesia Ukrainka (Larysa Kosach) that suffered greatly from the ideologization of their perception; Ukrainian Realism and Romanticism; Ukrainian

Modernism and works of the writers and poets of the 1930s that perished in the Stalin repressions (the so-called *rozstriliane vidrodzhennia* [Executed Renaissance]); works of MUR and the New York group, as well as feminist, psychoanalytical and existential discourses (449-453). Skipping over the Soviet period as one that is aesthetically less deserving of attention, Ukrainian literary scholars then directed their attention to the works of Ukrainian post-Soviet writers and poets, which they interpreted using new methodology (ibid. 455). This fate touched the writers of the Socialist Realism particularly as most of them were simply eliminated from the canon and disappeared from scholarly consideration altogether, although the influence of their style is felt in Ukrainian literature to this day. Although access to new literary methodologies has been open for some time now, revision of these works has not yet occurred or was too cautious, mostly aimed at rehabilitation of the Ukrainian Soviet literature under the conditions of Ukrainian independence (ibid. 445). In the Russian context, the pioneering work to revise the study of Russian socialist realist literature was done first by Katerina Clark and later by Hans Günther, Evgenii Dobrenko, Thomas Lahusen, and others. In the Ukrainian context, as Koznarsky aptly observes, "literary scholarship, by virtue of being a scholarly endeavor and at the same time engaged in the emotionally charged realm of national imagination, is … prone to adopt a defensive and protective position toward Ukrainian literature as the 'soul' of the Ukrainian nation" (ibid. 460). A matter-of-fact and rational discussion of the place and role of those writers who formally continue the socialist realist tradition while assuming a nationalist ideological position is therefore of great importance for a comprehensive understanding of the complex cultural situation in Ukraine of the 1980s-1990s and to this day.

The inadequacy of present-day literary scholarship on all these fronts is best exemplified by the state of criticism on Oleh Lysheha's work. Lysheha's highly complex, brilliant poetic works to date lack any systematic examination and discussion (sporadic essays and introductions come from George G. Grabowicz, Vadym Trinchii, Kost' Moskalets', and a few others). Petro Midianka's position on the very margins of Ukrainian poetic and geographic space has equally excluded him from consideration by most literary scholars. It is my hope that with this study I can make a meaningful contribution to stimulating scholarly interest in the immensely important and interesting writing of all these authors.

My study is organized around genre and the extent of experimentation in the works of authors discussed: the first half of the dissertation studies prose and the second is dedicated to poetry, while innovation of the works studied increases towards the end of the dissertation. I begin in Chapter One with Valerii Shevchuk's prose works which I discuss from the point of view of decomposition of the socialist realist style in its late form. In Chapter Two I turn to the prose of Volodymyr Drozd who shares the paradigm of late Socialist Realism with Shevchuk. I discuss both writers as representatives of ideological literature that engages with the Soviet discourse and incorporates its structural elements for a struggle against it. Chapter Three takes up the prose of Liudmila Petrushevskaia who provides a stark contrast to Drozd and Shevchuk: Petrushevskaia rejects any ideologization of her work radically and turns to the private sphere of human experience. The part of my study dedicated to poetry opens with Chapter Four on Elena Shvarts, as a comparative case from Russian literature to give more nuance to my discussion of Petro Midianka and Oleh Lysheha, while standing as a discussion of her

compelling poetic strategies in its own right. Chapter Five introduces the work of Petro Midianka, a poet who embraces his marginality – poetic and regional – and who employs strategies of nostalgia and melancholia in his poetic works. My study culminates in Chapter Six on Oleh Lysheha's poetry. He stands out as the most radical and impressive realization of all the categories that frame this study: complete disengagement from the Soviet cultural system; embracing of marginality as productive resource for inspiration; turn to outside poetic tradition for inspiration; and consideration of the topics of the highest abstract level of poetry while using radically non-metaphoric, narrative language.

Chapter One:

Valerii Shevchuk: Re-Appropriating Ukrainian History

Understanding Ukrainian literature in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods requires a broad analysis of both the literary works produced (published or unpublished at the time) and the cultural and political context in which they functioned. All works that were published in the Soviet time by the state publishing houses passed the Soviet censorship. This was also the case during the Stagnation Era, as censorship intensified after the 1972 crackdown on leading intellectuals and national movement leaders.[3] Many works, however, were not published until the political relaxation in the 1980s when they slowly began entering the public domain.[4] Valerii Shevchuk is one of many such cases: although his works were never considered boldly ideologically subversive, their orientation toward Ukrainophilism kept him from getting anything published in the decade between 1969 and 1979. Like all other authors considered in my study, Shevchuk was never an officially accepted Soviet writer and was treated by Soviet authorities with suspicion. In

[3] The dissident movement of the *shistdesiatnyky* (generation of the 1960s) was developing largely unhindered until 1965 when in August and September more than 20 Ukrainian intellectuals were arrested (around the same time in Moscow Andrei Siniavskii (Terts) and Iurii Daniel' were arrested). As Liudmila Alekseeva notes, unusual about these arrests was the fact that, unlike in other instances of such action by the KGB, the names of those who were arrested were not entirely banned from public discourse. In Alekseeva's view, this points to the fact that these arrests were not well-prepared and targets were chose mostly based on the belief that they are going to "confess" and publicly "repent" (16-17). This strategy mostly failed, but repressions for "nationalism" intensified after 1967. The 1972 arrests were significantly more thought-out by the authorities: they began on January 12 simultaneously in Kyiv and L'viv; in Moscow and Novosibirsk arrests began on January 14. The extent of the arrests in Ukraine was greater than in Russia: Alekseeva counts 122 arrests in Ukraine but notes that the actual number was larger (ibid. 24). People who were arrested practiced mostly learned professions, and equal parts of them came from Western and Eastern Ukraine, with a significant number of people from Kyiv.

[4] This does not include some works that were clandestinely brought to the West and published there, as well as *samvydav* publications in the country.

1967, however, Shevchuk joined the Ukrainian Writers Union. This probably allowed him to publish four books before 1969, under circumstances of an increasingly repressive political regime (*Sered tyzhnia* [In Mid-Week] (1967), *Naberezhna 12* (1968), novella *Seredokhrestia* (1968), and *Vechir sviatoyi oseni* [The Evening of Blessed Autumn] (1969)).[5] These works represent a number of developments in the late Socialist Realism that reflect its weakening: lack of explicit praise for communism and its leaders in the USSR in all its facets, a turn to personal and private experiences, their increased impressionism, and sentimentalism. At the same time, however, the overall structure of the works (plot development towards a positive resolution in particular) and their main characters maintain the obligatory characteristics of a Socialist Realist hero: patriotism, positive and romanticized attitude towards social reality. The works aimed to depict that social reality as wholesome and harmonious, even idyllic; it was visible in simplified development of the characters and non-conflictual personal relationships (that is, a world in which parents love their children and vice versa, husbands and wives love each other, and everyone hates the "bad guys").

In this chapter I will analyze Valerii Shevchuk's prose works *Na poli smyrennomu* [On the Field of Humility] (1979; published in 1983) and *Myslenne derevo* [The Tree of Thoughts] (1985-1986; published in 1989). I argue that the evident experimentation in Shevchuk's works is enabled by his rather partial disengagement from the Soviet system – that is, the style of Socialist Realism and its demands – and that this weakened connection to the Soviet system makes possible ambiguous readings of his prose. The extent of his experimentation is measured precisely by the Soviet system

[5] In 1966, Shevchuk's brother was arrested, and he was forced to give up his job at the Department for Museum Studies, located in the Kyiv Caves Monastery.

whose limits he very cautiously pushes. As I will show, Shevchuk's staying within the Soviet system determines the presence in his writing of elements that are characteristic for totalitarian culture. His departure from the system, which takes place in the late 1980s and the 1990s, paradoxically leads to a decrease of experimentation: the ideological message does not have to be concealed anymore and the genre of his works gravitates increasingly towards non-fiction. This point is crucial for my study: works by writers who from the very beginning of their literary career looked past the Soviet system – that is, entirely and radically disengaged from it – do not exhibit such a dependency, because ideological criteria did not dominate their work and primarily aesthetic concerns defined their literary output. Shevchuk's and Drozd's compromise with the system allowed them to publish their works, but it considerably limited the scope of their innovation. Although all writers and poets discussed in my study explored questions of identity, history, literary tradition, revelation, and vulnerability in an innovative way, authors such as Liudmila Petrushevskaia, Elena Shvarts, and Oleh Lysheha were not bound by such considerations and went much farther in pursuit of their artistic goals. As I show in my examination of Shevchuk's prose works, aesthetic quality suffers from the preeminence of the ideological impetus of his *oeuvre*. I show this based on examples of incongruous stylistic solutions, a limited range of stylistic devices, continuous reiteration of structurally identical contrast pairs, and of conflicts between style and content. I argue that the main reason for such failures lies in the fact that ideological rather than aesthetic considerations motivate Shevchuk: his prose seeks to negate the master narrative of the Soviet Union, to debunk its view of Ukraine, and to establish the grand narrative of the Ukrainian national project. This is achieved through the rehabilitation of Ukrainian

culture (in particular, a claim to Kyivan Rus' and the early modern period, primarily the Baroque) and through re-appropriation of Ukrainian history, mythology, and symbolic geography. Because Shevchuk does not entirely disengage from the Soviet model, his project remains structurally identical to it. Notable elements that remain from Socialist Realism include the positive hero, an embellishing, romanticized attitude towards depicted social reality, predilection for idyllic depiction of the past, and the creating of heroes and victims. In this Shevchuk evidently relies on the heritage of Ukrainian populism (*narodytstvo*), which appears to be a comfortable model for an oppositional stance towards Socialist Realism: replacing the ideological component requires less artistic effort than reorienting the style of writing entirely. Although Shevchuk does enrich his writing with stylistic elements that could be read as modernist, their function is rather "decorative": they represent his sensitivity to political and cultural demand of the time, not an orientation towards the aesthetic principle. I argue, therefore, that such elements of Shevchuk's writing as heightened sentimentalism, traces of magical realism, "whimsical"/"chimerical" digressions, plot and narrator fragmentation, and predominance of populist themes refer to the decomposition of the Ukrainian Socialist Realism in its late form.[6] On the level of text this is expressed in multiple repetitions of the same artistic devices and overflowing verbosity that borders on graphomania which makes it difficult to poignantly quote the author. The main goal of such a strategy is polemic persuasion of the reader of the ideological content of the works. As I show in my

[6] The English term "whimsical" prose for *khymerna proza* [chimerical prose] was coined by Marko Pavlyshyn in his discussion of the phenomenon since the late-1980s, most notably in his "National Idioms in Soviet Literature? The Case of the Ukrainian Whimsical Novel" (1988). Pavlyshyn has written extensively on Shevchuk and his "whimsical" novels, hence I will continue using it when analyzing Shevchuk's works simultaneously with the more neutral English translation as "chimerical prose." See also my discussion of this literary phenomenon in Chapter Two on Volodymyr Drozd.

analysis, this explains the style of solemn narration that is filled with pathos and compensatory self-esteem.

1. 1. Valerii Shevchuk in Ukrainian Literary Scholarship

In-depth considerations of Shevchuk's works are rare, as most Ukrainian examinations suffer from the largely unconfronted inadequacies of the Soviet literary scholarship that persist to this day. Early as well as later discussions of Shevchuk's prose emphasize his achievements primarily from the perspective of reintroducing into the Ukrainian public discourse the heritage of the Ukrainian Baroque. Such is, for instance, Petro Maidachenko's evaluation in which he only very marginally touches upon the "excessive stylization" that is characteristic for "some of Shevchuk's works" and which – in a "moderately sober analysis" – could be considered as a flaw of his prose (18). Rather than focusing on the aesthetic quality of Shevchuk's prose, Maidachenko praises rich references to Ivan Vyshens'kyi, Hryhorii Skovoroda, and Mykola Hohol (Nikolai Gogol) as well as thematization of the Kyivan Rus' heritage (*Kyivan Cave Patericon*) in Shevchuk's *On the Field of Humility*. Thus this and other such readings of Shevchuk's works approach them primarily from the perspective of the demands of the time that are ideologically motivated.

These demands are summarized in Leonid Novychenko's 1988 article: filling of "blank spaces" of Ukrainian history and literature, return to the "'old' fundamental truths," and "honesty and principles in the search for and establishment of truth" (14, 13). Novychenko's article reflects the changes introduced by the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He formulates the objectives of a new literature and a new literary scholarship: publishing and study of works by those Ukrainian authors

who were prohibited for ideological reasons (literature written in 1917-1920) and who perished in the Holodomor of 1933-1933 and purges of 1937-1938; rethinking the canon and labels attached to its most important figures; establishing the leading role of literature in finding the "historical truth" – what he defines as "the cleansing truth" and the "rejuvenating truth"; and, not least, advancing freedom of artistic expression (ibid. 6). At the same time, the defining quality of these new demands was their lack of radicalism: Novychenko and others continue to motivate their calls for change with the decisions of the party congresses and the party leaders' addresses, and they invest a lot of their effort into embedding the changes into the ideological framework of the Soviet Union and the stipulations of Socialist Realism (ibid. 6-8).

As someone who does not challenge the system directly yet consistently reappropriates Ukrainian history and culture thus filling in those "white gaps," Shevchuk fits particularly well into the model of gradual transition envisioned by many members of the Ukrainian literary and scholarly establishment of the time. The praise he receives, therefore, is directed primarily at his pioneering work in substantiating an autochthonous identity of the Ukrainian people.[7] In her 1993 article that draws comparisons between Shevchuk and the Chilean-American writer Isabel Allende, Anna Berehuliak frames the issue in precisely this way: she evaluates Shevchuk's use of the Ukrainian language as "rehabilitation and legalization of a formerly repressed language in the context of the Soviet reality," and connects it to strategies of preservation and search for identity, even "potential *healing* from the postcolonial identity crisis" (68). Shevchuk's role in the

[7] This perhaps motivates also the publication of *On the Field of Humility* in English by the Soviet publishing house Dnipro in 1989 (as *The Meek Shall Inherit*…, translated by Viktoriia Kholmohorova).

recovery of the Ukrainian cultural heritage only strengthens later, when Ukraine gains independence in 1991 and he publishes, edits, and translates an impressive number of key texts for the Ukrainian identity formation as it was emerging in the understanding of the former Soviet political and cultural establishment.[8] His position in this context grows so strong that any questioning of the artistic quality of his works becomes nearly impossible and most critics and literary scholars in Ukraine focus on the various achievements of his prose. As an example of how far such pseudo-scholarship can go a 1999 dissertation for the candidate of sciences in philology degree can help illuminate: the author defines her objective as a "comprehensive study of intellectualism of V. Shevchuk's works as a peculiar type of the author's artistic thinking" (Horniatko-Shumylovych). The author thus concludes that Shevchuk's main "intellectual achievement" lies in his "balanced dialectics of heritage and innovation" (ibid.). This observation, however, stands in stark

[8] Among Shevchuk's publications are a collection of monastery chronicles (now reappropriated as "Ukrainian") (2012), an anthology of Ukrainian Renaissance and Early Baroque poems (2009) and an anthology of Ukrainian Renaissance literature written in various languages (2006), a translation of Klymentii Zynoviiev's book on folk crafts, traditions and everyday life of the 17th-18th century (2009), a book on Ukrainian genealogy (2008), a translation of the Lutsk *Lament for Father Ioan Vasylevych* from the early 17th century (2008), a semi-fictional account of Hryhorii Skovoroda's life (2008) and a translation of one of his "conversations" (2002), a popular study of the Cossack state of the 16th-18th centuries (2007, 1995) and on Ivan Mazepa who was banned under the Soviet rule (2006), several books on the Ukrainian national idea (2007, 2006), an anthology of the Ukrainian Baroque drama (2007), a collection of the Cossack chronicles (2006), a book on the Ukrainian heroic poetry of the 10th-early 19th centuries (2004), a two-volume history of Ukrainian literature in the 16th-18th centuries (2004, 1993), a collection of Ukrainian bard songs (*bylynas*) (2004), a complete collection of Ivan Velychkovs'kyi's works (2004), foreword to Ivan Drach's translation of *Istoriia Rusiv*, a key text for the Ukrainian national project (1991), reflections on Ivan Kotliarevs'kyi's *Eneïda* (1998), on Taras Shevchenko (1995) and other questions of literature and culture of particular importance to the Ukrainian language and nation-state. The sheer volume of Shevchuk's often uneven output has firmly established him as one of the key members of those cultural circles who promote a sense of Ukrainian autochthony and cultural autonomy from Russia, seeking to counteract symptoms of inferiority complexes (frequently referred to as *khokhlachestvo*) among Ukrainians. This brief overview also shows the shift in Shevchuk's genre from fiction – which during the Soviet time was the only device that, through Aesopian language, could carry the message Shevchuk is invested in – towards non-fiction and to work on making available to broad readership of formerly repressed or forgotten works (hence his translations into modern Ukrainian).

contrast to Shevchuk's general stance in his efforts at studying and popularizing Ukrainian history and cultural relics. Representative in this regard is Shevchuk's 1994 article in *Khronika-2000* in defense of the *Book of Veles*, a proven literary forgery that claims to be an ancient Slavic religious text and historical chronicle. Shevchuk's article fits perfectly in the overall motivation of his writings and activism: its main argument is insistence on the authenticity of the *Book* primarily because it is denied by the "imperial" (Soviet) Russian scholarship (61). "[T]o acknowledge and begin objectively studying this [cultural] monument … would mean," Shevchuk argues, "to undermine the very foundation, that is the ideological postulates of the Russian imperial historical scholarship, and to agree that, indeed, there was no cradle of the three brotherly nations …; to acknowledge the fact that Eastern Slavs did not use a single language; and, thirdly, that Rus''s statehood was not brought to Kyiv from Novgorod by the Rurikids, but it existed here long before" (ibid.). The main achievement of the *Book of Veles* is recognition of Ukrainians as a "historical nation" (in the Hegelian sense), and for this reason Shevchuk entirely ignores the extensive body of scholarly works that exposes the *Book* as a forgery.[9] Shevchuk's invention of a series of pseudo-scholarly criteria that would establish the forgery's authenticity point to an anti-intellectual stance where ideological goals override concerns of academic integrity.[10] This stance can be placed within the framework of those who, as Marko Pavlyshyn shows, advance an "iconostasis" rather than canon of the Ukrainian literature: the term coined by Pavlyshyn

[9] Such works include Oleg Tvorogov's in-depth analysis of the forgery that was published only four years earlier, in 1990. In the Ukrainian context, Leonid Shul'man's publication in *Slovo i Chas* (formerly *Radians'ke literaturoznavstvo*) one year later, in 1991, equally effectively showed that the *Book* was a forgery.

[10] See George Grabowicz's discussion of this forgery and Shevchuk's role in introducing it into the school curriculum on Ukrainian literature, together with other forgeries ("Slidamy natsional'nykh mistyfikatsii").

"underscore[s] [the] quasi-sacral status and dedication to hierarchy, immutability and ideological unanimity" ("Literary Canons" 5). As Pavlyshyn aptly argues, "[t]he iconostasis displays continuity with both the nineteenth-century populist canon and, in most matters other than ideology, the canon of Socialist Realism, while openly promoting a national identity orientated towards the reinforcement of the Ukrainian nation-state" (ibid. 6). As I show later in this chapter, Valerii Shevchuk's work exemplify this stance very well.

1. 2. Socialist Realism and Totalitarian Culture

Valerii Shevchuk's works in a number of ways exemplify decomposition of the main characteristics of Socialist Realism in its late form. In this regard, the author's formal and content decisions that are influenced by this process are of particular interest to me. A productive approach to this subject lies in considering Socialist Realism as imbedded in and as a product of totalitarian culture, and as an instrument to fulfill a totalitarian regime's goals. In his study *Der sozialistische Übermensch* [The Socialist Übermensch], Hans Günther shows that such key features as what he calls "heroization," classicism, monumentalism, populism, and "total Realism" constitute the core of a totalitarian culture, either Soviet or national-socialist (Nazi). The discourse of heroization works in such a way that it substitutes abstract categories for authentic individual events, and archetypes for historic figures (176). Following this, the individual characteristics of a hero become dehumanized and then deified (ibid.). The Stalin era thus utilized a wide range of hero types, paramount among which was the "hero of labor," modeled on the Prometheus myth (in the Soviet Union, its most prominent realization was the

Stakhanovite movement).[11] Günther aptly points out the use of archetypes in a totalitarian society as an attempt of the totalitarian system to claim the energy of the hero myth. Since the hero archetype is generally connected with the ritual of initiation into adulthood, the totalitarian culture integrates it into a Great Family symbolism, used excessively by the state since the 1930s.[12] The hero is thus always youthful – the entire totalitarian culture puts great emphasis on youthfulness and regeneration – and is defined greatly trough her or his relationship with the figure of the Father (ibid.). The Father is meaningfully elevated above the sons and daughters who are the heroes completing a task on his behalf (ibid. 180-181).

This genesis of the totalitarian culture has profound consequences for our understanding of the Socialist Realism as one of its components. The fact that the main protagonist of a typical Socialist Realist literary work is heroized, the nature of her or his relationship with the figure of the Father, the need to always affirm youthful, positive, and enthusiastic attitudes, and the ritual character of her or his actions motivate the central features of Socialist Realism. The false populism of the totalitarian culture consists, Günther emphasizes, in the need for appeal to the popular basis for legitimacy of

[11] Günther extracts the main types of heroes from Aleksandr Fadeev's novel *Molodaia gvardiia* [Young Guard] (1945). These types are: discoverers and explorers; revolutionary fighter heroes; aviator and polar explorer heroes; labor heroes; war heroes; and the political leader heroes (177-178). The latter three were of particular importance: while the first allowed for the maximum mobilization of the population for production purposes, the latter two could be successfully used to polarize any discourse and present it as the struggle of good against evil (ibid.). One last hero type was the ideological victim hero that was modeled on the martyr legend (this hero would sacrifice herself or himself for the greater cause) (ibid.).

[12] In *The Soviet Novel* Katerina Clark shows how the Great Family became "[t]he new root metaphor for society" and "provided the state with a single set of symbols for enhancing its increasingly hierarchical structure by endowing it with spurious organicity" (114). The figure of the Father thus becomes defining for Socialist Realism in its high form, effectively turning the Soviet novel into a hagiography, whose master plot is a "ritualized biography" (131). As Clark shows, most "thirties novels have a single mentor as their positive hero," and their ritual role is to effect change in the son/daughter figures of the novel (132).

the totalitarian leader and his often extreme actions (194). In this regard, the totalitarian culture always calls for clarity, simplicity and a "healthy taste" in everything, which reveals itself upon closer examination as opposing Modernism in art (ibid.). Although the demand for *narodnost'* in the Soviet totalitarian culture contains also "an immediate folkloristic component," its main imperative is to create "for the people," that is, in effect, to satisfy the mass demand for kitsch and trivial art (195). Executed on a mass scale, this leads to kitschification of all spheres of life with the goal to create a gapless illusion of a "wholesome and happy world" (ibid.). At the same time, the folkloric part represents pseudo-folklorism insofar as the folklore was mostly used as a vehicle for propaganda of socialist ideas, while the Soviet Union rapidly became Russian-dominated, with Russians as the titular nation and the Russian language as the *lingua franca* (ibid.). The result in art and literature was, among others, pathos, didacticism, monologism, overly simplified narrative structures and very clear juxtapositions (of the kind good vs. evil), general lack of ambiguity, consistently positivist worldview, puritanism in dealing with sexuality, avoiding of naming social and political problems and critically confronting them, shunning psychologism, one-dimensional heroes-protagonists, and some folkloric elements to the extent that they did not interfere with the ideological message of socialism.[13]

Khrushchev's Thaw contributed the most to the partial disintegration of these characteristics as a result of political, social, economical and cultural reforms and general liberalization of the regime. Opening to the West and publication of several influential and critical literary works have changed the dynamics of the literary process in the Soviet

[13] On sexuality in Soviet public discourse, see Eric Naiman's *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (1997).

Union.[14] Stylistically, meaningful departure from the prescriptions of Socialist Realism – without abandoning it entirely – were works of the *shistdesiatnyky* generation of writers and poets. While continuing to subscribe to Communist ideology and social and political goals of the Party (under duress or not, as personal situations differed greatly), these authors introduced an inward perspective on issues that pertain to the social and political life. The Soviet phenomenon of the generation of the 1960s was marked primarily by the attempt to process the trauma of World War II and Stalinist repressions, and to reinvent the socialist project in the USSR, to which they remained loyal even despite personal suffering or repressions in the family. The notion of "sincerity" assumed a particular importance in this context. The Ukrainian phenomenon had a meaningful focus on national rehabilitation and ethno-cultural renaissance, especially in view of severe repressions against Ukrainian artists, writers, and intellectuals in the 1920s and 1930s. National oppression of Ukrainians and sweeping Russification became the main target of the movement; stylistically, however, the works of the *shistdesiatnyky* in many ways mirrored totalitarian culture, orienting themselves against the totalitarian suppression of Ukrainian culture and language, but not against the defining components of totalitarian culture itself, as outlined above. (More on the phenomenon of Ukrainian

[14] Highly important milestones in this regard were works by Leonid Martynov (*Poems* (1955)), Vladimir Dudintsev (*Not by Bread Alone* (1956)), Alexander Solzhenitsyn (*One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962)), as well as publications in the literary journal *Novyi mir*, edited from 1958 to 1970 by Alexander Tvardovskii (cf. also his role for Liudmila Petrushevskaia's career as a writer in the chapter on Petrushevskaia). However, the Thaw ended very quickly, as already after the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 the Party began rolling back some of the liberal reforms that were introduced. Further restrictions were introduced after the end of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, as well as after Khrushchev's removal from power in 1964. Celebration of the 20th anniversary of the victory in the Great Patriotic War (WWII) gave rise to renewed heroization of the war. The incisive threshold that signified a radical return to totalitarian practices was the crushing of the Prague Spring in August 1968, effectively halting liberal reforms in the Eastern Bloc.

shistdesiatnytstvo in the chapter on Volodymyr Drozd who was one of the movement's central figures.)

In order to adequately place this phenomenon, it is important to understand the totalitarian tendency towards Classicism. As Günther convincingly shows, utilization of Classicism was inherent to totalitarianism because "the Classical realizes the claim for harmonious totality and order of the whole" (192). Return to Classicism follows different patterns within each national context and departs from a different historical background.[15] They are united, however, in their opposition to Modernism: "in each culture, Classicism constitutes – as the normal and healthy – a militant antithesis to the sickly, the decadent, and the degenerate" for which Modernism serves as a model (194). The norm for everything "healthy and normal" is the people (*narod*), to which the classical aesthetics appeals.

1. 3. Ukrainian Socialist Realism, Classicism, and *narodnytstvo*

In the Ukrainian case, there is a particular intersection between Ukrainian Classicism (late 18th through early 19th century) with its notions of Ukrainianness and the phenomenon of Ukrainian populism (*narodnytstvo*) in the 19th and even 20th centuries. It is important to note here, however, that the populist tendency towards Classicism primarily reflected the surface characteristics of Classicism, absorbing mainly its notions of harmony and wholesomeness for its own purposes, while ignoring its other deep qualities such as formal restraint, compression, balance, completeness, furthermore empiricism, humanism, and depictive realism. Preoccupation with the surface

[15] Comparing German national-socialist and the Soviet variety of Classicism, Günther describes it as rather "sober and 'Doric'" in Germany and "more 'baroque'" in the Soviet Union, where it eclectically incorporates various national traditions (193).

characteristics of Classicism marks its Ukrainian appropriation as Romantic and secondary. All of this requires some elaboration before we can proceed.

Questions of language and nationhood as elements of an anticolonial struggle against Russian imperial politics form the historical background of Ukrainian Classicism. George Grabowicz proposes to view literature of the end of the 18th and the first three decades of the 19th century, subsumed by Dmytro Chyzhevs'kyi (Dmitrij Tschižewskij) in his *A History of Ukrainian Literature* (1956) under Ukrainian Classicism, as a "transitional period in which traditional, popular forms (burlesque, etc.), Classicist and Sentimental conventions, and the new pre-Romanticism were unevenly commingled" (*Toward a History* 97). In his "Ukraïns'ko-rosiis'ki literaturni vzayemyny v XIX st." [Ukrainian-Russian Literary Relations in the 19th Century], Grabowicz points out that "the question remains open whether such a phenomenon indeed existed as a separate period, separate poetics, a set of norms and values in Ukrainian literature independently from Russian (that is, all-Russian, imperial) literature" (202). For my purposes, such qualities of this period as its striving for a harmonious depiction of reality, demand for completeness, predilection for the classical definition of beauty, and its opposition to Modernism are of primary importance.[16] Inclusion of Romantic and Sentimentalist elements in this period's assessment opens up additional opportunities in analyzing the proximity of populism to the type of Romantic or Heroic Realism championed by the Soviet totalitarian culture.

[16] Very different in this regard is the phenomenon of the Ukrainian neo-Classicism whose representatives are inherently modernist: Mykola Zerov, Mykhailo Drai-Khmara, Pavlo Fylypovych, Iurii Klen (Burhardt), Maksym Ryl'skyi and others who are close to their Russian contemporaries, such as, for instance, Osip Mandelshtam.

Ukrainian Classicism marked the rejection of the "bookish language" (the Ukrainian version of Church-Slavonic) as a language alien to the local population. Statistically and socially, this became possible due to dramatic changes in the makeup of the local population: as Dmytro Chyzhevs'kyi argues, aggressive efforts by Russia to denationalize Ukraine and erase "all traces of Ukrainian autonomy" by the end of the 18th century led to an exodus of educated youth to the centers of the empire, St. Petersburg and Moscow, radically reducing the number of creative groups in the country and the number of direct consumers of local literary works (372).[17] However, the situation in Ukraine in the 18th century was more complex than what Chyzhevs'kyi argues. As Vasyl' Kononenko shows, the period from 1725 to 1762, known as the "epoch of the palace coups" in the Russian empire, "helped lessen the central government's pressure on Ukraine's autonomy and … allowed the intellectuals of the Hetman state to defend their interests" ("Ukraine's Statehood in the 18th Century"). The power dynamics between the Ukrainian hetmans – such as Kyrylo Rozumovs'kyi who had very close ties to the Russian imperial dynasty – and the monarchy is exemplified by the judicial reform that was implemented by Rozumovs'kyi in 1760-1763: as a result, Ukraine became judicially independent of Russia, relying primarily on the Polish-Lithuanian judicial procedures and establishing a sense of national borders, government, and economic policy (idem., "Ukrainian State in the 18th Century: The Nobility Project"). No matter what the precise reasons were, in the course of Ukraine's elites' reorientation towards the imperial centers an intellectual drain did affect Ukraine deeply. Combined with the Romantic interest in

[17] Such denationalizing actions included abolition of the Hetman state, destruction of the Sich, introduction of serfdom for the peasants, as well as dilution of religious institutions whose functions to a great extent were now taken over by schools in Kyiv and elsewhere, themselves in decline.

the ethnos and its spirit – a crucial European influence by and large – this circumstance created demand for the vernacular language as the language of literary works and necessitated a certain range of styles that experienced a strong development.

While the Classicist works that were created as a result still had to "project the impression of tranquil harmony – in pursuit of which the ideal of beauty assumed prime importance," the genres that flowered under the unfavorable political and cultural circumstances in Ukraine comprised almost exclusively fable, comedy, and travesty (ibid. 370, 375).[18] The advance of other genres – such as the novel and other prose forms, drama, and epic poetry – that "allowed for a quick maturation" of literature in neighboring Russia and Poland, was severely hindered in Ukraine and occurred partially only in the 19th and then with renewed strength in the 20th century (ibid.).[19] The higher

[18] It should be noted that these genres constituted for Chyzhevs'kyi the emblem of bad taste, hence his negative assessment. Yet these genres fit well into the overall phenomenon of popular, mass literature known as *kotliarevshchyna* – a phenomenon motivated not only by the genre and stylistic considerations, but also by circumstances of the society's social and cultural reality. The works of *kotliarevshchyna* are decidedly life-affirming. As George Grabowicz shows, a more in-depth understanding of *kotliarevshchyna* allows to save it from the normative understanding as an epigonic and thus inferior phenomenon. The deeper dimensions of *kotliarevshchyna* consist in a radical demarcation from the all-Russian literature (through the switch to vernacular Ukrainian), Grabowicz argues. While by this also separating the new Ukrainian literature from its previous stages, some of the central characteristics of the literature's "voice and tone" carried over – this is visible particularly in the character of the burlesque of the new Ukrainian literature ("Semantyka kotliarevshchyny" 295-297). This lowered humor is endowed with a significant subversive potential that is directed at the realities of imperial life in Russia and Ukraine as well as against the canonical and normative literature, against authority and authoritarianism (ibid. 298, 303). Interesting in this regard is the projection of this modality into the center – i.e. Russian literature – by Mykola Hohol (Nikolai Gogol) who secures a central place for subversive marginality of the Ukrainian literature within all-Russian literature (ibid. 304).

[19] This circumstance led Chyzhevs'kyi to his contentious thesis on the "incompleteness" of Ukrainian Classicist literature, convincingly challenged by George Grabowicz. Grabowicz shows that Chyzhevs'kyi's thesis hinges decisively on his general scheme of periodization of literary development which, in analogy to evolutionist thinking, assumes that certain stages should be present in all national literatures, as well as on Chyzhevs'kyi's static approach to literature as a set depository of styles, genres, and works, in which certain niches are reserved for an intended entity, and the set is complete once all niches are filled (*Toward a History of Ukrainian Literature* 90-91). As Grabowicz aptly points out, "[f]or Čyževs'kyj literature is perceived as

genres were realized by those Ukrainian writers and poets who wrote in Russian and Polish – making Ukrainian literature a "bilingual and even multilingual" literature, a fact eagerly overseen in the Russian imperial and later in Ukrainian populist discourse (Grabowicz, *Toward a History* 100). The truly revolutionary change that Classicism brought for Ukrainian literature was the introduction of *one* literary language and the radical switch from Church Slavonic and its Ukrainian version to vernacular Ukrainian.[20] Although higher genres of literature were being written, writers who created them were either excluded from the Ukrainian literature on the basis of language in which they wrote (and thus added to the Russian or Polish literary tradition), or they began participating entirely in the literary process elsewhere (Grabowicz aptly defines the criteria for such a distinction as "culture, the set and continuity of a people's experiences, values, [and] traditions," with language under certain circumstances as the major but not the only carrier of a literature's identity (ibid. 99)).

As a cultural and literary phenomenon, Ukrainian *narodnytstvo* (populism) of the 19th century was closely connected to Romantic ideas of the "people's spirit," as most prominently expressed by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803).[21] In his works, Herder particularly emphasized the importance of local language (urging Germans to write in

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something universal, as something that in its essence transcends national and cultural determinants. His history of Ukrainian literature is treated *sub speciae* of the putative universal (more specifically Western or European) structures, values, historical experiences, conventions; it is written from an idealistic and consequently also normative vantage point" (ibid. 86).

[20] The question of continuity between the literary tradition in Church Slavonic (including its Ukrainian version) and the later works in vernacular Ukrainian remains open. Literary works in Church Slavonic almost entirely represented the high genres, especially due to the language's use in religious practice. The successful and rather rapid development of literature in vernacular Ukrainian was possible particularly because it distanced itself from the self-contained elitism and otherworldly religiosity of literature in Church Slavonic. Although this led to the loss of high genres in the literature of the time, the connection was never entirely severed, as the later re-appropriation attempts in Ukrainian literature show.

[21] Cf. also Hundorova, *ProYAvlennia slova* 78.

their native German and not in Latin, wide-spread as literary language at the time). He also published a collection of folk poetry that triggered a wave of local patriotism in Germany and inspired ethnographic studies and similar collecting throughout Europe, which reached the Russian Empire.[22] Herder's ideas made him an important participant of the *Sturm und Drang* movement, which demanded literature that originates from the people and is accessible to the people. Herder's call upon the poet to be the creator of a nation around him and to lead that nation should be placed particularly within the *Sturm und Drang* philosophy.

These ideas resonated deeply around Europe, leading to the emergence of nationalism and local patriotism in the 19th century, but they were particularly attractive to the intellectual elite of a Ukrainian nation without a state. That elite was increasingly assuming the role of the poet-messiah for the sake of its people and its culture. Tamara Hundorova argues that, stemming from the ideas of Enlightenment, Ukrainian populism was a rational construct designed to modernize Ukrainians as a nation following the European example, and to create a literature in the people's language that was both close and relatable to them (*ProYAvlennya slova* 74-75). The task itself, however, and its formulation clearly point to the Romantic paradigm that has little to do with a rational construct. The novelty of using vernacular Ukrainian that was only recently elevated to the status of the literary language made the task particularly difficult. As Hundorova shows, revising the Romantic idea of *narodnist'*, Panteleymon Kulish saw the ultimate

[22] Herder's *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772), *Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker* (1772), and his influential *Volkslieder* (1778) (only later published under the title *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*) are of particular importance here. Herder's influence in Russia is supported by the fact that in 1767, while teaching in Riga, he was offered a position of inspector at the Lutheran school of St. Peter in St. Petersburg, which he declined in favor of the position of the Pastor Adjunctus in Riga (Andress 63-64).

goal in creating from the vernacular (*prostonarodna* – literally, language of the simple folk) the all-national language (*vsenarodna mova*) (ibid. 80). The local elite had the task to first learn the vernacular language in order to develop it further. This attitude was conceptualized as anti-colonial and as directed against one's own "foreign educated" countrymen who were leaving for Russia or Western Europe (ibid.). As Hundorova explains, this vision of the role of the language and the local elite in approximating the "simple folk" formed the basis of the Ukrainian populism, and it also signaled a clear conceptual division between high and low cultures (ibid. 81). Such a concept also contained the subsequently growing opposition between populism (expressed through imitating and masking as *prostonarodnist'*) and Modernism (a mode of expressing aesthetic and broader cultural values without such mediation) (ibid. 81).[23]

Another important shift in the literary practice occurs later as a result of the alienation between the higher and the lower manifestations of these concepts. Towards the end of the 19th century, a significant lowering, coarsening and trivialization of the concept of *narodnytstvo* occurs and finds its representation in the works of authors who later formed the very core of the national Ukrainian literary canon: Oleksandr Konys'kyi, Ivan Nechui-Levyts'kyi, Borys Hrinchenko, Mykhailo Staryts'kyi and others, in whose works populist Ukrainophilism translated into trivial attributes and idealization of the folk way of life (ibid. 81-82). Such a new and successful version that served the taste of wide middle- and lower-class readership was particularly prone to opposing Modernism, seen as (overly) refined, decadent, and belonging to high culture. As Hundorova

[23] In Hundorova's theoretic discussion of populism an important place occupies her argument that both populism and modernism originate from the same modernizing gesture: while the latter is "strictly modernist" (from the aesthetic point of view), the former is of populist nature (*narodnyts'ka kontseptsiia* [populist concept]) (*ProYAvlennia slova* 81, 83).

emphasizes, this populist "cultural model as a project and vision of developing Ukrainian literature toward a 'literature of the people' [*narodna literatura*]" has considerably influenced Ukrainian literature from the middle of the 19th century on (ibid. 84). Works written in the Romantic mode, empowered and elevated by the Ukrainian struggle for national identity under conditions of lack of statehood and severe suppression of Ukrainian culture, became the manifestation of Ukrainian identity for many generations of writers who sought to carve out a space for raising the Ukrainian national question. In their search for effective models in opposing the Soviet imperialism writers of the *shistdesiatnyky* movement and of later periods resorted to this particular model.

This Romantic concept of a literature that appeals directly to its people for its language's and its own existential legitimation, reliance on some inherently Ukrainian features (language, geography and its role in forming the national character, traditions, and customs) and the ethical component of a struggle for justice and against the oppressor become repeatedly actualized at critical junctures of Ukrainian nation-building in the 20th century. Opposition to the imperial politics of the Soviet Union towards Ukrainians and their culture, therefore, relied on their populist predecessors, using their formal devices to carry new ideological message. Formally and stylistically, Socialist Realism and the works of the late Ukrainian populism exhibit significant similarity and proximity. Both carry a considerable ideological component, rely on ethical argument (hence their pathos), see themselves as literature for the people from which they derive their legitimacy; they stand in opposition to Modernism (as decadent, deviant, and elitist), project an appearance of harmony and wholesomeness, and tend to rigidity and monumentalism (hence also predilection for epic forms). Cases of significant diversion

from this appeared within the framework of opposition to Socialist Realism in the *shistdesiatnytstvo* movement, some of whose members expressed interest in the modernist artistic possibilities that disrupt the Romantic mode of harmony and wholesomeness.[24] Similarly, decomposition of Socialist Realism motivated the writers' interest in modernist devices that became more acceptable. However, the truly meaningful difference consisted in the ideological component, whose replacement required less energy than reorientation towards the primacy of the aesthetic dimension as was the case in literary Modernism, which would have had profound, even radical consequences for the entire creative process of a formed author, the concept of the authorial Self, and her or his audience.[25] Whether such a complete reinvention of the author is possible remains an open question, but the analysis presented in my study speaks for the impossibility of a radical change within one generation. At the same time, many works exhibit key features of the late Socialist Realism and ideological rather than stylistic realignment of the authors, which could correspond to their general sensitivity towards the respective political or cultural demand. Valerii Shevchuk certainly fits many of these criteria, although he does not meet others.

[24] Consider, for instance, Ivan Drach's interest in Vasyl' Stefanyk: In 1968 Drach wrote the script for the film *Kaminnyi khrest* [Stone Cross] (directed by Leonid Osyka, Dovzhenko Film Studios) that was based on Stefanyk's 1899 novella of the same title.

[25] As subsequent analysis of the works of Valerii Shevchuk and Volodymyr Drozd shows, the hero of labor that was prominent in the Socialist Realism frequently transforms into the hero as prophet or messiah, while the author himself often adopts a Prometheus-like position, in a ritual gesture bringing (corrected) history back to his people. The figure of the mentor is still present in such works, but is now replaced with a cultural figure from the past which serves as the agent of change for the author and/or his hero as prophet.

1. 4. Valerii Shevchuk and Late Socialist Realism: *On the Field of Humility*

In his works from the Soviet and post-Soviet periods, Shevchuk remains consistently dedicated to the genre of historical fiction that illuminates a past of Ukraine that is radically different from the one presented by the Soviet official history. He is motivated to a great extent by the mission of enlightening his fellow citizens about the greatness of their past. As the main message behind the works, he formulates a legitimization of Ukraine as a nation in its own right. Shevchuk does not only educate his readers, but makes a bold attempt at re-appropriating the distant history of the symbolic Ukrainian territory, from pre-Rus' through Rus' and the Cossack state times. The legitimation of Ukraine as culturally and linguistically an heir to the Rus' heritage plays a particularly important role in this effort.

In terms of their structural makeup and ideological directedness, his works from the late 1970s and the 1980s comply with main tendencies of late Socialist Realism. They also exhibit traits that are strongly characteristic of the Ukrainian version of Socialist Realism: heightened sentimentalism, "whimsical" digressions, traces of magical realism, and populist themes. The plot of his novels and novellas – most of which represent hybrid genres (novel-parable, novel-reflection, novel-antiutopia, "discoursive novella," and so on) – is linear but complicated by numerous detours and deviations.[26] An important characteristic of this and other such Ukrainian works (by Volodymyr Drozd, Vasyl Zemliak, Ievhen Hutsalo, Roman Ivanychuk, Oles' Berdnyk, Volodymyr Iavorivs'kyi, and Pavlo Zahrebel'nyi, to name only the most prominent among them) is their verbosity

[26] These are genre definitions that the author himself gave to his works; subsequent publications (such as the 2013 edition of the four novels) consistently reiterate these definitions (see the blurbs on the back cover of the said edition, for instance).

bordering on logorrhea. (This is also what makes it very difficult to find compact and representative quotes from their works, which results in the need for lengthy and repetitive quotation.) In a highly reiterative gesture, typical building blocks, topoi, and stylistic figures of the Socialist Realism are multiplied without any apparent artistic motivation, eventually achieving an effect of overkill and marking a deep exhaustion and decomposition of the Socialist Realist style. This feature signals particularly strongly the crisis of expressiveness that the "master plot" and main composition devices of the high Socialist Realism experienced since the 1940s as a result of conservation of the literary development and its forced containment within the limits of one designated style.

Katerina Clark shows this on the example of Valentin Kataev's 1951 novel *Za vlast' sovetov* [For the Power of the Soviets]: "superabundance in forties novels is not to reinforce the master plot, but rather to undermine it. The functions become so diffuse that the overarching plot loses much of its inner logic," she argues (*The Soviet Novel* 194). This is precisely the kind of decomposition and resistance to Socialist Realism that we encounter in Shevchuk's works. Plot structure as well as typical stylistic patterns that are obligatory elements of the Socialist Realist literature serve here as decoration ("the forties novel often is to its thirties antecedent as baroque is to classical," Clark maintains (ibid. 193)), and the search for expressivity moves to other possibilities. In the Ukrainian context, with the national question consistently underrepresented or repressed in the Soviet time, variations on the historical theme, on customs and traditions of the people become valid carriers of such expressive possibility. (This applies to varying degree also to other national literatures of the Soviet Union of the time.) Having studied history and philosophy in their Soviet, highly didactical and ideologized tradition, Shevchuk's turn to

historical topics and his assuming of the role of an "enlightener" (and later an "educator," as in the case with the *Book of Vles*) seems a comprehensible decision in Shevchuk's development as a writer and activist, while it also corresponds with a general trend in the Soviet literature of the period.[27] The narrative of Ukraine's exceptionality that Shevchuk proposes in his works becomes more radical over time, as the political climate relaxes and the demands of Ukrainian society change. In opposing the Soviet project of a union of nations where Ukrainians play the folkloric role of a "small people," Shevchuk is sensitive to popular attitudes both in the establishment and among his wide readership. At the same time, while the ideological shift is represented through content, structural and stylistic devices are significantly less experimental. Valerii Shevchuk's works – such as *On the Field of Humility* and *The Tree of Thoughts* – support this argument.

On the Field of Humility (1979; published in 1983) presents its readers with the narration from the first person, which signals attention to the narrator's and main protagonist's inner states and feelings. The narrator also makes a distinct effort in stating his intentions of writing a history that is not one-dimensional or unequivocal. The formal tools for such multidimensionality are ten stories of men – nine of them monks at the monastery to which also the narrator belongs – which depict their various ways of dealing with questions of faith, social participation, and personal relationships. Despite such declarations and the available tools, the narrator's control over the microcosm of the story is absolute: through various auxiliary tools he has access to knowledge hidden from most

[27] An article from the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (1969-78) on the higher education in history in the Soviet Union states that a "considerable place is designated to methodological and socio-economical disciplines (philosophy of Marxism-Leninism, scientific Communism, political economy), to history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union," while the main goal is to "prepare teachers of history and social science," for which the programs contain a series of pedagogical disciplines – "pedagogy, psychology, methodology of teaching history and social sciences" (Sakharov).

characters (this is consistently explained in the novel), and all stories of the other monks are told in a third person narration. In addition, features such as high didacticism (the text declares its genre as a "novel-parable," i.e. it already contains the moral aspect, the narrator's stance, and the concept of the audience he addresses), reiteration of the moral message (ten stories in similar ways teach every time the very same lesson), and stark, binary contrasts used for its formulation make any declared ambiguity impossible and incongruous with the text's mission. This is additionally reinforced with the general solemn tone of the novel's language.

The novel – framed as a text that survived from presumably the 13th century and was recovered from the clay pot buried in the ground – begins with the narrator introducing himself. This introduction defines the boundaries of the narration and its polemic impetus, and it reflects the concept of the narrator and his readers. The opening chapter of the book also introduces the model against which the work defines itself – Polikarp and Symon's *Kyivan Cave Patericon* – and in this way also maps the geographic space of narration (Kyiv of the 13th century and the Kyiv Cave Monastery, founded in the 11th century). The original *Patericon* by Polikarp and Symon contains many sayings (*slova*) about monkhood and its perils, and about the first monks of the monastery, recorded from oral reports, but only eleven of them were authored by Polikarp. The text is written as an alternative history of the monastery and its monks and a direct response to Polikarp (who was a monk and, briefly, an abbot at the Kyiv Cave Monastery), not to Symon (the bishop of Vladimir-Suzdal' who, according to the narrator, was illiterate and his letters to Polikarp with contributions of sayings were Polikarp's own scheme to achieve bishopric). In opposition to Polikarp, Semen, the narrator of the novel, declares

his wish to "reveal all stories heard by [him] in the most detailed and truthful way, because Polikarp altered all those stories – since he had the goal to either praise or condemn" (Shevchuk, *On the Field of Humility* 7).[28] Later in the novel he states that "without the desire to attain a high position in life, [he] can tell this history as it was in reality – [he] bear[s] witness here to what [his] ear heard and what [his] eye saw" (NPS 33). The narrator thus emphasizes the worldly character of the normative religious text from the 13th century, establishes its human, selfish component, and proposes his own alternative to it.

Contextualization of the main protagonists of the stories comes close to unmasking: one of the central themes of the novel is "truth" as opposed to hypocrisy that the narrator condemns. "But I carry the following thought," the narrator says in the beginning, "… that for God's praise even the last human vainglory may be of service, and truth [*istyna*], not pious lies, should enter the people's memory" (NPS 8). The quest for truth motivates the narrator to give up the sky that he "loved while living in the monk cell and in the world" (ibid.). The sky, symbolizing freedom and creativity, is elevated to one of the symbols of the collective good, the highest value for the narrator. As a place of withdrawal from society and dedication of creative energy to serving an abstract idea, the monastery is viewed highly negatively. The narrator himself – one of the very few positive characters of the novel – proclaims boldly in the very opening of the book that he was "hardly suitable for monastic labor," and, "having enough money to hire a servant, [he] can afford idleness and dedicating [himself] to peaceful observation of the sky," therefore excluding himself from the community of the monks (NPS 6). This initial

[28] Henceforth all citations from *Na poli smyrennomu* [On the Field of Humility] will be abbreviated as NPS. All translations are mine unless noted otherwise.

negative marking of the monks, their style of life, and their character traits increases over the course of the novel, while the narrator establishes his own, alternative system of values.

As the plot progresses, the knowing reader discovers that most of the main characters are the very same monks from the *Patericon* but the book presents a version of their life and miracles performed that is entirely contrary to the actual work. Such direct correspondences are the stories of Prokhor (corresponds to *Patericon*'s saying 31), Mark of the Caves (saying 32), Fedor (Feodor) and Vasyl' (saying 33), Nykolai (Sviatosha), prince of Chernihiv (saying 20), Ahapit the Doctor (saying 27), while others are a conflation of different stories, such as those of Isakiy (saying 36) and Ioann (no direct correspondence).[29] Historical and well known figures anchor the narration and support the fiction's claim for historical proximity – this is particularly the case with Nestor the Chronicler, one of the monks at the Kyiv monastery and author of the foundational chronicle *Povest' vremennykh let* (beginning of the 12th century).[30]

If the novel is to be seen as a travesty or general undoing of the *Patericon,* the first story demonstrates the extent of the lowering of its style. The narrator witnesses how a man who apparently was possessed by a demon was supposedly cured by one of the

[29] References to sayings are based on the 1462 edition of the *Patericon* by Kasiian. Cf. in Zhylenko.

[30] Although his story is not part of the novel, Nestor the Chronicler comes up at many occasions in the text, every time accompanied by the attribute "the one who wrote the chronicle" (cf. chapters III, IV (7), V (1), VI (5)). Most interesting, however, is Nestor's linking with the concept not of culture, but of soil: "Nestor's name and the names of those similar to him will forever be recorded in our soil's book of memory, and nowhere else would have been Nestor able to accomplish his great deed other than behind those walls [of Kyiv Cave Monastery]" (NPS 126). Nestor rather than Polikarp seems also the more preferred model for the narrator, who redeems him from the sin of asceticism only for his literary accomplishment with the chronicle; hence also the topic of writing and truthful recording of events as the only legitimate reason to join a monastery.

monks. The divine ritual of the cleansing of the body turns here into an operetta (the narrator refers to it as to a "whimsical theater act" (NPS 16)) with hyperbolized movements, facial expressions, gestures, and statements. On the level of language this is signaled by the incongruous mix of high and low styles: the third person narration alternates between the levels of high, bookish language and the low style, characteristic of vaudeville plays known in the Ukrainian context from *kotliarevshchyna*. The higher style examples are Ukrainianized borrowings from the Church Slavonic: *muzh* [venerable man], *otiniaty* [to bless someone with the movement of a hand], *boliushchyi* [pained], *skorbnyi* [mournful], *blahyi* [good, good-natured] in combination with a postposition of adjectives (as in *chudo spravdeshnie* [genuine miracle] and *zhyttia zemne* [earthly life]). Lower style insertions include examples of colloquial idioms or their approximations such as *tovktysia* [to tumble] ("цілий гурт бісів товчеться зараз у нутрі велетня" [a whole gang of demons now tumbles around inside the giant] (NPS 9)), *pochornity vid liuti* [to grow dark from anger] ("Лаврентій аж почорнів, так розсердився" [Lavrentiy turned black from anger] (NPS 11)), *harkitlyvyi* and *stohinlyvyi* [one that tends to snarl and to moan] ("всі вони сплелися в гаркітливий і стогінливий клубок" [they all became entwined in one grunty and moany ball] (ibid.)), *vyskalyty zuby* [to bare teeth]. In a ploy that is typical for travesties and similar lower genres, the higher (usually referring to an elevated spiritual stance or context) and the lower (in reference to lower bodily functions or animalistic acts) styles are often put side by side, creating a comical effect:

На те слово біснуватий позеленів, впав раптом на землю і почав корчитися, обличчя його з зеленого стало біле, а з вуст потекла піна.	With that word the possessed turned green, suddenly fell to the ground and began writhing, his face turned from green to white, and foam began to run from his mouth.
– Він ще не готовий до розмови зі мною, – сказав Лаврентій, повертаючись до	- He is not yet ready to a conversation with

юрби. – Коли хочете, можете його зв'язати (NPS 10).	me, - Lavrentii said, turning to the crowd. – If you wish, you may tie him down.

In this episode, the violent transformations of the possessed are tied primarily to his body, they signal his lack of control over it. The transformations, however, are estranged and exaggerated to the extent that they become comical (in fact, slapstick): his clumsiness and sudden metamorphoses are humorous and embarrassing. Lavrentii's behavior, however, ignores this entirely and proceeds to interpret uncontrollable convulsions of the epileptic as his refusal to communicate. Such comical devices are usually clearly directed against a target and their goal is to deconstruct, virtually annihilate the target. In the chapter on the possessed, as well as in subsequent chapters, the goal of these devices are the monks, their hypocrisy, and their all-too-human desires and motivations. The hypocritical monks are usually set against the "true" believers, who are "holy" while not being dogmatic: here, the possessed in his pain is directly compared to Christ, *boliashchyi i skorbnyi* [pained and mournful], as if materialized from an icon (NPS 18). The same metaphor reappears later in the text in relation to another positive character whom the narrator observes with sympathy – Petro, the loyal friend of the Chernihiv Prince who sacrifices his life and becomes a monk for the sake of his friend who, however, does not appreciate the gesture (NPS 47). The narrator's position is very relevant here: in contrast to Polikarp who watched with his "eyes burning, so interested he was" (NPS 12) because he "tasked himself with the mission of a chronicler" (NPS 13), Semen observes everything with seeming compassion and kindness while declaratively remaining on the outside of the events. Not a member of the monks' community and with quite different views, the narrator reserves a place for himself above the realities of the time he describes. It is easier to voice damning criticism and to preach to his readers from such a position.

The next nine chapters follow largely the same principle. To a great extent, they deconstruct and re-appropriate the *Patericon*, making it both a human and a local phenomenon. The main target of the crushing criticism becomes the Church and its dogmatism in prescribing how to practice the Christian faith. The monks are convenient targets here as their hypocrisy is revealed. (The narrator himself is supposedly not hypocritical, since he openly states right at the beginning that he is wealthy and incapable of monastic labor, and that he joined the order mainly to have the leisure necessary for writing and thinking. An open confession of joining the monastery for purely selfish reasons certainly marks the narrator a cynic, but his blunt cynicism is preferred in the novel to the hypocrisy of the monks.) Destructive criticism of religion in the 1970s, when the book was published, was of course still a commendable activity, although largely unnecessary, since the Church was no longer an enemy to be reckoned with, or was to a significant extent incorporated into state politics. Shevchuk's anti-clericalism thus can certainly be read as helpful in superficially aligning him with the Soviet system and in this way getting his works published. However, besides being an entirely "safe" topic at that time, religious criticism turns into a vehicle to achieve other, extra-literary goals. One such goal is to elevate other ideas that appear in positive contrast to the entirely discredited religion. In the novel such ideas are pre-Christian paganism that has the function to affirm authenticity of the Ukrainian claim to the Rus' heritage, and a populist view of Ukraine's past that favors harmonic, simplified, and sentimental aspects of the past. The other is to spike the readers' interest in the epoch and educate them about the cultural heritage that the author claims as Ukrainian.

Instances of devastating criticism of the Church and its dogmatism are too numerous to cite in detail, but they mostly follow the same arguments throughout the book. The main one is the Church's misinterpretation of the God's commands: here, asceticism, mortification of the flesh, sacrifice of sensual pleasures, reclusiveness of the monastic life are marked as a manifestation of death (NPS 163) and therefore condemned (not just by the narrator, but by God himself, who appears to enlighten another positive character, Isakii, and does so in the same redundantly repetitive statements: "Those are pleasing to me who create life and not who waste life. Those who don't create life but flee from it are not needed either by the world or by God" (NPS 83)). The Church is thus blamed for its "heavy and inert wisdom" (NPS 157). The solution offered here is to shift the focus from normalizing the body and turn the gaze to love, which is the governing principle of life (NPS 89). Love in all its forms – including the bodily form – is life-affirming, and by denying it the Church rejects the gift of life that comes from God: "All those who flee from life go against God, because he created them and commanded them to live" (NBS 118; cf. also 147, 154, 199). This is the point where paganism differs greatly from Christianity and the novel uses this difference to favorably elevate it. The archetypal figure here is Ahapit the Doctor's father, a *volkhv* – a healer who uses forces of nature to restore his patients. Paganism thus becomes closely connected to nature which introduces the idyllic view of the past as one where people were part of nature and were not exploiting or destroying it (both nature as the human body and nature as the living environment). Unlike the distant figure of Christ, the healer truly manifests the principles which Christianity merely proclaims – yet another realization of the principle of revealing the "real" truth: "Only the poorest come to me these days," he says. "After

all, I am more comfortable with them" (NPS 137).[31] Recognition of nature's law and acceptance of oneself as part of it "brings freedom," the healer emphasizes (NPS 138). Life in such a world brings a reorientation in life and faith: "people, animals, insects, birds and trees, plants and water are of one root and they merge into one body, whose name is our nature-mother who can be called God" (NPS 144).

Shevchuk's treatment of sexuality in this novel is to be placed within the paradigm of paganism and its embrace of nature, as well as in populism, which creates a conflict on the level of style and content: the pagan embracing of bodily love and its openness to polygamy contradicts the populist Romantic ideas of traditional marriage and female chastity before marriage. Throughout the novel – and especially in the story of Ioann and his beloved yet rejected by him Nastia – love is consistently associated with warmth (that is, life), while the Church's practices and Ioann's strict following them with the cold (that is, death) (cf. NPS 159-161). Following natural desires is therefore commendable, but only as long as it occurs within the socially accepted institutions which for Shevchuk define our essence as human.

The woman's position is essential here: Nastia's spirit visits Ioann in his tiny and dark cave, because her other "half left [her], the half which [she] was meant to serve and to lie with" (NPS 156). Ioann rejected the woman that was apparently meant to be his by fate and mortified his flesh by burying himself in a cave thus, following this logic, effectively reverting to the animal. The rape scene that follows is therefore cast in oppositions of a patriarchal society that define the borders of human and animal: here Nastia is "clean, silvery, shining, full of magic and unearthly beauty" and similar to a

[31] This powerful statement also nullifies Ahapit's previous criticism of his father's healing skills as wisdom that "leads away from people" (NPS 140).

"hunter's prey" (a contrasting parallel to Elena Shvarts's use of the same image – see in the chapter on Shvarts), while Ioann is "a dark piece of rock, dirty, smeared in clay, unshaven, with an open mouth and burning eyes" (NPS 166). The act itself is described through the metaphors of hunting and possession; it culminates in biting of the victim (that is, Ioann turns into a wild animal), the actual rape, and the burial of her alive (NPS 167). The chapter concludes with the description of Ioann's divine punishment for the crime he committed against his nature and the patriarchal society that demands harmony: his procreative organs die off, he feels empty and dies (NPS 167-168).

The prominence of Romantic, populist ideas cannot be overestimated here. This is particularly visible in the description of the female body, which is deeply imbedded in idyllic nature ("the smell of soil reminded him of the female flesh, too" (NPS 148); "Here, on the sand, he saw prints of small tender feet, and every little impression was as if filled with fragrant oil" (NPS 149); "he felt that the night around him was soaked with the fragrance of those girls: soil, water, dew, and all sand" (ibid.)). In a symbolic sexual act with woman-as-nature, Ioann rubs against the sand as to fulfill his patriarchal mission of conquering it and procreating with it. However, because Ioann rejects the desire that is portrayed here as healthy (because "natural"), procreation becomes impossible. At night his over-excited mind produces images of seductive beauties, this time nude, and a discharge of semen occurs: "suddenly he lacked air, for this reason he tore the shirt on his chest, and maybe even lost consciousness, falling like a boat into the depth of the surgent sea; it seemed, his flesh becomes liquid and he himself as if flows out into the night, like the milk splashed out into the night" (NPS 149-150). Every occasion of pollution is accompanied by his subsequent feeling of disgust and indifference to women, that is, as

equally violating nature and its procreative element, the cornerstone of a peasant worldview (cf. NPS 150, 152, 161). The immediate cause of this – nude girls and Nastia among them – are similarly described in chaste circumlocutions: "They joined hands and spun in a dance, slowly, softly, graciously swaying; their firm breasts were sparkling now and then before his wide open eyes, and he saw slender legs, draped in young skin shining with gold" (NPS 149). The lexical choice signals both the patriarchal norm imposed onto the young women (the highly poetic *persa* for "breasts," not neutral *hrudy*), their objectification (*obtiahnuti molodoiu zolotystoiu shkiroiu* can be literally translated as "upholstered," similar to the context of leather furniture), while the mentioning of the skin's youth represents a break that reveals the perspective of a significantly older actor than the voice of a young boy the narrator tries to project (this could be, then, Shevchuk's own sexual fantasy).

Here and elsewhere, woman is made an object of male fantasy of conquering and submission, one who submits willingly, in full accordance with the patriarchal norm, which is one of the main components of the populist view of society and gender roles in it. If the girls are shining with gold here, Nastia is even further estranged in her later appearances to Ioann: she is described either as a flower that releases "unearthly" fragrance (NPS 155), innocently white and bird-like (ibid.), or silvery ("a silvery goddess shone in front of him, full of unusual beauty and magic" (NPS 160)). Nastia and other women appear as beings from a different world, incomprehensible to the man, and fatally attractive because of being unattainable:[32] "There, behind his back, remained streets and houses full of *creatures* in long clothes and with long hair, with eyes that cut his heart

[32] See my discussion of the mimetic desire in the chapter on Liudmila Petrushevskaia.

and with such captivating power that he could not resist it: they were like a *flame* that lures foolish butterflies in which they burn; they are full of magic which paralyzes the entire body; they are most beautiful, but their beauty exists only for one reason: to lure and to destroy" (NPS 153-154; emphases mine). The result of Ioann's resistance to the law of nature is depicted in his further exhaustion from nightly visions and repeated pollutions, which lead him to speed up his ordination as monk, and to eventual death. Thus the embrace of nature (paganism) is only sanctioned within the confines of a populist worldview (patriarchal society), in which man and woman are ascribed very rigid roles and positions.

Similar lack of ambiguity is characteristic for other relations in the novel. Relations between father and son (Ahapit and his father, the healer – cf. in particular the contrasting complexity of the father-son relationship in Oleh Lysheha's work) and mother and son (Ioann and his mother) are one-dimensional and rigid: the father is always loving but strict, while mother is nurturing and devoid of sexuality (cf. NPS 152). This brings the novel very close to the Socialist Realist canon, in which such images fit into the myth of the Great Family.[33] There are also a few mentor figures in the novel, the most important of them is Ieremiia the Sagacious who takes care of Semen and to whom Semen (in part, at least) aspires.[34]

The novel also exhibits a strong tendency towards epic narration. The author works here with a number of typified characters that are characterized not through their inner traits or psychological development, but through juxtaposition of outer attributes

[33] Cf. Katerina Clark's analysis of the treatment of these topoi in canonic works of high Socialst Realism (*The Soviet Novel* 114-135).

[34] In this regard, Ieremiia fulfills the ritual that Katerina Clark defines as crucial for a Socialst Realist work – he effects a "change" in the mentee, a transformation on the path to "consciousness" (cf. Clark, *The Soviet Novel* 66).

that are then ascribed character traits. A typical ploy is the discrepancy between the outer appearance and the inner essence of the persons and phenomena depicted. Such are, for instance, the oppositions of the possessed and the "exorcist" Lavrentii,[35] the Armenian doctor and Ahapit the Doctor,[36] or the prisoner sentenced to death and the same Ahapit,[37] or the spider-like Hryhoriy and his fly-like victim Isakii.[38] Despite a critical and life-threatening situations, these oppositions evoke a comical effect through contrast of incongruous phenomena, which is reflected on the level of style of language: lower, populist lexical units are used (*ohriadnyi, pidtiuptsem, triukhykaty*) as well as diminutive (*chenchyk*) and augmentative (*cholov`iaha*) forms. Such method of painting in broad strokes, using rigid and less-nuanced oppositions, is highly characteristic of epic prose. It also reflects the position of the author vis-à-vis his readers: the implicit audience is infantilized here, considered as such that will not decry the quality of writing but rather draw pleasure from the comic effects, seen as an object of the author's enlightenment efforts, and remains entirely on the receiving end of the creative process. This stands in stark contrast to, for instance, Liudmila Petrushevskaia's works that demand a significant effort and participation of the reader in the decoding of the complex narrative structure of the works.

[35] "In that light the two froze: one gigantic, and the other one tiny" (NPS 12).
[36] "They stood facing each other: furious and glowing, tense and apprehensive. The famous doctor was corpulent and tall. But Ahapit was cachetic" (NPS 129).
[37] "The criminal ran after him, and it was a strange scene. He was walking, the tiny black monk, making wide steps and proudly raising his head, and after him jogged at a trotting pace big, arched to appear smaller, fella" (NPS 143). This passage exhibits the travesty device that is used for comic effect particularly well – it contrasts starkly with the severity of a situation in which a person's life is at stake.
[38] "And indeed, he [Isakiy] was handing among the ropes and meshes like in a spider's net, and howled and wallowed, and below him slowly walked the big-headed thin little monk, calmly leaning on his little walking stick" (NPS 181).

Shevchuk's chosen style and setting of the novel – narrator as an enlightened monk who sees through religious dogmatism and rejects it, affirming life as a combination of "common sense," seemingly rational approach to complex phenomena, and a conservative social reality rooted in autochthonous Ukrainian identity – enable the author's position as a teacher whose main goal is to educate his readers: about the *Patericon*, the Ukrainian essence of the Kyivan Rus', about paganism, a meaningful way of life, acceptable social practices and institutions, and so on.[39] This significantly limits the aesthetic function of the novel, and the text seems to be aware of that – the opening remarks of the narrator, his self-deprecation (as a monk and a writer) are a clear sign of it. Preventative belittling as if anticipates the criticism of the aesthetic value of the work. This can go as far as the author's proclamation of his "cooling off" towards his work, as Shevchuk does in an interview for the Polish *Tygodnik literacki* from late 1990, shortly before the Soviet Union's collapse.[40]

Aesthetic function is thus secondary to the mission of the work, which is represented by the insertions of magical realist details that do not motivate the events and serve primarily for decoration.[41] Use of an abundance of devices and elements of

[39] Cf. NPS 39, 88, 104, 117, 147.

[40] The interview appeared in the November 18 edition of the magazine (an excerpt from *On the Field of Humility* in Polish translation appeared in no. 9 of the same year). The interview was translated into Ukrainian by Natalka Bilotserkivets' and authorized by Shevchuk before it was published in *Suchasnist'*, no 3, 1992. Citations from the interview refer to that publication. "I have, however, quite cooled off to the novel," Shevchuk says in the interview, "I was writing it at a time when a lot of disgust accumulated inside me. This was a sort of psychotherapy" (57).

[41] "He [Ieremiia] closed his eyes and sank into his usual frozen state. … Trembling light was spilling over the earth, as if someone waved with a white coat, and from that coat the earth was flooded with light. Perhaps it was still the same merchant that we talked about so much today, or maybe somewhere nearby scores of white flowers peeked through the soil. Millions of snow-white butterflies took off from them and suddenly streamed into the sky, in which they began to dissolve and melt, turning into the ethereal, trembling light that densely filled the clouds" (NPS 24). It is curious that Shevchuk believes magical realism to be an inherent part of Ukrainian

narration that are not motivated by the dynamic of the novel's plot development (indeed, they stall it) or evident artistic considerations has been usually discussed in the Soviet Ukrainian literary scholarship as the late Soviet literature's "whimsicality" and thus placed within the context of "whimsical" / chimerical prose (*khymerna proza*). The "whimsical" character was usually framed as "conditionality" of literature, meaning its increased subjectivity under new circumstances of greater artistic freedom, but also its general detachment from concrete reality which Soviet critics tried to interpret as a key feature of European philosophical prose (Kravchenko 62, 65; cf. also Mikhailova's earlier publication on the topic). Although this argument is reiterated in Ukrainian scholarship until this day, it is rather unconvincing and points to the struggle of literary scholarship to deal with adequate categorization of the new literary production. This, however, does not explain the rich use of unmotivated narrative digressions and reiterations. Such a strategy, however, can be explained if ideological, not aesthetic considerations dominate the literary work. As Marko Pavlyshyn argues, Shevchuk's ideological mission is to create "readings of the past that are not guided by state ideology, that do not reiterate the thesis of the beneficent centrality of Moscow, and that allude to the former wealth, autonomy, and dignity of Ukrainian culture" ("Mythological, Religious, and Philosophical Topoi" 913). Within this ideological program reiterations of elements that do not advance the plot of the narrated story and do not deepen our understanding of the characters are fully motivated by the goal of creating an alternative past that is richly described. Shevchuk's relation to the "whimsical" prose is also not as

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identity, that is, forming the mystical "Ukrainian mentality": "Such particular artistic way of thinking is characteristic of Ukrainians, in my opinion – in a from that is dominated by folklore and demonology; demonology, by the way, is not only a "mystifying" worldview or understand of nature, in which people live, it is also the people's own image. An image of their ideas and beliefs" (Pyvovarska 59).

immediate as it appears. If "whimsical" prose goes back to *kotliarevshchnyna*, a phenomenon broadly understood in the literary scene primarily through its epigonic character, then Shevchuk engages in a certain dialogue with it rather than realizes its principles. Marko Pavlyshyn aptly points to the fact that "devices of the whimsical novel – folklore, Cossackdom, phantasy – do appear in [Shevchuk], but with entirely new functions. Primarily, they are freed of that annoying comic – in reality, ridicule – that defines 'whimsical' tonality" ("'Dim na hori' Valeriia Shevchuka" 40). This has to do primarily with the fact that, stemming from *kotliarevshchyna* and perhaps even from Gogol (*Evenings on a Farm Near Dikanka* and *Mirgorod*) that equate Ukrainianness with provinciality, Pavlyshyn argues, the "whimsical" novel "in reality is an argument *against* Ukrainian literature as an original [autochthonous] phenomenon," it subverts "the prestige of Ukrainian culture by associating it with the peasant element, backward and hopeless" (ibid.). While some of the writers and poets discussed in my study embrace their marginality and seize it as an opportunity to carve out a productive creative space for themselves (most prominently Elena Shvarts and Oleh Lysheha), Shevchuk engages in an active struggle with the Russian and Soviet imperial paradigm, trying to undo marginalization of Ukrainian culture and nation.

In *On the Field of Humility* the didactic function dominates throughout. This also translates in the reading of the novel within the national literary canon. Now a part of school curriculum, the novel's interpretation follows entirely Shevchuk's own explanation of it, offered post-factum: "Some saw in it some anti-religious tendencies, while in reality it is about something entirely different – it's about incompatibility of the clean spiritual life and the brutality of state power, which seeks to assume control even

over the sphere of religion and spirituality" (Pyvovarska 57).[42] Given the obvious secondary character of the depiction of state institution in the novel (especially in comparison to attention that the Church receives), as well as for reasons of the inner logic of the work, this interpretation appears unconvincing and could be read as an attempt to reconfigure the work's reception under new political circumstances, in which criticism of the government, and not of the Church, is commendable. Similarly unpersuasive are also attempts by some Ukrainian scholars to read Shevchuk's work as modernist – based solely on a definition of modernism as "the author's psychological immersion in the human soul" and "constant doubts, hesitation, search, and great suffering" (Movchan 223).[43] More importantly, however, these possibilities point to an intended ambiguity that concerns only one level of the text: its ideological dimension. Conditions of political uncertainty in the Party's course – fears that were substantiated by the 1991 "August Putsch" – force such writers as Valerii Shevchuk and Volodymyr Drozd to write in a manner that is inherently ambiguous, thus fostering productive experimentation on the border of Socialist Realism. In his later works, under conditions of Ukraine's independence, such ambiguity disappears and Shevchuk's as well as Drozd's works lose a significant part of their experimental character and become more unequivocal in voicing their ideological agenda. *On the Field of Humility* can therefore be read as a typical for Ukrainian literature articulation of late Socialist Realism. Its main characteristics are the consistent use of the main topoi and figures of the high Socialist

[42] Shevchuk is not entirely decided on that and offers another alternative interpretation, apparently coming from a colleague of his: "By the way, a colleague, having read the work, said to me: 'Listen, isn't it the image of our Writers' Union?' Indeed, after all, it is also an enclosed corporation where writers live following principles that are characteristic for a state" (Pyvovarska 57).

[43] Cf. also Leonid Novychenko's early critique of the novel in the same direction: "Pro roman Val. Shevchuka 'Na poli smyrennomu'."

Realism (the myth of the Great Family and the Father, figure of the mentor, strong ideological message, didacticism, and so on) that are, however, reiterated to the point of becoming decorative, thus undermining their function in the original highly ritualized structure of Socialist Realist works.

1. 5. Re-Appropriating History: Valerii Shevchuk's *The Tree of Thoughts*

The tendencies described above generally continue in Shevchuk's later works, such as his 1989 novel *Myslenne derevo* [The Tree of Thoughts] (written in 1985-1986), in which Shevchuk very consistently reinvents the myth of Medieval Kyiv from before and during the times of Kyivan Rus'. He invokes the imagery and the authority of famous mystifications such as *Slovo o polku Ihorevu* [The Tale of Igor's Campaign] in an attempt to define the foundation of Ukrainian national culture. The fact that *Slovo* is taken for an authentic source points to ideological directedness of Shevchuk's literary effort, since the most important hypotheses about the origin of certain cultural phenomena discussed in the book are built on *Slovo*'s assumed authenticity. (As is evident, this tendency is identical to Shevchuk's later defense of the *Book of Vles* as an authentic source of information about the ancient Ukrainian ethnos.)

The book is divided into four "reflections": "Troian," "Troian's Popular Assembly," "Oleh and Olha," and "Volodymyr." This structure reveals that the book is dedicated to the main elements of the Rusian mythology known from chronicles and other sources. The author makes an attempt to furnish the legends and popular folkloric tales with semi-scholarly commentary – that is, to legitimize the claim of national "greatness" in a manner similar to that of popular science. The writer's own "reflections" are interspersed with fictional accounts and legends that the author uses as illustrative

material for his points about the "ancient" heritage of Ukrainians. The motivation behind this is clearly to educate the reader (more about the intended reader below) and to provide legitimacy to the Ukrainian demand for national recognition.

As in the previous example, the genre is once again defined as hybrid – here it is a non-scholarly inquiry:

Це книжка розшуків та роздумів, які здійснює не вчений, а письменник. Мені здавалося, що кожна людина, котра вважає себе інтелігентною, не може, живучи в сучасному світі, не тримати в пам'яті водночас історичного та культурного досвіду свого народу, ба навіть цілого людства (*Myslenne derevo* 3).[44]	This is a book of searching and reflection, done not by a scholar, but by a writer. It seemed to me that everyone who considers themselves educated cannot, living in today's world, not hold in their memory simultaneously historical and cultural experience of their own people, or even of the entire humanity.

This definition allows Shevchuk not to hide behind the figure of a narrator, while at the same time voicing his own beliefs and opinions and addressing his audience directly.[45] Already here we see a blurring of the boundary between the genres of fiction and non-fiction that considerably intensifies later, as Shevchuk proceeds to publish books that he presents to the reader as "monographs." In *The Tree of Thoughts*, anti-colonial educational and didactic purposes prevail over the artistic deliberations because they are

[44] Quotations from *Myslenne derevo* [The Tree of Thoughts] will henceforth be abbreviated as MD, followed by the page number. Translations are mine, unless noted otherwise.

[45] Indeed, the views expressed in the above quote correspond closely with Shevchuk's other statements on the mission of a writer: "In general, I believe that, if someone does indeed occupy themselves with literature, then they must come to know their own national writers from the very root, in the most complete way, or at least in their most remarkable achievements" (Pyvovarska 54). Anti-colonial foundation of such a mission is understandable: "Our culture, although it counts over one thousand years, today is quite neglected. This concerns, of course, also literature. Only recently did we receive the opportunity to publish Ukrainian writers who were forgotten or prohibited by the government – hundreds of names, from the ancient times to the latest years" (ibid.). Shevchuk sees his own mission as a writer to reverse that – and he imposes this mission onto other Ukrainian writers as well.

defined as critical and therefore indispensable:[46] "Therefore, the past is today's foundation, and the building of our contemporary day will never stand, if that foundation won't be solid. … It is precisely for this reason that the idea of this book that lies before you, my reader, is an attempt of such a travel to the past" (MD 5). This didactic stance is in general emblematic for the phenomenon of *shistdesiatnytstvo* in which Shevchuk participated in a rather limited way (we see it much more pronounced in Volodymyr Drozd; other examples include Lina Kostenko, Ivan Drach, Dmytro Pavlychko and others). In its orientation towards the *narod*, this stance also is inherently anti-intellectual: it relies on imprecise, intuitive, and ethical knowledge of the people and rejects scholarly knowledge where it contradicts its understanding of the world. This kind of didacticism and anti-intellectualism is shared by populism and Socialist Realism.

Perhaps the most important result of the book's own genre definition is that it legitimizes a romantic depiction of the "ancient" Slavs and their beliefs, as well as an idealized concept of the collective organization in the Medieval Rus'. The book overflows with typical socialist realist positive heroes, only dressed as "ancient" Slavs.[47] In a way that is similar to the method in *On the Field of Humility*, Shevchuk often resorts to the socialist realist typification as a means of character creation: the respective character loses individuality and their distinct language, and stands proxy for an entire category. Such is the narration in the story "Vishcha nauka" (A Warlock's Apprenticeship). Besides the general simplification of the depicted reality, the main

[46] In general, this rhetoric fits into the overall atmosphere of the second half of the 1980s in the Soviet Union when perestroika brought with it the feeling of impending changes in the society and allowed for more freedom in reexamining the past.
[47] Cf. Katerina Clark's notion of a positive hero in the socialist realist novel in her "Socialist Realism with Shores: The Conventions for the Positive Hero" (1997) and *The Soviet Novel* (2000).

characters lack specificity and remain schematic even when Shevchuk attempts to show their development over the course of the story. The boy is plagued with naiveté in the beginning of the story:

Отже, я дурний? – з тривогою спитав хлопець. – Ні, ти цікавий. А може, й дурний, не знаю... – Я не дурний, тату, - нахмурив брови хлопець. – Бо я багато думаю. Дурний не думає багато. Я ж дивлюся на світ і про все хочу довідатися. Хочу все зрозуміти, а мені на мої питання не відповідають. Сміються з мене і женуть геть. Брати б'ють мене, хоч я їм ніколи кривого слова не сказав (MD 109).	Therefore, I'm stupid? – asked the boy nervously. – No, you are curious. Although, maybe stupid, I don't know... – I am not stupid, dad, – the boy scowled. – Because I think a lot. Someone stupid does not think much. But I look at the world and want to learn about everything. I want to understand everything, but no one answers my questions. They laugh at me and cast me away. My brothers beat me, although I never spoke a bad word to them.

The presentation of the boy's naiveté in this episode is extremely straightforward. The sentences are short and the language is endowed with a sense of peasant dignity. The boys character constructed in such a way already here reveals the ethical dimension of his development. Moreover, the boy is depicted as curious and for this reason a victim of bullying from those who, the reader can infer, are morally and intellectually inferior to him. The journey is, therefore, already constructed before the main hero embarks on it, with predictable outcome.

As the story develops over a few months, the boy – who remains nameless – is expected to become "wise" from learning about human society, altruism, and self-esteem, but at the end the ultimate transformation into the "wise man" happens by the power of his mentor, the warlock. Simplicity – if not primitivism – of thinking remains the boy's main characteristic even after he returns from his travels, continuously endowed with a peasant sense of self-esteem. Moreover, such *Naturvolk* primitivism is depicted as key in achieving wisdom: "My master, I got tired, – he said, concluding. – I spent my entire

energy for the way back, so that I can return. As I was walking, I worried all the time about the following: I did not want to carry the evil, but carried it; I wanted to be wise, but turned out to be stupid. What of the lesson that that I learned?" (MD 129). Schematism and artificiality reveal themselves in the language of the old warlock and in the narrative parts of the story, as well as in the transformation of the boy who finally discovers the paradoxical dialectics of being in an imperfect world: "There is no happiness without sorrow, my boy; there is no wisdom without stupidity. My lesson is not in getting rid of sorrow, the evil and stupidity, but in knowing about them. … You stopped doubting, but a man becomes stupid without doubting" (MD 130). The ultimate lesson, therefore, lies in the experience of the world, not its intellectual comprehension.

The father figure of the master – a wise, old man, paradoxical in the expression of his wisdom – plays a crucial role in leading the boy to the light of knowledge, both literally and figuratively: in the concluding part of the story, the boy burns in the pyre of wood prepared by the old man only to be reborn in the knowledge of "half of the world."

Чи розумієш щось більше? – спитав Ох. – Знаю, що в півсвіті діється, - сказав хлопець. – Ну, то йди собі в той півсвіт, - мовив Ох, бо вже нічого не міг навчити хлопця. Уже був той мудріший за нього, адже дід ветхий, а хлопець – юний, адже він ніби вечір, а хлопець – як ранок, котрий ступив оце зараз на землю і звеселив та налив сонячним соком усе живе й неживе (MD 138).	Do you understand something else? – Okh asked. – I know what is happening in half of the world. – Then go ahead and travel to that half of the world, - Okh said, because there was nothing else he could teach the boy. He was already wiser than him, because the old man was decrepit, but the boy was like a morning that here and now stepped onto earth and cheered and filled everything, alive and dead, with the sun's nectar.

The resolution of the entire story is predictable and does not in any way surprise the reader's expectation. (As I show, this is radically different for writers that depart from the Soviet system – such as Liudmila Petrushevskaia who in her works thematizes literary

tradition and escapes following it, thus frustrating her readers' expectations.) Following the totalitarian rejuvenation myth, the Father passes on the torch to the Son who, having completed the task that the Father gave him, has now achieved the necessary wisdom. The Son's burning up in the pyre symbolizes the sacrifice for the greater good, that is, the son's transformation into the hero of self-sacrifice, modeled on the martyr legend (see my discussion of the types of heroes in socialist realist prose earlier in this chapter). The boy's burning in the pyre also completes a cycle of nature that aligns human society with the universe, thus creating a sense of harmony and natural progress of life.

Such a schematic and unidirectional transformation, avoidance of some of the key moral questions that accompany any struggle for the meaning of life and one's role in it, stereotypical images of the mentor and his disciple, and many other features point to the proximity of this and other stories to the typical narrative structure of the socialist realist prose. As Katerina Clark has shown, the presense of the positive hero and of a master-student (father-son, etc.) relationship is one of the defining characteristics of the socialist realist prose.[48] While most stories come from real or forged historical sources, their selection reveals a tendency: to portray the "ancient" Slavs as exceptional in everything. Such heroization is equally a remnant of Socialist Realism, and many socialist realist hero types find their way into the novel. An example of a hero who sacrifices herself for the greater good is a young woman who agrees to die for a deceased patriarch – and does not seem to have many regrets about sacrifycing her life for the sake of her tribe's traditions:[49]

Оскільки ж помер добрий господар, Since a good master died, the eldest of his

[48] Cf. *The Soviet Novel* 167-176 (on the plot as a rite of passage and its key elements).
[49] This story comes from the report of ibn-Fadlan which is discussed later in this chapter.

старший із роду його спитав у дівчат та хлопців: - Котре із вас умре з ним? На те слово виступила з гурту молода і гарна дівчина і сказала дзвінко: «Я!», прирікши себе тим на смерть... Мені можуть не повірити, але та дівчина зовсім не відчувала смутку, а була весь час весела. ... Щодня дівчина пила мед, скільки хотіла, й багато співала, веселячись і радіючи (MD 38).

kin asked the girls and boys: – Which one of you will die with him? A young and beautiful girl stepped forward from the group in response to his words and said with a clear voice: "I will!", thus condemning herself to death… Some won't believe me, but that girl did not feel any sorrow at all, but was all the time merry. … Everyday the girl drank as much mead as she pleased, and sang a lot, being merry and joyous.

Similar to the previous story, self-sacrifice here is voluntary, and it does not allow for any psychologism in depicting the girl's inner state facing death. This story not only signals strong cohesion of the "ancient" Slavic ethnos but also promulgates a pattern of behavior that the author perceives as commendable. In this particular instance the values of the community are reinforced by the girl's sacrifice: because a good master (*dobryi hospodar*, that is, a good provider) died, he should be honored and his legacy will live on through the act of the girl's self-sacrifice. The psychological implausibility of the story has little effect on the narration primarily because it is presented as a historical fact (reported by an outside witness – ibn-Fadlan). The exotic ritual is therefore fully legitimized and the reader is encouraged to consider such dedication herself or himself for the sake of her or his community.

One of the dominant tendencies of *The Tree of Thoughts* is the writer's affectionate, idyllic depiction of the community organization (*obshchynnyi uklad*) of the Slavic medieval society. Shevchuk presents it to the reader as an example of proto-democratic coexistence in a collective that was no longer bound by the blood relation. Shevchuk clearly idealizes the social reality here and avoids discussing any possibly difficult topics (such as slavery, for instance, vividly described in the same report by ibn-

Fadlan) that was the reality of that social structure.[50] What we see instead is the idyllic image of peaceful ploughmen, ready to reach for the sword only if they are under attack and need to protect their families and hard-won possessions. The institute of the princedom becomes here solely a protective mechanism against the enemy of the collective:

Ясна річ, що міцного порядку в общинному суспільстві не було, зате була федеративність, яка стягувала в цільність окремі групи, племена. ... Отже, общини складалися у землі, волості, області, князівства, а відтак виникала потреба в центрах общинних об'єднань, в яких збиралося спільне віче. ... Общинний лад – це мирний союз, об'єднання на добровільних засадах, яке виникло із спільних потреб оборони і потреб економічних... ... Отже, війни велися, щоб захистити свій край і плоди власної праці, саме для цього й існували у них князі (MD 77).	Certainly, there was no strict order in the communal society, but there was a federative organization, which pulled together into one separate groups and tribes. … Therefore, communities comprised lands, volosts, oblasts, and princedoms, hence there was need for centers of communal associations, in which a joint council would assemble. … Communal organization is a peaceful union, a voluntary association, which emerged from the collective needs for defense and economy. … Therefore, wars were fought to defend once homeland and the fruits of one's labor; for this very reason did they have princes.

This depiction of the social organization is particularly interesting because Shevchuk evidently tries to connect it with the later federalism of the Cossack State. While building a historical foundation for the Ukrainian statehood, Shevchuk also emphasizes those features that decisively set it apart from the Russian project: namely, democratism and peacefulness of the union created by the Ukrainian forefathers. The Ukrainian identity becomes legitimized here through biological, geographical, and cultural continuity between the "ancient" Slavs and the later Ukrainians. Simultaneously, by the very nature

[50] See Oleksandr Halenko's article on the origins of slave trade in Eastern Europe. Halenko shows that slavery was a widely accepted phenomenon and even the sale of one's own children into slavery was not a rare occurrence.

of the "ancient" community Shevchuk describes the Russian claims to the Rusian legacy is denied as foreign to the land and its traditions.

Strongly romanticized depiction of the popular beliefs and traditions, symbols and tales, hierarchy of deities, relation to soil and customs connected to the agricultural cycle closely correspond with the ideas of cultural populism and a Ukrainophilism that echoes that of the second half of the 19th century.[51] Ideas of peasant democracy and Herderian determination of the national character through the geographic location and relation to it are the objects of fascination in *The Tree of Thoughts*. The notion of culture and its attributes play a particularly important role here: Shevchuk goes to great lengths to argue that the medieval Slavs had a developed and adequate to that time cultural production, and that the contemporary Ukrainian nation is the heir to that cultural tradition. Pathos usually accompanies the author's observations:

Який геніальний творець створив оці слова і коли? Який дивовижний митець вигадливо нанизав оці розкішні образи і скільки за тими образами потаємного, символічного думання про світ, землю, яка велична картина пробудження природи і який високий гімн цій природі в образі прекрасної діви! Вона іде по землі, ця діва, щедра, багата, гарна й	What genius creator and when created these words? What miraculous artist so intricately strung these splendid images and how much secret and symbolic thought about the world and earth is hidden behind them, what magnificent picture of the nature's awakening and what solemn hymn to this nature in the image of a beautiful virgin! She walks on

[51] As was discussed earlier in this chapter, the lasting vitality and attractiveness of the ideas of Ukrainophilism and populism in Ukrainian culture, especially in various forms in the 20th century, to a great extent was the result of the regularly returning threat of national, cultural, and linguistic annihilation of Ukrainians and the constant perception of an endangered existence. In the 19th century, Russian imperialism significantly contributed to the emergence of the victimist paradigm (in particular, Russian imperial language and nationalities politics, as expressed most aggressively in the Valuev Circular (1863) and the Ems Ukaz (1876)). In the 20th century, the civil war of 1917-1921, Stalinism, collectivization and the Great Famine (Holodomor) of 1932-33, World War II, and the difficult economic recovery afterwards have been the important factors for the perception of the Ukrainian nation's constant threat of non-existence, danger to its culture and language. In a situation where political action was impossible or suicidal, culture took on the role of political institutions to preserve what was perceived as critically endangered, leading thus to conservation of cultural forms that were believed to be inherent to Ukrainians.

пишна і благословляє усе суще й людину, що її придумала, тішить і звеличує життя та світ; примушує уклонитися своїй власній величі, адже вона – вічна, бо вона – земля, вона – краса, вона – Діва, яка прийшла не просто попишатися у світ, а щоб його оновити, вона ж бо має високу і святу місію – продовжити життя, адже готується дати світові свій здоровий плід (MD 91).	earth, this virgin, generous, rich, beautiful and voluptuous, and she blesses everything existing and the man who invented her, she delights life and the world; she forces everyone to bow down to her greatness, because she is eternal, because she is earth, she is beauty, she is Virgin who came not just to show herself off in the world, but to rejuvenate it, for she is the one who has the high and sacred mission – to continue life, because she is preparing to give her healthy offspring to the world.

In the above passage, the pathos of glorification of the language is particularly striking because it seamlessly connects to Shevchuk's later strategy in defending the *Book of Vles* as an authentic document of early Ukrainian language. In his 1994 article Shevchuk directly refers to *The Tree of Thoughts* as a source of information that explains some of the inconsistencies of the *Book of Vles* and simultaneously elevates Shevchuk's novel to the status of a well-researched scholarly monograph (cf. "Zahadkova 'Velesova knyha' 63, 65, 66, 69). Not being an expert, Shevchuk nevertheless confidently argues in his article that "before us is the oldest monument of Ukrainian literature, one of the epic corpora in which we can really see the foundation for later epic tales, while simultaneously it is also an example of a proto-chronicle that will contribute a great many interesting pages to the history of Ukrainian chronicle writing" (ibid. 71). The identical tone of *The Tree of Thoughts* and Shevchuk's defense of the *Book of Vles* points to the fact that both works are dominated by the same political project: to compensate for the persecution of the Ukrainian language and culture, and to affirm the autonomy and autochthony of the Ukrainian nation vis-à-vis Russia. For this reason, the passage above is replete with sacral imagery that is connected to language: the "ancient" language

(understood as the predecessor of the Ukrainian language) was created by a "genius creator" (i.e. God) who is also the most skilled artist who already at inception endowed the language with "secret and symbolic thought"; this language is then connected to the earth deity marked primarily in its procreative function (soil, Virgin) and points to a concrete geographic location (Kyiv and contemporary Ukraine as the cradle of this language and culture). The beautiful language, created by God, is therefore naturally determined by the land that the people who speak it inhabit, and is thus fully equipped to grasp and reflect the complexity of the earthly and metaphysical dimensions of human existence. Defined by these strategies, Shevchuk's project is highly restorative: it seeks to reconstruct an identity that appears lost or hijacked by connecting it to a past knowledge about which is unreliable. Shevchuk spends a great deal of energy on legitimizing this connection by grounding the link in a network of pseudo-scholarly references which at closer examination turn out to be bogus (as with the *Book of Vles*), while also ignoring and excluding from mentioning those parts of the sources quoted that are inconvenient for his project. Shevchuk strongly differs in this from the strategies I discuss in Petro Midianka's work: while Midianka seeks legitimacy in the concrete use of language and available representations of the past in the present reality, he mourns the loss of a polyethnic and multicultural past of Transcarpathia. Shevchuk, however, is interested in reconstructing a homogenous Ukrainian nation that thwarts Russian attempts at provincialization. Midianka, on the opposite, embraces the marginal character of his language and region and presents it as full of productive opportunities for creativity and exchange that is not threatening to his ethnic or linguistic identity.

The identity building in which Shevchuk engages here makes significant use of sentimental imagery. Common to all such images is the idea of a strong, resilient people, one that "lived in a simple and strict way, modestly, but, like a long-living tree, slowly and unbowingly [*neskhytno*]," alluding to the popular mythology of Ukrainian resistance and struggle for statehood and survival (MD 7). In many instances, the text is a recasting of Rus' mythology as Ukrainian national mythology: thus Shevchuk dedicates a significant part of his effort to establishing a direct genealogic link from the times of Kyivan Rus' and before all the way to the current Ukrainian ethnicity. Such effort directly mimics the imperial Russian efforts as known from the cultural production and popular imperial discourse of the 19th century (publication of the *Tale of Igor's Campaign* in 1800 and Aleksandr Borodin's opera *Prince Igor* (1869-1887) are directly connected in this regard).[52] As Serhii Plokhii shows, the term Kyivan Rus' itself comes from imperial Russian historiography and was created to distinguish one historical period within the imperial Russian narrative from another (that is, Kyivan from Muscovite). It helped underline existing differences between these two periods of "all-Russian" history and as such was gladly accepted by the twentieth-century Ukrainian historiographers who fought hard to remove the history of Kyivan Rus' from the imperial historical narrative (204).[53] Shevchuk is a direct successor of such efforts.

[52] Cf. also Boris Gasparov's argument to this effect: "Beginning with Karamzin, Russian historiographers painted a picture of Kievan Rus at the height of its glory in the ninth and tenth centuries as a world power: intimidating Constantinople, dominating the northern Balkans, spreading from the swamps of Lithuania to the steppes of the northern Caucasus, interacting with numerous peoples and languages. This legendary past, which faded away in the subsequent centuries, now seemed to reawaken in the new glories of the Russian Empire" (32).

[53] For in-depth discussion of the claims to the Kyivan Rus' heritage for Russia alone in the 19th century see Tolochko 266-309.

Although the genre of *The Tree of Thoughts* is defined as a "novel-essay," the layer of a fictitious narrator between Valerii Shevchuk and the text practically does not exist.[54] For Shevchuk his identity as a historian is very important for the realization of the work's mission. Therefore, in most cases, he is present directly as the author of the text, an amateur historian who likes reflecting on the distant past of his people, while also educating them about it. As we see in Shevchuk's argumentation in the article on the *Book of Vles*, this is used later for legitimization of his pseudo-scholarly claims. This narrative position very closely ties in with the stylistic and structural characteristics of the text. Although thematically dedicated to the national topics (the main idea of the recounting of Rus's wonders is clearly glorification of the Ukrainian nation), in its structure and style the text is embedded in the tradition of Socialist Realism. Markers of such connection are the didactic tone of the story telling, the metaphorical devices used, and a number of clear divisions into binary oppositions – the remnant of the Socialist Realism's deindividualization of its characters for reasons of typification, as briefly discussed earlier in this chapter. Expressions of such devices are various techniques of exotifying the Rusian ancestors. In one example this becomes double exoticism: the Slavs are seen through the eyes of Akhmed ibn-Fadlan, an exotic Arab himself, and typical Western-European features of the Slavs become the target of a colonizing Eastern gaze:[55]

[54] In the beginning of the novel, the narrator/author states the following: "… defining the genre of this book, I called it a novel-essay, not a collection of historical-literary sketches; figuratively speaking, I want to wander along the thought tree of our people not as a nightingale (poet), but rather as squirrel – to squirrel around, to search for the hiding places that are themselves hidden in the hollows of that tree. For this reason, there will be in my reflections on the cultural treasures of the past more artistic than scholarly inquiry, - this is why this writing is a novel after all. But I don't want to look in the eyes of my reader like an author of fantasy, that is, I don't invent facts, but I take them and present them as they are, such as is custom in the historical science" (MD 44).

[55] While this source is considered authentic by scholars, no original of Ahmad ibn Fadlan's account exists. Moreover, what Shevchuk uncritically takes for the description of the Rusians (i.e.

Перше, що мене вразило: вони такі великі тілом, як дерева пальмові, волосся їхнє світле, а одежа така: плащ, яким закутує чоловік один бік, а з другого лишає оголену руку. Вони купці, але й воїни, бо кожен носить із собою меча, ніж і сокиру – мечі в них широкі, франкські. Але вразило мене інше: на руках у них від нігтів до шиї малюнки – сині дерева, уся шкіра розмальована. (MD 35-36).

The first thing that struck me: their bodies are so big, like palm trees, their hair is fair, and their clothes are as follows: coat with which the man covers one side and leaves the other arm bare. They are merchants, but also warriors, because everyone carries a sword, knife, and an axe – their swords are broad, like those of the Franks. But I was struck by something else: they have ornaments on their arms from the nails to the necks – blue trees, the skin is all painted.

The quote, imported directly into the text of the book, is striking for the attention to the bodily characteristics of the Slavs that appear almost flattering in Shevchuk's compensatory presentation. The main goal of such estranging depiction is to affirm the positive qualities of the Slavs. Remarkably, the guest from the East plays here the stereotypical role of the colonizing Westerner with his attempt at rationalization of the exotic Other: the portrayed barbarians are a nation of beautiful, strong, animalistic in their vitality and unyielding people. Their barbarism is positively cast as love for freedom and independence, their proximity to nature and their vitality are the typical traits of Romantic heroes:

От узяти, до прикладу, як розправляються вони із злодієм чи розбійником. Таких не судять, бо це в них крайні переступи, їх просто карають. Приводять до грубого дерева, в'яжуть такому на шию міцного шнура і вішають. При цьому злодій, за їхнім законом, має висіти доти, доки не

Let's take, for example, the way they prosecute a thief or a robber. These are not judged in court, because these crimes are ultimate transgressions for them, therefore they [the criminals] are simply punished. They take them to a thick tree, put a rope on their neck and hang them. According to their law, the thief has to hang until his

Slavs) has in the scholarly debate been often considered as a likely description of the Norsemen. Besides the descriptions that Shevchuk includes in his fictionalized account, the manuscript apparently also included depictions of nauseating hygienic rituals and other unsavory details of their everyday routine, as well as stories of the free sexual conduct. Another interesting circumstance is that the text was first published in Russian translation in 1823, at the height of the romantic and heroic period in the Russian Empire. See Richard N. Frye's commentary in *Ibn Fadlan's Journey to Russia: A Tenth-Century Traveler from Baghdad to the Volga River*.

розпадеться на кавалки від часу, вітрів та дощів (MD 38).	corpse falls apart from time, wind, and rain.

Overall, the text fits very well into the mystification mode of the work it uses as its foundation (*Slovo*), creating and reinforcing the edifice of the national mythology. Such are the legends of Kyi (and the connection Kyiv – Troy), Lybid' (princess Lebid' – Sunil'da), democratic self-government, traditions, beliefs, role of Christianity, and many others. The meta-narrative of the Ukrainian national project is upheld here and clearly opposes the Soviet narrative, while structurally mirroring it. The seeming contradictions imbedded in such a process – such as, for instance, the still obligatory quoting of Marx and Engels – are, in fact, pieces of the same puzzle, as they show the author's willingness to conform in order to participate in the discourse. The consistent tying of cultural and other phenomena to the territory (land and soil, as in *The Tree of Thoughts*) marks the attempt to re-appropriate them as elements of the national myth.

The question of the intended audience is one of the most important ones for literary works created with a clear ideological agenda. Such an agenda in *The Tree of Thoughts* is education of the reader of Ukraine's glorious past and legitimization of the Ukrainian national project through the depiction of the cultural heritage of the Kyivan Rus' as primarily a Ukrainian heritage. The style of writing, its simplifications and schematism all point to the fact that the book is intended to reach a mass audience and thus has to be accessible to readers with very different educational and social backgrounds. The didactic component consists in the presence of a wealth of ethnographic material (whose authenticity is often questionable) and Shevchuk's own interpretation of it. Shevchuk attempts to explain and localize some of the key myths and

legends of the Slavs: the legend of the founding of Kyiv,[56] the rituals surrounding the summer solstice, legends of the summit of witches on Lysa Hora (Bald Mountain), the legends of Princes Oleh and Ihor, Princess Ol'ha and her revenge on the Derevlians, legends surrounding Prince Volodymyr's life, and the legendary Slavic folk heroes (such as Kozhumiaka, Chobot'ko, Illia Muromets', and others). Unqualified reader will have a hard time distinguishing truth from fiction, which seems to be the goal of the writer. The author strives for a seemingly plausible, "logical" explanation, supplying his rationalization attempts with the most diverse and often startling connections to folklore, literature, history, religion, psychology, and archeology. Recounting of various traditions, customs, and folkloric material that accompany them occupy a very special place in the book. Besides educating his reader, the writer tries to make her/him as enthusiastic about it as he is himself. The following lengthy quote fully encapsulates the reiterative style of Shevchuk's writing (in which the same ideas are reworded in an immediate sequence) and shows the emotional motivation strategy he employs in order to formulate a moral appeal to his reader:

І все-таки він і досі вражає, цей And yet it still strikes to this day, this

[56] Very interesting are Shevchuk's strategies of equating ancient Troy with "ancient" Kyiv. To support his claim, Shevchuk refers to instances in *Slovo* where the name "Troian" is mentioned: "Let us, however, dear reader, summarize the facts [sic] that *Slovo* brought to us. In two cases – 'Troian's councils' and 'Troian's land' – the word 'Troian' can be changed to 'Kyivan' without any damage to the text. … In a second case Troian's land and Kyivan land are identical terms. … Therefore, the tribe of Polians could have arrived in the Kyiv region in the 70s of the IV century along with their three leaders, as follows from the chronology of Troian's centuries. Here they found Troy, a tripple city on three hills, and begin a new period in their history – the age of Troian" (MD 22-23). Shevchuk's founding myth does not go back all the way to Homeric Troy (although he might have gotten the idea for it from Kotliarevs'kyi's *Eneïda*, cf. MD 35), but it has clear founding aspirations, although with limitations: "This reflection is only a hypothesis, an attempt to tie facts together in such a *logical system* as to not contradict what is known and not to say that this one or another made a mistake. It is not only about one of the key moments in Kyiv's and our entire land's history, but also about certain periods of our spiritual life, about the *beginnings*, ultimately, *of our poetic tradition*, which, without any doubt, goes back all the way to grey-haired [i.e. ancient] past (as the author of *Slovo* attests)" (MD 29; emphases mine).

культурний феномен – епос землі, якого не вмістити і в сотню томів, який є грандіозною будівлею духу народу не в одному якомусь періоді, а в міжчассі. І всі ми, люди двадцятого століття, які, здавалося б, зовсім відійшли від своєї пракультури, усе-таки в душах своїх тримаємо її пагони, усе-таки відчуваємо її в кожній клітині свого мозку, бо є одна вічна істина: утікаючи, людина ніколи не втече від свого обличчя, а коли й утече, то їй поспівчувати варто, а не позаздрити. Ніхто із нас не осилить прочитати весь епос землі, він має читатися так, як і творився – спільно, цілим народом. Але й досі він читається, досі співається, й досі до нього повертаються очі, бо він символ життя нашого в цьому світі, бо він корінь щасливого чи нещасливого нашого буття (MD 96-97).

cultural phenomenon – the epos of the land which cannot fit even in hundred volumes, which is a grandiose building of the people's spirit not in one single period, but throughout time. And all of us, people of the 20th century who, it seems, entirely departed from our ancestral culture, in our souls still keep its [the culture's] sprouts, we still feel it in every cell of our brain, because there exists one eternal truth: fleeing, the man will never escape his own face, and even if he would escape it, then he deserves pity, not envy. None of us will be able to read all of the land's epos; it has to be read as it was created – together, by the entire people. But it is read even today, until this day it is being sung, and still our eyes turn to it, because it is the symbol of our life in the entire world, because it is the root of our happy or miserable being.

Together with the proclamation earlier in the book that every "educated person" (*kozhna intelihentna liudyna*) has to know their past, the above quote turns into an emotional accusation of the descendants who have abandoned their roots, forgotten who they are, and thus have no future. In this Shevchuk's prose closely approaches the populist examples of the 19th century, as well as writing of the non-Soviet Ukrainian writers of the 20th century whose works are dominated by the feeling of nostalgia.

In conclusion, Valerii Shevchuk sees the return to national roots – defined through language, traditional organization of society, knowledge of the heroic history and acknowledgement of folk beliefs and customs – as a way to overcome inferiority complexes, that is, to rise as a nation equal to its neighbors. Shevchuk's effort is directed at affirming the Ukrainian ethnic and cultural identity and in its essence directly negates the opposing master narrative of the Soviet Union. In the latter's stead it establishes the

grand narrative of the Ukrainian national project, identical in its structure. In an effort to undermine the ideological component of Socialist Realism, both *The Tree of Thoughts* and *On the Field of Humility* turn to the populist model of a Ukrainian culture that is rooted in the autochthonous identity of the people. To advance their ideological message and fulfill their didactic function, these works use devices typical for the late Socialist Realism and employ stylistic innovation as mere decoration. At the same time, against the backdrop of Socialist Realism – especially high Socialist Realism of the Stalin period – Shevchuk's works are highly innovational and experimental. Truly meaningful is here primarily the thematic innovation (Ukrainian national question and claim for the cultural heritage), not formal experimentation. Hybrid genres of prose allow for an effective realization of the goals of a literature that still does not seek to fulfill its aesthetic function to the fullest.[57] Shevchuk is close in this to Volodymyr Drozd's work, discussed in my next chapter, but differs greatly from the work of such writer as Liudmila Petrushevskaia or poets Petro Midianka, Elena Shvarts, and Oleh Lysheha.

[57] These legitimation efforts continue well into the post-independence period and can also be traced in the works by Volodymyr Drozd (*Lystia zemli* (1985-90), discussed in the present study), Lina Kostenko (*Berestechko* (1999)), Roman Ivanychuk (*Orda* (1993)), and Yevhen Pashkovs'kyi (*Osin' dlia anhela* (1993), *Shchodennyi zhezl* (1999)).

Chapter Two:

Volodymyr Drozd: A Chronicle of Ukrainian Suffering

Volodymyr Drozd is one of the most well known and accomplished Soviet Ukrainian prose writers who debuted in 1963 with a collection of novellas and short stories entitled *Liubliu syni zori* [I Love Blue Stars]. Following this publication, the 23-year-old writer was immediately accepted as a member of the Ukrainian Writers' Union. Drozd has always been closely aligned with the Soviet officialdom without embracing it entirely, and most of his works reflect this ambiguity. On the one hand, Drozd participated in writing the *kolhosp* sagas that were required of the "official" Soviet writers.[58] On the other hand, however, he has always remained interested in inherently Ukrainian topics, in questions of history and national identity. This conflict resulted in works that ranged from typical socialist realist prose, enthusiastic of and affirming the Soviet reality, to works that raised ethical and national questions. Like Valerii Shevchuk in the Soviet period, Drozd pushed the boundaries of Socialist Realism very cautiously and in his more nationally oriented works never directly challenged the Soviet system.

Proof of that are his works published during the Stagnation period, following the repressions of 1972: fictional biography *Rytmy zhyttia* [Rhythms of Life] (1974) and *Doroha do materi* [The Road to Mother] (1979), collection of novellas and short stories *Yrii* (1974), collections of short prose *Liudy na zemli* [People on Earth] (1976) and *Zemlia pid kopytamy* [Land under the Hoofs] (1981), his novel *Inna Sivers'ka, suddia*

[58] *Kolhosp* (from *kolektyvne hospodarstvo*) is the Ukrainian term for the Soviet collective farm, known in Russian as *kolkhoz*. Henceforth, in relation to the Ukrainian context, I will be using the term *kolhosp*.

[Inna Sivers'ka, A Judge] (1983), or novella "Novosillia" [House Warming] (1987) among others. These works strictly adhere to the ideological and stylistic demands of Socialist Realism, portray either a heroic and patriotic, or a harmonious and wholesome image of life in the Soviet Ukrainian society (mostly in a rural setting), or depict ideologically conscious members of the Party.

On the other hand, works like "Katastrofa" [Catastrophe] (1968, in journal *Vitchyzna*; banned for book publication), "Samotnii vovk" [Lone Wolf] (written as "Vovkulaka" [Werewolf] in 1971; published only in 1983), or *Spektakl'* [Spectacle] (1985) testify to the writer's ability for psychological detail and mark his ambivalent attempts at breaking out of the system. With his writings strictly within the "shores" of Socialist Realism the writer appears to have tried to buy himself the artistic license for creative work on the Ukrainian national themes. The result was a hybrid phenomenon known as *khymerna proza* (whimsical prose), mentioned briefly in the previous chapter. Novellas "Bilyi kin' Sheptalo" [White Horse Sheptalo] (1969) and "Balada pro Slastiona" [A Ballad about Slastion] (1983), and the novella "Yrii" (written in 1970-1972) comprise Drozd's contribution to the "achievements of whimsical prose," as one early post-Soviet history of Ukrainian literature puts it (Andrusiv 373). (In general, this apologetic approach to prominent Soviet Ukrainian writers becomes characteristic for the establishment-driven Ukrainian literary scholarship after independence, while alternative and counter-official sources drop Drozd as a relevant figure altogether.)[59] These scholars usually see sources of inspiration for "magic" elements in Drozd's whimsical prose not so much in the Latin American models, that became popular in the Soviet Union only in

[59] Cf. *Pleroma: Mala ukraïns'ka entsyklopediia aktual'noï literatury* where Drozd does not figure at all and thus is not considered *aktual'nyi* [topical, actual, relevant].

the 1970s, but in literary (Mykola Hohol (Nikolai Gogol) and Lesia Ukraïnka (Larysa Kosach)) and folklore traditions (ibid.). A separate question that generally reflects Drozd's cautious, ambivalent relationship with the Soviet system is his administrative participation in the literary process before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1983 he briefly assumed the position of the editor-in-chief of the newly founded literary journal *Kyiv*; only after his resignation the journal begins publishing some of the more daring, previously banned works of literature (works by Volodymyr Vynnychenko, Volodymyr Sosiura, Ivan Bahrianyi, and Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi). In 1992 Drozd was elected the deputy head of the Ukrainian Writers' Union, refashioned but not reformed as the Ukrainian National Writers' Union.

In this chapter I analyze Volodymyr Drozd's novella "Yrii" (published in 1974) and his late Soviet novel entitled *Lystia zemli* [The Leaves of Earth] (1986-1990; first published in 1989 in the journal *Vitchyzna*; book publication in 1993), which represents the first part of the writer's envisioned project of a series of great novels documenting Ukrainian history of the past century. My analysis of "Yrii" within the framework of "chimerical" ("whimsical") prose allows for a productive approach to Drozd's later works. This chapter thus culminates in the analysis of *The Leaves of Earth* against the backdrop of other Drozd's works, discussing also questions of ideological art, the prose of Socialist Realism, and the question of mass literature. I argue that the main impetus of Drozd's novel lies in documenting the history of suffering of the Ukrainian people. For this reason the figure of the Chronicler (as a variation of the Prophet figure) becomes of prime importance for the narrator and for the author himself who undertakes such a monumental task. At the same time, as I show, Drozd's motivation lacks any clearly

defined nationalist agenda: the perpetrated evil is attributed to no one, and for this reason the perpetrator, whose naming would mobilize the community, remains vague. The extreme internal focalization – in which horrific historical events are narrated from the perspective of single individuals that have no complete overview over the complexity of the historical moment – eventually frames the tragic events as universal and attributes them to human nature rather than to concrete internal or external political or social actors and forces. In my view, this reflects the overall ambiguity of Drozd's writing which carefully avoids posing a direct challenge to the discourse of power and relies instead on the concept of "complex truth" that is realized as "many truths." Outlining this important circumstance, I contrast Drozd's stance with that of the poet Vasyl' Stus who challenged the Soviet regime and perished in a Soviet camp. Similar to the case of Valerii Shevchuk's writing during the Soviet period, Drozd's ambivalence towards the system results in a style of writing that is experimental and innovative by necessity and is therefore rather decorative, especially in view of the anti-modernist, nativist, and peasant values it advances. As I show in my reading of *The Leaves of Earth*, Drozd's main innovative achievement is the projection of a heterogeneous and autochthonous voice of the *narod*. At the same time, however, the monumental undertaking of an epic chronicle that would reflect the history of an entire people in response to the needs of the Ukrainian national project overrides this possible polyphony and absorbs significant elements of late Socialist Realism: high pathos, the figure of the Father, fragmentation of the plot as progression from darkness to enlightenment (here the novel itself represents such a quest), duplication and disintegration of the positive hero, and advancement of traditional, patriarchal values.

2. 1. Ideological Art, Kitsch, and Expressiveness

Scholars interested in the concepts of literary process and literary development have historically focused their attention on the achievements of Russian formalists and the structuralists (the Moscow and Prague schools). For the purposes of my study, the terms and concepts established by Mojmír Grygar's research on the Prague structuralist Jan Mukařovský are of particular importance. Grygar studied Mukařovský extensively and expanded the structuralist's ideas in the framework of his own argument about literary development. The building blocks of Grygar's work have clear structuralist pedigree: concepts of literary consciousness, artistic (literary) norms, the importance of striving for expressiveness as the main force for artistic (literary) development, the autonomy of the artistic developmental "series" vis-à-vis other developmental series (such as ideology, politics, economics, and science), the aesthetic and developmental value of the work of art, and the role of personality in artistic development.[60] Within this framework, Grygar discusses issues of developmental continuity (emphasizing the difference between chronological and "structural" continuity) and extra-literary factors that contribute to various systemic changes.

At the heart of Grygar's argument lies the assertion that it is precisely the struggle for expressiveness, not the achievement of aesthetic perfection, that drives forward artistic development. Thus, new developmental stages emerge from periods of crisis, when the available expressive possibilities of a particular style or technique have been realized in "perfect" form and, therefore, have reached the point of exhaustion ("The Possibilities of a Structural Analysis of the Literary Process" 377-379). To illustrate this

[60] Cf. Grygar, "The Role of Personality in Literary Development" and "The Possibilities of a Structural Analysis of the Literary Process."

in the context of modern visual art, Grygar maintains that "[m]astery of the laws of perspective or ignorance of them – in some cases their deliberate violation – does not in itself determine the value of an artistic structure and an individual work: this is the result of a complicated evaluation dependent upon a whole range of factors" (ibid. 378). Addressing the issue of the motivation for changes in an "artistic structure" such as a literary work, Grygar underscores "concrete problems of the writers 'craft'" (such as the "choice of the narrative compositional articulation or the theme, the distribution of characteristic stylistic and compositional devices, the establishment of the narrative rhythm and 'tone'," and others) vis-à-vis extra-artistic motives that usually receive prominent attention in the studies of artistic development (ibid. 380-381). In doing so, Grygar places the primary value on the artistic side of a work of art ("the very weaving of the work of art"), separating it from the way "a particular kind of art rendered or expressed extraliterary problems" (ibid. 381). Most importantly, Grygar defines such ideological art as a form of forgery: "In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we encounter downright frightening cases of so-called ideological art that is more than willing to conform to an external demand and that – despite varying ideological mandates – remains remarkably faithful to certain stereotyped devices and expressive means. Here, in fact, we are dealing with a certain kind of pseudo-artistic production merging with or bordering on the wide domain of kitsch. Like ideological art, kitsch seeks to be evaluated as genuine art; in both cases it is a matter of falsification" (ibid.).

Grygar's evaluation of ideological art is important here because it gives a theoretical basis to the general observation that the introduction of Socialist Realism effectively moved Soviet art and literature further away from the artistic domain and

subordinated it to the ideological domain (in Grygar's structuralist terms, a different "developmental series"). Any analysis of Soviet ideological art and literature as art *only* would therefore be misleading.

The notion of kitsch is closely connected to the technical reproducibility of a work of art and is an important part of mass, popular culture. Tamara Hundorova, in her *Kitch i literatura*, studies the evolution of the category of kitsch and evaluates it in socialist realist literature. Hundorova aptly points out that already the "national Ukrainian literature was consistently programmed in the 19th century as *popular literature*" which defined its unique artistic practice in comparison to other European literatures (9). Kitsch's appeal to the middle- and low-brow taste of the masses, its connection to the "sentimental experience" of the world (ibid. 7), makes it a good fit for ideological art that seeks to address a wide audience. Visual imagery in the style of kitsch is an effective device to transport ideological messages through the depiction of objects that trigger a certain emotion; similarly, in literature kitsch can be utilized for the purposes of advancing a chosen agenda. Appealing to emotions rather than rational analysis, kitsch is closely related to a romantic worldview, as it operates with categories of clear-cut oppositions, nostalgia for the lost "original," and fetishization of artifacts (ibid. 6). As Hundorova emphasizes, in literature kitsch can emerge as "a style of graphomania and then adapt ideologically to colonial art" and even become "a mask and a shield" (Hundorova explains thus the phenomenon of the burlesque "Little-Russian" style of *kotliarevshchyna*) (ibid. 10). In the case of both Drozd and Shevchuk, the latter is not the case, but significant moments of graphomania can be detected in both writers. This results primarily in an endless reiteration of wholesome, touching ("cutesy"), or similarly

schematically tragic moments that are freely interchangeable and do not qualitatively increase the value of the works (hence also the difficulty in finding a passage for quotation that would uniquely represent this style of writing). Instead, the quantitative increase of sentiment-charged moments achieves a heightening of emotion with the goal of persuading the reader. Indeed, the Greek word *πάθος* [pathos] that denotes suffering and experience fully encapsulates this mode. In his *Rhetoric,* Aristotle uses pathos precisely as an artistic mode of persuasion by appealing to the audience's emotions in reaching a desired judgment.[61] Solemn pathos and the authorial self-projection as Prophet (Chronicler) that fulfills a mission before his people are defining characteristics of the works of Drozd and Shevchuk that I analyze in my study.

Socialist Realism as a style that was meant to express *sovetskost'* [Sovietness] – as both the writers' willingness to "write themselves into [the] larger enterprise [of the Soviet Union]" as well as a similar persuasion of their readers to align themselves with it – was particularly predisposed to make use of the appeal of kitsch to masses (Parthé 291). Already with the advent of the NEP the "incomprehensible revolutionary imagery" of the avant-garde went through a crisis, and a demand for all things "beautiful" emerged (Hundorova, *Kitch i literatura* 187-188). A later rehabilitation of Romanticism as part of the socialist realist method of a "truthful depiction" of the Socialist reality contributed to the introduction of kitsch into Socialist Realism, whose total optimism was primarily directed at constructing the ideal reality in the future (ibid. 171-172, 189). As a rhetorical device, this method easily merged with such characteristics of kitsch as simplicity,

[61] In Aristotle's view, the main goal of rhetoric was to put the audience in a "sympathetic mood" and to convince it that the speaker is a credible person (Rapp, "Aristotle's Rhetoric" in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). These are the goals that both Shevchuk and Drozd seek to achieve in their works.

sentimentalism, and monumentalism (ibid. 191). This rehabilitation of other stylistic currents, summarized under the general term "romantic," that occurred during the Thaw, resulted largely in the license to depart from the purposefulness of the Soviet literature: now Socialist realism embraced a "boundless variety of forms, styles, and individual penmanship," a 1957 collection of articles on the Communist nature of (ideological) literature claimed (qtd. in ibid. 172).[62] Hundorova sees a positive effect in this reintroduction of the Romantic notion into Socialist Realism: as she argues, "a diversification of the Soviet literature in the 1960s took place not without the influence of the Romantic paradigm. In any case, Romanticism allowed for [the introduction of the] elements of the grotesque, for 'chimerical' and 'magic' Realism, poetic universalism and so on" (ibid. 175). As one of the representatives of the "chimerical" tradition in the Ukrainian literature, Drozd is an emblem of this phenomenon: it occurred within the boundaries of Socialist Realism and sought to generally affirm its ideological loyalty to Soviet system, receiving in return a very limited freedom in pursuing aesthetic goals. The result was an increase in expressiveness, as defined by Grygar, and thus a semblance of innovation. But the content of such art's message was bereft of any subversive power, as it continued being ideological art, that is, a forgery of art, in Grygar's terms.

2. 2. Volodymyr Drozd and "Chimerical" Prose

Since the publication in 1958 of the novel *Kozats'komu rodu nema perevodu* [There is No End to the Cossack Clan] by Oleksandr Il'chenko, Ukrainian state-

[62] An important discussion of the boundaries of Socialist Realism took place in 1957-1958 at the Gorky Institute of World Literature and in *Voprosy literatury*, as well as in a published collection of articles entitled *Problemy realizma v mirovoi literature* [Problems of Realism in World Literature] (1959). Rehabilitation of Romanticism was made possible by appealing to Gorky's "revolutionary Romanticism" as a 'progressive' Romanticism. See Hundorova, *Kitch i literatura* 172-174.

sanctioned literature was enriched by the emergence of the so-called *khymerna proza* (chimerical or "whimsical" prose).[63] This style was in many ways close to the Russian "village prose" or Georgian historical prose and was later connected to the Latin-American Magical Realism that became widely popular in the Soviet Union a decade afterwards, when in 1970 Gabriel García Márcez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* was published. Márcez's novel, because written by a prominent Latin American socialist, did not arouse much resistance from the censors and further established the romantic tradition in the Soviet literature; as a result, different versions of magical realism took root in the Soviet Union. A number of other publications and translations contributed to a further strengthening of the style in Ukrainian literature.[64] Equally important was also the change in official politics towards the study of the Ukrainian early modern literature that occurred with the 1978 publication of an anthology of Ukrainian poetry of the 16th-17th

[63] When analyzing the phenomenon of the "chimerical" prose, I will interchangeably use the terms of "chimerical" and "whimsical," as explained in the previous chapter. There is currently no unity among literary scholars regarding the one preferred translation of the term into English. Translation as "whimsical" is not entirely motivated, as the style shows little "whimsy" and is not exactly fanciful. In his 2000 article "The Soviet Ukrainian Whimsical Novel" Pavlyshyn explains that the chosen translation means also "'chimerical,' 'strange,' and 'fantastic'," but without explaining the choice of "whimsical" beyond its being "useful to describe a trend in Ukrainian prose fiction that became especially productive in the 1970s and early 1980s" (103). In my view, the justified part of such a translation consists in the lack of artistic or ideological purpose for the "magic" elements introduced into the writing beyond the ability itself to have such non-purposeful elements in Soviet fiction. The term's translation as "chimerical" is closer to the Ukrainian original and represents the illusory character of magic events (as they have little to no effect on the plot progression), yet it does not capture the lack of purpose to the device. The Ukrainian term originates from the full title of Il'chenko's novel: *Kozats'komu rodu nema perevodu, abo zh Mamai i Chuzha Molodytsia. Ukraïns'kyi khymernyi roman z narodnykh ust*. [There Is No End to the Cossack Clan, Or Mamai and the Female Stranger. Ukrainian Chimerical Novel from the Folk Tradition]. The novel itself is an excellent example of a combination of Socialist Realism, Ukrainian populism (*narodnytstvo)*, and some experimentation with Magical Realism. Unlike Volodymyr Drozd's *The Leaves of Earth*, however, it stands out for its lowering comic effects that contribute to a more multidimensional narration and balances out the novel's implicit victimism.

[64] Marko Pavlyshyn points to the 1978 translation of Herman Hesse's *Das Glasperlenspiel* and 1983 publication of a translation of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Kater Murr* ("The Soviet Ukrainian Whimsical Novel" 105-106).

century.[65] In general, as Erika Haber notes, "[n]on-Russian writers of the Soviet Republics benefited the most from this literary mode; Magical Realism supplied them with a medium for national self-expression, for revealing and preserving aspects of their own traditional native cultures" (1). The Ukrainian version, whose first example emerged earlier, at the time of the Khrushchev Thaw, was a rich combination of local mythology, history, and sentimentalism, seen in the works of such authors as Volodymyr Drozd, Vasyl Zemliak, Pavlo Zahrebel'nyi, and Volodymyr Iavorivs'kyi.

Drozd's notable contribution to this style consists of his novella "Yrii" (1970-1972, published 1974). The main character of the novella, Mykhailo Resheto, travels the usual socialist realist character's road from darkness to enlightenment. Following the convention, he is a young hero who seeks guidance and finds it in the figure of his uncle Denys. At first, Mykhailo is driven by the desire to abandon his village Pakul' where he grew up and where his mother remains, and to live in the "city," that is, the town by the name of Yrii. Uncle Denys and his wife (who changed her name from the peasant and unfashionable Fedora to the more appropriate for the "city" name Dora) take Mykhailo in so he can attend a high school in the town and thus have a greater chance at success in life. The town reveals itself soon as full of hypocrisy and greed (aunt Dora is the figure that symbolizes that urban corruption), deviating greatly from the (Socialist) ideals of honesty and hard work that Mykhailo's peasant mother (Dora's own sister) represents. Having graduated from high school, Mykhailo and his friends become model Soviet

[65] Natalia Pylyp"iuk emphasizes that the study of early modern Ukrainian literature was nearly impossible after the repressions of 1972 when in their aftermath many notable Ukrainian scholars lost their positions in the academia (21). The publication of the anthologies *Ukraïns'ka poeziia. Kinets' XVI – pochatok XVII st.* [Ukrainian Poetry: End of the 16th – Beginning of the 17th Century) in 1978 and *Apolonova liutnia* [Apollo's Lyre] in 1982 (the latter one included authors from the early 17th through the beginning of the 19th century) was a radical departure from the previous politics (ibid. 24).

citizens: they "grow stern" (*suvorishaiut'*), a familiar trope from high Socialist Realism of the Stalin period, assume responsibility and dream of learning professions that are useful for the society (such as train operator, for instance). Instead of enjoying a leisurely summer vacation, they solemnly decide to undertake an expedition to a part of town in order to properly record its topography and create a map. Their heroic deed (*podvyh*) is defined precisely by learning professions that are less fashionable, but are (accidentally) direly needed by the homeland – and being happy in that. For Mykhailo, the mission consists in returning to his village Pakul' and in working hard on his native land. Small insertions into the main narration show us that Mykhailo and his friends have successfully completed their transformations into heroes of labor.

Drozd's novella thus exhibits the main features of the socialist realist *Bildungsroman*, especially in its general hyper-positive tone that seeks to affirm the Soviet reality. At the same time, however, there are also clear signs of the Socialist Realism's decomposition. The plot itself is marked by numerous digressions and deviations that "distract" from the primary ideological message. The figure of the Father is represented by a less than ideal person, uncle Denys, who ends up with delirium tremens after consuming his own wine and thus has to undergo a treatment in the psychiatric clinic (*zhovtyi dim*). He rehabilitates himself, however, through a selfless act of saving the town from a monster that he himself created (a giant boar he used to keep in his backyard). Aunt Dora undergoes proper public shaming several times, but is never reformed entirely and never repents as would have been expected in a work of high Socialist Realism. There is also a host of positive characters who are defined primarily by being autochthonous Ukrainians (such as grandpa Ievras' or godfather Huts, for instance)

and who are striking for their vitality in defiance of all unfavorable circumstances. (Grandpa Ievras', for instance, "bakes" a glass mug in his own oven: the mug looks exactly like the "official" (*kazennyi*) mug at the cafeteria where Dora works but is two thimbles smaller in volume, thus allowing Dora to cheat at work and save for her dream car, an Opel.) Similarly, while uncle Denys's obsession with showing off by driving an Opel (not a Lada or Zhiguli) has to fail miserably (the car goes up in flames while his neighbors and acquaintances look on), the car itself is a product of the local people's creativity (the car is reconstructed using local parts). The most evident part, however, is the presence of "magical" ("chimerical" or "whimsical") elements whose artistic or ideological purpose remains entirely unclear. Against the backdrop of the clichéd structure of the socialist realist prose these elements are striking precisely because they seem not to fulfill any practical goal. At the same time, because of their surreal nature, they also in no way contradict the overall affirmative stance towards the Soviet system. The resulting ambiguity can be illustrated by a few examples of such "whims" of the writer.

When uncle Denys arrives to pick up Mykhailo from his mother's house in Pakul', Mykhailo greets him with a bucket of pears from their garden. Here is what happens when uncle Denys attempts to eat one of them:

> Uncle Denys put on his hat, took the pear by the tail and began to solemnly raise it to his mouth that was encircled by pink lips like sausages that were freshly stuffed; but the pear flattered with its wings, crowed with the hoarse voice of a young rooster and, leaving its tail in the uncle's hand, flew onto the willow tree. Following that pear, every single pear, strewing their yellow and pink feathers over me, dashed from the basket and, quacking and fluttering with their wings, flew in a small flock low above the garden (112).

Following the pears, the basket runs away, too, and the episode ends very anticlimactically with Mykhailo's mother simply catching it and tying it to a pole in the fence. The pears or the episode itself is never mentioned again, it does not in any way influence the progression of the plot or any artistic decisions in the novella. Such moments of unmotivated and inconsequential illusory events occur numerously throughout the novella: when Mykhailo literally "tilts the sky's edge" (*prykhyliaie krai neba*, a well-known Ukrainian Romantic idiom) for the girl he knows he will fall in love with (128), or when he saves the girl in a white beret by "lifting himself by his ears and drawing the curtain that separates day from night" (171), or when uncle Denys lifts the entire Sobakareva mountain and buries the monster boar underneath it (207). Drozd's excessive indulgence in a device that is rather nonessential to the aesthetic success of the novella or the progression of its plot is directed at creating a humorous effect that is contrasted with the serious insertions in "Yrii." These insertions that project the voice of the wise Soviet citizen attribute the fantastic elements to the unrestrained creativity of the boy – that is, given the possibility of an autobiographic interpretation, as the promise for future excellence of penmanship now fully realized in the novella itself. The serious insertions in which romantic ideas of the protagonist's adolescence thus dismiss the "chimerical" parts as such that should not be taken seriously, as they are only a byproduct of the boy's growing up into a conscientious Soviet citizen. Professional careers of Mykhailo's friends, all of whom also abandon their adolescent foolish ideas of self-realization, support such a reading (the most vivid example here is Kol'ka Kapel'dudka who rejects the idea of going into trade and instead allows himself to be re-educated and trained by Andrii as an assistant train operator, a profession that is ideologically proper).

Infantilization and dismissal are also signaled by the language itself that is used, as it strongly harks back to *kotliarevshchyna* in its lowering comic effect (see previous chapter on Shevchuk). The episode with the pears as well as other "chimerical" episodes in the novel illustrate Drozd's lexical decisions to this effect.

Disintegration of the "chimerical" style in *The Leaves of Earth* is only partial: the fantastic elements lose their comic dimension and become mysterious and eerie instead, in line with the solemn voice that narrates the suffering of the Ukrainian people. The folkloric color remains, however, and is used in the novel to support the claim for national distinctiveness in the Herderian sense as resulting from the people's connection to their native land, from their own language, traditions and beliefs. Similarly, the pathos of the wise grown-up that we see in the insertions of "Yrii" undergoes only a slight adaptation as it changes into the voice of Nestor, the main character of *The Leaves of Earth*. Crucial is also that the narrative in *The Leaves of Earth* does not challenge the main Soviet narrative and instead attributes all the ills, murders, famine, and even the nuclear meltdown at Chornobyl' to the abstract human nature. In this Drozd preserves continuity with the "chimerical" prose whose works, as Pavlyshyn shows, "for all their formal innovativeness" were "ideologically as orthodox as their predecessors" ("The Soviet Ukrainian Whimsical Novel" 106). A major difference to other works of this style was, however, Drozd's appeal to the values of the peasant and rural society, in which he is close to the phenomenon of the Russian "village prose." The underlying structure here is formed by the nostalgic idea of a lost idyll that is represented by the wholesomeness of the peasant life style and its implicit "wisdom" that results from the close connection with and indeed embeddedness in nature. Most of Ukrainian *shistdesiatnyky* – grouped by the

alternative literary scholarship of the post-Soviet period under the term *testamental'no-rustykal'nyi dyskurs* [testament-rustic discourse] – subscribe to these views (cf. Ieshkiliev). In this regard Drozd differs from such writers as, for instance, Zahrebel'nyi, Iavorivs'kyi, Hutsalo, or Zemliak who, as Pavlyshyn aptly observes, for the "humorous depiction of the countryside" employ the opposition of "metropolis and province" rather than of city and village, as we see in Drozd (ibid. 108). Whereas in the works of the other writers of the style the countryside indeed is "the province, the antithesis of what is urban, modern, and relevant" and, therefore, a "symbolism of marginality" (ibid. 109, 108), Drozd – like Shevchuk – consistently resists such marginalization and through the devise of pathos attempts to lend the notion of central importance to the rural setting. Already in "Yrii," then, Drozd paradoxically achieves a certain degree of mobilization of his readers that is based on ideas of national identity as rooted in the land and the values of its people.[66]

2. 3. *The Leaves of Earth* and the Concept of Many Truths

The Leaves of Earth was written mostly during *perestroika* in 1985-1990 and published already in the independent Ukraine. The novel combines structural elements of late Socialist Realism, of "whimsical"/"chimerical" prose, and a number of interesting innovations in the spheres of language, sexuality, and narrative strategy.

A repetitive trope in the late Soviet and the post-Soviet Ukrainian literary scholarship has been to compare Drozd's work to that of William Faulkner's. The main argument in such a comparison was that Drozd, too, in his works created a fictional

[66] In Ukrainian history, this mechanism goes back to Kotliarevs'kyi, whose "combination of history and the ethnographic" was "the source of a powerful symbolism of national identity," even though later, after the establishment of a modern national identity, it came to be perceived as "anti-modern and offensive" (Pavlyshyn, "The Soviet Ukrainian Whimsical Novel" 107-108).

geographic space, which characters of most of his works inhabit (Andrusiv 369). The center of such a "Polissian Yoknapatowpha" lies in the fictional village Pakul' in the region of Polissia in Northern Ukraine, surrounded by other fictional nearby villages and towns, and connected with markers of the real world such as Kyiv, Odessa, Kharkiv, St. Petersburg, Moscow, and other cities (ibid.). Drozd's characters are depicted as split between different realities of their lives, between past and present, myth and everyday life. The author goes to great lengths to avoid a linear development of each sub-plot, and tries to paint a broad, epic picture of his people. The people (*narod*) itself is the ultimate protagonist of the novel, and its suffering holds together the disparate parts of the work.

The novel exhibits traits of "chimerical" prose, but compared to "Yrii" the national element is dramatically enlarged and put in opposition to various ideologies of the depicted periods. The novel is marked by a loose plot structure, an arabesque style of writing, introduction of mythological elements into the reality of everyday life, combination of fantasy world with the world of mundane activities and motivations, and a general romantic mode. To this list Drozd adds sentimental musings about the past and the present that are embedded in the peasant countryside and infused with folklore motives. An important divergence from the early example of "chimerical" prose in Oleksandr Il'chenko's novel is the considerable absence of ironic, playful elements that are rooted in *kotliarevshchyna*.[67] The lack of purpose that we observed in "Yrii" is replaced here with the project of a recovered national history as the purpose of most elements of the narration. Fantastic elements thus are put to use to reveal a part of truth

[67] It is important to emphasize yet again that such elements were, in fact, the politically correct expression of the interest in the Ukrainian national theme under the conditions of the Khrushchev Thaw.

about certain episodes in Ukraine's history (such as, for instance, the society's apparent infatuation with the Communist ideology, depicted in the novel as a madman's obsession).

The epic mode of narration in *The Leaves of Earth* is dedicated to chronicling Ukrainian history of about one hundred years.[68] With playfulness of the early "chimerical" prose significantly reduced or gone,[69] the main task of the novel becomes the channeling of the "voice of the people" as it tells the readers of the *narod*'s suffering from its own experience. Consequently, the narration is entirely transferred to the *narod*, and the author claims to merely record the testimonies of various witnesses.[70]

Drozd meticulously stylizes the language of the parts narrated by different representatives of the people, their style, grammar and dialect. In this regard, he aims at producing a representative fabric of the entire society: from peasants to wealthy landowners, from soldiers and officers to intelligentsia and revolutionaries. "The Book of Fates and Days Past," as the novel is subtitled, collects voices of witnesses and victims of countless crimes against humanity that occurred on Ukrainian territory. However, other nationalities are present only on the margins of the narration, and the *narod* emerges for the most part as an entity that is ethnically highly homogenous. In depicting the suffering and injustice, Drozd does not single out one group as the perpetrator and the other one as

[68] Part two of the novel (written in 1994-2000 and published in 2003), continues the narration to the then present day.

[69] There is a certain tendency to playfulness in the peasant dialogues that comment on the narration in the "Book" (*Knyha*), as it is written in a dialect and is very close to the oral tradition. However, this device is rather effective in lowering the general pathos of narration and in this way often confirms it instead of subverting.

[70] The afterword to the novel, entitled "From the Author," testifies to this effect: "For decades I've been recording testimonies of those people who went through the great trials of the modern time. Many of them are no longer alive. I bow deeply before the memory of the crafters and the witnesses of the epoch. … I am deeply grateful to tens and hundreds of people who shared with me their memories" (559).

the victim of a crime. The novel thus testifies to the state of an utter confusion and inability to grasp the reality in its totality. In this Drozd stands very close to the Soviet literature of the 1960s when writers (especially of the "idealist" camp) recognized that "truth is complex": as Katerina Clark argues, "truth is complex" became "a sort of catchphrase of early-sixties fiction" (*The Soviet Novel* 230). Clark's assessment that "the erosion of epic wholeness can be sensed both in the vogue for first-person narration chronicling the hero's confusion and the inordinate role that sheer chance plays in determining his fate" works very well for Drozd's novel. If departure from Socialist Realism means abandoning the sense of predetermination and freedom from ambiguity, while at the same time the elements of the "chimerical" prose could only marginally be utilized for a narrative that should be taken very, very seriously, then the only available option appears to be the increase of subjectivity, rejection of wholeness of the world, and the presentation of "many truths" through voices of deeply individual narrators. At the same time, however, the nature of the competing project – the Ukrainian national project, that is – forces Drozd to maintain an overarching unity that is guaranteed by the figure of the Chronicler (with whom the author can be abstractly identified) as the instrument of continuity and preservation of popular memory.

The result of these efforts is the idea that the entire *narod* is both the victim and the perpetrator of its own suffering, while other forces are rather secondary: tsarist regime, land magnates, or ruthless political leaders. The concept of "many truths" thus insistently places an emphasis on self-inflicted pain. This recurrent self-victimization amounts to fatalism: it maintains that Ukrainians fought against each other because they could not see through the workings of fate, and they continue falling in its traps to this

day. In its essence this stance is also apologetic of those who participated in the Soviet system, which, of course, includes the author himself. This position represents a moral relativism that absolves not only the Soviet regime of its crimes, but – by extension – similar others, too, and therefore entirely removes the question of personal responsibility for one's collaboration with it. In addition, the novel fits very well into the concept of "Ukrainian cultural martyrology" and "a posture of exclusivity" that came to dominate the ideological mood among Ukraine's cultural establishment since independence (Koznarsky 442). In this discourse, Ukrainians for centuries were the object of a cultural and ethnic genocide, which defines its uniqueness compared to other ethnicities. This position is instrumental in demanding a *revanche* that would compensate for centuries of persecution (Valerii Shevchuk's ideological stance comes closest to this). Rather than taking this argument that far, Drozd's novel emphasizes biological losses and derives from them the cultural apocalypse that the nation still faces. The many narrators of the novel merge into one apocalyptic voice to recount and document the numerous tragedies that could not be avoided and should serve as a warning for generations to come.

Drozd goes to great lengths working out the different styles for each of the narrating protagonists. This often finds corresponding elements in the structural and thematic composition of the novel. The work is evenly divided into ten parts of "The Book of Days"[71] that evenly separate from each other further ten chapters that describe the fate of a particular character or their family. Some of the entries in "The Book of Days" are made by Nestor: this especially regards foundational philosophy of the novel

[71] To be precise, there are nine excerpts from "The Book of Days" and one titled "From the Book of Testimonies" which in style and other formal characteristics matches "The Book of Days" and thus belongs into the same category.

and its universal moral message. Other entries seem to be made by dwellers of Pakul' who show a lesser level of education and literary finesse. These entries advance the story, explain contexts not clear through narration in other chapters, and often complete or even contradict each other, creating the impression of a collective patchwork narration. These parts of narration stand out also meta-textually as they appear in italics and are written in both a dialect and *surzhyk*, a combination of Ukrainian and Russian. Moreover, the language often appears to be a directly transcribed speech, containing misspellings, lexical borrowings and grammar deviations from the standard written language. The author aims to create an impression of authenticity and immediacy of narration by equating speech and written language. The novel remains inconsistent in this regard: given the status of the book as the final testimony, or as the everlasting chronicle of the people's life, the allegedly recorded insertions appear highly implausible.[72] This, nevertheless, does not reduce the experimental character of this device.

Chapters that separate different parts of "The Book of Days" are stylized as Old Rus'ian tales: "Knyha Nestora" [Nestor's Book], "Knyha pro liubov i nenavyst'" [The Book of Love and Hatred], "Povist' pro Opanasa" [The Story of Opanas], "Slovo pro zemlyu Horikhovu" [The Tale of the Walnut Land], "Kazannia pro rozor Pakulia" [The Legend of Pakul''s Destruction], "Knyha Kuz'my, syna Semyrozumovoho" [The Book of Kuz'ma, Semyrozum's Son], "Zhytiie Khrysti, dusheiu u dobri skupanii" [The Life of

[72] Cf. the following excerpt from the part that is perhaps the most apocalyptic in its tone as it deals with the experience of the Chornobyl disaster: "And I record my pain in the Book of Days, because only it [*vona*, she], memory, will remain of our Pakul', as long as the sun shines onto people. And after that – even memory will fade. But maybe memory, like the soul, the memory of different people [*liudei*] and of peoples [*narodiv*] is something stronger, more eternal than us, than the stars, the suns, and when there are no Days anymore will there still be the BOOK?" (LZ 361). Note the pathos of the language that is reflected in reiterations of the same phrases, which is meant to heighten the emotional involvement of the reader.

Khrystia, Whose Soul Was Bathed in Good], "Diiannia Mykhalia Hromnyts'koho" [Mykhal' Hromnyts'ky's Deeds], "Duma pro Darynu, Matir ditei liudiats'kykh" [Song of Daryna, the Mother of People's Children]. Such a titling evokes the oral tradition of bards (*kobzari*) and their *dumy* whose mission was to tell the epic history of their people. Contributions from Nestor Terpylo [Nestor the Sufferer] are stylized as prophetic messages and warnings to the people of Pakul', and it is here that the paradox of the novel (characteristic for the entire phenomenon of the late Ukrainian Soviet literature) stands out in all clarity: while the novel claims to tell the history of the "small people," it cannot abandon the totalizing approach that is dictated by the project it seeks to advance.[73] The Ukrainian national project demands the creation of a homogenizing national narrative (a national myth) that would mobilize the reader to oppose the Soviet project as one that brought destruction for Ukrainian culture and massive loss of lives for the Ukrainians. Governed by its own internal logic, such a narrative must be written in a form that is appropriate for the martyrology it uses as its legitimizing foundation and the greatness of the people it seeks to project (hence Drozd's choice of epic novel). Yet the discrepancy between Drozd's own participation in the system and the accusatory stance he tries to assume leads to a significant weakening of the challenge that the author can pose to the Soviet system and results in an apologetic position that includes himself. These conflicting motivations lead to artistic decisions that can serve as an emblem of the late Ukrainian Soviet literature: the author fluctuates between self-destruction (as in *Spektakl'*, discussed below) and self-destruction of the *narod* (as in *The Leaves of Earth*).

[73] In his afterword, Drozd emphasizes that "we ought to abandon the illusion that history is made only by select individuals. Social earthquakes … are born in the depth of the people's [*narod*] strata, and what we see on the surface of the ethnos is the result of those gigantic forces that we have not yet properly studied, and the real history is the history of the people's [*narodna*] soul, not a chronology of dates" ("Vid avtora" 559).

The complexity of this dilemma consists in the choice between creative silence (since the moral foundation for any kind of prophesizing has been corrupted by collaboration) and writing without full sincerity, satisfying the popular demand of the moment. (Shevchuk in this regard is in a stronger position as he can point to his partial ban during the 1970s as his own participation in the people's martyrology. A contrasting case of Vasyl' Stus is discussed later in the chapter.) Drozd solves this dilemma without making a definitive choice for one or the other: his overall output decreases after independence, but he completes the second part of *The Leaves of Earth*. The last entry of the second part comes from a Pakul' teacher by the name of Volodymyr that points to Drozd himself and speaks of repentance and conversion (*navernennia*) to "the forefathers' faith" that is presented as the only chance of salvation (*Lystia zemli: Novi knyhy romanu* 496).[74] Several stylistic breaks in the last passage indicate its purely performative character and the hybridity of the work itself: once again, innovation here is only decorative and serves primarily non-aesthetic purposes.

The central and unifying figure of the novel is Nestor – the embodiment of the very *narod*, its guardian and prophet of apocalypse in its archetypal manifestation. This central character's name is revealing about his mission in the novel: like his historic predecessor Nestor the Chronicler, he is to record the history of the people with the

[74] Images of the nation's spiritual apocalypse and the promise of salvation are rendered in overarching consistency with the first volume of the novel: "I entered the empty church. It was a wide space, and it was quiet; the sky was shining blue through the tall windows. Having spread his hands pierced by nails, Jesus soared over the ungrateful earthly world. I tramped with my knees [*hupnuvsia kolin'my*] onto the floor so hard that the church's quietness got stirred up, and crawled on my knees [*pokolinkuvav*] to the crucifix that was the only thing in the entire Universe that gave the mortal man an illusion of immortality and eternity. … Do find, do find yourselves in the honest [*nelukavii*] forefathers' faith – and you will save yourselves" (*Lystia zemli: Novi knyhy romanu* 496). The lexical choice that is illustrated in the square brackets points to a stark discrepancy between the high pathos and the low style of the language – a break that signals the "decorativeness" and performativeness of the depicted act.

utmost detail – a history that is marked by recurrent episodes of extreme human suffering. It appears a common strategy of the late works of "chimerical" prose to build their legitimacy upon references to canonic texts, or texts that can be claimed as canonic. Such references should cement the claim for authenticity that "chimerical" prose puts forward. This is the case in Valerii Shevchuk's *The Tree of Thoughts*, where *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* serves as the legitimizing reference for most of the author's speculations (see previous chapter on this). With the national question firmly in the foreground, such a strategy falls within the logic of the genre. Nestor the Chronicler roots the novel in the Kyivan Rus''s chronicling tradition and the subtitle of the novel is precariously close to the title of Nestor's canonical *Tale of the Bygone Days*, the first reliable account of the Slavs and their way of life. In a similar fashion, Nestor Terpylo provides the foundational mythology for the novel (with a strong local emphasis) and serves as the connecting device for most of the narrated events. The beginning paragraph of the first book of the novel, "The Book of Nestor," opens with the following foundational myth:

Дак не було сперва нічого – ні світу білого, ні Пакуля в світі, а було поле, та ясне сонечко, та ясний місяць, та ясні зорі, дєтки їхні і дробний дощик з ними. А в полі росло світове дерево, на дереві сиділи два голуби, йони й сотворили світ (*Lystia zemli* 5; italics in original).[75]

Yet there was nothing there in the beginning – no world and no Pakul' in the world, and there was only a field, and bright sun, and bright moon, and their children – bright stars, and with them light rain. And in the field the world tree grew; on the tree two doves sat; it was them who created the world.

Narration in what we are to interpret as the Polissian dialect does not strictly adhere to the Christian myth of genesis, although it copies its structure and several elements: tree,

[75] In order to illustrate Drozd's experimentation with language in *The Leaves of Earth*, quotations are given in both Ukrainian and English where relevant. Abbreviation LZ refers henceforth to quotations from *Lystia zemli*: *Knyha dol' i dniv mynushchykh* (1992). Italics in original usually indicate direct speech in dialect, unless noted otherwise. All translations are mine.

logos, human soul, powers of good and evil, trespassing of the divine command as the source of the original sin and human suffering afterwards. Continuation of the foundational myth in subsequent paragraphs in form of a series of contested stories of human origin, as a topic open to interpretation and debate, emphasizes the democratic nature of the agrarian local community. Importantly, the local version of genesis zooms in on the local population who is given the voice here. This people's concept of an idyllic rural life is reflected in the choice of the main deity: *Hospodar* [Master] who plows the earth and saws wheat, mills the harvested grain, and knits the dough from which he creates the man (ibid.). Humans, created in the image of such an agrarian god, can only be peasants, and being a hardworking peasant amounts to the meaning of human life: being a part of and serving the nature, without robbing it of its treasures. References to the agrarian Slavic mythology are linked here with the low social status of the respective narrator, or their lack of education, and are meant to establish a sense of authenticity, of *authochtony* in Heideggerian sense: one that originates from *native* and not imported beliefs and way of life (Heidegger 48-49). In its essence this tendency is anti-intellectual (which my discussion of Shevchuk shows); it criticizes modernity and rejects civilization and urban culture in particular as destructive to the innate character of the *narod*. Marginality of the province and its lack of relevance are therefore invalidated here by shifting the emphasis of the people's innate identity (rural, patriarchal, rooted in their land, and so on) and making return to that identity the key condition of the people's survival.

Their rootedness in the land and its traditions allows Drozd's protagonists to claim Slavic mythology for themselves, with the right to freely adapt and modify it. Such

immediate connection to the folk beliefs has consequences for the foundational mythology: it accepts the possibility of an alternative origin of humankind from the evil and thus preempts an explanation for the atrocities documented later on in the novel:

Ні-бо, Громовик їхав на білому коні, викресав копитами вогонь із скелі і світ сотворив з того вогню, а Чорний бог з пеньків людину склав.	No-no, the Thunder God was riding a white horse and struck fire from the rock with the horse's hoofs, and created the world from that fire; but the Black God put the man together from stumps.
А я чував, старі люди гомоніли, що вогонь рогатий придумав, а Бог вогонь вкрав і людину з вогню сотворив (LZ 5)	And I heard – old folks babbled – that the Horned One invented the fire, but God stole the fire and made the man from the fire.

Values of the agrarian, prehistoric society override social conventions and economic and political transformations of the later periods, from Christianity to industrialization. The many narrators of the novel long for the natural simplicity of the agrarian society: clarity of boundaries, firm roles for men and women, clear cycles of life based on nature, and so on. Women serve as an important part in justifying this largely patriarchal setup: they play mostly supporting roles to key male characters and fail when embarking on an adventure of their own.[76] Within the agrarian, patriarchal worldview that the peasant setting of the novel reproduces, women are primarily mothers and wives, relegated to activities and spaces traditionally reserved for them. Such is the figure of Uliana, the second archetypal figure of the novel who accompanies the narration as Nestor's representative on Earth after his death and as the apocalyptical prophetess of the

[76] Failure of both men and women in accomplishing their set goals and ultimately in surviving is characteristic for the novel and stems from the general fatalism discussed earlier in this chapter. As Katerina Clark points out, failure in achievement of "wholeness" generally testifies to the crisis of Socialist Realism and disintegration of its late form: "social integration was the mandatory end point of any novel. The 'new prose' writers wrote not of wholeness and harmony but of alienation, disintegration, confusion" (*The Soviet Novel* 232). The major difference of Drozd's work is that it continues to pursue the "big" genre of the novel, while the "new prose" was mostly written in smaller forms.

stature of a Cassandra. While Nestor's gift for prophesizing was granted him by God himself, Uliana's gift is secondary as she "inherits" it from Nestor. Overall, Uliana and Nestor come to represent many of the binominal oppositions of a traditional patriarchal worldview.

Through his ascendance to heaven and direct connection to God, Nestor is also associated with the upper spheres of nature and human activity: he is the scribe, the thinker of the village, and the inventor, the one striving for knowledge and transcending social limits, and is consistently aligned with the sky.[77] Uliana, on the contrary, consistently represents the link with earth and its fertility. Nature is conventionally associated with women in patriarchal, traditional societies, and it is from nature that Uliana's healing power comes. Uliana's connection with the nature permeates the novel (including the violent episode when she becomes a victim of rape). It is the feature that makes her character one of the most convincing and entirely indispensable for the novel's narration. Centrality of the reproductive activity for women comes to bear in the genesis of the village Pakul' and in Uliana's kin through maternal line:

> People talk about all kinds of things in Pakul', but one is known for sure, because it is recorded in the Book of Days: Pakulians trace their origin from the sun. Mother-Sun gave birth to Lada, Lada gave birth to Zhyva, Zhyva gave birth to Eve, Eve gave birth to Kateryna, Kateryna gave birth to Oksana, Oksana gave birth to Maria, Maria gave birth to Natalka, Natalka gave birth to Solokha, Solokha gave birth to Vivdia, and Vivdia gave birth to Uliana – from the Pakul' potter Kuz'ma (LZ 6).

In the genesis story, pagan Slavic mythology (Mother-Sun, Lada, Zhyva) decisively overrides elements of Christianity (Eve and Maria) as it points to the agrarian society and its cult of procreation.

[77] Cf. the episode when Nestor builds artificial wings to fly from the village bell tower (LZ 39-40).

Drozd goes even further in claiming the various mythologies for the *narod*: by introducing recognizable references to the works by Shevchenko (Kateryna, Oksana) and Gogol (Solokha, Natalka) he weaves together Slavic pagan beliefs, Christianity, iconic elements of the Shevchenko poetry of suffering, and dark Gogolian magic with the everyday reality of his characters. References to Gogol are a matter of the "chimerical" prose's inherent proximity to the same mode of "affectionate, yet dismissive to the point of caricature" attitude that Gogol's *Vechera na khutore bliz Dikan'ki* [Evenings on a Farm near Dikan'ka] stand out for (Pavlyshyn, "The Soviet Whimsical Novel" 109). As I emphasized above, the ambivalence of this attitude is overcome in Drozd who makes peasant identity a central elements of his project of a Ukrainian renaissance. Yet the Gogolian elements remain and continue to exude the folkloric colorfulness that is ambiguous in its essence. Thus the novel draws on the symbolic potential of all relevant cultural sources native to the territory of Ukraine and Northern Ukraine in particular, no matter what the potential side effects are. This makes the novel into a cultural re-appropriation project that is dedicated to the mission of cultural vengeance and a forceful return of the 'illegally seized' cultural heritage to its native land and people, without, however, formulating any unequivocal political demands or visions.

The chronicling impetus of the narration is in fact motivated by the attempt at re-appropriation and reconstruction of history, language, and culture. From this perspective, the novel's stance is both nostalgic and restorative (in Svetlana Boym's sense, as explicated in Chapter Five on Petro Midianka). The key elements that define the reconstructed world of the Northern Ukraine are idealistic concepts of historical truth (in the author's and the narrators' understanding), language in all its facets, culture,

traditions, and sexuality. These spheres are also the source of most of the experimentation in the novel – especially against the backdrop of Socialist Realism. In fact, increasing radicalization of narration in these spheres corresponds with a strengthening of the rejecting stance towards language, style, and politics of the Soviet system.

While the novel dedicates a considerable amount of energy to introducing sexuality *as a topic of narration*, it effectively does little to overcome the puritanism of the socialist realist writing in the sphere of sexuality. Sexual connotations are usually dark, mostly combined with lower expressions of sexuality (rape, loose sexual behavior, unvarnished notions of marriage and sex life in it, birth-giving and similar activities). Events of sexual activity are often accompanied by mystical circumstances, or they acquire a deeper magical sense. Drozd refers here strongly to the cultural models of paganism, but also to well-known literary predecessors (Gogol in particular). Here we also find a number of folk beliefs and superstitions:

> They left before dawn, the devil still busied around in Tereshko's mill, grinding tobacco, and across the sky, full of stars, witches strolled with milk pails, and souls sowed themselves falling from the sky. As a star was traveling over the sky, Uliana whispered prayers for herself and Martyn – the fate may bring them together – because mother said: in such a moment all wishes come true. She dreamt of the moon last night, it shone so brightly through the window, but her father woke her up – it was time to leave – and scared off the dream. Moon in the window, that's a suitor at the door (LZ 6).

Rare cases of successful sexual relations are usually granted to couples that exhibit superior moral qualities – that is, those who are united in a socially sanctioned way in marriage, and who show their close connection to nature and the agrarian style of life. Marusyna and Kuz'ma represent the only such wholesome couple in the novel.

Marusyna is a poor, exceedingly virtuous girl from the village who works in the city but does not succumb to its temptations and instead prepares to become a nun and join the monastery (cf. LZ 220). Kuz'ma is Nestor Terpylo's son, from childhood on endowed with the talent to work with wood, imbued with love for agrarian work, industrious, patient, smart although rather uneducated, honest and friendly to all. In short, they are a perfect manifestation of the authentic peasant who stays true to her or his nature by rejecting intellectual refinement and urban setting for the sake of fulfilling their calling as a part of nature. The development of their relationship follows a set of socially accepted rituals as known from folk tales and peasant songs. At first, Kuz'ma is shy and patient in courting Marusyna:

> Kuz'ma followed the children to the orchard, to dig in the poles afresh, as he loved all kinds of work. And as the master's children were chirping around him, Kuz'ma thought, blushing, that sometime Marusyna and he, if Marusyna won't become a nun, will have many children, because children are a joy (LZ 220-221).

We see how in this episode, when Kuz'ma visits Marusyna at her place of work, their wholesome union is already being set up through a situation where Kuz'ma symbolically assumes the role of a father figure towards the children that "chirp" around him as he does "serious" work. This inspires ideas of marriage not only in Kuz'ma, but also in Marusyna who witnesses him in his role as a promising partner in establishing a family of their own. Later on in the novel Kuz'ma steps forward directly and makes a proposal to Marusyna:

> And Kuz'ma told Marusyna that he erected a new gate in his front yard, and soon he will build a new house on the ashes where his father's hut stood. And Kuz'ma said that he will build a wind mill on the Crow Mountain, that he can do everything and is not afraid of work but loves it, because man was created by God for work, not for idleness, and the best prayer to God, Kuz'ma said, Semyrozum's son, is work on the land. …

> And Kuz'ma, Semyrozum's son, also said to Marusyna, the novice in the Mryn monastery: "Be the mistress of everything that I by myself and with your help will gain. And be the mother of my children, because I want many children, as children are the reason for our existence on earth and continuation of our kin" (LZ 257).

The proposal of marriage that Kuz'ma makes is thus not made primarily out of romantic reasons such as love or affinity, but for reasons of procreation and fulfilling one's purpose on earth. The romantic love that is unsuccessful throughout the novel is thus marked as inferior: "idleness" as a symbol of decadence and human alienation from nature that is the result of civilization is strongly rejected here. Pleasure from each other's company must come only after duty – work and procreation – is fulfilled. Once again, everything points to the patriarchal values of a rural community, especially when Marusyna eventually submits to Kuz'ma's courting:

> And Marusyna quietly slid from the cart, and stood by the side of the forest road, obedient to Kuz'ma, Semyrozum's son, and the wagon rolled on. And Kuz'ma approached Marusyna, and, like her master, he took her under the arms that were hanging low like a bird's wings that will never join the flock to fly south again, he took her under her arms and put her in the seat in front of himself on his mare Rusalka (LZ 266).

Strong biological imagery here is entirely in agreement with the primitive beliefs of the social organization in a prehistoric community that the narrator sees as the source of lost idyll. According to that view, women "naturally" submit to men because supportive roles are what they were created for and what completes them and makes them happy. Wholeness is achieved here only through the return to the values of such a community.

In a similar way, pleasurable (because wholesome) sexual intercourse is usually situated in the novel only in the natural scenery, in the middle of the agrarian work cycle. In the idealized process of agrarian labor that leads to the sexual act, the wife both provokes her husband and submits to him, and the couple works and loves in harmony, as

a team. There is no place for discord in this idyll that is filled with sentimentalism. In the description of the love scene itself, the narrator avoids any explicit details, using allusions to tactile perceptions and metaphors of nature instead. These episodes approximate the populist (*narodnytstvo*) attitude towards the erotic, altogether avoiding the dangers of a naturalistic description. As it merely serves as a symbol for the lost idyllic way of life, the scene of wholesome sex between husband and wife is meant to signal the novel's experimentation with the topic of sexuality rather than actively explore its expressive opportunities. The language of euphemisms used in these scenes indicates the narrator's strong self-censorship:

> And one summer day Kuz'ma and Marusyna finally went to the meadows to gather their hay. And they packed full a big cart, and tied it down. Kuz'ma stood on top of it, while Marusyna threw the hay bundles to him with a pitchfork. And Kuz'ma held on to the knot, leaned over and gave his hand to Marusyna. Marusyna leapt with ease onto the full cart, as she was still young and strong. The cart swayed and she fell with a hot laughter onto her husband, embraced him firmly and turned him over onto herself, scalding him with her laughter as if with boiling water. … And the hay smelled of bumblebee cells, and Marusyna smelled sweetly. And he pressed against the wife's body like in the very first night, after the wedding, in the new house, the one he built just for her. And Marusyna moaned greedily, and she cried out with a sweet cry scaring the stork that took off the haycock and began circling in the sky, around the sun… (LZ 268-269).

Similar imagery is used also in the last love scene between Kuz'ma and Marusyna, when they pick apples and Marusyna seduces Kuz'ma by biting into a juicy apple (cf. LZ 519). (In this regard, Valerii Shevchuk clearly goes further.) Such and similar scenes are full of pathos and nostalgia for the lost "natural" way of life. These passages strike a high tone that is somewhat lowered only by the insertions of opinions narrated in dialect. Although these insertions play the role of village gossip and lower and vulgarize most of the elevated scenes, they cannot diminish their nostalgic power (cf. LZ 266).

Language itself as a medium of narration is another important instance of experimentation in the novel. Introduction of multiple narrators with their distinctive language styles results in a multitude of voices that stand out each for their own style, register, dialect, level of education, or system of beliefs. Although full of breaks and inconsistencies in its realization, such a narrative strategy effectively deconstructs the idea of a monologic Soviet style, language, and ideology. It also allows Drozd to effectively realize his concept of "many truths." Overall, the many different narrators with their distinct voices are perhaps the strongest artistic achievement of the novel.

Difference in the language of narration is used by Drozd to put forward the idea of the complexity of ultimate "truth." We can see this in the examples of Mariia Zhuravs'ka, her brother Opanas, and the madman Havrylo Latka. Mariia Zhuravs'ka, the daughter of the village land magnate, tells in the "Book of Love and Hatred" her story from the point of view of the new generation of children of wealthy landowners, sympathetic to the cause of social revolution in Russia. Well-educated, eloquent, and self-reflective, Mariia fills her story with references to revolutionary ideas of the time, including protofeminism, going to the people (*narodniks*) and similar. Mariia eventually is sentenced to jail and labor camps where she commits self-immolation by burning. As with most other characters, the story she tells is full of pathos and didacticism. Conforming to the expectations set by the title of the book chapter, Mariya walks the path from love to hatred at the end of which she realizes that only love matters in life:

> And I ran away from my own home, from my own father, as if escaping from the Turkish captivity; I made my choice. The choice between secure vegetation of a progressively thinking female city dweller and this very prison cell at the end of the world, in which I'm dying cursing the oppressors of my people. Do I regret what I did? Probably, not. I feel regret for something else: that I no longer have in me that tomboy, so open

> to the world, who knew how to love. Hatred for my people's prison guards burned out all that was alive in me. Although, perhaps, hatred is precisely the dung of history from which in some future generations love and the good will sprout and spread around the world? (LZ 64).

Mariia's confessions are phrased in terms that are highly impersonal. She is cast here as the revolutionary type; her origin from the Ukrainian people is meant to introduce the notion of the revolutionary movement as a domestic phenomenon. If this is achieved, resistance to the revolution and its various *peregiby* (excesses) can be equally rooted in the domestic sphere. Thus the conflict's tonality can be neutralized, the national and ethnic component removed, and the tragedy presented as the "complex truth" of a typical civil war – that is, the situation of many (and hence none) "truths." In order to achieve this Drozd introduces an idea that dominates the ethical motivation of the novel – that of love as the primary principle of human existence and social cohabitation. It is the mystical loss of love that leads to atrocities between neighbors in the same village, or even between "brotherly" nations. Abstract love becomes the leitmotif of the novel and it is made more concrete in the Christian religion at the end of the second part of the novel (*Novi knyhy romanu*). When describing the loss of love in Mariia's case, Drozd effectively condemns any act of vengeance, reducing the validity of the class or national cause, as life without love loses its meaning:

> "Life had meaning for me as long as I loved. But today there is no love in my soul, there is only hatred. Hatred for the bloodsuckers fills my entire soul, there is no space in it for love. So what to live for?" – Mariya used to say (LZ 88).

The latter realization comprises the central part of the moral message of the novel and its didactic mission. Nestor Terpylo, having read Mariia's fate from her palm, predicts that "one of the great secrets of our scary world" will reveal itself to Mariia through her great

suffering (LZ 51). Her realization that love is the meaning of life rehabilitates Mariia and her generation who in the novel otherwise appear as naïve revolutionaries who unleashed unthinkable suffering upon their own people.

The story of Opanas Zhuravs'kyi, Mariia's brother, sheds light on a different part of the same generation: practical, industrious people who believed in evolutionary rather than revolutionary changes in the society. The language here is stylized to represent an educated, forward-thinking and somewhat cynical land magnate, yet it is similarly full of pathos and worn-out revolutionary metaphors:

> … So what that Mariia is rotting in the labor camp, and [Opanas's other sister] Daryna with her little kid is exiled all the way to Kolyma, and all of his former friends are in different jails and labor camps, and in Siberia, so what? … The world has not changed because of that. … Opanas, he is with those who do the work. There are periods in human history when a small, modest deed on the life's cornfield has more weight than loud revolutionary roulades, especially if those roulades sound only in prison cells. For them, the young ones, revolution seemed to be so close, a work of a few next years. Turned out, it was all illusions, though beautiful ones. Suddenly it revealed itself to them that the people they kneeled before in their youth, to whom they even prayed like to an icon, are not ready for radical changes. This people [*narod*] had to be prepared for a free social life, slowly straightening out its spine, bent from centuries of serfdom; Tatars, Asians, khokhol idleness – only waiting for pierogi to fly on their own into their mouths … (LZ 102).

Opanas's figure is that of a hard realist and of someone who is not afraid of committing crimes for the sake of social transformation. There is essentially no condemnation of this stance, although Opanas fails as badly at the end as do most of other characters. Instead, in line with the general strategy of moral relativity ("many truths"), Opanas's point of view is presented as a valid one – above all because it is considered a "historical" fact that contributed to the complexity of the civil war in Ukraine, as seen by the narrator. It is also with Opanas that the national question surfaces for the first time in the novel – and in

a negative way. In the episode where Uliana finds in the attic of her young master a forged chest with documents about his gentry origin, Opanas learns that his ancestor gained the title through lies and intimidation, having betrayed his Cossack origin and having claimed the beginning of his kin to be from Polish landed gentry (cf. LZ 125-126). Opanas's moral foundation is thus marked as inherently corrupt; in popular culture it points to the Cossack elite that for the sake of their own enrichment would denounce their national interest or moral integrity (as best known from the Mazepa story). For all his good intentions, Opanas fails when he falls prey to his own philosophy of compromise: he marries Natalie, the daughter of the rich local baroness, and succumbs to the old ways of running business in the village.

The story of Havrylo Latka's quest for the Walnut Land stands out among other books of the novel as it allows for a reading as an allegory. This story is also perhaps the most daring challenge Drozd poses to the Soviet system and Communist ideology – and it is highly poignant that this challenge is given the form of a fable about a madman. The story of Havrylo Latka exemplifies the ambiguous stance that not only Drozd assumed towards the official Soviet ideology: similarly to the main method of the "chimerical" prose, the story's criticism can be rhetorically "retracted," that is, made irrelevant precisely because of its form (as does Shevchuk in the case of his *On the Field of Humility*, offering an alternative interpretation in the post-Soviet period).

Havrylo Latka, one of the poorest peasants of the village, yearns for absolute power – apparently, to bring happiness to others – and begins to believe in the existence of a Walnut Land: a land where "one does not need to plow or to sow, or to reap" because walnuts that grow there "are as big as a man's head" (LZ 154). Blinded by his vision of

the paradise far away, he becomes the leader of a group of villagers who, unhappy with their lives, decided go with him on a quest for that promised land. The narration in this book is an interesting hybrid. The prevailing inner dialogue that approximates the stream of consciousness illuminates various parts of Havrylo's personality, depicting him both as a complete madman and as an insightful social architect who looks deep into the social makeup of the village to manipulate it to his own benefit. The overarching narration retreats into the background in this book, and the voice is given to Havrylo himself. As in previously discussed examples, this helps lend validity to Havrylo's truth and to absolve him of his crimes: after all, it is not his fault that he fell ill. Drozd stops here and does not proceed to search for deeper social and political motivations; the success of Communist ideology remains a mysterious phenomenon that can only be labeled as madness, not explained through acts of concrete people:

Наче мана яка на нас опустилася, бо всім раптом заманулося в землю Горіхову. ... І продали ми останнє із себе, і рушили валкою в степ, бо той чоловік казав, що, як степ минемо, за ним море буде, а в морі острів, а на острові земля Горіхова, де теплі води, і де горіхи ростуть з людяцьку голову, і є сходи на небо. І перемерло нас чимало в дорозі, покуль брели за ним, а вельми дєток, бо яни першими од солоної води помирали (LZ 173).

As if some sorcery fell over us, because suddenly everyone yearned for the Walnut Land. … And we sold the last possessions that we had with us and headed for the steppe in a caravan, because that man was telling us that, when we pass through the steppe, there will be a sea, and in the sea there will be an island, and on that island will be the Walnut Land, where waters are warm and where walnuts grow, the size of a man's head, and where stairs lead into the sky. And a great many of us died on our way, while we followed him, and especially children, for they were the first to die from the seawater.

In the novel, it is Havrylo's family that pays the highest price for his fanatic delusion. The phenomenon in the passage above is described by Belarusians from a nearby village whose susceptibility to the charms of Havrylo's utopian project testify to its universal

power, therefore releasing a particular group – Ukrainians and the author himself – from the responsibility of succumbing to it. Once again, the vividness and urgency of these statements point to their great importance for the author who through these explanations seeks to rationalize his participation in the system. Later on in the novel, delusional Havrylo becomes the prophet of the popular uprising against the land magnates of the village: having recognized the idea of the Walnut Land in the project of socialism, he joins the underground movement that leads to the violent confrontation with authorities and to destruction of much of the land magnate's property (cf. LZ 204, 214, 229, 243). Havrylo, who dreamed of building a "*hyl'hotyna*" (phonetic approximation for guillotine) to bring about universal happiness, is sentenced to death by hanging, but in the episode before his death he evolves from a madman into a romantic who sees his own idealism as a part of a larger philosophy of human existence:

> [Nestor speaks to Havrylo:] "You are going to die soon, Havrylo, you are seeing the sun for the last time. My sin is great before you and the people, because I was the first one to talk about the Walnut Land, but even greater is your sin before the Pakul' people that suffered and will continue to suffer: for there is no Walnut Land on earth or in heaven, that is a delusion and a day-dream, and I realized that, having wondered through space and time. But there is and will be [only] hard labor, by the sweat of one's brow, as long as there are men on earth. …" And Havrylo Latka answered him the following: "You are a smart man, Nestor, it has been revealed to you what was, what is and what will be. But do not darken the last hours of my life, as they are dark enough. Because the Walnut Land is the people's soul, and men will strive for it as long as the world exists. And I realized the God's design, although he continues to be deaf to my crying, as he was until now: this seductive mirage is given to men so that they stay men, and not dumb, driven cattle in the ruins of earth" (LZ 243-244).

Susceptibility to the ideas of Communism is therefore explained as a "natural" desire of humans for idleness – the same idleness that Kuz'ma and Marusyna, the peasant heroes of the novel, vehemently reject in favor of hard work and procreation. The metaphysical

aspect of the delusion framed as idealism that is presented as an indispensable part of human nature removes any possibility of responsibility for falling for it. What matters here is rather repentance that Drozd performs almost as an act of self-flagellation, while maintaining, however, that erring is the most human of all qualities we possess (beginnings of this can already be seen in *Spektakl'* and a similar case of Hromnyts'kyi is discussed below). In the end, the only valid counterargument that Drozd does uphold is the universal moral imperative of love and the good in human soul.

Following the historical chronology of events, Drozd touches upon the most painful traumas in the Ukrainian collective consciousness of the 20th century: Holodomor and Chornobyl. The unspeakable tragedies redefine the very concept of the novel and its mission; it is here that the narrative strategy of lending voice to the *narod* itself becomes effective. Drozd succeeds in showing how the gravity of the tragedy disrupts and fragments the narration. The narrating voice therefore frequently breaks and turns into a lament, with an overabundance of diminutives and metaphors of victimization. As before, Drozd attempts to strike a balance here between different motivations of the witnesses and the actors of the atrocities. His rationalization is clearly directed against judgment of the perpetrators of the atrocities, and in this he assumes the position of those who point to the exceptionality of the situation that removes the ethical dimension of men (love is one of its expressions – and people lose it, as Drozd shows) and leaves only their animalistic part intact – the part that struggles for survival at any cost:

> But the Book of Days is not for men's judgment, it is to remember. Who was right and who was wrong, no one will ever be able to tell, except perhaps at the Last Judgment. Or maybe it has come already, the Last Judgment? I testify what my eyes have seen and my ears have heard, without adding or removing anything (LZ 353).

As before with the obsession with the Communist delusion, Drozd appeals here to the irrational in men as something that people cannot be prosecuted for. Once again this effectively relieves the perpetrators of the responsibility for their crimes and accommodates a stance of apologism.

The novel brings up the man-made famine, the Holodomor of 1930-1933, and interprets it as a result of a complex confluence of circumstances, local infighting, and the general degradation of moral values. Drozd radically reduces the angle of his authorial narration: coming from immediate witnesses, victims, and perpetrators of the crime, no broad generalizations can be made about the ultimate causes of the events. Drozd's treatment of the Holodomor is a prime example of his concept of "many truths" that all retain their validity. A rational investigation of the circumstances is not possible or, to be more precise, is not desirable as it would introduce factual evidence that would allow for prosecution of the perpetrators. In the novel, witnesses see the events as they unfold before them, where death is motivated by personified evil and by acts of hatred within the community itself. Similarly, survival under such extreme deprivation is only possible through selfless acts of human kindness. The very few who survive the famine serve as witnesses who provide their testimonies of the most horrific crimes that people can commit against each other: here is a neighbor confiscating all available food from a family with small children; here is a ruthless activist willing to take advantage of the starving peasants; and here is the madness from hunger that leads to cannibalism.

Як прийшов йон, Громницький, з бригадою «буксирів» востаннє до нашої хати, - і ложки забрав. «Будете, як свиння, з корита їсти!» - регоче. А що ж нам їсти, як вони ще уранні єдиного горшка з печі дістали, картопельку, що

When he, Hromnyts'kyi, came with a gang of "tugboats" for the last time to our hut, he took even the spoons away. "You'll eat like pigs, from the trough!" – he laughed. But what are we to eat if in the morning they already took the only pot from the oven –

я дєткам голодним своїм варила, у припол подрузі молодощів моїх Наталці Блюмовій вигорнули, а в горшка того – насцяли? І вигнав Громницький нас з хати нашої на мороз, а двері – бомажкою з печаттю гербовою заклеїв. «Михаль, хай ти мене із сьої жисті списав, а за які ж гріхи ти оцю малечу мою безталанну під жорстокі колеса історії кладеш?» І на дєток наших показує (LZ 386).

potatoes that I was boiling for my hungry kids they emptied into Natalka Bliumova's apron, a friend from my youth, and then they pissed into that pot? And Hromnytsky cast us out from our hut into the frost, and the doors – he sealed them with a paper bearing a coat of arms. "Hey, Mykhal', that's OK if you wrote me off this life, but for what sins are you throwing these my poor kids under the cruel wheals of history?» And he pointed to our kids.

А се ж тади брели діточки із сіл околишніх, бо вимирали села в степу, до причалу, щоб на пароплав попасти і якось у місті, коло люду, порятуватися, хоч і не пускали їх на пароплави. Брели діточки, голодні, а Сонька їх приманювала добрим словом та кусничком яким, уночі ж косою горлечка їм перерізала, сама їла, ще й підторговувала на причалі котлетками (LZ 397).

Back then little kids were wading from the surrounding villages to the quay, because the villages in the steppe were dying out, and they were trying to make it onto a steamship to somehow survive in the city, with other people, even though they were not allowed onto steamships. Little children waded, hungry, and Son'ka lured them with a good word and a piece of food, and then in the night she cut their little throats with a scythe; not only did she eat [them] herself, but she also sold some cutlets at the quay.

Drozd emphasizes here the role of every single member of a local community and ascribes the atrocities to preexisting relationships: there is no trace of any kind of order "from above" to appropriate the last scraps of food from the peasants; instead it is Hromnyts'kyi's own diabolical nature and his memory of old grudge that motivate his actions. Similarly, Son'ka's cannibalism is explained through madness and opportunism, with the paradox of cutlets made of human flesh perhaps saving the lives of the very same people whose children she was killing to cook the horrific dish.

The story of Mykhal' (in "Mykhal' Hromnyts'kyi's Deeds") is an important example of public whipping that Drozd performs with those characters who represent moral degradation and collaboration with the regime. Mykhal' is a conformist and a

collaborationist with all regimes, from Soviets to Nazis. Hromnyts'kyi's moral relativism is dedicated solely to the goal of physical survival. Although motivated by much suffering and deprivation, his function is to be unconvincing in the face of tremendous suffering of his people. The story's main purpose lies in the performance of symbolic self-flagellation as an act of repentance for the human weakness (the same that one paradoxically could not be judged for before), as the narrator's outer sympathy appears to be with the principled members of the village community who chose to die before committing crimes against their own neighbors and humanity at large. This, therefore, already touches on the moral reproach that the fate of those cultural figures poses who died for their beliefs and did not conform to the system (Vasyl' Stus is a case in point here). Drozd's response to this is public penitence with the use of a character whose animalistic self-preservation instinct is dramatically hyperbolized.

Hromnyts'kyi's story, told in his interview for a local history project to the pioneer leader Andron Mokhnach and recorded in form of a diary, exposes him as a man without moral values and willing to adapt to anything in order to survive (cf. LZ 371-384). Presented with a series of moral dilemmas, Hromnyts'kyi always chooses a solution that ensures his own interest – a ruthless individualist stance that the reader, following Drozd, is compelled to condemn. The idea of collectivism that is championed here is framed in terms of both nation and local community: Hromnyts'kyi's persistence at the cost of his own people embodies the moral degradation that results from a long chain of acts of hatred and thus represents a crime in itself. Hromnyts'kyi's obsession with survival – to live until he turns 100 – reveals itself as yet another delusion that originates in human nature. Drozd makes Hromnyts'kyi – through language of naïve justification of

his life that we see in his diary – an easy target for condemnation (as he speaks of his life as "heroic," which appears rather improbable in its harsh cynicism). Rationalization here is very superficial and falls apart under the weight of his crimes that Hromnyts'kyi openly recounts. His "punishment" then is to die of heart failure in the middle of writing his account of those crimes: such death therefore symbolizes a partial return of the moral dimension (justice that importantly does not come from men, but from transcendental powers – paradoxical "fate" or "god"), as the perpetrator's own body cannot bear the graveness of his crimes. Similarly, Hromnyts'kyi's striving for eternal presence as part of Pakul''s history remains unrealized as well. The reader is left to wonder whether the pioneer leader will ever include Hromnyts'kyi's far too blatant confessions in the writing of Pakul''s history:

Принеси мені, синку, ручку і на чому писать і опишу я всю жисть свою довгу і героїчну для історії села Пакуль, з перших днів моїх на землі. А ти – перепишеш грамотно, щоб люди, які далєй житимуть, читали й навчалися на моєму примері житейському, хорошому і поганому навчалися (LZ 370).	Bring me, son, a pen and something to write on, and I will describe my entire life – *long and heroic* – for the history of the village Pakul', from my first days on earth. And you – you will rewrite it in an educated way, so that people, who will live afterwards, may read and learn from the example of my life, learn the good and the bad (emphases mine).

Enframing Hromnyts'ky's life story with Uliana's actions and words, Drozd stresses the importance of doing good in the world, as it would cease to exist otherwise. While the extent and the inner logic of historic events remain ungraspable, one can only rely on moral principles of the people from one's immediate environment. A counter-example to Hromnyts'kyi that Drozd uses to illustrate this is Daryna, the daughter of the former Pakul' land magnate. Having lost her own children to opposing political camps and the civil war, she takes on the role of the "mother of people's children," taking care of the

starving homeless orphans and sacrificing her own life to ensure their survival. In contrast to Hromnyts'kyi, Daryna is a positive example of immortalization in the memory of the community and of children she saved. The moral tendency of the novel is to emphasize such positive acts of collective perseverance and selfless support, while arguing that supreme forces will punish the perpetrators of heinous crimes.

The tragedy of human life assumes apocalyptic dimensions when Drozd introduces the Chornobyl nuclear disaster. Invisible to the human eye in everyday life, it is present in the text only atmospherically, with scattered references and reported observations (cf. reports of eerie mutations in domestic and wild animals: LZ 360, 362). Apparent invisibility of the catastrophe deprives it of clear causality and makes it uncanny as the nature itself appears to have turned against humankind. At this point, the impending apocalypse transcends the communal boundaries and takes on a global, planetary magnitude. Criticism of civilization and predilection for the rural style of life and its values find their strongest representation here. Modern civilization as disturbance of the "natural" (here mostly agrarian) way of life as well as ignorance for universal moral law are presented as the ultimate cause of the evil in the world. This fully corresponds with the ideological tendencies of the *testamental'no-rustykal'nyi dyskurs* (rustic-testament discourse), which Ieshkiliev defines as limited by the "peasant horizon" and ethnically protective stance (108-109):

> There exists a language of the earth and only those who work on earth with love and respect can hear it. And one shall not hurt the earth, and one shall teach that to one's children, and one shall not speak of earth in vain, because earth is the mother and we are her sons and daughters, this is me, Nestor, testifying, whose grandfathers and great-grandfathers were plowmen from generation to generation (LZ 48).

Speaking from the post-apocalyptic time (after the Chornobyl' catastrophe) it is the peasant way of life that represents the lost utopia. Therefore, only restoration of the values of a peasant community can bring wholeness back to the world:

> And my mother taught me, and I am testifying to you who will live tomorrow: the human soul lives as long as there is good in it, and when the evil sprouts instead – the soul dies, like a tree whose root has been cut, only with woodpeckers it doeth talk until it falleth and moldereth to dust. … Because evil is like a sickness, like plague, like a desert: it breathes hell for all eternity of the earth. And only those will be saved from the hell's burning who do good (LZ 50).

The high moral mission that the novel claims for itself illuminates a paradox of combining experimentation and traditionalism of its thematic and stylistic choices. On the one hand, the novel seeks to respond to the liberalization that occurred at the time and which allows for more artistic freedom and aesthetic elaboration (by keeping up with that the writer would also signal their "progressiveness"). This is pursued through remnants of the "chimerical" prose (thus escaping purposefulness of socialist realist writing) and thematic innovation (national question, suppressed history, sexuality, and language). On the other hand, the demands of the mass audience that the writer seeks to meet calls for a national project that comes to be defined through the reactivation of a national identity that is based in the ethnographic and the vitality of peasant life whose values are reinforced under new conditions. In addition, there are also personal considerations that the writer takes into account – such as his own positioning vis-à-vis the change of the political climate and his past activity that has to be reinterpreted in the new ideological light. The main principle that motivates these shifts is the writer's concept of the audience (mass audience) and his own self-positioning (as the Prophet who bestows knowledge onto that audience).

In this regard the figure of Nestor as the Scribe and the Chronicler of the history of suffering is of key importance to the didactic dimension of the novel. As the local prophet figure, Nestor defines the structural framework of the entire novel. However, the choice of Nestor as a constant moral reference appears rather unjustified and motivated by reasons outside of the aesthetic considerations, as he mostly preaches old and well-known Biblical wisdoms for which the Bible, or Christianity in general, would be much more suitable as a reference. This is particularly striking as Nestor violates some of the key prescriptions of the hagiographic genre. In my view, the choice of Nestor has to do with a strong rootedness in the local (in form of a "local truth" that is part of the "many truths") and with the need to present a case of corruption that finds rehabilitation through moral guidance of his people which Drozd projects onto himself. We find here a complex case of a language that suggests identification with both the perpetrator and the victim. One of the central episodes in this regard is Nestor's rape of Uliana, which breaks her resistance to marry him:

> The path that led through the Scary Woods to the Devil's Swamp made a turn here, and Uliana only noticed Nestor when she was emerging from behind the hazelnut bush. He slid down from the poplar tree and stepped towards her – Nestor's eyes were frightening. Her father's lunch slipped out of Uliana's hands, the clay pot with borsht crashed onto the pathway and broke to pieces. "Uncle, uncle!.." – she cried out, but no one heard her except the forest itself. Neither did Nestor. He did not hear anything except for his boiling blood. Uliana fell onto his arms like a weak grass cut down by the scythe. Nestor carried her into the hazel grove and threw her onto the grass. When Uliana felt pain she moaned, but it was moaning of a victim, not a woman's moaning (LZ 29).

The rape scene that represents an act of moral transgression is cast in strong natural imagery with Uliana epitomizing both the stereotypic passive female, conventional to a patriarchal setting, and the nature itself, defenseless before the ruthless human will and

technology. The scene neatly fits into the traditionalist worldview of peasantry in which the male is the main provider and the head of the family. Similarly to the scene with Marusyna and Kuz'ma, the woman submits to the will of the man, eventually marrying him.[78] Mythologically, the scene corresponds to the procreation logic of the agrarian society and the violence is therefore justified (Uliana gets pregnant and gives birth to her son Kuz'ma after she marries Nestor). The rape, however, does not comply with the absolute moral law of love and non-violence that the novel consistently puts forward. Uliana as the symbol for the land (indeed, standing in place of *Ukraïna*) is the victim of her own people (consider Nestor's cultural embeddedness discussed earlier), which fully corresponds with the idea of the source of evil with the community itself that Drozd advances. Permissibility of Nestor's figure as a Prophet can also be read in the context of Drozd's unveiling of the mechanism of myth making (in which only the positive deeds remain in popular memory), as well as his conscious re-appropriation of the Gogolian imagery (in which the evil lurks underneath the surface of the everyday). Nestor also is a reference to the popular figure of a soldier magician (cf. Kotliarevskyi's drama *Moskal'-charivnyk* (1819); cf. also the popular idea of a soldier in the Russian empire) that in its industriousness contradicts the exalted figure of the Prophet.[79] Adding a dark dimension to Nestor's figure creates a fuller character, makes him more tangible and truly a part of his violent local environment. However, Nestor never becomes a *Übermensch* as he is

[78] We see an interesting example of the opposite behavior in a scene of an attempted rape later in the novel, when the suitor of Uliana's youth, Martyn, attacks her in the hay field: "Martyn fell onto her like onto a sheaf, twisting her arms and tearing her clothes, but Uliana was different now than when Nestor crossed her path in Scary Woods. Brisk and strong, she slipped from under Martyn, and grabbed her pitchfork with which she laid the hay onto the haycock: 'Go on and try it, you damned bully, and I will pierce you through!'" (LZ 99). This can certainly be read as an allegory for the people's learning from past experience with ideological delusions and learning to resist them.

[79] See Miller, endnote 76.

prohibited from interfering in human affairs (and when he disobeys, he departs from earth forever). His role is confined to the task of the Chronicler and the Prophet through whom Drozd channels the Biblical moral codex. This largely succeeds as the didactic dimension of the novel dominates the narration. Quite unfortunately, the aesthetic quality of the work is often sacrificed for the sake of the didactic message.

The novel also continues Drozd's previous work on issues of conformism and conflict from the novel *Spektakl'* [The Spectacle] (1986). The duality of a Soviet writer who betrays his own talent for the sake of comfort and party recognition is infinitely radicalized in *The Leaves of Earth*, but the underlying structure of self-flagellation without a direct challenge to the system remains the same. In *The Leaves of Earth* the largely harmless writer Petrunia turns into the spineless survivor Hromnyts'kyi who, solving his moral dilemmas, betrays, slanders, and kills as he sees fit. As argued earlier, the victim and the perpetrator of the horrific crimes is the entire *narod*, without further differentiation or judgment. As previously in *The Spectacle,* a proper attribution of guilt fails to materialize.[80] The novel presents the peasants who murder each other for one cause or the other as naïve or blind enough to be guided by the next passing delusion or their grudge against the neighbor. The passionate revolutionaries from intelligentsia are depicted as sincere both in their beliefs and their disappointments, as are the former land magnates and their estate managers. Even the violent anarchist warlords are shown as governed by the belief in a higher mission they have to fulfill, which justifies their murders. Spared of naivety are only those characters who remain truthful to their calling.

[80] Cf. George Grabowicz's observation that *The Spectacle* does everything but abstains from the last step in formulating a political stance against the perpetrator, the Soviet system (Hrabovych, "Avtobiohrafiya – omana chy spovid'?" 101). Cf. also Vitalii Donchyk's reading of *Spektakl'* and similar works from the 1980s as works that "contributed to the spiritual cleansing and renewal of the society" (23).

In the novel, such characters reflect the values of a patriarchal, agrarian society: Uliana, Nestor's wife who inherits a part of his magical powers and heals people; Kuz'ma, the miller who continues to build his wind mill despite the raging civil war; and Daryna, the former revolutionary who finds her true calling as the motherly guardian of the orphans of war. All of them, however, fall victim to the supreme forces of history. Real political circumstances, domestic and foreign actors and other relevant details never make it to the novel – the main hindrance for this being the chosen narrow, very personal view of each of the characters through whom the author nevertheless tries to narrate an epic story. The characters who, unlike their naïve compatriots, are not blinded by the events and apparently possess the intellectual ability to recognize patterns in the events that occur in their lifetime, see it as a chain of mutual acts of violence and admit their powerlessness in facing history. The only answer the text provides is a call to stop violence altogether. All the while, justice in the sense of responsibility for one's actions, as a process of active and painful working through difficult past is impossible and delegated to higher moral (and very abstract) authority – that is, postponed to the Last Judgment.

As a contrasting case, the political stance vis-à-vis the Soviet system and the poetry of Vasyl' Stus can be brought. Vasyl' Stus participated along with Drozd in the *shistdesiatnyky* movement but, unlike Drozd, refused to yield to the demands of the Party in writing in a "politically correct" way. In 1970, without Stus's knowledge, his collection of poetry entitled *Zymovi dereva* [Winter Trees] was published in the West (Brussels). Stus was arrested in 1972 among over a hundred of other leading Ukrainian national activists, intellectuals, and dissidents. While serving his term in Mordovia, Stus often refused compliance and was harshly punished. Returning from exile in 1979, Stus

joined the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, and was arrested again 1980, shortly before the Moscow Olympic Games. He died in Kuchino in the Urals while serving a period of solitary confinement during which he went on a hunger strike that he refused to suspend. Stus therefore became an icon of national resistance to the Soviet system and his fate posed a moral reproach to those of his former peers who gave in to pressure. Both in his works and in his life he engaged the Soviet system directly, posing challenge to its narrative of Ukraine's history and culture, and to its own myth of a multicultural family of peoples. The point of difference between Stus and a Shevchuk or a Drozd lies also in the fact that his engagement of the system was done in poetry that was artistically brilliant and of the highest aesthetic value. Ukrainian idea deeply defined Stus's work, but he avoids the regression to rural imagery and peasant utopia as much as he abstains from didacticism. As George Shevelov wrote in a 1987 introduction to Stus's collection of poetry, "Ukraine is a potion that intoxicates and possesses the poet, and it is a poison that leads him to his doom, body and soul" (XV). A look at a fragment of his poetry will testify to the sophistication with which Stus approaches the dilemma of a Ukrainian existence during the Stagnation period:

Хочеш – задушись. Можеш – утечи	If you wish – suffocate. If you can – run away
сам од себе.	from yourself.
Скільки не волай, скільки не кричи,	As much as you call, as much as you shout,
а – порожнє небо.	still empty heavens.
Хто б тебе почув? Хто б тебе схотів зрозуміти?	Who would hear you? Who would want to understand you?
Висохло перо. І мулькавий стіл	The pen dried out. The rough-hewn table is
слізьми – змитий.	awash with tears (*Selected Poems* 94-95).[81]

[81] Written in July 1966. Translated by Jaropolk Lassowsky.

Stus was influenced by poetic predecessors such as Rainer Maria Rilke (whose poetics of death inspired him), Boris Pasternak (overcoming of death through art, as found in *Doktor Zhivago*), and Marina Tsvetaeva (the figure of the Poet who transcends the human reality in order to "enter the supreme sphere of art") (Achilli). We find this in Stus's 1970 collection of poetry *Veselyi tsvyntar* [The Joyous Graveyard]: "And first of all I'll pray. / And for the second time I'll pray. / And I will pray a third time, too. / And in my death / I will embrace this earth" (qtd. in ibid.; translation is mine). Yet Stus's *podvyh* [heroic deed] came to overshadow his artistic accomplishment in his reception in Ukraine and abroad. As Marko Pavlyshyn writes, "[t]he reception of Stus, …, like many phenomena of Ukraine's cultural history since the initiation of the national project, bears evidence of the polarization of cultural forces and corresponding passions between modernity and tradition, universalism and parochialism, and modernism and populism" ("Martyrology and Literary Scholarship" 602). The dilemma of Stus's reception consists in the attempts to appropriate his poetry for the national project in the nativist form that both Shevchuk and Drozd represent because of the unambiguous and direct challenge that he posed to the Soviet system, while his poetic works themselves resist such their casting. In this regard Stus is on the opposite side of a range of possibilities for engagement with the Soviet system from poets such as Elena Shvarts and Oleh Lysheha who entirely bypass the Soviet cultural sphere. Stus to a great extent matches their artistic accomplishments but directs his energy also against the Soviet system as a phenomenon that inhibits the cultural and political development of his people.

In conclusion, my analysis of the novella "Yrii" and the novel *The Leaves of Earth* emphasize the hybridity and ambiguity that we find in Volodymyr Drozd's work.

The expressive possibilities that the writer explores lie, as in Valerii Shevchuk's works, in thematic innovation. The experimental promise of the "chimerical" prose that we see in "Yrii" is limited to the extent that this style complies completely with the demands of Socialist Realism for master plot, positive hero, and positive affirmation of the Soviet reality. While the "chimerical" prose indeed "represented a departure from socialist realist tradition towards greater formal freedom," the style nevertheless remained "subject to the requirements of a realist aesthetics" (Pavlyshyn, "The Soviet Ukrainian Whimsical Novel" 105). As a result, the "magic" and fantastic elements that are introduced here have no effect on the plot progression or the aesthetic motivation of the works, and their formulation in the language of lower humor allows for it to be easily dismissed as non-essential. Residues of this style can be found in *The Leaves of Earth* where the "chimerical" elements assume magic and eerie connotations that fit into the overall pathos-filled narration of the Ukrainian history of suffering. Recording the history of his people, Drozd is aiming for a representative picture of the *narod*, trying to include as diverse groups as possible – from analphabetic, backward yet hardworking and self-aware peasants to intelligentsia and to factory workers (except non-Slavic ethnicities). Painting in broad strokes, however, often results in generic characters. At the same time, a complex system of motivations that seeks to rationalize the acts of both the victims and the perpetrators creates a story of "many truths" that is neutral, at times even dull. At the heart of this motivation is the position of the author himself who through symbolic performance of repentance and punishment of his characters produces an apologetic narrative (as can be seen also in his *The Spectacle*). The novel achieves this through the idea of a "complex truth" that by definition can only be entirely balanced and neutral,

accounting for all conflicting motivations, truly all-encompassing. Needless to say that such a position also makes the narrator entirely unimpeachable as he does not take a definite position on contestable issues, does not accuse or defend one group over the other, and does not distinguish between the victims and the perpetrators. The polemic potential of such a stance on the level of tangible issues of nationality, sexuality, historic memory and so on is reduced to zero. Instead, the grand narrative of truth seeking and truth telling – through immediate witnesses – dictates the structure of the novel. Such a grand narrative itself is, of course, politically directed: it is an act of unveiling of atrocities against Ukrainians that remained hidden for many decades and can be told openly only now (Drozd began writing the novel in 1985). At the same time, however, the novel challenges the Soviet system only indirectly, through an allegory that can be retracted or dismissed, thus exhibiting cautious ambiguity in its abstention from explicit statements. From this perspective, the novel is close to works of late Socialist Realism and "chimerical" prose in that it to a significant extent belongs to the developmental series of ideology and politics (as defined by Grygar), not art.

Drozd's "disengagement" from the Soviet system is hesitant and cautious, as he relies strongly on the main constitutive elements of Socialist Realism. An important factor in this is also the author's self-projection and his claim to reach a wide audience. As my analysis in this chapter shows such a concept of the implied audience results in a general lowering of the aesthetic quality of the literary works. (The next chapter on Liudmila Petrushevskaia discusses the case of an author's desire to reach a wide audience and her refusal to compromise her artistic principles.) The demand of the time that Drozd, similarly to Shevchuk, seeks to meet consists in a text of a "great genre" that in a

monumental fashion opposes the Soviet narrative of the Ukrainian history and culture and imposes a homogenizing narrative as it formulates its vision of the Ukrainian national project. This demand was formulated primarily by the late Soviet cultural establishment that encouraged the apologetic stance with which it identified under new political circumstances (a proof of this is the award of the prestigious Shevchenko prize in 1992 to the author for the novel). Testifying to its aesthetic limitations, the novel's literary impact remained almost unnoticeable, as the post-independence Ukrainian literature quickly turned towards the West and moved to incorporate its main artistic achievements.

Chapter Three:

Liudmila Petrushevskaia's Histories of Small People

In this chapter that concludes the prose part of my study I will analyze the poetics of Liudmila Petrushevskaia's 1988 collection of short stories titled *Bessmertnaia liubov'* [Immortal Love]. Liudmila Petrushevskaia represents one of the most interesting developments in Russian late Soviet prose that turns to questions of *byt* [everyday life]. The characters of her short prose and drama occupy urban space in which economic and social conditions play a defining role in shaping interpersonal relations. In this she comes close to Iurii Trifonov's "urban prose," a leading figure of this literary phenomenon, who was interested in depicting the everyday life of Soviet citizens, while also portraying a certain "social type" that deals with questions of historical memory (Balina 167). Unlike Trifonov, however, Petrushevskaia does not provide any epic dimension to her protagonists' struggle: historical events (Revolution of 1917, the Stalin era, World War II, or the Thaw) as well as the writer's personal history (her life of deprivation after the War, the fate of her many relatives who suffered from Stalin purges, and other traumatic events) are never made explicit topics of reflection or objects of depiction. In numerous interviews and memoirs, Petrushevskaia generously shares with her readers her own struggles as a teenager and as young adult, as woman, mother and writer that are important insomuch as they shape her creative motivations and allow her to deeply understand and sympathize with the suffering of others. These intimations that closely resemble her short stories will also become an object of my analysis because, as Petrushevskaia herself emphasizes, a considerable part of her artistic motivation

originates directly in her personal biography. Having herself lived through extreme deprivation, insight into and empathy for the suffering of regular people in everyday situations and spaces are immediate goals of her work; they define to a great extent the range of artistic devices that Petrushevskaia employs in her writing.

A prominent factor that shapes her texts is Petrushevskaia's concern for the implied reader. My discussion of such characteristics and components of Petrushevskaia's prose as genre, spatial dimensions, gender, bodily image, interpersonal relations, desire, and revelation of an alternative reality is closely tied to the author's concept of her implied audience and her self-positioning in relation to it. Petrushevskaia's narrative strategy in turning to her reader for reconstruction of the reductively depicted reality aims to disclose the mimetic nature of desire: without prescribing anything that could be adopted as a formula for "correct" behavior, Petrushevskaia exposes trivial violence that results from mimetic desire because she wants to motivate her reader to withdraw from inflicting violence on people in her or his own proximity. The breadth of this project provokes an internal conflict in Petrushevskaia, whereby the author yearns for wider readership but refuses to attain it by sacrificing under censorship pressure what she perceives to be the ethical foundation of her story telling – the truth about human relationships. I argue that – as in the cases of other writers and poets discussed here – Petrushevskaia's concern with her reader has far-reaching consequences for her creative experimentation and aesthetic organization of her works.

Equally important is the role that literary tradition and influential predecessors play in Petrushevskaia's works. Her trivialization of some of the most well-known literary genres, tropes and topoi is a form of deconstruction that targets primarily the

romantic and utopian elements of the tradition. A clear sign of this is the absence of a positive hero, of pathos and didacticism in her works. Just like Oleh Lysheha, Petro Midianka and Elena Shvarts – the poets analyzed in my study - Petrushevskaia looks for inspiration to modernist predecessors and does not at all engage with the demands of Socialist Realism. I will show that, unlike these poets, Petrushevskaia, however, is deeply interested in reaching a wide audience due to universalism of her artistic project. It is from this perspective that she is a necessary element of my study. I believe that her work exemplifies yet another possibility of an artist's position vis-à-vis her audience and the repressive regime.

Although chronologically Petrushevskaia could have been a member of the generation of the 1960s (*shestidesiatniki*) – she was born in 1938 and shares social background and family history with many of them – her artistic concerns could not be farther from those of *shestidesiatniki*. On the one hand, Petrushevskaia consciously embraces her position on the outside of *shestidesiatnichestvo*: in a 1987 interview she maintains that she "was never part of that set anyway because [she] began writing properly quite late, when [she] was nearly 30 years old," thus emphatically disengaging from its force field (Laird 47).[82] On the other hand, Petrushevskaia did not share the political views of that generation and firmly refused any ideological instrumentalization of her work. To Petrushevskaia, the nature of the Soviet system became clear very early

[82] Petrushevskaia, however, entertained close friendship with the journal *Novyi mir* that under Aleksander Tvardovskii's leadership (1958-1970) was the most important and influential media outlet for *shestidesiatniki*. In 1969 Petrushevskaia took her work there and was declined but not rejected: as she states in an interview from the early 1990s, "it's been the most serious friendship of [her] life. *Novyi mir* fed [her], gave [her] work, all through the most difficult and hungry times they gave [her] reviews and book reports to do. They couldn't publish [her], but they fed [her] and read [her] and gave [her] their opinion – always. Above all [her] first editor there, Nina Petrovna Borisova, literary godmother to [her]…" (Laird 33).

on and unlike *shestidesiatniki* she did not believe that the system was corrigible. Similarly to Oleh Lysheha, her answer was not to engage with the system in any way, and to avoid politics altogether in her works: "you see," she says in an interview, "I was born in the belly of the beast, the very womb, and from earliest childhood I rejected it completely… Of course we came into collision with the system, but we were so skilled at living, at just surviving. We'd been born in the belly of the beast and it was an art to stay whole, not to be dissolved completely" (Laird 29-30). When any contact with the system is perceived as corrosive to the identity of a writer who is trying to preserve her autonomy (the image of dissolving sense of self is extremely powerful here), incorporation of systemic elements or an ideological struggle against it are not viable options. In this regard Petrushevskaia differs greatly from Valerii Shevchuk and Volodymyr Drozd who incorporate in their works certain features of Socialist Realism and use them as weapons in an ideological struggle against the Soviet system. As the author who exemplifies radical disengagement from the system, Petrushevskaia's art offers important insight into the possibilities for authorial self-positioning in very similar political conditions and cultural climate.

Petrushevskaia became the object of immense interest and scholarly scrutiny after the publication of her plays and short prose stories in the late 1980s: *Bessmertnaia liubov'* [Immortal Love] and *Pesni dvadtsatogo veka* [Songs of the Twentieth Century] (both in 1988). The stories in *Immortal Love* are for the most part undated and were written between the late 1960s ("Takaia devochka" [Such a Girl] was the story Petrushevskaia took to *Novyi krug* in 1969), in the early 1970s and in the 1980s. Having failed to publish her stories in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Petrushevskaia, around

1973-1974, turned to writing plays and became very popular in the underground and amateur theatre scene.[83] The 1970s were not entirely without publications of her works: six fairy tales were published between 1971 and 1976;[84] "Rasskazchitsa" [The Storyteller] and "Istoriia Klarissy" [Clarissa's Story] were published in 1972, "Skripka" [The Violin] and "Mania" in 1973, and "Seti i lovushki" [Nets and Snares] in 1974. Until 1982 no more short stories were published.[85] Before the collection *Immortal Love* was published in 1988, many stories included in this collection appeared piecemeal in various journals.[86] It should be noted, however, that dating each one of Petrushevskaia's works is of little relevance to my analysis, because she remains consistent in her artistic method throughout her early and late work.

After the publication of the collection of short stories, both the reading public and literary critics were struck by the bleakness of Petrushevskaia's worldview. Her portrayal of people trapped in hopeless situations, the fact that the writer offered neither resolution to the conflicts she described nor moral guidance for their "correct" interpretation – all of these features prompted some critics to label her prose with the pejorative term

[83] The first non-underground performance of her play was Mark Zakharov's staging of *Tri devushki v golubom* [Three Girls in Blue] (a reference to Chekhov) in Lenkom in 1985.
[84] These fairy tales are: "Govoriashchii samolet" [The Speaking Airplane] (1971), "Vse neponiatnye" [All the Incomprehensible Ones] (1972), "Kak Vasiu lechili" [How Vasia was Treated] (1975), "Kot, kotoryi umel pet'" [The Cat That Could Sing] (1975), "Verbliuzhii gorb" [A Camel's Hump] (1976), and "Belye chainiki" [White Tea Pots] (1976). Two further fairy tales – dedicated to language games and thus hardly translatable – were published in the mid-1980s: "Puski biatye" and "Burlak."
[85] In 1983 the publishing house Sovetskaia Rossiia published a collection of plays that contained Viktor Slavkin's and Liudmila Petrushevskaia's plays ("Uroki muzyki" [Music Lessons] and "Lestnichnaia kletka" [Staircase]), titled *P'esy*.
[86] Novella "Smotrovaia ploshchadka" [The Lookout Point] (1982), short stories "Bessmertnaia liubov'" [Immortal Love] and "Cherez polia" [Crossing the Field] (1983), "Iunost'" [Youth], "Udar groma" [A Clap of Thunder], "Milaia dama" [That Delightful Young Lady], "Temnaia sud'ba" [A Dark Fate], "Elegiia" [Elegy], and "Diadia Grisha" [Grisha] (all in 1987), "Bednoe serdtse Pani" [Pania's Poor Heart], "Gripp" [Flu], "Ali-Baba," "Svoi krug" [Our Circle] and "Takaia devochka" [This Little Girl] (all in 1988; English translation of titles follows Petrushevskaya, Ludmilla. *Immortal Love*. Trans. Sally Laird. London: Virago Press, 1995).

chernukha [from *chernoe* – black]. Moreover, she was often perceived as a writer who revels in gruesome details – for instance, her characters' violence and trauma. She was also suspected of savoring the unpalatable details of human bodily functions and illness. Most of her characters and narrators are women, usually with a university education, who live in the tight space of communal apartments, and work at an unidentified state-owned *uchrezhdenie* [agency], be it a research institute or a science lab. In her perhaps most detailed, almost statistical analysis of Petrushevskaia's narrative strategies to date, Nina Balz shows that in most short stories there is no information on the physical space of the story, no descriptions, "room is only mentioned when figures move in it," which also applies to temporal and spatial dimensions of Petrushevskaia's narratives (98-99). This device of omission allows Petrushevskaia on the one hand to zoom in on the narrated material itself, the language of her story, and the individual identity of the narrator. On the other hand, the same device contributes to a sense of universality of depicted events: they could happen to anyone, anywhere, at any time; they are certainly not about space, time, or people who come from a particular place (that is, USSR of the 1970s and 1980s).

As a rule, Petrushevskaia quietly narrates her stories of the Soviet woman who is confined to claustrophobic space of her communal kitchen, one-room apartment that is shared by many family members of different generations, or bleak office. As Ewa Thompson notes, the smallness of Petrushevskaia's world makes crowd scenes impossible, thus the range of relationships is limited to those between individuals populating those tight spaces (206). Men are central figures only in a small number of short stories, as also are – surprisingly – children, given how striking and particularly well-known these stories are (Balz 71). There is generally no one major conflict in the

stories dealing with which characters evolve or experience failure (ibid. 86). The language of Petrushevskaia's stories is built on the stark contrast between *razgovornaia rech'* [spoken language, speech] of the "carriers of the Russian literary language in casual speech situations" and *gorodskoe prostorechie* [common urban language, speech] of "uneducated classes," both indicated by the author's lexical choice (ibid. 116). This language is frequently enriched by bureaucratic speak, jargons from science or journalism, and by coarse language. In effect, we encounter *skaz* that serves the narrative purpose of distancing the narrator and signaling her social milieu, as well as indicating the narrator's subjectivity (ibid. 116-117). The language of the short stories is practically devoid of metaphors and seems "inartistic" (ibid. 118), which brings Petrushevskaia's prose stunningly close to Oleh Lysheha's poetic language. Petrushevskaia herself explains that the stylistic transformations of her language stem from her departure from the literary tradition she tried to imitate as a beginning writer:

> … when I started to write properly I stopped trying to imitate and wrote just as simply as I could, without metaphor or simile, in the voice people use to tell their story to another person on the bus – urgently, hastily, making sure you come to the point before the bus stops and the other person has to get off. And then you know that the story will get passed on, and that's the beginning of folklore - … city folklore, … the folklore of chance encounter. Such stories have to be told at speed, and the plot is never the point – sometimes they begin at the end, and the story consists just in explaining how that end came about. Sometimes there *can* be no end in the traditional sense… (Laird 46).

Petrushevskaia's narrative motivation, then, is meaningfully defined by the genre she embraces – that of oral history that records and passes on a relevant piece of experience and collective wisdom (hence also the significance of her mentioning of folklore). Her language is meant to support this narrative intent by eliminating the artifice of the

literary, high language that is far removed from the reader's everyday experience (the experience of such a chance encounter in particular).

Narrating a personal history that can be universalized, Petrushevskaia, first and foremost, yearns to be heard, and for the story to have an impact on the reader: "I've always wanted my work to shock, to strike, to wound the spiritual users of my work – to set in motion the process of forming the pearl inside them. A pearl's life can only begin with a trauma, a blow" (ibid. 35). It is precisely this quality of her stories that motivates a frequent elegiac lament: Svetlana Pakhomova defines it as *pronzitel'naia intonatsiia* [piercing intonation] and traces it to the theme of death and to mystical motifs (106). As Tatiana Markova argues, it is partially due to Petrushevskaia's combination of contrasting lexical levels that she produces the effect of paradox, which is used to create a "starkly oxymoronic picture of the world" (38). Pakhomova points here to the proximity of Petrushevskaia's method to that of Varlam Shalamov (in particular, his *Kolymskie rasskazy* [Kolyma Tales]) and Mikhail Zoshchenko (as seen, for instance, in his "Bania" [Bathhouse] and "Aristokratka" [The Noblewoman]) whom Petrushevskaia regarded not as a comedian (a common interpretation of Zoshchenko's work in Soviet literary scholarship), but as a big tragedian who felt compassion for the pain of the "small" people he depicted (34-35; cf. Petrushevskaia, *Deviatyi tom* 330-331). Both Shalamov and Zoshchenko skillfully employ high language for depiction of low circumstances and events, using the powerful contrast between the content of the story and its language to evoke tragic or comic effects (or frequently both). As Pakhomova argues, in a way similar to Zoshchenko's Petrushevskaia's prose is geared towards the "destruction of cultural mechanisms and barriers that were developed by human civilization" (36). In

effect this points to Petrushevskaia's narrative strategies of paradox as a means to lay bare the deeper mechanisms of human nature once all "pretense" of culture, the romantic misconceptions we have about ourselves and our motivations are removed.

Petrushevskaia's short stories show that she intuitively understands the relationship between imitative desire and violence. The interactions between her characters consistently demonstrate that they exert violence against people in their closest proximity as a result of desire that is grounded in nothing else but imitation of the perceived desire of the Other. While Petrushevskaia's characters are aware neither of the imitative origin of their own desires, nor of their mutual misunderstandings, their author is, and her awareness of the truth prompts her to devise a variety of narrative strategies that help the reader to glean the truth about her characters' delusions and unacknowledged mistreatment of each other. Exposing this violence in the protagonists of her stories with whom the reader has begun to empathize – a common narrative strategy of her "monologic" short stories is the reader's gradual realization that the narrator might not be the victim she or he claims to be in her or his first person narration – forces the reader to admit the possibility of her or his own violent impulses. This is precisely the moment of shock and trauma that Petrushevskaia identifies as the goal of her works: thus the "pearl" she longs to cultivate inside her reader is the reader's decision to abstain from violence in their own close circle. Such a decision should grow out of the grain of suspicion that the reader is similarly not the victim but perhaps the perpetrator of violence. (More on this below.)

The urgency of sharing this knowledge and of motivating the reader to identify with the protagonists of her stories create a clear conflict in Petrushevskaia's relation to

her audience. On the one hand, her entire work is built on evoking compassion in the reader who should both laugh and weep reading her prose or watching her plays (as Petrushevskaia intimates in many interviews).[87] Empathy with the pain and suffering of others projects a universal claim that cannot be limited to just a select group of people – and Petrushevskaia believes that most readers will react to her works in this way once they read carefully. On the other hand, the artistic realization of this goal (i.e. evoking empathy in the reader) makes impossible any substantial compromise with the censor – who comes from the pathos-ridden, optimism-instilling background of Socialist Realism – who could provide Petrushevskaia with a wider reception. (There is also a very clear image of her reader that Petrushevskaia entertains – more about that further below.) Describing the options available to a writer in the Soviet Union (and being a woman in a highly patriarchal society to boot), Petrushevskaia mentions an incident with an editor at the Sovremennik publishing house who "advised [her] that if [she] were to change the endings of all [her] stories and make them more positive – have everyone get married, for instance – everything would be just fine!" (Laird 30). In other words, the path to publication would be cleared, should Petrushevskaia give up one of her most fundamental beliefs – that of impossibility of a happy ending in real life and, by extension, in her art. This recipe for success seems to be universal, as Western scholars, likewise, recommended that Petrushevskaia introduced similar changes in her work in order to increase her readership in the West. In her book of essays and memoirs *Deviatyi tom* [The

[87] Here is how Petrushevskaia describes her delight in the audience's reaction to her play *Three Girls in Blue* (1985): "They roared with laughter virtually throughout – right up to the crucial scene when the heroine Ira, who's been having a hopeless affair with a married man, is desperately trying to get back home to the child she's abandoned, and you see her on her knees in the airport shouting 'I'm not going to make it! I'm not going to make it!' There was a girl sitting in front of me who was so distraught she was literally tearing her hair out!" (Laird 32).

Ninth Volume] (2003) Petrushevskaia recalls how the German Slavist and industrious translator Wolfgang Kasack during his visit to the USSR for a presentation of his lexicon of Russian Soviet writers[88] voiced the following recommendation: "When you write, remember my advice: In the West we don't like bad endings" (315).[89]

Petrushevskaia succeeded in resisting the pressure to compromise and alter her writings for many years, despite her longing for a broader audience. She was able to preserve her artistic integrity at the price of becoming marginalized in public life. Here is how she describes her predicament in her 1987 interview (given before the publication of both her short stories and plays in 1988):

> Up until now my whole existence as a writer has been in question – and even now it's by no means assured. But oddly enough I've always considered that state of affairs to be not just natural but even essential for both my life and my work. You can see plenty of cases where mass publication and acclaim, and all the material benefits and public status they bring, have subtly or not so subtly altered the outlook of a writer (Laird 44).

And yet until the actual publication of her works in 1988 Petrushevskaia remained deeply concerned with the impossibility of getting her work published and thus reaching her readers. The uncertainty of her position of a writer – whose *existence* is, to some extent, uncertain until she is read – compelled her to take some radical steps in pleading with the authorities:

> I feel desperate now to get at least one book out. I wrote a letter to Gorbachev and the message was very simple, it was a cry from the heart: I won't live to see my book published, help me! How long are we going to go on publishing writers only after they're dead? My book of stories has been doing the rounds since the 1970s, and the publishers keep putting it

[88] Kasack, Wolfgang. *Lexikon der russischen Literatur ab 1917*. Stuttgart: Kröner, 1976.
[89] To this Petrushevskaia claims to have replied ironically: "When I write I forget not only about you, I forget even myself" (*Deviatyi tom* 315).

> off. How long can they go on? I'm still waiting. I'm still standing in that never-ending queue (ibid. 46).

Here and elsewhere Petrushevskaia voices her frustration with the fact that "[her] circle of readers has been artificially limited by the fact that [she's] been so little published," also because she "[does not] allow [her] work to be passed around and copied in typescript" (ibid.).[90] After the staging of *Three Girls in Blue* and the publication of her works in 1988 a significant backlash followed from literary critics who disapproved of the works' depressing tenor ("blackness") and thematic "smallness" (*melkotem'e*). This response revealed to Petrushevskaia a new dimension of interacting with her audience: her existential thirst for a wider audience slowly transformed into a more selective and even educational approach to the reader: Petrushevskaia beings to look for a more intelligent audience capable of appreciating her literary skill. Indicative of this is her essay from the late 1980s entitled "Popytka otveta" [An Attempt to Reply] in which she addresses the avalanche of criticism and negative emotional reactions to her work.[91] The type of defense Petrushevskaia chooses is symptomatic for her understanding of the essence of her work: in her essay she travesties some of the most well-known literary classics (such as *Hamlet, Othello,* and *Romeo and Juliet*), retelling them as everyday conflicts based entirely in quotidian activities and petty desires of the protagonists (*Deviatyi tom* 33-34).[92] Furthermore, she points to the absurdity of the continuing

[90] As the main reason for not partaking in clandestine publications (*samizdat*) Petrushevskaia cites her fear of plagiarism, thus confirming her deep concern with the originality of her work and her artistic contribution ("people feel free to steal and plagiarize your work if it isn't published" (Laird 46)).

[91] A more complex attempt of a reply to her readers – urging them to step up their efforts in interpreting Petrushevskaia's literary game and to avoid a literal interpretation of her works – is her story "Tri puteshestviia, ili vozmozhnost' menippei" (2000).

[92] Proximity of Petrushevskaia's travesty to Mikhail Zoshchenko (especially in his *Golubaia kniga* (1934-1935)) motivates Svetlana Pakhomova's argument that Zoshchenko was

demands of the perestroika period to depict party leaders as invincible epic heroes, pointing out that the gesture that later translates into bloodbaths in places far away often begins with what happens at the kitchen table of those leaders. Petrushevskaia concludes with a laconic formula that encapsulates her art: "Прекрасное есть жизнь" (beauty is life) (ibid.). "An Attempt to Reply" marks a threshold in Petrushevskaia's perception of her audience after which she resigns herself to communicating with a handful of initiated readers – resembling her caring helpful colleagues at *Novyi mir* and her close circle of friends. The writer's main realization here appears to be that her strategy of confronting the reader with disillusionment and trauma that dominate her fictional universe will require a careful, attentive reading that not everyone is prepared to do, or is capable of doing. While she rejects instances of misreading by those literary critics who approach her work from the position of Socialist Realism, she continues to appeal to the intuitive reaction of the general audience that knows her short stories to reflect the Soviet everyday reality truthfully. The short story "Our Circle" is a good example of such a story:

> But the right people understood "Our Circle." The thing is that my work is of no use to stupid or evil people – they hate it, reject it, see only the bare facts I present and not what surrounds them. They don't understand the game I'm playing (Laird 33).

Consciously or not, Petrushevskaia employs here the same scapegoating device she exposes in her own stories (as, for instance, in "The Lookout Point," where the main character, Andrei, claims to be "a normal person with no perversions" but reveals the desire to "lash out and abuse" others (171).) Petrushevskaia points to the crucial problem

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Petrushevskaia's immediate predecessor and she succeeds him in perfecting the oxymoronic style of narration that brings to the fore the "exclusively everyday [*bytovaia*] side of depicted reality" (34-35).

any writer had to face who wrote outside the Socialist Realist canon: she or he had to deal with a reader who was accustomed to a very concrete style of narration, where the boundaries are clearly demarcated and the reader is able to infer the story's moral lesson without much effort (the crucial problem is the exigency on the writer to perform the function of a preacher and have a sermon to deliver, a behavior we can trace in the works of Valerii Shevchuk and Volodymyr Drozd). Petrushevskaia's open-ended stories that lack a positive hero and a happy ending could have only upset the expectation of a reader not prepared to deal with such a radical departure from the familiar literary style. Petrushevskaia finally realizes that her hope of finding an appreciative audience sophisticated enough to understand and participate in her "game" was rather naïve. She now seeks shelter with an ideal reader who is receptive to her work – a self-limitation she certainly could not foresee:

> I know many readers have wept over this story [The Violin] – women, naturally, who understand everything! My best readers have always been women. … Any work of art is a kind of game played between the author and the reader. I've always considered my real heroes to be not the characters in my books but my readers who reflect on those characters' lives. … But the reader or the audience must always know more than the hero, that's a basic principle of art. My ideal hero is the person sitting in the theatre or reading the book, reading about a hero who … isn't ideal at all – maybe the very opposite. But by reading or watching, that person comes to reflect on his own life too. … I know someone who was so affected by reading one of my plays, *Music Lessons*, that it really did change his life (ibid. 35).

Petrushevskaia's ideal reader thus emerges as someone who can both understand the suffering she portrays and who is "initiated," that is, versed in non-traditional literature enough to be able to participate in her literary game. Unlike examples of other writers who attempt to engage a mass audience in their project – such as, for instance, Volodymyr Drozd and Valerii Shevchuk discussed in previous chapters – Petrushevskaia

is not willing to lower the level of her work's sophistication. Instead, she abandons the idea of a mass audience and returns to a modest circle of those readers who can appreciate her artistic accomplishment.

Petrushevskaia's collection of short stories *Immortal Love* fully illustrates her poetics and narrative strategies. In its length, this collection is almost equally divided between 23 "histories" (*istorii*) and 13 "monologues." The latter group differs from the former primarily by the type of narration: in the "monologic" stories most narrators are the main characters of the stories (these stories thus are formalized as first-person narratives). In order to demonstrate some of the key characteristics of Petrushevskaia's short prose that were mentioned above, I discuss two pieces from this collection: the short story "Sluchai Bogoroditsy" [A Case of Virgin Birth] and the novella "Smotrovaia ploshchadka" [The Lookout Point]. These stories exemplify Petrushevskaia's unique method in using space, time, and language of narration for achieving her artistic goals. They also show the concrete textual embodiment of topics Petrushevskaia is most interested in and reveal her notions of the audience, genre, and literary heritage. In addition, I discuss "The Lookout Point" as an example of Petrushevskaia's interest in laying bare the mimetic nature of desire – a concern she shares with such classics of the Russian literature as Fedor Dostoevskii, Aleksandr Pushkin, and Mikhail Lermontov. Exposing the mimetic origin and nature of desire, Petrushevskaia's stories are highly persuasive in urging the reader to become conscious of her or his violent impulse and the self-perception as a victim.

Petrushevskaia's stories frequently turn to topics that explore bodily or mental illness and deformity, death and loss, illusion and reality, corporeality of human existence

as well as its metaphysical dimension, the life of consciousness, its delusions and misunderstandings. (In this she is very close to the poet Elena Shvarts.) The writer also describes the patterns of human behavior under conditions of extreme stress and deprivation (such as critical lack of living space, food, or career opportunities). These are invariants of her works and they demonstrate that her approach is significantly based on the technique of counterpoint: in different antinomies that appear in her stories, the respective options are never given exclusivity or dominance over the opposing ones. This results in a complex picture of reality that is endowed with ambiguity and paradox, and in which diverging voices are clearly heard. A complex representation of reality in Petrushevskaia's writings cannot by definition have simple solutions. For this reason, the main formal characteristics of her writing differ strikingly from the schematism of the Socialist Realist prose that for the most part followed formulaic notions of genre, plot, constellation of characters, and moral message. Although the invariant elements of her stories would certainly lend themselves to an impressive organization within a big narrative form (such as novel), Petrushevskaia clearly resists this genre. Sally Dalton-Brown points in her study to Petrushevskaia's "constant subversion of genre forms" (196) and maintains that the author's "overall genre" is *skaz* or "failed carnival narrative" (viii) that is built on speaking in "two remarkably different ways, one private, and one public" (13-14). Thus her dedication to the genre of oral narration and the language of *skaz* demand a form that can fully transport the voice of her many characters. We find in Petrushevskaia fragmentation of the big narrative into a multitude of closely related stories each of which attains its own voice and resists completion (another story can be added at any time), monumentality and pathos of the big form. In all their striking

similarity, her stories cannot merge into one epic tale. Making them subservient to some other greater goal that a novel would advance – it usually being an ideological or didactic agenda, as we see in Volodymyr Drozd's *Lystia zemli* – would dissolve the nuanced identity of the "little people" she has chosen to portray, a threat she herself desperately tried to avoid since the moment of her birth in the "womb of the beast." Without a clear agenda, the plot of Petrushevskaia's stories is largely anticlimactic, the outer life of her characters is frequently uneventful, there are no clear heroes or villains, and the characters themselves seldom experience a radical transformation.

As a writer who from very early on was "terribly conscious of the huge moral demands made on writers in Russia," Petrushevskaia chooses to ignore this demand (Laird 45). Her rejection of "metaphor and simile" mentioned above points to the fact that, although she initially followed the example of writers known for their literary artistry, in her own work Petrushevskaia favors the style of minimal embellishment that brings her closest to conveying authenticity and spontaneity of narration – that is, to rendering the unique subjectivity of her characters.[93] As Anatolii Barzakh aptly remarks, this points to a general "anti-literariness" of Petrushevskaia's prose and her propensity for the aesthetics of the *lubok* (Barzakh).[94] In rejecting the literary tradition of the big form with all the demands it poses towards the writer, style, and plot structure, Petrushevskaia reacts not to a concrete novelistic instance in history, but to a collective body of texts, which she refers to as "a single *Prätext"* [pre-text], defined by a collection of most

[93] In her 1987 interview Petrushevskaia says the following: "I studied journalism at the university and later worked as a journalist, and all that time I was writing away, trying to imitate my favorite writers: Joyce, Proust, Bunin, Bulgakov, Thomas Mann. But all that early writing – before I found my own voice – was just nonsense, pastiche, parody" (Laird 45).

[94] In this context, Svetlana Pakhomova's linking of Petrushevskaia's narrative strategies to those of Zoshchenko is especially persuasive (see earlier in this chapter).

familiar and predictable narrative strategies of character development, plot structure, and rhetoric devices (Balz 218). Frustrating these expectations of her readers opens unprecedented opportunities for innovation and, as pointed out earlier, stands in stark contrast to narrative strategies of a Valerii Shevchuk or Volodymyr Drozd.

"A Case of Virgin Birth" epitomizes most of these opportunities. The short story is very compact and multiple reductions in the narration require a considerable effort on the part of the reader towards reconstruction and valuation of the underlying story (ibid.). As usual for Petrushevskaia, the narration begins *in medias res* and departs from the present moment. Mother and son have dinner together, during which the son suddenly says aloud the name of his girlfriend – Natasha Kandaurova – which leads to the discovery that both mother and son have love affairs with people whose last names begin with Kan-. This incident bears significance that is yet unknown to the reader: the son "tried to join in his mother laughter over the coincidence, but in fact felt totally terrified" (CVBa 17).[95] Tormented by what he sees as an act of "betrayal," the son freezes over the sink horrified (*pomertvev*). The third person narrator's characterization of the mother's laughter melts into the son's perspective that reflects his separation from the mother (as disapproval) and the threat that he perceives coming from her: "you could feel in her silence that she felt somehow sated [*ona molchit kak-to sytno*], as if she had got just want she wanted" and "her laughter was somehow idiotic, female, over-excited" (CVBa 17). The physicality of the mother's presence, the animalistic quality ascribed to it signals the

[95] Translation of passages from the short story is based on Sally Laird's translation in *Immortal Love* (1995) and adapted for proximity to the Russian original where it significantly departs from it. Direct citations from this translation will be henceforth abbreviate with CVB and adapted translations with CVBa, followed by the page number. In the present passage, the adverb and verb used by Petrushevskaia in original is *silno ispugalsia*. For practical purposes, such clarifications will be provided immediately in the English text in parentheses (in the course of my reading) or square brackets (within quotations).

archetypal and sexual threat that the son perceives – as if she would devour him, suck him back in so as to have entirely to herself ("she felt somehow sated … and was poised and waiting to take him under her wing" (CVBa ibid.). This reunion is fiercely rejected by the son in his disapproving reaction to her: "her laughter was somehow idiotic, female, over-excited in her anticipation how the two of them – in a little family plot – would join forces against the two 'Kans'" (CVBa ibid.). In this light, the son's involuntary disclosure of his girlfriend's name is a "betrayal" insofar as the proximity to the mother is unwanted by him and perceived as a threat of absorption. The son leaves with the name of his girlfriend on his lips: he pronounces it aloud, even sings it and thus turns this act into an initiation ritual that is meant to both establish his emancipation and resume his independence from her.

The narration proceeds to the point in the past when the trauma that the mother unwittingly inflicted on her son, caused him much torment ("he'd many times suffered such torments from her [*muchilsia tak ot materi*] (CVBa 18)). As the reader finds out only towards the end of the short story, the trauma originates in the mother's compensatory behavior: she feels guilty for not spending time with him and so "never misses an opportunity to try and educate him" (CVB 26). Another possible explanation the reader suspects later is the mother's loneliness and her desire to have a friend in her son – but confiding in him prematurely turns out traumatic for the son, which the mother does not realize. The traumatic scene that the son describes is marked by omission, which signals a possible blockage and repression on the part of the son: "when she was giving him a bath in basin as a child … she'd tell him that certain boys indulged in silly things [*baluiutsia glupostiami*], but that was very bad, you land up in hospital and have to have

injections" (CVBa ibid.).[96] Then, "when he was a bit older she'd suddenly started telling him what terrible agonies she'd been through giving birth to him … a case of virgin birth… the doctor did not want to interfere surgically, so it was her son who'd made her a woman," the mother would repeat her story as her son was lying in the dark, "staring up at the ceiling and clenching his teeth in horror" (CVBa 18-19). In a gesture that parallels the preceding premature initiation of the son into adulthood (as her friend), the mother, by sharing the details of his birth – an act whose true meaning the son could not yet fully comprehend – makes him the taker of her virginity. This story, filled with oblique and sacral knowledge about his origin, deeply traumatizes the boy who perceives himself a perpetrator of a dark crime that remains deeply mysterious to him. The consciousness of the adult son from whose perspective this part of the story is narrated sees him as a victim of a mother who was blind to her son's sensitivity: "Virgin, birth – he'd only just started looking up words like that in dictionaries and encyclopedias, there was something unbearably forbidden in them, secret, essential [*nevynosimo zapretnoe, tainoe, nuzhnoe*], something that shouldn't be disturbed but should have accumulated in him gradually, so he'd eventually be able to reconcile himself to it all" (CVB 19). In the tone of condemnation the young boy blames his mother for destroying his innocence and infecting him with a vague sense of shame: "And he was forced to remember all this and keep it inside him and feel shame at the mere mention of the words 'birth' or 'virgin', because they were quite different for him than for all the other kids in class" (ibid.). The mother who "would not have mercy on him" now turns into a monster in his eyes, and the

[96] Petrushevskaia employs one of her signature devices here in combining the mother's compensatory didacticism (that is, her noble intention) with the widespread disinformation in the Soviet society about non-reproductive sexual behavior such as, for instance, masturbation that she alludes to in this episode (low content).

son cannot forgive her the torture she unknowingly subjected him to. The consequence of the child's premature inclusion into the world of adults is the boy's alienation from his peers. He stays away from his classmates, even though he passionately longs for becoming a part of their carefree community. Overcome by nostalgic reflection, the son mourns the loss of his innocence and attempts to restore it through a process of emancipation from the mother (a rather unusual case of "restorative nostalgia" (Boym)). He successfully represses the memory of his trauma and adopts the attitude of superiority towards his mother (CVB 20). His condescending treatment of her serves to shield him from rejection, while the narrator ascribes the fear of being rejected to his mother ("she was afraid of being hurt afresh, of reopening old wounds by trying to get closer" (ibid.)). Practicing cautious reserve with his mother, he unconsciously assumes the position of power in their relationship. Now it is the aging mother who is looking for ways to win back his trust.

The boy's emancipation reaches a peak when the mother suddenly falls ill. While the nature of her illness remains oblique to the boy, her illness has to do with sexuality and motherhood: however, only when he takes his mother to the hospital does he find out that this was "Reception for expectant mothers" (*priem rozhenits*) (CVBa 21). The initiated reader immediately recognizes that the boy's mother went to the hospital to have an abortion – yet it remains unclear how much of this knowledge is accessible to the child and the narrator does not spell it out. Petrushevskaia chooses to focus on the complexity of the boys emotional reaction to his mother who is now in trouble. When he is summoned to the principal's office to answer his mother's telephone call, he promises her to come to the hospital right away and is suddenly enveloped by a wave of tenderness and

love for himself. He is so moved by his own selfless impulse to drop everything he was doing in school and run to his mother's rescue that he feels tears of rapture in his eyes. The narrator leaves it to the reader to divine how much of this sudden feeling of happiness was love for his mother and self-satisfaction derived from feeling important because another person needed him. What is important to the narrator is the boy's action that follows the telephone conversation: it is the son who assumes responsibility for taking care of the mother.

After the abortion, the roles played by mother and son are reversed: it is her turn to withdraw, and his turn to long for her attention. In other words, the son loses – at least temporarily – the exclusive position he enjoyed in his mother's life: she is now distant and preoccupied with something – or someone – else.

At this point the author makes a transition from describing the characters' psychological state from the perspective of the son to that of his mother, although, in formal terms, this shift occurs somewhat later. Thus for over a page there are two voices that are clearly perceptible in the narration, with a noticeable shift of perspective to the mother. In the text this is introduced by a short phrase tinged with irony. The son's promise to come help his mother at the hospital is clearly marked as male discourse signaled by his use of coarse language: "Я за тобой приду и заберу тебя к чертовой матери оттуда!" ("Sluchai Bogoroditsy" 40) ("I'll come and fetch you and get you the hell out of there!" (CVB 23)). The irony of the utterance immediately following this promise undercuts the potential pathos of the moment: "He felt quite shaken, perhaps by his own goodness" (CVB 23). After the mother gets home from the hospital, a period of harmony ensues in which the mother gradually recovers and the son takes care of her and

of the household. Here, the ironic voice becomes more palpable, as does, increasingly, the shift to the mother's perspective who now begins to notice that the son exhibits the traits familiar to her from other men: "[…] [H]e wouldn't allow his mother to get up and one day [*odnazhdy*] went to the pharmacy to buy her cotton wool for dressings, and he went grocery shopping every day [*a za produktami on khodil kazhdyi den'*]" (CVBa 23). The shift to the mother's point of view is very subtle here, but one cannot help but hear the proud mother silently commending her son for *even* going to the pharmacy once, and to the grocery store *every day*. The silent approval of the mother is seen from the son's perspective as submission, because "she had learned her lesson," the narrator states (CVB 23).

The mother accepts the new constellation of roles in their family, busies herself with household chores, whereas the son in his new capacity now helps her out, but at the same time she loses a significant part of her former energy. Clearly, the mother has settled into a new phase of her life where romantic relationships become secondary to her family obligations. On a symbolic level, the mother's submission signifies the victory of the son. In his mind, he succeeds in emancipating himself from her and becoming successfully initiated into manhood. The son's romantic involvement with a girlfriend signifies that he does not need his mother for emotional attachment anymore – at the very moment when the mother experiences this need towards her son.

At this point the narration loops back to the present, to the moment at the beginning of the story on Sunday when, during breakfast, the son, now a young man, suddenly blurts out the name of his girlfriend with which the story began. The concluding paragraph of this part of the story, narrated from the son's perspective, discloses the

principle at play in his new relationship with his mother. If before, after his mother's abortion, he would wash the floor voluntarily, "giving in to the new impulse inside him" (CVB 24), as a grown-up, after mentioning his girlfriend's name the son emphasizes his refusal to do that. His refusal to wash the floor is absurd because the floor had been freshly painted, but it is an important element in the power struggle that the son wages against his mother. Revelation of his girlfriend's name is seen in this context as a sign of weakness, his letting "himself be crushed" (CVB 24); therefore, voluntary participation in household work would mean for him the loss of masculinity and full independence that he strove for so consistently.

As the son departs, running down the stairs and singing his girlfriend's name, the mother remains seated at the breakfast table and the narration slowly shifts to illuminating her side of the story. Everything that had great significance for the son suddenly loses its meaning when viewed from the mother's perspective. The mother's view stands in stark contrast to that of her son. It suggests not only the ongoing childishness of the son – palpable primarily because of the mother's lack of any awareness of the power struggle that was going on between them – but also the immense mental and emotional disconnection between the two individuals who have been living all their lives in close proximity. Thus, the storyteller begins tracing back the development of this detachment. The events from the first part of narration are consecutively taken up, reviewed, and unmasked to reveal a different reality underneath. Significantly, these revelations are marked by their anticlimactic character. The reader finds out that there has never been any intention to manipulate her son on the mother's part and no ill will to have her son all to herself. For instance, when she learns from her

son that he has a girlfriend, the news and his mention of the name "Natasha Kandaurova" do not arouse her jealousy. As the reader may remember, at the beginning of the story the name of the girlfriend merely prompts her to share with her grown-up son the story of her own affair with the man who has a similar surname. Rather than jealousy the mother is struck by nostalgia and the realization that her son is now all grown up.

However, coming from the first part of the story, the reader's expectation at this point is to find out that the mother is indeed a heartless monster who is eager to torture her son. In the second part of the story the narrator upsets the reader's expectation and slips into a seemingly negligible digression apropos of her son's childhood: "The name [Natasha Kandarova] didn't mean anything in itself; years back when he was still in the six-day kindergarten [*v detskom sadu, na shestidnevke*] and she used to fetch him on Saturdays, she'd ask him who he was friends with these days" (CVBa 24). In reply, every Saturday, he would diligently recite to her the surnames of his two friends. The narrator also mentions that, in the kindergarten, the boy would go to bed in a room with 26 beds. The cursory mention of *shestidnevka* that inconspicuously follows *detskii sad* throw into sharp relief the unfortunate circumstances of the little boy's childhood. A careful reader gradually realizes that *detskii sad* where the mother picked the boy up on Saturdays is in fact *detskii dom,* an orphanage for children without parents or children who had no one to take care of them at home during work week. The reader thus slowly understands that the young mother had left her son in the orphanage for much of his childhood, and sent him later to pioneer camps in the summer to be able to have a private life and a career.

The device of gradual and somewhat elusive disclosure of her characters' background and true motivations is Petrushevskaia's key technique. It differs sharply

from the instantaneous and explicit revelation we find in Elena Shvarts's and Oleh Lysheha's works. In Petrushevskaia's fictional universe, the reader approaches the horrendous reality slowly, first, sensing that the narrator's hasty, as if garbled language conceals something, and later with a jolt of surprise, realizing what lies underneath. After the narrator makes the first disclosure of what actually happened to her characters, she goes on to complete the picture by discreetly sneaking in additional detail. The mother's main concern is that "her son had friends, that he wasn't alone and lonesome when he went to bed" suggests that in her heart she suspects that he indeed missed her terribly after she would drop him off again at the orphanage (CVB 25).

In fact, Petrushevskaia's reluctance to discuss overtly the hardships of everyday life (especially for single mothers) in the Soviet society permeates many of her stories. She sprinkles the narratives with traces of these problems, leaving a reconstruction of the full picture to the reader. Her equivocating style (one might even say, her version of the Aesopian language) is certainly consistent with her declared intention to avoid using ideology in her prose and let her critical perspective of the Soviet reality be inferred from her texts by the reader, rather than indulging in the overt criticism of the system.

In "A Case of Virgin Birth" the theme of the child's longing for his mother as he undergoes his "incarceration" in the Soviet institutions (from orphanage through pioneer camps in the summers and to school), this theme resurfaces as the narrator describers the mother's visiting her son on the Parents' Day (a reference to the pioneer camp where this was a well-known tradition). The boy desperately clings to her, dreading the hours of her departure at the end of the day. The mother utilizes a trick to distract her son from the anxiety he feels in anticipation of their parting: "'You haven't picked flowers for

Mummy for ages,' she said. He nodded, let go of her dress and walked out of the pavilion. … And now he'd walked off over the grass and disappeared behind the bush, and she quickly got up from the bench, ran to the gates and set off heavy-hearted to the station" (CVB 26). In the narration, this very incident appears to be a singular instance where the mother's guilt manifests itself:

> Oddly enough, though, he had no recollection of the incident with the flowers. It seemed to have been erased from his memory straightaway, as if it had never been. He never brought it up at all, and she never told him about it, although she was naturally so communicative and open hearted [sic]. She never mentioned the incident at all. She only remembered it over and over again, and punished herself for it [*ona tol'ko sama vse vremia pomnila i kaznila sebia*] (CVB 27; my emphasis).

However, a number of other, less conspicuous narrative elements point to a more complex picture. The narrator supplements the episode of the mother's visit on Parents' Day with the heart-breaking, tragicomic details like her little son's looking for her behind the cupboards and at the teacher's toilet after she had left, "because once he'd seen her go off to the teachers' toilet and lock the door with the little hook, and he'd been terribly scared and started desperately tugging at the door, holding on to a nail that was sticking out – he couldn't reach the handle" (CVB 25). And another moving glimpse into the boy's past when he – while eating a salami sandwich – suddenly turned around and said to her: "'I've been thinking about you, Mummy' [*a ia o tebe vspominal*],"[97] while "his mouth glistened with butter" (ibid.). Or that in the mother's apartment where the son was only a temporary visitor (hence his *raskladushka* [folding bed] his mother kept for his Sunday visits) he would get up at night, "stand there hesitating beside his folding bed,

[97] Rhetorically, a more successful translation of this striking declaration would actually be "I did not forget you, Mummy," as it would properly render the logic of Petrushevskaia's narrative strategy here. See below for my reading of this passage.

then quickly run over to her bed, clamber over the blanket and stay there breathing timidly until she told him to go away" (CVB 26).

Petrushevskaia's superb skill at combining in her language highly contrasting, even incongruous elements does not allow for the respective scenes to come off as sentimental. Everything is narrated very reductively, with high restraint, and the "low" incongruous details appear precisely at the moments of the greatest emotional tension, providing an effective counterpoint to the emotionally charged content and, in this way, preventing the scene from keeling over into pathos. Examples of such incongruous elements are the son's mouth, glistening from butter at the very moment of his confession that, in fact, he missed her but also that he has begun to forget his mother; or the toilet as the locus of his desperate expression of need for his mother; or *raskladushka*, the metonymy for his place in his mother's life, when he is so anxious for bodily contact with her. The conspicuous nature of these details is so engrossing for the reader that the issue at stake remains concealed behind them.

The guilt that tears the mother apart stems from the fact that she made a rational and selfish decision rather than listening to her motherly instincts – that is, that she was selfish in choosing her private life over her son. She regrets not having time for him when he was little and needed her most, and that she allowed the faceless Soviet system to raise him. Most likely, the broken bond between her and the maturing son is the result of that choice. This irreparable damage manifests itself in the detachment between the two, which is evident in both parts of the story. The moral dilemma that the mother keeps returning to is truly excruciating: "But what could she do! She was still so young then. If it had been now she would have gone to any length [*vstala by s nog na golovu*], laid

herself out to manage [*razbilas' by v lepeshku*]" (CVB 27). The reason of her feelings of guilt is the banal bad timing: she gave birth to a son who needed her at a time when she was young and wanted to experience romantic love. Having grown older and wiser now, she regrets her choice – but the opportunity to undo the damage is gone. The narrator uses the circumstances of the mother's life to construct a rational argument for the choice she made, but it does not hold to scrutiny. The mother constructs an opposition of "right" and "wrong" that her later life entirely overturns. This opposition is reflected in the duality of day and night and the states of waking and sleeping.

In the scene when the son runs over to her in the middle of the night, she makes the "right," emotional decision precisely because in the night her mind is symbolically in the state of sleep. In the morning, however, she would realize that "she ought to do what was right [*kak polagaetsia*], not just what made him happy [*kak emu bylo udobnei*]," where "right" would refer to a rational and selfish, and socially widely prevalent choice (CVB 26). This earlier conception of right and wrong, in which social practice and the primacy of her own needs represented the "right" decision, is entirely overturned in her later life when she realizes the significance of the emotional impulse to attend to the needs of her child. Such a conclusion to the story, however, does not invalidate the son's perspective that was laid out in the first part of the story. The mother and her son, each suffering from their emotional detachment, stand alone in their own right, while the possibility of repairing the mother-son bond is irrevocably gone.

As my reading of the short story demonstrates, Petrushevskaia challenges her reader to reconstruct the motivations of her characters buried in the unconscious of their psyche. A comparable method in Volodymyr Drozd's prose differs in this regard to the

extent that the *skaz* language of separate stories narrated by individual characters of his novel *The Leaves of Life* are clearly subservient to the larger narrative he advances, defined by an ideological agenda of his work. Although not simplistic, his message to the reader is perspicuous and on both the personal and political level directed at negating the Soviet experience. In Petrushevskaia, however, the depiction of insoluble dilemmas and paradoxes that the reader encounters is geared towards initiating a strenuous reflection about the reader's own situation with the potential of influencing her or his decisions in private life. The possibility of such influence is, however, significantly limited by the same trivial existence that her readers share with her characters in the reality of the late Soviet Union.

One of the most striking patterns of human desires and behavior that Petrushevskaia examines in her prose is the mechanism of desire, while the ultimate, broad message to her reader is to withdraw from violence towards others. The novella "The Lookout Point" is from the very beginning deeply concerned with grasping the essence of a certain pattern of behavior that its main hero, Andrei, exhibits in his life in the capital. The narrator who reveals herself very early on represents here a collective effort to understand Andrei's motivations in life. His continuing success appears paradox and rationally unexplainable: he would emerge victorious over ever-new self-imposed challenges despite approaching them with striking nonchalance and while carelessly revealing his intentions. Irrationality of these victories made them appear particularly puzzling because they were "to a certain extent unwished for and … the victor himself, in

the depths of his soul, evidently yearned to be vanquished" ("The Lookout Point" 164).[98] The reason for Andrei's careless behavior the narrator motivates with his being preoccupied with some other idea, a higher goal that made him appear distracted and distant, "as if what really mattered was some thought which he kept probing from every possible angle, as if testing it out" (LP 165). Paradoxically, the same preoccupation also prevents him from realizing that he is preoccupied with "this other problem of his, the main one"; his constant orientation to the future keeps him from engaging with the present (LP 166). The narrator's very existence is therefore motivated by the fact that Andrei is too preoccupied to deeply reflect on his own actions: this task falls to the narrator who, through a series of Andrei's "implied monologues," assumes Andrei's self-reflective position, were he to reflect on the motivations of his own actions. Time and again, however, the narrator breaks out of this model to lament about the banality of the phenomenon she describes:

> Oh Lord, why is the world constructed thus? – why is it so unlike literature, why can nothing be read just once, from one single point of view? Why is everything susceptible to some deeper reading, and ever greater abysses open up before you, and plunging deep into them, seeking the very bottom, the truth itself, a person loses a great deal on the way, paying no heed in passing to truths no worse than that which awaits him at the very last; but people always want to get to the bottom of things, and afterwards (just like Andrei in our case) have a good laugh and say that the world is full of faggots and wankers, and women are all either whores or lesbians or masturbators or old spinsters (LPa 170).

In Petrushevskaia's signature way, the contrasting language in the beginning and the end of the long sentence represents clashing voices that lower the tone of pathos in the narration. The narrator travesties here the high concept she introduces in the beginning,

[98] Citations from "The Lookout Point" follow Sally Laird's translation in *Immortal Love* (1995) and will henceforth be indicated by the abbreviation LP followed by a page number. Adapted translations will be indicated by the abbreviation LPa.

rendering it at the end of the sentence in vulgar terms of the disillusioned main character himself. The narrator thus bemoans the futility of a widespread behavior that reveals itself as a desire that cannot be ultimately satiated. As a scalable structure, this pattern is realized in numerable dimensions: from very concrete love affairs to a more abstract desire to conquer the capital, and to the most abstract constant search for "the main truth" that in the process discards those truths that are valid and available in favor of a never-to-be-found ultimate wisdom. At the heart of the boundless nature of this desire lies its mimetic character: that is, its grounding not in the subject or the object of desire but in the figure of the Other who also desires the object. The value of the object increases with its exoticism, which makes it rare and thus more valuable to a greater number of Others. Once the object loses its exotic appeal, becomes knowable and available, the subject loses his interest and embarks on the search for a new object – that is, a new Other.

The concept of desire has received considerable elucidation in the works of René Girard. In his seminal work *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure* (*Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque*, 1961; English translation 1965) Girard discusses broad issues of the Self and its mimetic dimension, the crucial role of Others in the structure of our desire, and the question of violence in interpersonal relations. His findings Girard applies to a reading of pivotal works by Stendhal, Cervantes, Flaubert, and Dostoevsky to show that "the great writers apprehend intuitively and concretely, though through the medium of their art, if not formally, the system in which they were first imprisoned together with their contemporaries" (*Deceit* 3). The concern of these great masters of literature was, Girard argues, to lay bare the workings of the mimetic desire that is accompanied by vanity, contempt and hatred, which

ultimately destroy the individual who loses "the sense of reality" and whose judgment becomes paralyzed (ibid. 4).[99]

Girard distinguishes essentially between two stances of reflection on this issue: *romantique* [romantic] literature denies the imitative character of desire while *romanesque* [novelistic] literature reveals its imitative nature (ibid. 14). At stake here is the idea of the spontaneity of the Self, that is, its originality, self-sufficiency, and freedom. The romantic subject thus believes in the spontaneity of her or his desire and remains oblivious to the role of the Other in the desire's formation. Here is how Girard formulates this in his analysis of Stendhal's characters:

> The romantic *vaniteux* does not want to be anyone's disciple. He convinces himself that he is thoroughly *original*. In the nineteenth century spontaneity becomes a universal dogma, succeeding imitation. … The romantic *vaniteux* always wants to convince himself that his desire is written into the nature of things, or, which amounts to the same thing, that it is the emanation of a serene subjectivity, the creation *ex nihilo* of a quasi-divine ego. Desire is no longer rooted in the object perhaps, but it is rooted in the subject; it is certainly not rooted in the Other (ibid. 15-16).

Spontaneity as freedom ultimately amounts to emotional autonomy, a romantic misconception that Girard vehemently rejects pointing to the fact that human beings are by design meant to relate to each other by imitation (ibid. 14). The structure of human desire can therefore be grasped by triangle as a spatial metaphor that expresses the relationship between the subject, the mediator (who is usually perceived as also desiring the object), and the object of desire (ibid. 2). The object is desired precisely because the mediator is perceived as autonomous in relation to the subject: the mediator's desire of

[99] One problem of Girard's explication is that he claims all desire to be mimetic, thus not providing a sufficient basis for explaining the "original sin" (that is, the emergence of the original model of desire that is then imitated) (cf. Pommier 18). At the same time, non-mimetic desire is implicitly presumed in his reading of Dostoevsky, an example of which is Sonia Marmeladova's feelings for Raskol'nikov. Following Girard's own model, Sonia's humility and unconditional love is what saves her from the detriments of mimetic desire (cf. *Deceit* 41, 61).

the object makes it all the more desirable because the subject, through possession of the object, can absorb the quality of autonomy of the mediator: that is, the mediator's being complete and invulnerable, while the subject perceives herself or himself incomplete and vulnerable. As Girard maintains, "[t]he object is only a means of reaching the mediator. The desire is aimed at the mediator's *being*" (ibid. 53). Denial of the object's possession is perceived by the subject as an act of violence on the part of the mediator who, although being desired, now turns into a hated rival. Yet because it is precisely this act of violence that enables the desire, the true object of the subject's preoccupation and even passion is the violent intervention of the mediator who prevents the subject from assuming possession of the object. Therefore, "desire is blind to the fact that it is so irresistibly drawn to the spectacle of the Other's violence incorrectly interpreted as evidence of power, divine self-sufficiency, and the plenitude of being that the Other seems to enjoy" (Reed, *The Sickness of Heroic Will* 39).

Petrushevskaia's intuitive understanding of this mechanism that we find reflected to a varying degree in many of her stories seems to have precedent in her own experience. The event in question is of such relevance that she names it as the main motivation for her becoming a writer. Describing in an interview her childhood and the choices she had for spending time after school as a teenager in post-WWII Soviet Russia, Petrushevskaia recollects:

> The choice was very stark: either you went to the library or you went out on the street. So that was where the split between the intelligentsia and the working class began: the children of the intelligentsia grew up in libraries, while the rest learned the life of the street – stealing, drinking, fighting. There was virtually no contact between the two. I remember feeling a complete outcast in the yard outside our apartment building where the other kids played. And I think that's precisely where my love of ordinary people comes from – from this feeling of both exclusion and of guilt

> before them. As a writer I've always sought to get inside this world that was inaccessible to me as a child, to discover the beauty of its language, to show its suffering (Laird 29).

As a story narrated by Petrushevskaia the recollection itself can become an object of our analysis. What is unique about this story that is based on Petrushevskaia's own life is the fact that it manifests unerringly the workings of mimetic desire: the arbitrariness of the object of desire and its grounding in the Other rather than the Self. Although she is of intelligentsia background and books define who she is, the loneliness and the lack of human contact that mark Petrushevskaia's afternoons at her school's library (which she also describes in this interview) cannot compete with the fascination she feels for the street kids. The captivating force of such otherwise detestable activities as "stealing, drinking, [and] fighting" consists precisely in their being inaccessible to her while those who engaged in them exhibited apparent fullness and self-sufficiency of being. The forbidden fruit of the community from which she was excluded is marked by a concrete, immediate engagement with material reality ("fighting" signals this very vividly) that stands in stark contrast with abstract, mediated experience of life through literature that library signals. Equally, the concrete language of the street, its coarseness and contact with corporeal sensuality define the inaccessible object of desire, while her own and readily available environment is dominated by the purified, restrained, and more abstract language of literature. (Consider also "anti-literariness" of Petrushevskaia's prose discussed earlier in this chapter.) As the recollection story shows, gaining access to the world of the street and lower social classes in terms of space, body, and language have become the primary force behind the author's creative activity. However, her propensity for self-reflection – unlike Andrei, the hero of "The Lookout Point" – prompts her to go

beyond trying on the identity of those who fascinate her and to depict the mechanism of desire that she intuitively understands.

In this Petrushevskaia does not break entirely new ground in Russian literature. In fact, the interest for the exposure of the mimetic nature of desire permeates the work of many great Russian writers and poets. Aleksandr Pushkin's novel in verse *Evgenii Onegin* is one remarkable example of such interest. As Natalia Reed shows in her study of the novel against the background of Pushkin's thought on passion, the love story between Tatyana and Onegin can be successfully read "as the story of the mimetic contest that tends to be, by its very nature, perversely inconclusive for Onegin, but not so for Tatyana, Pushkin's favorite heroine" ("Eugene Onegin" 6). Reed demonstrates that "the problem of the origin of Onegin's spiritual ailment is … one of the author's central concerns" (ibid. 19). Tatyana who recognizes that Onegin's passion for her is a result of his imitation of the Others' desire (Tatyana's success in Petersburg aristocratic salons) is, in fact, "the first character in Russian fiction to invoke the notion of 'imitation' and identify it with the spiritual sickness that infects Onegin" (ibid.). A reading through the lens of the mimetic desire allows for establishing that, "despite its open-ended shape, the novel does have a conclusion because it terminates the mimetic rivalry between the two lovers, which, due to its internal logic, could go on interminably" (ibid. 6).

In her *The Sickness of Heroic Will* Reed also offers a persuasive reading of Mikhail Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*. The application of the Girardian theory of triangular desire shows that the novel primarily consists of "retrospective narratives" – statements that occur in the aftermath of destruction caused by the mimetic desire and that amount to scapegoating (50). The depth of Lermontov's novel, Reed argues, is

measured by the contrast between the "fictional speakers' erroneous representation [of] desire as rooted either in the object … or in the subject" and the author's exposure of the mechanism in which the narrators' desires "proceed from imitating desires of other characters" (ibid.).

Finally, Girard builds his theoretical conclusions regarding the mimetic nature of desire by analyzing seminal works of Fedor Dostoevsky. For Girard, Dostoevsky is particularly prominent as he "by a stroke of genius places the mediator in the foreground and relegates the object to the background" (ibid. 45). Dostoevsky's achievements allow Girard to conceptualize external and internal mediation: the former locates the model (mediator) beyond the geographic or social reach of the subject, while the latter establishes an immediate contact between them. Furthermore, Dostoevsky serves as a prime example of difference between exogamic mediation (excludes family members in depiction of mimetic desire) and endogamic mediation (includes them). Unlike his West-European counterparts, Dostoevsky does not restrict the depiction of mimetic desire to the exogamic mediation only. "In Dostoevsky hatred is so intense it finally 'explodes,' revealing its double nature," because he exposes the mechanism of desire through both its internal *and* endogamic mediation (ibid. 42). Petrushevskaia is very close in this to Dostoevsky, which many critics remarking on her "Dostoevskian 'underground' voice" fail to notice (Emerson 232).[100]

Petrushevskaia's focus on figures who are forced to compete for scarce living space, food or the very limited opportunities for professional advance draw attention to

[100] For other readings of Petrushevskaia through Dostoevsky see Josephine Woll, "The Minotaur in the Maze" 125; Robert Porter, *Russia's Alternative Prose* 54-62; Helena Goscillo, "Speaking Bodies" 142.

questions of identity in the framework of the essence of human nature. Petrushevskaia usually explores the role of culture and ethics under conditions that are dominated by the animalistic side of humans. Her characters typically struggle against each other in satisfying their most basic physical needs, either painfully carving out room for ethical considerations that go against their survival instinct or entirely submitting to that instinct. The "desires" that figure in such stories should therefore rather be considered as hunger: only after physical hunger has been satisfied does the desire emerge. As Robert Hamerton-Kelly convincingly argues, the nature of desire is metaphysical because "[n]o mere object can satisfy desire. Desire demands recognition by another desire; it needs to be needed, it desires to be desired" (200). "The Lookout Point" stands out among Petrushevskaia's short stories particularly because it is primarily devoted to illuminating metaphysical desire.

Mimetic desire permeates all of Andrei's spheres of engagement with outside world. Its most immediate expression is the pattern of his love affairs, his relationships with new acquaintances, his bosses, but also total strangers. Andrei is typically attracted to the most unusual women in his environment, or women that exhibit features that are of particular value to Others. These Others are subject to a flexible definition, but they are united by being male, heterosexual, and representative of the capital. The pathological manifestation in him of the mimetic desire dictates that all women can become objects of his desire, and after a week or so when the last woman becomes familiar and available he has to compulsively move on to the next one (LP 171). Andrei himself is from the province and on a more abstract level his conquering of women (as well as his "victories" over men) is an expression of his desire for the metropolitan identity in which he

competes with the desire of the provincial Other: "he hadn't entirely lost a certain provincial enthusiasm for the capital… An integral part of this victory over the city was a sense of his innumerable victories over the men and women inhabiting it" (LP 164). For this reason on the first date Andrei brings his women to the lookout point on the Lenin Hills that overlooks the city below. Every consecutive victory over metropolitan women brings closer to him the appropriation of the capital. Petrushevskaia vividly and in Girardian terms describes it as a snake's swallowing of the city with all its relevant attributes:

> So there's no one else up there at the lookout point, the city lies at one's feet winking peacefully, entirely at one's disposal, offering hospitality at every point, completely open to its conqueror, and he, done now with marauding, can begin loading up the whole place by the wagonful – *absorb* the lot, the whole lot, or that's how it seems. But if you look closely you'll see that it's not so much that the city's slowly disappearing into him – on the contrary, it's Andrei who spreads himself further and further out over the city. The process of *absorption* occurs of its own accord, while the mind remains quite free, and the *desire for happiness can no longer be satisfied by the simple act of devouring more and more streets, more and more alleyways*… (LP 167-168; emphasis mine).

Andrei engages here in a ritual in which every woman he brings to the lookout point has to stroke his hair as he strokes hers, thus enacting on a physical level the metaphysical integration of identities. The narration proceeds for the most part in a third person mode, but the narrator frequently speaks with Andrei's voice, thinking and articulating for him the abstract ideas to which he is oblivious being immersed so deeply in the process of their pursuit (the narrator reveals this by openly referring to such instances as *kosvenno zvuchashchii monolog* [indirectly sounding monologue]). Describing how Andrei's "desire moves [always] one step higher," the narrator's voice merges increasingly with that of Andrei until it turns into his stream of consciousness: "at the very thought that she

might just offer herself without even being asked, suddenly unbutton her fur coat and … my God!" (168). Having reached this point of merging, the narrator withdraws and renders everything a hypothetical "external ascription," but convincingly continues the same line of argument as soon as the next paragraph.

The line of thought pursued in such a seemingly hesitant way becomes increasingly more convincing as the details of the love affair accumulate. Through interspersed details the reader learns of the exotic attributes of the woman that make her desirable to other men whom Andrei brings to the lookout point this time. She is at first a mature woman "whose breasts … surpass all possible bounds," she is married to a "bigwig," has children, "drives round in her very own car, … lives in a world of comfort and convenience" – in short, is inaccessible to Andrei in every possible way and the prospect of her offering herself to him seems exciting particularly because of its exotic rareness. The reader then learns that Andrei is eager to get direct access to all the attributes that make his conquest so unique: "this matron floats into Andrei and gets absorbed by him, along with her five-room apartment, her husband, … and her children" (LP 169).

One important detail is that the woman herself – especially when she has such "indescribably voluminous breasts" that appeal to Andrei – should appear indifferent or unaware of these exotic qualities. In effect, Andrei seeks the same self-sufficiency and completeness, full autonomy of the object of his desire that makes him so attractive to the women he conquers. Because Andrei is mostly distracted by that "larger problem" he appears distant and inaccessible to women who seek to absorb his autonomous being. The "matron," however, with her "naïve awareness of the value of those breasts" expresses

exactly the opposite – a sense of insecurity and vulnerability that begins to drive Andrei away (LP 169). This process is completed when the woman becomes familiar and turns out not to be desired by the Other:

> But the matron is no longer just a matron: her name is Sonya, and she now comes to light as an unloved wife, a wife whose husband has calmly ceased to live with her, … for this imperturbable motorist has made other arrangements, not entirely proper, one has reason to suspect, for he seems to have various research assistants on the go [*mladshye nauchnye sotrudniki*], his students [*ego ucheniki*] and followers [*posledovateli*] (LP 169).

Thus Sonya becomes yet another one in a long line of those whom Andrei describes as "faggots and wankers, … whores or lesbians or masturbators or old spinsters" – that is someone who is knowable and categorizable, now fully within Andrei's mental reach and therefore no longer desirable.

The story proceeds to illuminate other instances of Andrei's mimetic desire. There is a string of other affairs that all run the same course. Since the pattern is always the same, Andrei realizes that "in the meantime his main concern was at a standstill, not moving, not developing; everything had come to a halt, nothing was happening, as if life itself had forcibly stopped in its tracks" (LP 172). Yet he is not able to grasp the principle at play in the structure of his desire. The reader slowly realizes that each time the main attribute of every next woman is her inaccessibility, as, for instance, in the case of Tanya "who was so unattainably charming and sweet, … adored by all the boys, … who played so hard to get [and] suddenly allowed herself to be got" (LP 173). The peak of Andrei's conquest campaign and its breaking point is beautiful Artemida, apparently the daughter of a university professor who is believed to live with her mother alone in a luxurious three-room apartment. Artemida is courted by a middle-age artist who supports her

financially and supplies her with foreign clothes that are very hard to get in the Soviet Union; he also drives the exotic "dark blue Mercedes in which he picks her up after work" (LP 181). Andrei's efforts to win Artemida are successful, but once she stops seeing her wealthy artist, loses access to fashionable clothes and has no money, she begins to lose her appeal for him. Andrei and Artemida go on a short vacation trip together which results in a scandal at work. The scandal also leads to the ousting of the only male colleague who cannot possibly be the Other for Andrei – "a certain Erik, a colleague in the department, … himself almost a woman, the sort of man who notices when someone's underwear is showing or she's got a ladder in her stocking" (LP 186). When after the joint vacation all the exotic and "desirable" details of Artemida's identity turn out to be not true, Andrei suffers yet another "defeat" and quietly ends their relationship.

It is remarkable how the focus of the narrator's attention slowly shifts from Andrei to the women he dates. The pattern of his behavior – the pathologic overexpression of the mimetic desire – is clear to the reader at this point, and so the narrator turns to the fate of women who are the object of his desire. Artemida, for instance, disappears from work for a few days – but not to take entrance exams for college, as the official legend sounds, but to spend a few days in the hospital, after which she returns "looking wan and wary" (LP 200). Artemida's oblique abortion is not made into a bigger topic, it is not the tragedy of her life which quietly goes on after Andrei gets a promotion and moves away. Similarly, Lidka, another Andrei's affair that ends with her reuniting with her husband, continues her rather unexciting family life after the affair is over. While Andrei "devours" the city one city dweller at a time, in the background he

continues to busily work on figuring out "[w]at did they all want from him. What did the world out there lack if it needed him so badly?" (LP 174). He eventually fails at this, but the reader is the one who eventually realizes the trivial nature of Andrei's desire, his being drawn to things that are independent of and inaccessible to him. Andrei's departure from the narration is highly undramatic and it signals the impossibility of resolution of the "main problem" for him: as many of us, he is hopelessly trapped in the banality of his desire. The only alternative the story proposes to this is a quiet existence that seemingly lacks any excitement, but its quotidian nature paradoxically appeals to the real essence of life: those other important thruths one ought not ignore in life. The ultimate realization for the reader is that Andrei is just like the women he dates: he secretly desires the violence of the Other that would find expression in the denial of access. The narrator states this in passing in the beginning of the short story, and never returns to it again: his "victories were to a certain extent unwished for and … the victor himself, in the depths of his soul, evidently yearned to be vanquished" (LP 164). The banal tragedy of Andrei's life – and it is also true for the women he dates – is the fact that his own appearance of inaccessibility and plenitude is so strong that he has no chance at finding someone who would be able to resist it and thus the satisfaction of his desire to be rejected has little chance of every being achieved. Petrushevskaia's interest for such paradoxes of life and the unspectacular solutions she suggests strongly distinguish her from other prose writers discussed in this study – Valerii Shevchuk and Volodymyr Drozd. Petrushevskaia's attention to these questions and very non-prescriptive solutions she offers are possible primarily because she abandons any claim for an overarching agenda of her works, rejecting the possibility of their instrumentalization for ideological purposes.

In conclusion, the short stories analyzed here indicate the extent of possible innovation that was going on in Russian prose during one of the most repressive periods of the Soviet history. These stories demonstrate Petrushevskaia's unique approach to questions of space and time, language and voice of narration in which she significantly differs from approaches that in many ways engage with the Soviet "official" culture by mimicking and rejecting it. Unlike such writers as Valerii Shevchuk and Volodymyr Drozd, Petrushevskaia does not engage with the attributes of the "official" culture: she resists the big form (novel), makes her plot highly anticlimactic (no progression from darkness to light and no unambiguous resolution), does not structure her narration in terms of heroes and villains, and therefore does not communicate any moral that could be translated by the reader into instructions for action. In this Petrushevskaia usually resists not a concrete text, but a set of classical texts that exemplify narrative structures that have lost their expressive function. Very much aware of her audience, Petrushevskaia goes to great lengths to frustrate her reader's expectations. Petrushevskaia's method is built on contrast and opposition, but the revelation of the "true" reality that is hidden beneath the surface of appearances occurs gradually, which starkly differs from the instantaneous and shocking revelation with find in the works of Elena Shvarts and Oleh Lysheha. Petrushevskaia's narrator names the attributes of a phenomenon but relies strongly on the reader's reconstructive effort in establishing the phenomenon itself. In addition, Petrushevskaia's interest in exposing the mechanism of mimetic desire, in which she succeeds many great Russian writers and poets, distinguishes her among the artists discussed in my study. Her message to the reader is broadly humanistic: she urges the reader to empathize with her characters and to live with them through the everyday

horrors they experience. The reader who succeeds in that effort will be less likely to judge other people and, by realizing the mechanism at work in her or his behavior towards others, will refrain from inflicting violence upon them.

Chapter Four:

Hybridity and Liminality in Elena Shvarts's Poetry

In Russian literature, Elena Shvarts's poetry stands out for its unique ability to address issues of bodily reality and rootedness in spatial and cultural environment, its problematizing of gender and creativity in an otherwise male-dominated Russian literary tradition, and its thematization of connection to women poets who are both creative influences from the past (real and imagined) and interlocutors in the present.[101] These features make Shvarts a particularly well-fitting candidate for my study as it seeks to uncover common aesthetic challenges that Ukrainian and Russian poets and writers of the Stagnation Era and *perestroika* addressed in their works. The focus of my examination is Shvarts's early works from the 1970s: "Elegiia na rentgenovskii snimok moego cherepa" [Elegy on an X-Ray Photo of My Skull] (1972), "Nevidimyi okhotnik" [The Invisible Hunter] (1975), and "Zver'-tsvetok" [Animal-Flower] (1976). This selection allows me to illustrate the possibilities for poetic experimentation in the late Soviet period as well as to discuss parallels in imagery and narrative structures between Russian and Ukrainian

[101] Cf. Catriona Kelly's brief discussion of parallels between Shvarts and Marina Tsvetaeva whom she sees as Shvarts's predecessor, although without Tsvetaeva's "aggression and self-hatred" when treating the body (Kelly, *A History* 422). Maria Khotimsky discusses poetic dialogue and competition between Elena Shvarts and Olga Sedakova ("Singing David, Dancing David: Olga Sedakova and Elena Shvarts Rewrite a Psalm"). Stephanie Sandler has shown how Shvarts relies in her poetry on a series of references to the literary tradition of some of her male predecessors, notably to Fedor Dostoevskii, Andrei Platonov, Velimir Khlebnikov, and Osip Mandelshtam ("Cultural Memory and Self-Expression in a Poem by Elena Shvarts" 260-263). In Russian criticism, Valerii Shubinskii has emphasized Shvarts's stylistic continuity with Mikhail Kuz'min, Velimir Khlebnikov, Nikolai Zabolotskii, and her sharing of the romantic worldview with Marina Tsvetaeva and Vladimir Maiakovskii (201). In his review of the 1999 edition of Shvarts's poetry in Russia, Aleksandr Ulanov traces her references to the "older symbolists" Viacheslav Ivanov and Zinaida Gippius, and argues that her thematic focus on love, death and "mystic confluence" points even further, to Romanticism (217).

examples. These parallels have never before been studied in such juxtaposition, and they will help us to understand the periods in question in a much deeper way. Moreover, my analysis of Russian examples shows that questions of identity, past, and the poetic self truly motivate the artistic search of the generation of poets and writers of the late Soviet period, not just in Ukraine or just in Russia. While some turn to questions of mystical and bodily experience, explore fragmentation of the self and its hybridization, others – though also experimenting with new topics and narrative strategies – continue to hold on to mechanisms of literature's instrumentalization towards ideological goals. In literary production of both groups this manifests itself in various forms of authorial self-projection and in the concept of an implied audience that emerges from the style of their writing. A key point of difference here is sentimentalism that compensates for the lack of aesthetic quality through pathos and didacticism. In addition, representatives of both tendencies often hold strong traditional and patriarchal beliefs. Therefore, inclusion of works by a woman poet serves the further purpose of problematizing the question of gender in the literature of the late Soviet period. As I show in my reading of her poems, Elena Shvarts challenges and subverts the male patriarchal logic – both in terms of social organization and literary practice.

In the past three decades Elena Shvarts became one of the most important and most-studied – both in Russia and in the West – Russian poets. She often wrote cycles of poetry that, while thematically connected, offer enough space for radical shifts in narrative strategies and metaphorical transformations of the poetic self. Her first publications appeared in the West in the 1980s – *Tantsuiushchii David* [Dancing David] (New York, 1985), *Stikhi* [Poems] (Paris, 1987), *Trudy i dni Lavinii* [Works and Days of

Laviniia] (Ann Arbor, 1987), – while the first Soviet book publication appeared in 1989 (*Storony sveta* [Cardinal Points] (Leningrad)). In her short and long poems, Shvarts draws profoundly on an elaborate interplay of oppositions to create paradox and jarring effects in the reader. Spiritual revelation of an alternative reality, a hidden world beneath seemingly familiar, material façade strongly interests her. The most frequent categories employed to this end as contrasting realities are, on the one hand, the earthly and quotidian and, on the other hand, the metaphysical and divine. The question of identity of her poet is usually decided in a complex negotiation of these categories. The opposition of male and female is rarely addressed directly, but it is frequently present in allusions to various forms of contact between the two sexes. Shvarts's poetry is oftentimes sexual but it is rarely sensual or filled with romantic longing, as the body is usually the source of pain and revulsion, even pity, but seldom pleasure. To realize these interests the locus of Shvarts's poems are usually liminal states such as sleep or half-sleep, death and various states adjacent to it, and physical or mental illness. Such hybrid conditions of body and mind are productive for poetic utterances on the larger issues of culture and society that reveal themselves as ambiguous but sincere truths.

As some scholars have pointed out, Shvarts is not entirely consistent in the quality of her poetry and some of her verse may strike the reader as whimsical and metaphorically improbable (Kelly 416). Yet Shvarts brings together qualities that previously had not been combined with such success in Russian poetry – primarily in the realm of language, subjectivity, stylistic devices, metaphors, and rhyme. As Valerii Shubinskii points out, she and a number of poets of her generation are distinguished by their "non-Sovietism" – that is, by the complete absence of the Soviet "official" mass

literature (poetry) from her "cultural experience" as a "factor of influence or struggle" (201). This connects Shvarts with Oleh Lysheha, discussed in this study as another example of such radical non-presence of the Soviet mass culture in poetic works that originated in the Stagnation Period.

Shvarts also shares with Lysheha the experience of writing and publishing clandestinely, as well as a dislike for political poetry.[102] In regard to this Barbara Heldt particularly emphasizes the unassuming authorial position that Shvarts takes on in the social context: her "casual inevitability" stands in stark contrast to the poetic masks of many Russian male poets, "who prophesy to a world outside with heavy traditions of truth-telling unknown in that world" ("The Poetry of Elena Shvarts" 382). Indeed, Shvarts's poetry is replete with images of religious revelation and transformation, but irony and humor prevent them from becoming prescriptive messages to the reader. A complex poetic self constitutes the epicenter of Shvarts's mystical exploration, and she invites her reader to share in that experience rather than imposing a set of norms onto the reader. A direct result of such a self-positioning is the complete lack of pathos and ideological instrumentalization of poetic experience in Shvarts's works.

This circumstance, of course, does not preclude the very strong self-projection that we also find in Shvarts's poetry. As a true "poet of the self," Shvarts exposes various modes of subjectivity in the process of identity formation and transformation (Sandler,

[102] Shvarts's poems were published in *samizdat* magazines *Severnaia pochta*, *Chasy*, *37*, and *Obvodnyi kanal*, as well as in anthologies *Lepta* (1975) and *Ostrova* (1982), and in the almanac *Zhenshchina i Rossiia* (1979). In 1974-1987 five collections of Shvarts's poetry were disseminated clandestinely: *Voisko, izgoniaiushchee besov* (1976), *Orkestr* (1978), *Razbivka parka na beregu Finskogo zaliva* (1980), *Korabl'* (1982), and *Lotsiia nochi* (1987). Shvarts published her works under pennames E. Cherniakhovskaia and Laviniia Voron. Her works were actively discussed in *samizdat* publications by Tatiana Goricheva, Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, Dmitrii Bobyshev and other fellow poets and underground writers (Severiukhin 365-368)

"On Grief and Reason" 648). Shifting her narrative identity from the figure of the tyrannical Roman poet Cynthia (in "Kinfiia" (1978)) to the fox in her dedication to the Estonian poet Arno Tsart ("Arno Tsart," 1984), or to the figure of a mad and eccentric nun (in "Trudy i dni Lavinii" [Works and Days of Laviniia] (1987), the poet consistently maintains a strong and distinctly demarcated poetic self. To a great extent, poetry has always been a "monologic" art, but Shvarts's strong notion of the self has led to some miscategorizations that require some elaboration on my part. This is of particular importance as I interpret Shvarts's work as avoiding the kind of monologic didacticism we see in the works of a Valerii Shevchuk or Volodymyr Drozd, and, to a lesser extent, of Petro Midianka.

In a discussion of the poetic generation of the 1970s, the presence of such a "strong and well-defined lyrical 'I'" leads Alexei Parshchikov and Andrew Wachtel to place Shvarts among the "monologic writers" (together with Nina Iskrenko, Mikhail Aizenberg, Dmitrii Prigov, Viktor Krivulin and others) (7). "For poets like Shvarts and Krivulin," they argue, "the central fact of existence is personal experience, and that experience … becomes the central factor in their work" (ibid.).[103] Parshchikov and Wachtel's division of poets into monologic and pluralistic appears problematic and at times arbitrary because it underestimates some the other vivid traits of the "monologic"

[103] Although no explicit list is provided, it is telling that Parshchkov counts himself among the so-called "pluralistic" poets – by exclusion of the poets classified as "monologic," he keeps company in this Vladimir Druk, Ilya Kutik, Arkadii Dragomoshchenko, Olga Sedakova, Nadezhda Kondakova, Ivan Zhdanov, Vladimir Aristov, Yurii Arabov and Aleksandr Eremenko. Although the authors state that "[t]he classificatory system being proposed here has nothing to do with the value or quality of the poetry," a penchant for the poets of the "pluralistic" group is evident here (this is particularly signaled by the language choice when describing the "monologic" writers and their "desperation" to express their lyrical "I" (8)). Unlike the former, the latter exhibit features that could be called "postmodern": "pluralistic" poets reject binary oppositions and importance of the real life experience, and favor language over society, trying to renew the language rather than mocking the surrounding reality (ibid.).

poets, in particular their linguistic experimentation, the nature of their depicted experience, and their self-positioning vis-à-vis their audience. Elena Shvarts who for decades was not published and did not recite her poems publicly, and whose poetry is devoid of politicization is thus in many ways a poor fit for their category of "monologic poets." She never sought in her work to be the kind of "speaker of the collective" that "monologic" poetry might seem best equipped to support.

An alternative categorization of contemporary poets into conceptualists and nonconceptualists, proposed by Parshchikov and Wachtel, could be equally challenged by Shvarts's poetry. While Shvarts is counted by them among the "conceptualists," Parshchikov and Wachtel's argument that conceptualists "started with the recognition that they were Soviet men and women through and through" certainly does not apply to her, especially given Shvarts's history of avoiding any association with Soviet institutions (be it the Soviet educational system or the official literary process) (4). Her work also has far too strong a sense of a lyric persona as well as a powerful absorption of the modern poetic tradition within and beyond Russia to count her among the conceptualists, for whom poetic language was simply one among many to be used, parodied, and taken apart.

Wholesale arguments that other categories suit Shvarts and a number of other poets of the 1970s appear equally flawed. They attest rather to the lack among literary scholars of appropriate theoretical instruments for adequate analysis of phenomena discussed here. The study of Russian literature continues to suffer from the lack of a categorical apparatus that would be capable of successfully grasping the essence of the bulk of literary production during the Stagnation Era and *perestroika* (cf. my discussion

of the same phenomenon in Ukrainian literary studies in the chapter on Petro Midianka). Boris Groys, for instance, excludes Shvarts from the group of authors who are interested in the "possibilities of literary writing under the conditions of contemporary split, fragmentary, and pluralistic language" and places her among those drawn by the prospects of "possibilities of neoclassicism" (in this case, Shvarts is thus grouped together with Iosif Brodskii and Viktor Krivulin) ("Za literaturnyi professionalizm" 190). But this, too, is problematic, particularly given the importance of bodily representation in her work: Shvarts's persistent interest in liminal corporeal states such as sickness or injury, and her attention to bodily deformations are very far from Groys's idea of neoclassicism.[104] What is more, the body that emerges in Shvarts's poetry is rarely attractive, and the view is an internal one. In this regard Shvarts radically differs from most male poets and writers discussed in my study: in the works of Petro Midianka and Valerii Shevchuk, for instance, the female body is wholesome, appealing and promising of pleasure. In Shvarts's works the body in most cases is smeared in blood, incongruous, decadent, repulsively or comically ugly and distorted. As Stephanie Sandler argues, Shvarts "conveys the material sensations of bodily experience … grotesquely," which points to Shvarts's proximity to Tsvetaeva ("Elena Shvarts" 1464). Body as object – and subject – of poetic narration in Shvarts's poetry could not be further from the classical beauty, harmony, balance, and proportion – in short, it is far from "normalcy" that Classicism represents.[105] Shvarts's poet is eccentric and idiosyncratic in her experience of

[104] Dunja Popovic offers a profound and nuanced discussion of the role injury as well as specifically female forms of blood-shedding (and of female body functions) play in Shvarts's imagining of the body as the vessel of spiritual transformation (cf. especially 756 (ritual wounding) and 766 (female body functions); 768).

[105] Humor and comic effects in Shvarts's poetry that are distinct from irony as well as occasional decorativeness of language point generally towards "lower" styles and reveal ornamentalization

the world; her body is susceptible to "disease, death, and decomposition" (idem, "Cultural Memory and Self-Expression" 268), while the poet exposes her own vulnerability (idem, "Women's Poetry since the Sixties" 270). The idea of the poet is frequently superimposed on the bodily image, while the material reality of the body and its environment often define the metaphysical identity of the poetic self. Shvarts's narrative strategies thus reveal a complex relationship between the poet's body image, her poetic utterances, and spiritual revelations that in her poems are designed to escape unequivocal categorization.

"Elegiia na rentgenovskii snimok moego cherepa" [Elegy on an X-Ray Photo of My Skull] (1973) is one of Shvarts's early and most successful poems. In a way that reminds us of Oleh Lysheha's poetry Shvarts explores here the bodily identity and its fragmentation through the device of doubling of the perceived reality that reveals itself through an object of the material world (cf. my discussion of Lysheha's poem "Cherepakha" [The Turtle]). In Shvarts's poem the poetic and the physical are powerfully juxtaposed to reveal the poet's mortality and the art's belonging to the divine sphere. Personal recollections and philosophical reflections that frame her revelatory experience are infused with nostalgia and melancholy. Since the notion of self-observation is very strong here, this nostalgia can be categorized as "reflective" (Boym), which makes the poem comparable to the nostalgic strategies in Petro Midianka's work.

"Elegiia" opens with a reference to the myth of Marsyas who challenged Apollo to a contest of music and was flayed alive by the god for his hubris, which the poet and musician derived from his talent. The fable serves as a framing device for the entire long

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often associated with Baroque. On Baroque attributions to Shvarts cf. also Polukhina 251 and Lipovetsky, "Post-Soviet Literature Between Realism and Postmodernism" 189.

poem, introducing the topic of artistic creativity and the access to the divine and immortal that it opens for the poet. At the same time, it also demarcates the limits of such access – namely, the poet's mortal body. An interesting aspect of this introduction is the detail that Marsyas is in fact a satyr – an equine male figure with horse-tale and -ears – who is prominent for being an ithyphallic companion to Dionysus. The pronounced sexual identity of the satyr (his depictions in early Ancient decorative art usually emphasize that) reflects his association with Dionysus – the god of fertility and religious ecstasy, whose proximity to the theatre tradition marks the act of flaying as a masquerade. While hubris remains a sin, the drama and trauma of punishment by flaying is considerably reduced by the possibility that Marsyas' skin could have been only a theatrical disguise.[106] Such a reading suggests that the opening fable acts as a device to introduce a distinction between pure, divine art and its lower forms that are interpreted as mocking of the gods, that is, effectively, blasphemy. The poet's mortality, for this reason, is the punishment for the sacrilegious attempt to approximate god. In his death the poet, however, is immortalized by the myth of his punishment, through which he achieves immortality that Apollo, being a god and a planet in the sky, already has (in Ancient Greek Apollo is the name of Mercury, the morning star planet). Thus human art is redeemed after all.

Another interesting and valuable element of the fable is the introduction of the physical hybridity and deformity. The horse-like satyr symbolizes here the lowbrow, melodramatic answer to the high art represented by Apollo (the satyr's art is performed on a flute, thus his craft lies outside language). As half-animal, Marsyas has access to the

[106] Cf. Karl Kerényi's interpretation to this effect (179).

poetry of the heart, while Apollo's playing on his lyre and use of language (singing) symbolize the creative activity of the mind. Marsyas' hybridity points to the animal world and animalistic passions that align with his over-pronounced sexuality, a symbol of earthly fertility and procreation.

In the poem this hybridity prefigures the splitting of the poetic self between the bodily identity and its representation (x-ray photo), and the identity as a poet. The x-ray image to which the poem later turns serves as an unveiling in the material reality of an identity that remains otherwise concealed. The fable of the satyr, read as a multidimensional allegory of the poet herself, opens a space for productive exploration of various identities. Assumption of the animalistic persona (satyr) signifies a transgression into sacrilege that makes other acts of blasphemy possible: spitting in the skull's eye sockets, filling it with wine, or hurling it aside:

Вот стою перед Богом в тоске	In anguish here before my God I stand
И свой череп держу я в дрожащей руке –	Holding my skull in a trembling hand –
Боже, что мне с ним делать?	O Lord, what shall I do with it?
В глазницы ли плюнуть?	Spit in its eyesockets?
Вино ли налить?	Fill it with wine?
Или снова на шею надеть и носить?	Or put it on my neck and wear it once again?
И кидаю его – это легкое с виду ядро,	So I hurl it aside – this light-looking shell
Он летит, грохоча, среди звезд, как ведро.	And it flies off thundering among the stars like a pail (P 71).[107]

However, when blasphemy reaches its limits and turns into profanity later in the poem – when the poet reminisces about a drinking party where another skull is profanely used to collect coins for another bottle of vodka – a boundary is reached which the poet cannot cross.

[107] Translations into English by Michael Molnar from: Shvarts, Elena. "*Paradise": Selected Poems*. Newcastle upon Tyne, 1993. Henceforth abbreviated with P and page numbers following; Pa indicates translations adapted by me from Michael Molnar's original translation.

The poet experiences constant duality of reality as she switches between her mortal body (skull, spine, bones, and skin function as its markers) and the divine world of her poetic word (after her death she imagines herself as "a dusty cloud … setting as the Word" (P 71)). This is also signaled in the poem by the distance that the poet registers between her living body and its estranged representation in the form of the x-ray photograph. Before the drinking party commences, the poet describes the strange experience of looking at an x-ray of her own skull. Significantly, the photograph itself is at first estranged as well, as the skull only slowly emerges in it, as if made of fog: "… my glowing skull, / Etched from the invisible, / Swam, blocking out the dusk / And the stripped naked park – / It was a mass of fog / Embraced in liquid dark" (P 69). The recognition of her own skull creates an affect of shock in the poet ("And my hand began to tremble" (ibid.)), because it reveals her own mortality that is present in her still living body. This marks the moment of a shattering spiritual revelation: the poet is mesmerized by the doubleness of reality that suddenly reveals itself to her and a reflection unfolds that, through a series of personal memories, reconstructs the world in a new way.[108] The x-ray photograph allows the poet to address her own self in a state that is conventionally unreachable: indeed, "the skull picture becomes an interlocutor" (Kelly 419), but the conversation is a mystical one because it summons the dead. Finally, the skull itself is estranged through a depiction that pays attention to the detail, emphasizing the skull's

[108] Duality of reality is a pervasive topic for Shvarts and is motivated by the trauma of the seeming revelation of an alternative reality. This is masterfully realized in her memoir "Uzhas preobrazeniia" [The Horror of Transformation] as an experience of her mother's frightening transformation: "… and suddenly it was as if she had changed from my sweet, beautiful mama into a merciless monster. At that moment the thought crossed my mind that everything to this point had been false, that here and now began the real. Now the horrible end would commence, everything good in the world had pretended to be good, had only feigned goodness" (qtd. in Sandler, "On Grief and Reason" 654).

belonging to an objective reality that is outside of the subject: “This skull was my own / But it didn’t know me, / Its intricate pattern / Like a damascene dagger / Is skillfully crafted, / How pure and how strong” (P 69). This gesture continues and is strengthened in the following lines that signal repulsion and stylistic lowering of the depiction: the skull is addressed through a synecdochal trope (*kost’* [bone]) that has yellowed because of aging; it has grown brazen (colloquial *obnaglet’*) and uses skin like a robe to cover itself (*zapakhnut’ kak polst’*) (P 68). Estrangement serves here as rejection and rebuttal of the physical body for its control over the spiritual part of the poet’s identity.

Overcoming of this stark division and integration of both parts of the self is signaled early on in the poem (“But the mouth is bared, / Still alive its grin” (ibid.)). Integration allows the poet to overcome the affect of horror: although the poet still stands holding her skull “in a trembling hand,” she acquires agency and control over her own body. This process is mediated through an identical external object that can be incorporated through an odd metaphor (“like a kitten it [the skull] rubbed against my palm” (P 71) that reconciles the poet with her own physical reality. The control gained in such a way extends beyond life, as the poet decides to reward herself with saving her own skull from the kind of abuse suffered by the “fellow” skull (the one passed around as a vessel for collecting money): “For this I shall be granted as reward / That nobody will desecrate my skull – / No worm will crawl inside, no new Hamlet take it in his hands. / When my end comes – I shall walk up the aisle in flames” (ibid.). Integration is complete when the poet mourns for the future loss of her own self of which the skull is now a manifestation: “But what a shame you won’t be filled again / With all that soft old curd” (ibid.). Nostalgia – this time projected into the future – bemoans the loss of the same

body that previously was the source of the poet's revulsion. The closing lines of the poem consider once again the connection between the material and immaterial that are now once again integrated: although the poet "can't sense [her] skeleton inside – / neither skull nor flesh nor bones," it is now as essential a part of her identity as is her spirit, and she embraces her own hybridity. Thus the poem is an excellent example of narrative strategies that explore questions of identity and its hybridity, use nostalgia as a device to reintegrate the fragmented self, and juxtapose the mystical world of poetic art with material and profane reality. Shvarts is also remarkable in her addressing of existential questions of poetry, framing them through religious and mystical experience that defines the dichotomy of pure and "mortal" art. Her striving thus is towards the ideal art that can only be achieved beyond material world, when the body no longer constrains the "Word."

Duality of reality as a combination of overlapping systems of signification figures prominently in "Nevidimyi okhotnik" [The Invisible Hunter] (1975). The material reality serves here as mere reference to another world – similar to the way material reality in Midianka's works refers to the idyllic lost past. For Shvarts, however, this other world is defined through literary activity.

The poem is very subtle in juxtaposing identities that correlate in their medium, yet are distinct and inescapable. The poem begins with a beautiful metaphor for complexity of a poet's identity: it is grounded in material reality, but reflects the ethereal world:

Может быть – к счастью или позору –	Perhaps – to my good fortune or my shame –
Вся моя ценность только в узоре	My sole worth is nothing but designs
Родинок, кожу мою испещривших, –	Of birthmarks peppering my skin,
В темных созвездьях, небо забывших.	Dark constellations that have forgotten the sky (P 67).

The birthmarks signify an idea of poetic talent as permanent, as something that cannot be removed or changed. At the same time, the poetic identity is only one of the many markings that define the self – the metaphor of skin (later reinforced through the invocation of a sable's and a mink's fur) clearly points to that – and other identities remain harbored underneath. The rhetoric figures of the first lines are composed in such a way as to orchestrate a response of rejection in the reader, or of compassion. This prefigures the separation between the outside view (those who ascribe sole value only to the poet's "skin") and the inner conviction of the poet: an admission a few lines later confirms that, indeed, the poet finds it lamentable that she has been reduced to her "skin" only ("Ah, I dread the way they single me out!" (P 67)).

What exactly skin represents alternates in the beginning and in the end of the poem. In the beginning, one line suggests that skin refers primarily to some physical, undeniable but ultimately reductive characteristics – such as, for instance, sex:

Нет – не дар, не душа, не голос, –	No, it's not my gift, my soul, my voice –
Кожа – вот что во мне оказалось ценнее.	My skin is my most precious attribute,
И невидимый меткий охотник,	And a keen-eyed, invisible hunter
Может, крадется уже за нею.	May already be on its track (P 67).

The poem refers to a past experience in which not poetic talent or other spiritual qualities "turned out to be more precious" (*okazalos' tsennee*) but apparently immutable physical representation of identity – body. This allows me to interpret skin (a feminine noun in Russian) here primarily as the feminine body defined by its utilitarian purpose for the (male) hunter (*okhotnik*), that is, either as an element of power (control) or pleasure. Such a reading helps recognize the anti-patriarchal dimension of Shvarts's poetry, which stands in stark contrast to the poetry of Petro Midianka whose poet frequently objectifies the female body. Shvarts establishes here a binary opposition that appears to be grounded in

permanent identity markers, since "gift, soul, and voice" as well as "skin" are sets of characteristics of which the poet is a mere recipient. To emphasize that these are phenomena of seemingly the same order, Shvarts offers an expanded metaphor: she likens herself to those animals that have been used by a "celestial spirit" to record its inspiration in the haste of the moment. Unfortunately, the poet's bitter irony gets lost in the English translation: "(Бывают такие черепахи / И киты такие бывают – / Буквы у них на спине и знаки, / Для курьезу их убивают)" [(Certain whales exist / And there are tortoises / With letters and signs across their backs, / They are slaughtered as curios)" (P 67)]. This is an important step in the metaphoric transformation and hybridization of the poetic self in the poem: if earlier the distinguishing attribute of the poet was a "pattern of birthmarks" (*uzor rodinok*), now, through analogy, these birthmarks become signs and letters, and notes. Moreover, through the trope of a simile, the skin of the animals – and by extension the skin of the poet – is likened to paper on which the mystical signs are written: "Первый схватил во тьме белый комочек / И нацарапал ноты, натыкал / На коже нерожденной, бумажно-снежной…" [And in the darkness seized the first white scrap / And scratched his notes into it, jabbed / Snowy, unborn, paper-pale skin… (P 67)]. That is, the poet's birthmarks are no longer incidental and acquire the higher meaning of a system of poetic signification imprinted onto the poet by a sublime force. In a gesture that is highly characteristic for Shvarts, this very intricate metaphor culminates in its opposite that abruptly brings it down to the level of everyday pragmatics and irony: "Знают ли соболь, и норка, и белка, / Сколько долларов стоит их шкурка?" [Do sable, mink or squirrel guess / How many dollars their fur can fetch? (P 67)]. The same lexical choice is then directly applied to the poet herself, which further increases the

tension between the poetic and mystical origination myth and the everyday pragmatics that she has to face: "И там мою распластанную шкурку / Глядишь, и сберегут как палимпсест" [For behold, my pegged-out pelt / Will be preserved as a palimpsest (P 67)]. The analogy between the poet's skin and parchment is now firmly established, and the poet dreads the trivialization of her transcendent self. Therefore, the second meaning of the poet's skin that emerges towards the end of the poem refers to an artistic identity that falls victim to banality of everyday life. (This topic is also a focus in Midianka's and Lysheha's poetry – cf. my reading of Lysheha's "Song 2" and "Song 43," and of Midianka's "Ironichne" [An Ironic Piece] and "Travneva vulytsia Erdeli" [Erdeli's May Street].) The poetic identity defines that the "invisible hunter" is not so much the figure of the threatening Other anymore, but a faceless threat of appropriation of the poetic identity by profanity that in an act of sacrilege turns talent into coin. The concluding lines of the poem mirror the threat through the use of language that is rooted deeply in the vernacular and at the same time evoke the image of cleansing ("washing off"): "Куда же мне спрятаться, смыться бы, деться?" [Where can I hide, where can I run to, what can I do? (P 67)]. Because of its permanent, inborn, and unavoidable nature, talent as a marker of identity cannot be removed without destroying its carrier (the poem visualizes this through the image of the animals who are flayed for their "talent," that is their fur – not unlike Marsyas in "Elegy on an X-Ray Photo of My Skull"). The conclusion of the poem brings a shocking resolution to the conflict: unable to remove her talent, the poet lays curse on it.[109] As Vadim Mikhailin has shown, within the framework of the language's

[109] We see a similar but significantly amplified such trope also in a later poem by Shvarts, "Kindergarten After Thirty Years" (1986). Stephanie Sandler has shown how the harm of reality's revelation motivates the poet's wish to lay curse on God. As Sandler points out, "[i]n ending with this curse, Shvarts takes up an elegiac formula," because the same summoning of the

cultural code, laying a course amounts to the act of magical destruction of the utterance's object (357). The final line of the poem thus returns us to the metaphysical realm in which the poet flays herself in a brutal act of cleansing that parallels the fable of Marsyas' punishment that opens the "Elegy."

One of the most interesting of Shvarts's poems, "Zver'-tsvetok" [Animal-Flower] (1976) represents an example of hybridity that echoes Oleh Lysheha's aesthetic search, with whom she shares interest in a deformed body that enters a liminal state of sickness or death (cf. my analysis of Lysheha's poems "Dog" and "He"). Lysheha and Shvarts are surprisingly close in depicting death as a progression towards a different modality of existence while retaining the subject's consciousness in that new reality. However, they depart from different points: Lysheha does not dramatize death and does not mourn it, while Shvarts laments the state of death and expresses her sorrow. Lysheha's view opens out on the greater biological dimension of death, without focusing on the poetic self (for this reason transformation as decomposing goes as far as the basic elements of the soil), while Shvarts's poem returns us to the poet's self that becomes repeatedly reincarnated in non-human organisms. The key difference between the two poets is the poet's lack of concern for his own death in Lysheha who instead observes and sympathizes with animate and inanimate objects of the surrounding reality, while Shvarts's poet closely observes herself, both imagines and records the transformation she undergoes. For Shvarts it is thus an opportunity to experiment with the poet's identity in unexpected and shocking ways. This stands in stark contrast to Midianka's poetry where death is only very marginally present, and also to Shevchuk's and Drozd's narrative strategies that

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divine powers as was possible in epic poetry appears impossible in the contemporary cultural context ("Cultural Memory and Self-Expression" 263).

seek to make the death of Ukrainians into an object of heroization and victimization with a transparent ideological agenda.

Since the poem is fairly short, it lends itself particularly well to an in-depth interpretation and formal analysis. Here it is in full:

1	Предчувствие жизни до смерти живет.	Anticipation of life lives on till death.
2	Холодный огонь вдоль костей обожжет,	A chilling fire burns along the bones –
3	Когда светлый дождик пройдет	When a bright shower passes over
4	В день Петров на изломе лета.	On St. Peter's day at break of summer.
5	Вот-вот цветы взойдут, алея,	Scarlet blooms are just about to flower
6	На ребрах, у ключиц, на голове,	On collarbones, on ribs, upon the head.
7	Напишут в травнике – Elena arborea,	The cluster will be tagged *Elena arborea* –
8	Во льдистой водится она Гиперборее,	Its habitat is freezing Hyperborea
9	В садах кирпичных, в каменной траве.	In gardens made of brick, in grass of stone.
10	Из глаз полезли темные гвоздики,	Dark carnations sprout from the eyes,
11	Я – куст из роз и незабудок сразу,	I'm at once a bush of roses and forget-me-nots
12	Как будто мне привил садовник дикий	As if a savage gardener'd grafted on me
13	Тяжелую цветочную проказу.	A virulent floral leprosy.
14	Я буду фиолетовой и красной,	I will be violet and red,
15	Багровой, желтой, черной, золотой,	Crimson, yellow, black and gold,
16	Я буду в облаке жужжащем и опасном –	Inside a perilous humming cloud
17	Шмелей и ос заветный водопой.	Of bumblebees and wasps I'll be a sacred well.
18	Когда ж я отцвету, о Боже, Боже,	And when my flowers fade, o Lord, o Lord,
19	Какой останется искусанный комок –	What a bitten lump there'll be left over,
20	Остывшая и с лопнувшею кожей,	Grown cold and with its skin split wide,
21	Отцветший, полумертвый зверь-цветок (Shvarts, *Sochineniia* 96).[110]	A faded, half-dead Animal-Flower (Pa 105).

The poem opens with a striking philosophical observation on life: "Предчувствие жизни до смерти живет" [Anticipation of life lives on till death] (P 104).[111] *Predchuvstvie zhizni* is open here to ambiguous interpretation: both as a fearful foreboding, and as an excited anticipation. Given Shvarts's penchant for contrasting metaphors, the latter, more positive reading seems to be more likely here, as it allows for a conflict with the idea of

[110] The poem contains also the following epigraph: "The Jewish tree blossoms / Along the trunk with its lilac blooms" (Shvarts, *Sochineniia* 96).
[111] Micheal Molnar's translation offers here "presentiment" as a translation for *predchuvstvie* – I diverge from this. My reading places the first line in a broader context that includes a more neutral and even a positive interpretation as a part of Shvarts's narrative strategy.

death that produces a paradox: we have an elaborate metaphor here in which "anticipation of life" is anthropomorphized (it *lives*), life is contrasted with death (also grammatically: *zhizni – smerti*), and is then followed by an affirmation of life again (*do smerti zhivet*). In this way the line encapsulates life, death, and a mystical rebirth that the poem is dedicated to. Moreover, "anticipation of life" as the reference to the physical life emerges here as a delay of fulfillment; its expectation in the future rather than search for it in the present signifies futility of human motivations and positively marks the rebirth in the new form of existence. As a metaphor for poetic creativity, the poem also reflects on the metaphysical afterlife that a poet finds after her death, in which her body (here the body of her works) continues to function. The poem is then dedicated to exploring and observing this function that is cast in biological terms.

The next line transports us directly to the point after the death, when the poet records the sensations of her dead body buried in the soil: "Холодный огонь вдоль костей обожжет, / Когда светлый дождик пройдет / В день Петров на изломе лета" [A chilling fire will burn along the bones – / When a bright shower passes over / On St. Peter's day at break of summer (Pa 105)]. The metaphor of the second line parallels the previous line, since they both connect phenomena that are incongruous (life and death, coldness and fire).

The future tense of both *obozhzhet* and *proidet* transports the narrated time to the future, and that future experience is tied to a concrete date (St. Peter's day). The religious dimension of the date defines its redemptive qualities: *svetlyi dozhdik* (diminutive of *dozhd'*) signals both absolution of past sins (metaphorically, cleansing with holy water) and an escape to a more innocent, childlike consciousness. This mode of childlike naivety

defines the middle part of the poem when it reappears less obviously in *nezabudki* [forget-me-nots] and *gvozdiki* [carnations] (where the diminutive suffix -k- has lost its grammatical function). Until now the poet's self has been one whole, but it begins to fragment when the poet imagines her different reincarnations. Shvarts works brilliantly with grammatical categories here: the sudden switch to the past tense in *polezli* [began to creep] introduces a notion of darkness and injury that the next lines powerfully reinforce through the metaphor of sickness as *prokaza* [leprosy], which is both very striking and subversive (think of patriarchal association of women with flowers). Once again Shvarts employs the notion of contrast to generate meaning here: dark carnations are in direct contrast to the "bright" shower, signaling that the state of innocence is lost once again. The poet's human body and the poetic body of her works begin to rupture as foreign objects painfully violate them: "Из глаз полезли темные гвоздики. / Я куст из роз и незабудок сразу, / Как будто мне привил садовник дикий / Тяжелую цветочную проказу" [Carnations began to creep from the eye sockets. I'm at once / A bush of roses and forget-me-nots / As if a savage gardener'd grafted on me / A virulent floral leprosy] (Pa 105). This is also the point where the self of the poet begins to assume hybridity and undergoes multiple fragmentations. The injury of the body, its violation initiates transformation into a different being, as if the former, wounded identity has to be cast away now to avoid further hurting. The transformation is completed in a predicative phrase that matches the old I of the poet with a new identity (*ia kust* [I'm a bush]). Death and transition to afterlife are thus cast in terms of an illness that one has to suffer through. The poet then imagines herself after the transformation, and the tense switches back to future tense:

Я буду фиолетовой и красной,	I will be violet and red,
Багровой, желтой, черной, золотой,	Crimson, yellow, black and gold,
Я буду в облаке жужжащем и опасном –	Inside a perilous humming cloud
Шмелей и ос заветный водопой.	Of bumblebees and wasps I'll be a sacred well (P 105).

The threat of such interaction is already anticipated in the imagery employed here (*opasnoe oblako* [dangerous cloud]), and it develops further in the next lines. The poem's conclusion that completes the cycle of metamorphosis of organisms in nature employs powerful metaphors that describe the process of giving sustenance to others as one that injures the poet, exposes and depletes her (*iskusannyi, s lopnuvsheiu kozhei*). Very compelling in interpreting the logic of the poem in such a way is the imagery used: the poet does not actively partake in this exchange, she is rather its victim who lacks any agency. This is powerfully realized in the image of the flower (connotations of passivity and defenselessness) and of bumblebees and wasps (emphasizing their active role, aggression, and forceful penetration). Imbued with procreational metaphors, this interaction results in a symbolic birth giving which is perceived as tremendously violent. That which remains afterwards (*kogda ia ottsvetu* [when my blooms fall off)] loses its identity – the strong shift here is from the magnificent and mythical *Elena arborea* (that even has her own entry in a book of herbs) to pitiful *komok* [lump, a diminutive form of *kom*] that signifies the return to a pre-human and pre-sexual (childlike) state. The image of a little lump that is bitten all over and abandoned after her essence was sucked out of her and who is now dying (*ostyvshaia* [having grown cold]) is extremely powerful and evokes compassion. The act of giving that was initially celebrated turns into the revelation of uncanny and horrid reality, and the poet gently pities and mourns what it does to her.

By design, the poem is open to a number of competing interpretations: as a philosophical reflection on the meaning of life and death and as a struggle with comprehending the poetic heritage and the painful hybridization of one's identity that it inflicts onto the poet. All of them are cast in biologic metaphors that expose the outside world as a forceful intruder whose actions are dictated by self-interest and thus bring injury and trauma. Through her careful attention to the poetic self and its hybridization and fragmentation, the poem tries to invert the prevalent male perspective that is dictated by the power structure. This strongly applies to the space of cultural influence that she tries to escape and is cast against the background of popular culture. There is a progression in the poem from deification to a symbolic devouring of the poet that metaphorically mirrors the dynamics of social interaction. This is realized in the attribution of an exotic name to the poet – *Elena arborea* – and her treatment like a rare animal: "Напишут в травнике: Elena arborea – / Во льдистой водится она Гиперборее, / В садах кирпичных, в каменной траве" [They will write in the herbiary: *Elena arborea* - / Its habitat is freezing Hyperborea / In gardens made of brick, in grass of stone (Pa 105)]. The exoticism of such identity imposed from outside are different hybridities: a plant that thrives in an urban, hostile landscape and its origin in a utopian, mythical land.[112] The reference to the Ancient myth of Hyperborea is very clear here: it is the land of eternal spring, whose wild forests were in sources from Pindar ("Olympian Ode") to *Bibliotheca* (*Pseudo-Apollodorus*) and to Stravo is referred to as the garden of Phoibos (that is, Apollo) ("Hyperborea"). Geographically Hyperborea was imagined to be to the

[112] Interesting here is the possible connection to Elena Blavatskaia, the Russian author and occultist who co-founded the Theosophical Society and in whose mystical thought Hyperboreans were a race of beings formed of pure spirit. Cf. Daniel H. Caldwell's *The Esoteric World of Madame Blavatsky* (2000) and Gary Lachman's *Madame Blavatsky: The Mother of Modern Spirituality* (2012) for popular accounts of Blavatsky's mystical thought.

north of the lands of Skythians, that is, on the territory of today's Ukraine and Russia. The poet thus imagines herself as an exotic plant in Apollo's poetic garden, while at the same holding on to the roots of her land. The rhyming of *Elena arborea – Giperboree* may seem somewhat artificial and forced, as it is also not a clean rhyme, but it perfectly fulfills the function of signaling distance that "they" (*napishut* [will write] points to *oni* [they]) create by estranging the object of their attention that now can be singled out and studied as an exotic species. Description of the interaction with them as painful and one-sided points to the exclusion of the poet and inequality of interaction. While Shvarts's poet bemoans the exclusion she yearns to be recognize as an equal, but without joining their company.

This brief reading of "Animal-Flower" highlights some of the most interesting features of Shvarts's poetry. I point out the various dimensions that hybrid identity of the poet exhibits, as well as the fragmentation that the self is once again subjected to. Similary to Lysheha's poetry is particularly evident here, as Lysheha's poet is intensely interested in the shifts of identity, often assuming the identity of animals and even inanimate objects (cf. his poem "Kunytsia" [The Marten]). Lysheha and Shvarts are both also genuinely interested in liminal states that open the opportunity of a mystical revelation of another, hidden reality (cf. Lysheha's poem "Sobaka" [The Dog]). At the same time, Shvarts productively engages the narrative strategy of lament that Midianka applies in descriptions of his Transcarpathian homeland. His use of diminutives that create a naïve and immediate connection to the depicted reality also resembles Shvarts's approach in accessing the state of innocence and childlike consciousness (which then is contrasted with the horror of the "real" reality – a step Midianka does not take). Most

importantly, all poets discussed here are concerned with the poetic heritage and either thematically invoke or address directly – in this regard Shvarts is rather oblique and works with both thematic clusters (topoi such as St. Petersburg or the industrial landscape) and formal references and deconstruction (rhythm and rhyme of her poetry).

Cultural memory of Shvarts's predecessors deserves a brief separate discussion, particularly because of its elaborate realization as poetic self-consciousness in the formal features of her poetry. The strong reference to the poetic heritage of the Golden and Silver Ages (as discussed earlier in this chapter) defines the boundaries for such experimentation. Shvarts employs a number of different rhythmic elements in her poetry, effectively breaking up any appearance of regularity that her poetry establishes before. This quality creates an effect of a near-colloquial language that flows naturally, at times speeding up and at times slowing down again, directed entirely by the thematic principle and held together mostly by the rhyming of the lines. (Oleh Lysheha goes even further in this regard, entirely abandoning rhyme and writing consistently in free verse.) In my view, this feature stems from Shvarts's anti-classicist concept of beauty that rejects the idea of balance and harmony of a composition's elements (cf. my discussion of Shvarts's categorization in the introduction to this sub-chapter). On the one hand, Shvarts's main concern lies in disrupting the glossing-over of familiar language, tearing off its trivial meaning and endowing it with new and unexpected sense – that is, in a way, revealing the real that the language fails to access.[113] We can see this in Shvarts's combination of the language of different styles: her mixing of colloquial and concrete with high poetic and

[113] Stephanie Sandler discusses Shvarts's language strategies and identity formation within the context of the elegiac tradition, in which mourning and grief can be read as the advent of a new language to voice them ("On Grief and Reason" 648, 654).

very abstract lexical units. On the other hand, disturbing the even flow of rhythm and rhyme of the verse is equally productive in assuming distance to the Russian poetic heritage.

In all three poems this is quite consequently realized through a regular beginning that very soon starts to disintegrate into an increasingly more irregular rhythm of the poem. In "Animal-Flower" the first two lines appear at first glance very amphibrachic: the anacrusis is limited to one syllable, and the distance between each of the four ictuses always equals two non-ictic syllables (a very regular scheme of 2-2-2). This sense of rhythmic regularity prompts one to consider it a *dol'nik* which, according to Mikhail Gasparov, is a transitional phenomenon between the syllabo-tonic and the tonic system (Gasparov stresses here the "consistent syllabic volume of inter-ictic intervals") (*Sovremennyi russkii stikh* 220). This expectation is quickly frustrated in line three and four where the anacrusis consists of two syllables and the line contains only three ictuses (with the scheme 1-2 and 2-1 of non-ictic syllables between ictuses for lines three and four respectively). From line three to six there are only three ictuses per line and anacruses become very irregular: two syllables in line three and four, and three syllables (*vot-vot tsvetý*) in line five. This coincides with narration of lesser emotional intensity, which non-stressed syllables skillfully introduce as a mode. The images in these lines signal peace and tranquility, but in line seven, with return to four ictuses, this is interrupted by a heightened diction (record of *Elena arborea* in a book of healing herbs). From line six on the focus of irregularity and experimentation shifts to the non-ictic syllables. The extent of irregularity here is truly fascinating, as the poem very dynamically proceeds from line to line. Compare the non-ictic scheme for lines 6: 3-2; 7:

3-1-3; 8: 1-3-3; 9: 1-1-3; 10: 1-1-3; 11: 1-3-1; and 12: 1-1-3. This visualization of the diversity within the verse structure elucidates the fact that the semi-colloquial quality of Shvarts's poetic language very much relies on the contrast between short (one syllable) and long intervals (three syllables). Poetic narration in these lines is dedicated to radical changes in identity and dramatic transformations that the poet undergoes (exoticism of *Elena arborea* and Hyperborea, dark and incongruous metaphors of brick gardens and stony grass, violent and painful piercing of the skull by plant shoots). Line 13 concludes this through a switch to three ictuses and the image of a bizarre illness (floral leprosy). Here Shvarts uses the more regular rhythms for contrast against the less regular ones: as in the first two lines (where the non-ictic scheme is 2-2-2), lines 13 and 14 appear more regular (scheme 3-3), and this regularity signifies a general slowing down of the narration, as if mimicking the weakness of the ill poetic self. The remaining part of the poem is marked by a frequent alternation between three- and four-ictic lines with two clear culminations: in the poet's apostrophe to god where four ictuses with the scheme 3-1-1 radically increase the urgency of the poet's appeal, and in the pitiful lamentation of the concluding line, also with the scheme 3-1-1. Therefore, we encounter in this poem a fascinating rhythmic quality on the border between *dol'nik* and accentual (tonic) verse.

In absence of a regular rhythmic structure the poetic character of the narration is signaled by the rhyme. Here, too, Shvarts abundantly experiments. In "Animal-Flower," lines one and three have inexact masculine rhymes (*zhivet – proidet*), while the second line forms pair rhyme with both the first and the third line, thus yielding a triplet (*zhivet – obozhzhet – proidet*), where there is a consonance between *zhivet* and *obozhzhet*. Lines four and five rhyme in the stressed identical syllables of *aleia – leta*, while their endings

match only in vowel (*a*). At the same time, *aleia* also rhymes with *arborea* in line seven (cross rhyme) where we see an interesting interplay of the two sounds that are alveolar in Russian (*l* and *r*), and between *a* and its iotated variant *ia*. Line seven also rhymes with line eight in a couplet that may seem somewhat artificial ("imprecise" rhyme *arborea – Giperboree*), while line six forms an enclosing perfect rhyme with line nine (*golove – trave)*, thus creating a quartet that encapsulates the pair rhyme in the middle (scheme ABBA). The next four lines offer alternate rhymes (ABAB) where the pair *srazu – prokazu* is phonetically striking for the dynamic relationship between the stressed syllable *sra* and the unstressed syllable *pro* (in unstressed position in Russian pronounced as [pra]) that precedes the stressed syllable *ka* which emulates *sra* – the consonant *r* thus plays a crucial role here. The next four lines once again form an alternate rhyme (*krasnoi – opasnom, zolotoi – vodopoi*), but *krasnoi-zolotoi-vodopoi* also form an "imperfect" rhyme. The last four lines have alternate almost perfect rhymes in which lines 18 and 20 have feminine endings and lines 19 and 21 masculine. Lines 18, 19, and 21 have four ictuses, while line 20 only three. The regularity of the rhyme contrasts strongly with the dramatic narration of these lines (the poet appeals to god and in the end turns into a half-dead animal-flower).

"The Invisible Hunter" stands out for a strong variation in the length of its lines (between nine and thirteen syllables). The poem's rhythmic structure is also quite irregular: segments of lines with four ictuses alternate with those that have three ictuses without any consistent pattern. Thus the poem represents yet another example of a border phenomenon that approaches tonic verse. The first seven lines open with a mostly dactylic rhythm, but the stress on the first syllable is rather weak. Dactylic line openings

join these lines into one segment, in which the poet melancholically complains about her fate and this mode is rendered in the overall lower contrast between intra-ictic intervals (usually either 2 or 4, with a rare variance of 5). The first two lines once again seem very regular (both have the scheme 2-4 between their three ictuses, plus a feminine ending), while lines five and six exhibit a balanced scheme of 2-2-2 and lines three and four more irregular, transitional schemes (2-5 and 2-1-2 respectively). The very strong initial stress in line eight introduces a new mode of a more urgent narration (*Ákh – strashnýˊ mne*) that culminates in line ten with the bitter, ironic conclusion that it is "skin" which defines the poet's identity, not her "gift," "soul," or "voice" (as I point out earlier, each of these markers is rather ambiguous). Rhythmically this is realized in the scheme 1-4-2 where stark contrasts support the emotion of the line. When the poem introduces the figure of the "invisible hunter," line 11 follows with an immediate contrast in the change of the narration mode that suddenly weakens, quiets down and projects fatalism: two syllables of the anacrusis appear for the first time in the poem, while in line 12 we find yet again a weak first ictus without anacrusis (*mozhet*, which points back to line one). Both lines also exhibit a more regular intra-ictic schemes of 2.2-2 and 2-2-2.[114] Lines 13 through 16 that bring examples of animals touched by the divine spirit are highly interesting: the first two lines and the last line have three ictuses, while the third line has four. There is a number of shifts in the interval schemes (13: 1.2-3; 14: 2.1-2; 15: 2-2-1; and 16: 2.1-2) that strongly emphasize line 15 whose utterance, as a result, strikes us as ironic ("Буквы у них на спине и знаки" [With letters and signs across their backs (P 67)]). In a similar way lines 24-25 stand out: here the poet's irony intensifies as she asks whether sable,

[114] The number before the period refers to the number of non-icitic syllables of the anacrusis.

mink, or squirrel know how many Dollars their fur costs. In these lines the principle that realizes such a dramatization is the interplay of anacruses in the lines 23 (two syllables), 24 (zero), and 25 (again two). As a result, this strongly elevates *znaiut*, which is modified by animals as the grammatical subject of this clause – a highly contrasting, incongruous metaphor that is now stressed even more. Later on, in line 27, an unusual iambic rhythmic structure that has a very urgent, staccato quality to it (1.1-1-1-1) brings unprecedented dramatism, but the scheme's contrast with the content of narration reveals the poet's unexpected humor: not even a worm will eat the wicked skin ("Но кожу – нет – и червь не съест" [But skin – no! – that won't give worms a feast (P 67)]). The poem reaches a dramatic point in line 31 that laments inescapability of the poet's "skin" in amphibrachic plangent reiterations of the same meaning (grammatically, the line is structured as an echo – its increasingly reductive construction is remarkable: "Куда же мне спрятаться, смыться бы, деться?" [Where can I hide, where can I run to, what can I do? (P 67)]. Finally, the most dramatic and longest line (thirteen syllables) concludes the poem: exclamation *akh* that is intrinsically endowed with a stress conflicts with the demonstrative pronoun *eti* that loses its stress, while the glottal stop that *akh eti* [ah those] produces heightens the dramatism. The tragic outcome (*na gibel' uzory* [deathly patterns]) and the poet's laying curse on the "skin" are fully carried by the rare interval scheme (3-3-2) with a feminine ending: the dynamic favors here the last outcry of the poet (curse) who herself is condemned to perish (and perhaps does perish in an act of symbolic self-flaying, as her voice quiets towards the end of the line and falls silent entirely).

The rhyme scheme of the poem is also interesting but significantly less irregular. The overwhelming majority of the rhymes are feminine (with the exception of only two lines that rhyme, and a third line, ending with *dusha*, which significantly rhymes with nothing), the AABB scheme alternates with the ABAB scheme with a few deviations towards enclosing rhyme (ABBA). Many rhymes are inexact and seem at times forced (*golos – okhotnik, muzýku - natykal, snezhnoi – srezhet*) which is generally characteristic of the AABB scheme. Two lines remain entirely unrhymed – *fleitistu* in line 17 and *dusha* in line 26, which respectively foreground the concepts these words represent.

"Elegy on an X-Ray Photo of my Skull" is very irregular in its rhythmic structure, but differs significantly from the other two poems analyzed here. Since Shvarts's propensity for formal experimentation has already been established, I am only going to point out some of the key characteristics that differenciate "Elegy" from other poems. The poem's length and its more protracted story play a significant role in the rhythmic organization of the poem. There is a clear division into four segments that thematically propel the poem. The rhythm of the poem follows the thematic division, exhibiting significant irregularity primarily in the lines that border on the pervious or subsequent segment, thus creating a clear rhythmic separation between them. Furthermore, within the longer segments smaller narratives stand out for their distinct rhythmic structure, which adds additional dynamics to the poem. Finally, rhyme plays a crucial role here, organizing and holding together the poem in its different parts and as a whole. The first segment, consisting of lines 1-13, contains the introductory fable of Marsyas and Apollo. The rhythm relies here strongly on iambic structure: exhibiting three to four ictuses, it is defined by the contrast of one- and three-syllable intra-ictic

intervals (schemes such as 1-1-1 in the first line, 3-1-1 in the second, 3.1-1-1 in the third, 3-1-1 in the fourth, 3.3-1-1 in the fifth and so on). This generates overall an impression of a quiet, meditative narration that highlights only particular phrases, which allows the poet to reflect on complex issues. This is interrupted radically in line nine that has only one ictus ("Но помрачился" [But he [Apollo] grew dark]), and in line ten we have an occurrence of two ictuses together (*kogda tý, Márs*ii), an interesting device Shvarts uses also elsewhere in the poem (line 72: *Tý – dúkha moego*). The second segment appears generally more uniform: the lines are shorter and contain mostly two ictuses (only four lines have three ictuses here). The intervals between the ictuses alternate between two and four, usually also with two syllables of the anacrusis: 14: 2.2; 15: 2.2; 16: 2.2, 17: 4; 18: 2-1; 18: 2.2; 22: 2.2-4, and so on). This significantly more monotonous structure creates the impression of a somber, dark voice, and the segment is about the poet's confrontation with her own skull that slowly emerges as if from fog. The softer beginnings of the second segment (their anacruses) are abruptly interrupted in line 14 that opens the third segment with an ictus that introduces the line (*Kost'!*). This segment remains very dynamic and is by far the most irregular: we encounter lines with two to six ictuses (lines 48, 53, 61, 62 where, it appears, two lines are joined into one), and the inter-ictic intervals can consist of up to five syllables (lines 48 and 60). Within the third segment there is a clear separation that follows the thematic organization: here the sub-segment in which the poet addresses god is perhaps the most striking. The first two lines of the sub-segment are very anapestic and rather regular (2.2-2 and 2.2-2-2), which is briefly interrupted with a line that opens with a strong ictus in *Bózhe!* before it transitions back to a more regular and quiet narration (via 1.2 scheme in lines 43-44). A very

interesting feature in this poem is the way Shvarts works with syllables that would be undoubtedly stressed but lose a significant part of their stress due to their position in the line. Compare in line 46 (weak stress is marked with the sign ˚ above the vowel): *I kidáiu ego – e˚to légkoe s vídu iadró*, or in line 49: *Davno˚, v gostiákh – na stólike stoiál ego˚ sobrát, dlia ukrashén'ia*. This and other such variations keep the poem very energetic: at times elegiac, and at times forceful.

However, Shvarts experiments even more with rhyme in this poem. The rhyme scheme changes here between alternating (ABAB) and pair rhyme (couplets of AABB), disrupting the flow of the verse. Such is, for instance, the transition to lines 12 and 13 that conclude the first segment and summarize the Marsyas fable narrated in it (*mertsan'ia – stenan'ia*). Other occurrences of pair rhyme are in the second (in lines 22-23: *oblaka – ruka*) and the concluding of the fourth segment, but the third, very narrative segment is particularly rich in them (*kost' – polst'*, *toske – ruke*, *delat' – pliunut'*, *nalit' – nosit'*, *iadro – vedro*, and the triple rhyme of *uteshen'ia – ukrashen'ia – rasten'ia,* etc.). Rhyming couplets generally create the impression of simplicity as they historically refer to folk songs: statements expressed in couplets are shorter, their metaphors clearer, and phenomena they discuss are immediately connected with each other. Shvarts employs this rhyming scheme skillfully to indicate modality of the respective situation also on the formal level, as is the case, for instance, in the third segment when the poem describes the poet's humble trembling in front of god. A complex enclosing rhyme that encompasses five lines – from 35 (*podarok*) to 39 (*arok*) – precedes this couplet rhyme. The strong contrast between the complex rhyme structure of the enclosed rhyme (bold and colloquial apostrophe to the skull that has grown too brazen) and the simplicity of the

couplet rhyme (humble address of god) creates the impression of unexpected fragility. Shvarts also employs internal rhymes, especially in longer lines: *vzial – stal* (line 53) and *konets – venets* (line 62), which can also be weak, that is, rhyming a stressed and an unstressed syllable (as in line 61 (*vlezet – voz'met*)). Weak rhymes also occur in end rhymes, as, for instance, in *mói - otdélkoi* (lines 24 and 26). There are also a few cases of consonance as in *zheltela, / Tiazelela* (lines 32-33) and *voronkoi – vzryva* (line 66). Additionally, a few lines do not rhyme with any preceding or following lines (line two, eight, ten, and thirty eight).

Summing up the extent of Shvarts's formal experimentation in her poetry, I would like to once again underscore her interest in frustrating the reader's rhythmic and rhyme expectations with the goal to avoid predictability that usually results from regularity of the formal organization of verse. Poems analyzed here are written in tonic verse. Mikhail Gasparov notes that tonic verse is dominated by the tendency of the verse to "approximate natural speech" (*Sovremennyi russkii stikh* 221). From here stems also the quality of Shvarts's poetry that has often been defined as child-like or naïve: after all, tonic verse refers directly to the earliest, folk poetry that was entirely held together by rhyme (ibid. 222). Such penchant for formal irregularity signals strongly the wish to differentiate oneself from the heritage of important and influential predecessors. However, this is at least a two-step process in which the poet first actualizes the heritage to which she then assumes distance. We see this particularly in the more regular openings of Shvarts's poems that then increasingly disintegrate and become structurally more amorphous and governed by the logic of the content itself. The scope of my examination of Elena Shvarts's work does not allow for an in-depth analysis of concrete poetic

influences, but some scholars have already addressed this important question.[115] It can be noted, however, that influential predecessors are usually referred to thematically (that is, in poetry dedicated to symbolic space or certain topoi) and evoked through association, while the poet parallels them or diverges from them (or, frequently, both).[116] Velimir Khlebnikov was, for instance, a significant influence for Shvarts: yet she takes his verse that "leans towards two-foot meters, above all towards iamb" significantly further, complicating and diversifying his "one-syllable anacruses, male line endings," and frequently perfect rhyme (ibid. 459-460). It would also be possible to establish further connections to Vladimir Maiakovskii whose tonic verse exhibited tendency towards lines with four ictuses, and whose longer lines were very likely to rhyme in couplets, while their rhythmic structure grew more amorphous (ibid. 443). The complex interplay of these influences deserves to be the subject of a separate comprehensive study.

My limited examination nevertheless allows to make conclusions about the general tendency that Shvarts's experimentation signals: at its heart is an anti-classicist stance that rejects the classical regularity of the verse form (as expressed in predictability of such meters as iamb and trochee, or in consistent rhyming schemes) and asserts irregular forms that express complex ideas in a form that in its dynamism comes close to colloquial speech. Historically, classical forms of versification prevailed in the entire 19th century during Romanticism and Realism in Russian literature; they made a return only in the Soviet period, especially in the Stalin era (ibid. 52-53). It appears that these are the immediate predecessors that Shvarts strongly distances herself from. On the other hand,

[115] Cf. Stephanie Sandler, "Cultural Memory and Self-Expression."
[116] As Stephanie Sandler emphasizes, such figures for Shvarts are Aleksandr Pushkin, Nikolai Gogol, Fedor Dostoevskii (all of whom significantly define the symbolic space of St. Petersburg), as well as Andrei Platonov (factory imagery), Iosif Brodskii (dark atmosphere), Osip Mandel'shtam and Velimir Khlebnikov ("Cultural Memory and Self-Expression" 260-263).

the prevalence of non-classical verse in 1890-1935, during Russian Modernism, points to examples of formal experimentation that Shvarts prolifically reimagines, while also detaching herself from them.

My analysis of Elena Shvarts's poetry points to the proximity of issues that occupied Ukrainian and Russian Soviet poets in the 1970s and the 1980s. Reading select Shvarts's poems I elucidate her particular way of solving these issues artistically and show yet another dimension of the profound aesthetic experimentation that was taking place in the Soviet Union during the Stagnation Era. Although invisibly to the mass audience due to ban on publishing until *perestroika*, Shvarts's poetry establishes continuity to earlier periods, most significantly the heritage of Russian Modernism. Shvarts was particularly interested in topics that addressed the poetic self and poetry, juxtaposed material and immaterial reality, often leading to a spiritual revelation on the part of the poet that she shared with her reader. The poet's own body – injured or deformed – is frequently the vessel of such revelatory experience that reflects her fragmented self through liminal states (sickness or injury). This poetic solution brings Shvarts closer to Oleh Lysheha and differentiates her from Petro Midianka. Lysheha is equally interested in the body's bordering on death and narrates his journey to the mystical revelation of interconnectedness of being. Although melancholia and nostalgia are perceptible in Shvarts's poetry, her much stronger attention to deformation and hybridization of the body sets her apart from Petro Midianka whose nostalgic poetry favors rather harmonious settings and wholesome bodies as expressions of the "paradise lost" (although he also pays attention to bodies deformed by age or sickness, as in "Litnia rumunka v misti" [Middle-Aged Romanian Woman in the City"] or "Vitol'd iz

Tsehol'nians'koï" [Vitol'd from Tsehol'nians'ka]). Poetic self-consciousness is another point of differentiation here: poetic influence is entirely oblique in Lysheha's works (present only on the formal level of language) and very explicit in Midianka's (direct thematic invocation of artistic figures). Shvarts defines herself against the background of Russian poetic heritage thematically and formally by invoking well-known topoi, rejecting Classicism of her predecessors (and bypassing "official" Soviet literature altogether), and by developing further the productive achievements of the Modernist poets.

Chapter Five:

Literature of the Periphery: Experimentation in the Works of Petro Midianka

In Ukraine, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the 1980s were marked by a general relaxation of the political climate that culminated in Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* as the new "thaw" after a long period of stagnation. However, in a way that was highly characteristic for the Soviet province, the process was slow and hesitant in Ukraine, significantly lagging behind the developments in the Soviet centers – Moscow and Leningrad. While situation with censorship was shifting significantly from year to year, and later even from one month to the other, the more daring publications were sanctioned for publishing only in the late 1980s. Midianka's first debut took place in the literary almanac *Vitryla* in 1985 in the publishing house *Molod'*.[117] (Before that, separate poems were published in local newspapers.) However, his first collection of poetry, *Porih* [Threshold], appeared only two years later in a collective publication series titled "Molod''s First Poetry Cassette",[118] together with other poets that praised their "small homelands."[119]

[117] This volume appeared under the editorial direction of the important moderator of the cultural life in Ukraine in the 1980s and 1990s Mykola Riabchuk who served as the "literary editor" on the board of the influential *Suchasnist'* journal (late 1980s – early 1990s).
[118] A reference to the small format of poetry publication from the late 1960s, among poets popularly referred to as the "collective grave."
[119] Ihor Malen'kyi on the Ternopil region and Attyla Mohyl'nyi on the Kyiv suburb of Chokolivka. The 1987 installment of the "cassette" featured also Oleksandr Hrytsenko's poetry that was refreshingly focused on the Ukrainian urban subculture, as well as poetry by two Russian-language poets (Ratushnyi and Soloviov). The print run of the first installment was only 1000 copies and was sold out within days (Strikha 163).

In this chapter I analyze Midianka's first collection of poetry and consider the extent of his experimentation in the spheres of language, thematic focus, verse and metaphor to show that in his innovative writing Midianka considerably leans towards neo-modernism. I argue that Petro Midianka's case is exceptional in Ukrainian literature for its radical embracing of the periphery as the source of identity and inspiration. Analyzing select poems of this collection, I highlight that Midianka can serve as an emblem of the deep changes that begin to occur in Ukrainian literature in the 1980s. The chapter discusses Midianka's use of history of Transcarpathia, its nature and people as elements of his poetic program at the heart of which lies the myth of homecoming to a vanishing world. As my analysis shows, remnants of this "paradise lost" are artifacts of material reality that continue to be available in the present. I proceed to illuminate how the poet estranges these familiar objects through their reinsertion into historical time, thus restoring continuity between the past and the present. This approach is highly contemplative and melancholy as it involves the realization of loss and mourning for it. I show that in Midianka's poetry it is realized through observation and depiction of natural landscape, architecture, and people marked by degradation and decline. The temporal marker of this is often autumn which reveals the beauty of a fragile nature and the people situated in it. Developing this argument further, I emphasize that such an approach is also decidedly nostalgic as it appeals to the collective memory of the people of the region and seeks to form a community with them. In my view, Midianka's nostalgia comes closest to "reflective nostalgia" (Boym) as it lingers in the moment, observing the ruins of the past. As I point out, while the poet advances traditional social views and encourages his reader to remember and cherish the past, restoration of the utopian reality of the past does not

dominate the poetic program. I argue that, on the one hand, this is due to the continuous existence of the past in the present that the poet documents, while, on the other hand, the complexity of the Transcarpathian identity, whose main markers are cultural and ethnic diversity and patriarchal social makeup, prevents instrumentalization of the past for the creation of the homogenous, totalizing national project. Analyzing Midianka's use of language and dialect, his reference to the works of Bohdan-Ihor Antonych and Adal'bert Erdeli, I thus argue for a placing of his works within the neo-modernist paradigm that rejects mass audience for the sake of an "initiated" reader. In my view, the collection of poetry *Porih* [Threshold] (1987) manifests this approach. In his later collections, through a change in editorial practice, Midianka slowly gravitates towards reaching a broader audience. My readings of the poems from this collection elucidate Midianka's nostalgic strategies, the social views he promotes, and show the extent of his experimentation in works that can be read through their ideological or aesthetic function.

5. 1. *Litprotses* and a New Audience

The 1980s were marked by a new generation of poets and writers whose works represented a further step in the direction towards aesthetic experimentation. In a way this is represented in an attempt to consider their creative output generationally and in decades. The marking point in such an attempt is the Ukrainian generation of the 1960s, *shistdesiatnyky*, that emerged from the destalinization period and Khrushchev "thaw" (the Thaw) that allowed for more artistic freedom. In Ukrainian context, it translated into the emergence of a number of young writers with works that emphasized national topics – Ukrainian language, history, and culture in particular: Ivan Drach, Mykola

Vinhranovs'kyi, Vasyl' Symonenko, Mykola Kholodnyi, Yevhen Hutsalo, Hryhir Tiutiunnyk, Volodymyr Drozd, Vasyl' Stus, Lina Kostenko, Ivan Dziuba, and others. A seminal work that influenced the poetics of this group was Oleksandr Dovzhenko's epic cinematic novella *Zacharovana Desna* (1956) that praises his Ukrainian homeland and is full of nostalgic – and aesthetically very nuanced and successful – memories of his childhood. *Shistdesiatnyky*'s introduction of national topics and their turn towards inner feelings in poetry and prose signified a considerable innovation in comparison to the ideological motivation of literature during the Stalin period. However, *shistdesiatnyky* mostly remained within the constraints of Socialist Realism: defined primarily through its ideological opposition to the Soviet regime, their artistic production was no less politically engaged than art encouraged or enforced by the regime. While the more daring poetry explored individuality and a more complex metaphor (Lina Kostenko, Vasyl' Symonenko, Ivan Drach, Vasyl' Stus), prose turned to historical themes and decorative, expressly anti-purposeful writing (the phenomenon of the pseudo-baroque *khymerna proza* [whimsical prose]).[120] The aesthetic losses in this regard are comparable to those of Socialist Realism: instrumentalization for a political cause – namely, the mission of rehabilitation of Ukrainian history and culture, reappropriation and rewriting of that history – significantly undermined the striving for aesthetic innovation in prose whose genre was historically also significantly more mandated by the Soviet regime. Because of its more elusive nature, poetry was more successful in escaping this predicament and yielded more productive results.

[120] The work of literary scholars and cultural philosophers deserves a separate discussion – for instance, Ivan Dziuba's contribution, the author of the widely popular and influential essay "Internationalism or Russification?" (1965).

However, both artistic and political heritage of *shistdesiatnytstvo* remained highly problematic due to later developments in the movement. Although some of its participants remained true to their principles (such as Ivan Svitlychnyi, Vasyl Stus, Valerii Marchenko, or Lina Kostenko, for which some paid with prolonged bans on publications and others with long imprisonment or even their lives), the majority of *shistdesiatnyky* eventually yielded to pressure and in one way or another accommodated the authorities (Vitalii Korotych, Ivan Drach, Volodymyr Drozd, Yevhen Hutsalo, and others). Massive Soviet repressions of 1965-1972 (especially of January 1972) served as an effective means to keep quiet those who sympathized with *shistdesiatnyky* but for various reasons only marginally participated in the movement (such as Valerii Shevchuk, for instance). This group later assumed an ambiguous position towards the authorities, accepting posts and positions in a number of official structures (the most prominent example of such an attitude was Oles' Honchar, the author of the 'pro-Ukrainian' novel *Sobor* [The Cathedral] (1968) and head of the Soviet Ukrainian Writers' Union in 1959-1986).

The generation of post-*shistdesiatnyky* ("post-1960s") sought ways to distance themselves from their predecessors and turned to non-political art that emphasized aesthetic objectives of the artist, moved away from focusing on issues of national history and culture, and towards global artistic developments. In many ways they continued the modernist tradition in Ukrainian literature where modernist devices retained their expressive potential due to the suppression of modernist literature and art by the Soviet authorities. This generation yielded a group of absolutely brilliant poets: the Kyiv School of Poetry (Vasyl' Holoborod'ko, Viktor Kordun, Vasyl' Ruban, Mykola Vorobiov,

Mykhailo Savchenko, Valentyna Otroshchenko, Nadiia Kyr"ian, and others) and a group of poets around exceptionally gifted Hryhorii Chubai from L'viv (Oleh Lysheha among them, but also Mykola Riabchuk).[121] In prose, the most impressive writer was Volodymyr Dibrova who remains very successful – although also less known among wide readership – until today. Unfortunately, living through the Stagnation period under conditions of severe censorship and repression, none of these poets and writers could hope to be published, and some suffered from persecution from participating in *samvydav* (Lysheha and Chubai). As a result, their exceptional aesthetic achievements remained unknown to a wide audience until the mid to late 1980s, and the writers worked in the underground, writing for themselves and for a very small circle of friends and colleagues. The works of some of them were still reproduced and distributed clandestinely, but because they lacked any political agenda they never achieved the same levels of distribution as did political poetry or polemic essays directed against the Soviet system (as did, for instance, Dziuba's "Internationalism or Russification," mentioned earlier). The entirely different concept of the audience also necessitated a self-positioning of the poet and writer that was utterly new and unique for Ukrainian literature: the artist was no longer tasked with the mission of saving or enlightening her or his people, of defending the Ukrainian culture from impending annihilation, or of correcting the wrongdoings of the perpetrators. The radical nature of this shift could perhaps be compared with going from a military orchestra (dominated by wind instruments and performing for an audience in need of encouragement) to a chamber ensemble (consisting primarily of string instruments and performing in an intimate setting). The result in art was a complete

[121] In an interview Lysheha also mentions that he "observed" Vorobiov and learned from him as a student would learn from his master. Cf. my discussion in the next chapter.

absence of pathos and epic narration, use of techniques and devices of the highest complexity, attention to questions of inner life and philosophic aspects of being. Since these achievements enjoyed for the most part no reception, the artists remained marginalized until the mid-1980s (and in some cases even later), which created a considerable confusion in questions of continuity and generational succession.

The 1980s are perhaps one of the most problematic period in this regard as they inherited the tremendous distortion in the literary process that was caused by the repressive censorship of the Stagnation period. Thus included in this period (as *visimdesiatnyky*) are often such authors as Oleh Lysheha, Mykola Vorobyov, Vasyl' Holoborod'ko, Viktor Kordun, Taras Mel'nychuk, Viktor Mohyl'nyi, Vasyl' Ruban or Hryhorii Chubai – as does *Visimdesiatnyky: Antolohiia novoï ukraïns'koï poeziï* (Edmonton, 1990). In the 1980s most of these poets were in their mid-40s and matured as artists already in the 1970s. The formal criterion of inclusion in this generation based on the chronological "debut" of Ukraine's "young poetry" (as explains Mykola Riabchuk in his introduction to the anthology mentioned above) fails particularly, because most of the poets were neither truly debuting (in the sense of a new aesthetic beginning), nor were they young (xiv). Most importantly, however, artistic principles of the older generation (born in the late 1930s through early 1950s) formed in an entirely different context and reacted to significantly different cultural, political, and aesthetic circumstances (namely mainly to the phenomenon of the *shistdesiatnytstvo*) than those of the younger generation (born in the late 1950s and the 1960s). Mykola Riabchuk thus reverts to the term "new" Ukrainian poetry, referring in this way to the "post-1960s generation" (Viktor Kordun, Vasyl' Holoborod'ko, Mykhailo Savchenko, Vasyl' Ruban, Mykola Vorobiov, Stanislav

Vyshens'kyi, Vasyl' Stus, Ihor Kalynets' and others), the generation of the 1970s (*simdesiatnyky*: Taras Fediuk, Natalka Bilotserkivets', Vasyl' Osadchyi and others), and the generation of the 1980s (*visimdesiatnyky*: Viktor Neborak, Kostiantyn Moskalets', Oleksandr Hrytsenko, Oksana Zabuzhko, Oleksandr Irvanets', Ivan Malkovych, Petro Midianka, Iurii Andrukhovych, Ihor Rymaruk, and others) (ibid. xvi-xvii). The peculiar situation of the 1980s also consisted in the simultaneous influx of previously prohibited literary works from the early 20th century (Ukrainian and Russian modernism and avant-garde), of prominent dissident and underground works, and of the previously banned from publication *shistdesiatnyky*, post-*shistdesiatnyky*, and *simdesiatnyky*. In this regard the youngest generation was probably the first to get their works published: in 1984 appear collections of poetry by Ihor Rymaruk (*Vysoka voda*), Ivan Malkovych (*Bilyi kamin'*), and Viktor Kordun (*Zemlia natkhnennia*); in 1985 almost simultaneously appear collections of poetry by Iurii Andrukhovych (*Nebo i ploshchi*), Oksana Zabuzhko (*Travnevyi inii*), Mykola Riabchuk (*Potreba slova*), Mykola Vorobiov (*Pryhadai na dorohu meni*); in 1986 appear collections of poetry by Oleksandr Irvanets' (*Vohnyshche na doshchi*), Mykola Vorobiov (*Misiats' shypshyny*), and Viktor Kordun (*Pisen'ky z mamynoho naperstka*); in 1987 Petro Midianka's (*Porih*), Viktor Kordun's (*Slaviia*), and Viktor Neborak's (*Burshtynovyi chas*) collections of poetry get published; in 1988 further collections of poetry appear by Volodymyr Tsybul'ko (*Kliuch*), Vasyl' Holoborod'ko (*Zelen den'*), and Mykola Vorobiov (*Ozhyna obriiu*). This short survey gives an idea of the kind of fragmentation that takes place in the Ukrainian literary process within only a few years, creating an entirely new and very dynamic literary and cultural situation at the beginning of the 1990s.

Awareness of this context allows for a productive return to the discussion of the questions of a state-controlled literary process in the 1970s and early 1980s that was not defined by literature's aesthetic function, as outlined in earlier chapters, because they become particularly visible in a society that seeks to assume total control over cultural production and its dissemination. In a situation of restrictive censorship, a writer faces the tough choice either of participating in varying degree in the literary process, thus reaching a compromise that largely depends on the political situation of the moment, or of refusing to participate and creating without the prospect of publication, or relying on alternative ways of dissemination and thus reaching an entirely different audience. A side-effect of this complex situation is the fact that writers and literary works, topics and styles that are excluded from the state literary process no longer have to conform to the institutional pressure of that process. Therefore, entirely distinct factors of economic, political, and cultural nature define the creative process when the prospects of publishing are uncertain, or certainly absent. In the Soviet Union, a crucial change with regard to publication and its modes occurred during the liberalization of the Khrushchev Thaw. Destalinization efforts during the Khrushchev time signaled to society that a return to the same severity of repression was not imaginable anymore, and the slim difference between a labor camp or imprisonment and certain death made all the difference for a great number of dissenting intellectuals and writers. Thus if writing for the drawer dominated the Stalin period, many writers of the Thaw turned to *samvydav* (Ukrainian for *samizdat*, clandestine publication in the Soviet Union) and *tamvydav* (Ukrainian for *tamizdat*, publication abroad, mostly in publishing houses of the émigré community) for

dissemination of their works.[122] This remained valid even during the period of Stagnation, introduced by Brezhnev, when the Soviet regime and the security agencies cracked down on *samizdat*.

In short, the phenomenon of *samizdat* in many respects exemplifies the state and the situation of the literary process in the Soviet Union. The seamless system of censorship introduced in the Soviet Union in the 1930s and somewhat modified in the 1960s required the censor's visa on all printed works, while all means of text reproduction were subject to registration (for practical reasons, typewriters were excluded from this regulation – a significant liberalization compared to Stalin's times).[123] Even though Khrushchev's policies of cultural and political relaxation were reversed after his dismissal as party leader, when the policies of the new leadership sought to reinstate the tight control over cultural production known from the Stalin time, the period of liberalization left a deep mark in the cultural memory of society. In his 1970 introduction to one of the first collections of Soviet *samizdat* literature in English, Michael Scammell

[122] From here on, the term *samizdat* will be used in reference to the practice of self-publication, reproduction, and distribution of written works in all of Soviet Union and in Russia, while the term *samvydav* will be used in the Ukrainian context. The terms *tamizdat* and *tamvydav* will be used following the same logic. In the context of clandestine publications, it is important to emphasize that the majority of works published in such a way were of political nature: they chronicled the abuse of human rights in the Soviet Union (especially documenting show trials), and published critical pieces by prominent thinkers or works that criticized one or the other aspect of the Soviet political system. Only a small fraction of clandestine publications were dedicated to literary works and art that did not have any distinct political anti-Soviet agenda. For a totalitarian society, however, any dissenting voice poses a threat to its harmonizing narrative. Evoking a distinct Ukrainian identity, Ukrainian publications were, therefore, by definition seen as subversive to the system, even when they did not express any explicit anti-Soviet views.

[123] As Feldbrugge outlines, the Chief Department for the Protection of Military and State Secrets (established in 1966) was responsible for a "security check" of all printed materials, while the Chief Department for Literature's approval (Glavlit) appeared in the colophon of every Soviet book (2). Later on, the censorship function was transferred directly to the publishing houses to which representatives of the State Committee for the Press were attached (ibid. 3).

provides an apt description of the change that defined *samizdat*'s functioning in the Soviet Union during the period of Stagnation:

> no matter how gloomy the immediate outlook, there has so far been no return to the draconian measures employed by Stalin. … In Stalin's day dissent meant certain arrest and almost certain death in inhuman labor camps. Now it means probable arrest, exile and near-starvation in camps that are only marginally better than before. But the difference, however small, is crucial, for it is the difference between life and death (7-8).

Unlike those publications in *samizdat* that were explicitly political (that is, ideological in their opposition to the Soviet regime), various markedly literary publications did not always carry a political message.[124] Yet even works that were far from directly condemning or criticizing the Soviet system (like Solzhenitsyn's *Cancer Ward* and *The First Circle*, or Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, all of which were actively circulated in *samizdat* form) found themselves outside the literary process if they did not actively conform to the artistic and political demands that the party imposed on Soviet literature. While not actively participating in dissent, such writers and their works were nevertheless in opposition to the system: they advanced an alternative path of development for literature and art in the Soviet Union, and they refused to be silenced.

The rigid controls imposed by the Soviet authorities upon publication in the 1960s and 1970s thus led to a complex splitting of the literary process: while some of the officially published authors also participated in *samizdat*,[125] the new situation also

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[124] Feldbrugge emphasizes that, besides philosophical and literary *samizdat* – which, due to its volume, was often difficult to circulate and reproduce – the bulk of the *samizdat* consisted of documents concerning individual complaints or specific topics, general political writings, religious publications, Jewish and national *samizdat*, official Soviet documents, trial reports and "final words," foreign documents, and Soviet documents without any dissent character (yet of interest to dissident circles) (Feldbrugge).

[125] Scammell points to Voznesensky, Aksyonov, Nekrasov, Akhmatova, Zabolotsky, Akhmadulina, Okudzhava and others who were often "grudgingly acknowledged by the authorities but in practice [found] it difficult to get their works published" (10-11).

significantly contributed to the emergence of a new audience. This reading audience was dedicated enough to participate in reproduction and dissemination of the literary works that they deemed important or artistically outstanding. Apart from the political groups that engaged in genuine political debate, literary groups formed that in a similar way advanced and discussed alternative artistic and literary development.[126] Without the limitations that were imposed on officially authorized publications, the aesthetic criteria once again came to dominate artistic production that did not engage in a political opposition to the regime and thus was on the periphery of both the state and the *samizdat* literary process. Most importantly, the writers oriented themselves to an entirely new audience.

In this regard, forsaking the claim for a mass reader – the only reader that mattered for Soviet censorship – had grave consequences for the entire creative biography of a writer. The concept of a reading audience as knowledgeable and informed, even "initiated" by a common understanding of literature as art, in which the aesthetic function dominates, radically changed the writing process that sought to engage its audience. For such writers, most of the non-aesthetic functions – didacticism or persuasive positivism (enthusiasm) so characteristic for propaganda, but also a general attitude to write in a way that can and should be understood by a mass audience – retreated into the background and these authors focused on primarily aesthetic functions

[126] Writing about the political *samizdat*, Feldbrugge emphasizes that "*samizdat* authors who discuss[ed] the political situation inside the Soviet Union ha[d] read each other, refer[ed] to, and criticize[d] other *samizdat* documents containing political views. In this way a genuine political debate came about and distinguishable groupings and currents took shape which together may be regarded as an articulate political opposition" (2). Although less pronounced in the case of the literary discussion, a similar statement can be made about the development of a separate literary process in *samizdat* publications, which largely or entirely ignored state-sponsored publications and instead engaged in a dialogue with each other.

and topics important to them.[127] This often resulted in framing the works as private and very personal, bearing importance for the writer and her or his closest circle, or in focusing on a very small, local community. Quite frequently, this attitude presumed a situation of isolation and individualism. It also led to a significant reduction or complete disappearance of the stance of magnificence and importance, and with them also of the pathos that animated most Socialist Realist works as well as works that ideologically opposed it. The main reason for this was the fact that the private and personal mode of narration in most cases reduced or eliminated the ideological dimension, be it confirmation or rejection of a certain ideological stance and practice. At the same time, however, as pointed out earlier, writing non-conformist works in a system that (especially in its high form) demanded full submission and sought total harmonization of all cultural, political, social, and economic aspects was by definition a subversive act.

Separate existence of state-sanctioned literature and of literature published and disseminated clandestinely raises the question of the nature of literary process in the country.[128] As literature written (geographically) in the Soviet Union, the term "Soviet literature" certainly includes both literatures. However, the definition of the Soviet literature primarily in ideological terms complicates the inclusion of both literatures in our understanding of the Soviet literary process. The institute of censorship did not only deform the principles that govern the dynamic of the literature's development, but it excluded from circulation – and thus participation in and influence on the process –

[127] This, certainly, did not entirely exclude ideological aspect from artistic production.
[128] An additional dimension of this debate is the literature written abroad – however, its low availability at the time makes it of somewhat lesser priority for the current discussion.

works by some of the most talented and creative authors.[129] Even if some reception of the works published clandestinely on the part of the officially recognized authors did take place, the extent of their artistic response to such works was severely limited or made entirely impossible by censorship and the danger of prosecution or exclusion. Under such conditions, the official literary process was driven primarily by motivations that were far removed from concerns of the aesthetic function of literature, although experimentation within the allowed framework did take place, often in a way that undermined it, but never challenged it directly (as my analysis of the works of Valerii Shevchuk and Volodymyr Drozd shows). At the same time, underground literature was often forced into an oppositional stance even if it expressed little or no political agenda.

Even more important is the question of the literary establishment's ability to engage in a literary process that is driven by aesthetic criteria and fosters experimentation and innovation to increase the literature's expressiveness under the conditions of a lower outside pressure. The general expectation towards the end of the Soviet Union's existence was that a boom of high-quality literary works would follow after the lifting of the censorship. As the experience of perestroika and the years of independence have shown, however, the generation of authors who previously enjoyed official approval was mostly unable to adapt to new circumstances and either continued writing with a political

[129] It is important to mention that Russia has a long tradition of political pressure and censorship and of resistance to it. Never before, however, was the pressure on writers as great and as intrusive. Michael Scammell notes that, before the triumph of the Bolsheviks in Russia, "[w]riters of *belles lettres* as such, though needing to be on guard and heedful of the censorship's demands, did not suffer nearly as much – normally they were able to handle the pressures put upon them without compromising their creations" (2-3). This changed radically with the increasing grip of the party on all spheres of life, whose highest expression was the phenomenon of Stalin's Great Terror.

mission in mind, or went silent altogether.[130] The achievements of the writers who wrote and circulated their works outside the public domain came to dominate the literary process aesthetically, although seldom in terms of success with the mass reader.[131] For the most part, these authors assumed the position of the literary avant-garde, while the more traditional writers recalibrated their skills to suit the demands of the time and the new establishment, and continued to write for their audience – mostly in a way that emphasized local Ukrainian and nativist aspects. At the same time the small but very active and engaged alternative audience that emerged from the *samizdat* culture of the 1960s and 1970s reoriented itself towards a Western literary tradition (that now became easily accessible) and reshaped the role of the new Ukrainian literature in the global context. One of the key factors of the literary situation of the 1970s and 1980s was thus the rapidly decreasing relevance of state literary institutions for alternative literary groups and their audience (for which they already were rather less relevant). Some writers, as long as they could meet their minimal financial needs, readily assumed outsider positions in relation to the state literary process, aiming for aesthetic achievements and participation in the global developments in literature. In this regard, poets like Oleh Lysheha and Petro Midianka embody the challenges and opportunities of a literature that embraces its position on the periphery. Petro Midianka's works particularly highlight the

[130] This circumstance, of course, does not exclude a degree of stylistic and thematic experimentation, as I show in the chapters dedicated to Volodymyr Drozd and Valerii Shevchuk. However, as my analysis shows, the main impetus of their creativity was dictated by a political agenda, while stylistic experimentation was secondary and decorative, serving rather as a draping for the ideological message.

[131] In fact, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, only very few such authors achieved wide popular success, while works written in the tradition of neo-realism or neo-populism were significantly more successful in satisfying the popular demand. Characteristic in this regard are the neo-modernist works of Yurii Andrukhovych who enjoys greate acclaim as a public intellectual and essayist, while his works find less resonance with the mass reader who knows of them, but seldom reads them.

continuity between the 1970s and the 1980s through the inheritance of a similar concept of the target audience for which the poet writes.

5. 2. Nostalgia of the Periphery

Petro Midianka is truly an exceptional case in Ukrainian literature of the period, as he makes a radical argument for an aesthetics of the local and provincial in his works. As Vadym Trinchii notes in one of the very rare insightful reflection on Midianka's poetry, he "uses provinciality consciously – as a manifest" (21). This is the "deep Rusyn Europeanness" that is inherent to the Transcarpathian identity (ibid.). The key component of such a gesture is the local language, which he legitimizes through his reliance on it in his poetry. Of all writers analyzed in this study, Midianka is the youngest and is often categorized as belonging to the generation of the 1980s (*visimdesiatnyky*), following the classification of the 20th century Ukrainian literature in decades (the other principle often applied being that of regional attribution – with Zhytomyr, L'viv, Kharkiv, Stanislaviv (Ivano-Frankivs'k) and other regional capitals as their centers).[132] His first collection of poetry, *Porih* [Threshold], that is analyzed here, came out in 1987 in the series "The Poet's First Book" by the Komsomol publishing house "Molod'" [Youth] in the first installation of the "Poetry Cassette."[133] Midianka's regional background is very important here: he was born in 1959 in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine. After graduating from Uzhhorod University in the regional center of

[132] This categorization is not entirely consistent and certainly not representative in terms of its aesthetic classification of authors and works included in certain periods. Cf. my discussion in section 1 of this chapter.

[133] The same publishing house that published also the first book by Oleh Lysheha. As was mentioned earlier, in the same installment with Midianka – the first installment since the 1960s – also the poems of Oleksii Hrytsenko, Ihor Malen'kyi, and Attyla Mohyl'nyi were published.

Transcarpathia, bordering Slovakia and Hungary, he lived and worked as a school teacher in the village Tysolove, near his home village of Shyrokyi Luh. His poetry is crucially centered on his local identity as a Transcarpathian, defined by his Rusyn roots, proximity to Western Europe, and its Ukrainian component. The official publication in 1987 of a work that strongly relies on the local Transcarpathian and Ukrainian national history and identity testifies to the unprecedented relaxation of the political climate in the Soviet Union and the removal of a considerable censorship barrier that would have previously prevented the publication of even a fraction of such material. Midianka is integrated in the *samvydav* tradition of the 1970s (although he did not publish his works clandestinely) and the 1980s atmosphere of opening to the West and release of works for publication that were shelved before in that the general tone of his works particularly emphasizes his region's connection to the West. In a way similar to the generations of writers and poets of the 1960s and the 1970s who wrote for a very small and "initiated" audience, Midianka also abandons the implicit appeal to a mass audience. The most important formal tool he uses to demarcate his audience is regional identity and language: although he is a teacher of (standard) Ukrainian, Midianka richly infuses his poems with local dialects and Ukrainianized borrowings from Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, and Romanian. Other aspects of his early poetry are mostly conventional: sentimental images of the region, traditionalist worldview, nostalgia for the lost past, and mapping of cultural space through relevant historical sites, figures, and events prevail in his works. These qualities significantly intensify in his later collections, while formal experimentation also deepens (cf. two collections from 1994, *Oseredok* [Midpoint] and *Farametlyky* [Embroidery]).

The collection of poetry *Porih* that consists of 37 poems is characterized by a moderate reliance on dialectal elements.[134] The imagery is generally easily accessible and revolves around symbolic places, figures, and quotidian events that encompass the poet's identity as a Transcarpathian, a Ukrainian, and a Central European. Midianka's language is rich in metaphors (in which he profoundly differs from Lysheha), the poems are mostly descriptive (some narrative does occur, but it does not play the same role as in Lysheha's works) and they alternate between rhyme (mostly *abab* rhyme scheme) and free verse. The poems are imbued with a general sense of estranging exoticism and folkloric color, which is largely due to the lexical choice *outside* of the dialect, the use of diminutives, and the reiteration of local attributes in different variations. The poet is frequently filled with wonder and delight; the local history, beautiful nature, or simple people often entrance him. This stance also often serves as a source of pathos that elevates the local language and its carriers, and as a foundation for a moral message to the readers: Remember and preserve! (The abundant use of exclamation marks elucidates this.) Both the dialect and the turn to cultural, architectural, or natural memorials can, therefore, be read as a search for authenticity in the region's past, as an attempt to create continuity between the past and the present where the past can serve as the source of an alternative identity (that is, not Soviet). This, in turn, reveals the populist dimension of the poems: they rely heavily on a definition of identity that is tied to geographic location and language. In the case of Midianka's Transcarpathia these features are realized in the myth

[134] Many dialectal words are also explained in footnotes. In an interview that accompanied the 2010 edition of Midianka's works he addresses this issue: "My manuscripts were full of underlined words, but I had a very delicate editor, Ihor Rymaruk [poet himself and editor of the 1987 collection *Porih*], who was rapturous from my poetic language, and so everything went well. And when private publishing houses appeared, I was allowed to give my book the 'Transcarpathian' title *Farametlyky*" (Panchenko 19).

of the region as an equidistant midpoint between several sources of cultural influence: Ukrainian Lviv and Kyiv, Hungarian Budapest, Romanian Bucharest, Austrian Vienna, or Czech Prague.[135] In a similar way, the local language presents itself as an intersection of several systems of linguistic codification: Ukrainian serves as the basis, while borrowings from other languages bring in entire national and historical contexts of neighboring countries. This hybrid, patchwork identity is elevated and celebrated for its uniqueness and apparent openness to the world. Patriarchal views on social organization set limits to this otherwise polycentric and multicultural vision. The past is seen through the lens of nostalgia, always as a lost idyllic way of life, with a traditional distribution of roles between sexes and social classes, an idea of labor that is wholesome, and a sense of a close community and integration with nature without destroying it. Midianka, therefore, realizes nostalgia here primarily through estrangement and through idealization of the past, usually as a lost proximity to nature and to "natural," non-alienating activities (for the most part in form of agricultural work, handcraftsmanship, gathering, and other similar activities where the results of production are immediately accessible to the worker).

In an early poem titled "Nostal'hiia" [Nostalgia], which did not make it to the first collection of poetry, the poet articulates the sense of deep mental connection to his homeland that defines the nostalgic attitude of Midianka's early poetry:

А ланцюг білих вершин	And the chain of the white mountain tops
Мене міцно прив'язав	Tied me closely
До маленької улоговинки,	To the little valley,
Ще меншого села... (*Virshi z podu* 5)	And to the even smaller village…

[135] Footnote on the borrowings from different languages in Midianka's poetry (see Czech translation of his works by Tomáš Vašut in Mid'anka, Petro. *Užhorodské kavárny*. Prague: Ukrajinská iniciativa v ČR, 2004).

The poem articulates a stance that is programmatic for the bulk of Midianka's early poetry: it marks contemplation, steeped in melancholy and nostalgia, as the primary activity of the poet ("I sit down on the dry beech leaves / … / And then I think, that…" (ibid.)). "To really appreciate beauty or experience love, one must also know melancholy," notes Jonathan Flatley when discussing the concept of melancholia in Romanticism (38). In many works of the Romantics melancholia is elevated as a "mode of intensified reflection and self-consciousness," as a state that stimulates contemplative approach to the world (ibid. 37). In this regard melancholia has been considered as a state of interior disorder which makes it particularly suited for intellectual activity (as does Robert Burton in his influential *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621)). In his 1969 *Melancholie und Gesellschaft* Wolf Lepenies argues that Burton's utopian work is a way to overcome the disorder of melancholia: as Flatley points out, there is "a dialectical and mutually constituting relationship between melancholia and utopia" (37). Melancholia, as well as nostalgia, usually results from the feeling of loss of something or someone to whom one is emotionally attached. Loss triggers mourning and longing for the lost object, its expression is therefore highly emotional, romantic and sentimental.

Midianka's poetry decries the loss – real or imagined – of the Transcarpathian region's ethnic and cultural diversity that made it unique as well as the loss of the traditional way of life. Midianka's feeling of loss signifies the temporal shift of modernity, but his modernity is a relative one: it is the modernity of the radical changes that the Soviet state brought to the region, while the lost utopia points to the late 19th – early 20th century, the period of the most painful transformations in the rest of Europe. The period of time when the region was first a part of the Hungarian Kingdom and then a

part of Czechoslovakia functions as a kind of "golden age" to which the poet refers recurrently: it is the time when diversity was possible while preserving the wholesome way of life in immediate proximity to nature; and it is the time when local culture and art flourished. It is only with the period of the Soviet Union that the typical transformations of modernization take place: industrialization, labor division and alienation from the products of one's labor, isolation of the people from each other and from their natural environment. Midianka's poet thus revisits sites that bear witness to the lost utopia and finds its fragments in phenomena that survived its destruction. Similarly to Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal*, the experience of loss is presented as an extensive catalogue of relics that have personal meaning to the poet, but unlike Baudelaire the *I* of the poem is not alienated from them but feels a deep connection that attests to the continuing vibrance and relevance of the lost utopia.[136] The poet shares the identity with the phenomena he describes, their loss or gradual decline is felt as a personal threat of annihilation. In this respect Midianka greatly differs from Valerii Shevchuk or Volodymyr Drozd in whose works there is a strong sense of distance to the depicted phenomena, which allows for their instrumentalization for ideological purposes. In Midianka's works, on the contrary, we feel a strong emotional connection of the poet to the objects, contexts and people he depicts, their loss is perceived as personal and it is only in this way that the poet experiences the "historicity of [his] own subjectivity" (Flatley 73).

While loss and mourning are channeled through the poet's personal experiences, there is also a major appeal to the collective memory and collective identity of the people of the region. In *The Future of Nostalgia* Svetlana Boym argues that, "unlike

[136] Cf. Jonathan Flatley's reading of Baudleaire's poems (Flatley 65-67).

melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups or nations, between personal and collective memory" (XVI). This relationship is precisely the sense of one's historicity: the placement of one's personal biography within the fate of a larger collective. Boym proposes two kinds of nostalgia: restorative, which appeals to truth and tradition and seeks a return to origins via symbols, and reflective, which expresses longing and belonging and "lingers on ruins, the patina or time and history, in the dream of another place and another time" (41). Although presented as mutually exclusive, these two forms are in my view rather extreme representations of a range of nostalgic strategies. On the one end of this spectrum lies the approach dominated by ideological activism that allows for instrumentalization of the constructed utopia for political goals in the interest of a larger collective (as manifested in Shevchuk's and Drozd's work) and on the other end lies the highly contemplative, intellectual and thus rather melancholic stance of personal relation to the paradise lost. Estrangement is the necessary element of either of these approaches, but it does not entirely overwhelm Midianka's works. The most important part in this regard plays the language that affirms the uniqueness of the land and its people. The temporal locus of many of Midianka's poems in the present where he finds proof of the past's survival, as well as his frequent turn to future in which the present will continue to exist testifies to his resistance to the romantic nostalgic strategy of the nostalgic object's otherness from the present life (cf. Boym 13). Although Midianka's search for a new language does not "explore the dialects of the past" but rather seeks to testify to the new language's existence in the presence, this still places him virtually within the "hybrid tradition of impure modernity" where

"estrangement can be not only an artistic but also an existential principle" (ibid. 29-30). Midianka's language thus is not simply stylization or decoration (as is particularly the case in Valerii Shevchuk's works), but indeed a lived identity that bears meaning for his everyday life.

To adequately place Midianka and his artistic method, a brief look at poets and writers from whom he draws continuity appears highly productive. In his interviews Midianka names a long list of "poets-interlocutors," but traces of influence can be established primarily of Bohdan-Ihor Antonych's poetics, a simplified Taras Shevchenko, and some formalist aspects of Mykhail' Semenko.[137] Antonych figures particularly prominently among the sources of Midianka's inspiration, both in terms of poetics and as a model for the poet's own self-positioning. As Midianka acknowledges in his interviews, Antonych was interesting for him primarily "as a Lemko," that is, for his hybrid identity as coming from an ethnicity that has been largely dispersed from their ancestral lands during the turmoil of the 20th century (Panchenko 24). Midianka specifically refers to Antonych as to a bard of the "land of oat and juniper," a direct quote from Antonych's poem "Ellegy on the Singing Door" (collection *Three Rings*, 1934), which paints a nostalgic but life-affirming picture of the poet's childhood and of his own Lemko village in the Carpathians (ibid.). As someone who "lost much of the Lemko dialect, but retained his Lemko syntax" (ibid. 20) Antonych serves as a model of rootedness of a genius poet in his own land and culture, while also creating exceptional works. Antonych's language (Midianka probably refers not so much to his "syntax" as to the melody and experimental

[137] Midianka names also poets-neoclassicists (Maksym Ryl's'kyi, Mykola Zerov, Pavlo Fylypovych, Osvald Burhardt, and Mykhailo Drai-Khmara), Pavlo Tychyna, as well as a score of contemporary poets (Ihor Rymaruk, Vasyl' Herasym'iuk, Oleh Lysheha, Hryhorii Chubai, Andrii Bondar, Serhii Zhadan, and others) (Panchenko 24-25).

rhyming schemes in Antonych's works)[138] is the marker of retaining a particular identity, which Midianka seeks to share with him and to promote. In this regard Antonych is the most important in the series of key figures that exemplify the local genius of the land – together with painters Andy Warhol (another famous Lemko compatriot) and Mihály Munkácsy (born in Munkács, today's Mukacheve in Ukraine), Baroque architect Vasyl' Hryhorovych-Bars'kyi, composer Artemiy Vedel', the contested Mykola Hohol / Nikolai Gogol or the national poet Taras Shevchenko. The genius of these artists is claimed in different ways: through geographic or cultural proximity, while their most important feature is the fact of their belonging to the cultural heritage that Midianka claims and hence their connection with, even indebtedness to the land and the people from which they originate. Midianka's direct address to these figures in the poems of this and other collections signifies an attempt to map himself as a poet among these prominent predecessors. His effort to localize them and to build the Transcarpathian or the Ukrainian myth upon their prominence stands in a stark contrast to the strategies employed by Oleh Lysheha, whose connection to Ezra Pound or D.H. Lawrence emphasizes aspects that transcend national or local cultural borders, is more subtle and explores possibilities of formal dialogue and continuation.

Porih [Threshold] opens with the programmatic poem "Nam" [It's up to Us], in which the poet boldly addresses his audience – a new generation (that includes him) whose mission he radically redefines. "Nam" introduces an important theme that can be

[138] Many rhymes in Antonych's works depend on assonance or consonance, or are half rhymes. In the "Song on the Indestructability of Matter" that Midianka mentions as well one finds the following rhymes: *viter – kvitom*, *pisniamy – kamin', lopit – popil, stolittia – kvittiam, palmy – kopal'ni*. In the "Elegy on the Singing Door" we find a similar approach: *iavir – uiavi*, *porih – moïkh, khloptsia – obsiah, obrazy – dryzhyt'*, and so on. This technique creates an impression of a unique and dynamic language, hardly bound by rhyme and very close in its rhythm and melody to speech.

traced throughout the entire collection: creation of a community whose uniting trait is their love for their Transcarpathian homeland. The poem is a combination of urban and countryside topoi – such as "big brick buildings" or "the warmth of the sweet milk from the farm," or "lupine, blooming by the road" – which the readers ought to love (*Porih 3*).[139] The poet encourages the reader to look forward to "overcrowded local trains" and to eagerly "[s]earch for dusty books in village / [s]hops," which appear as romanticized details of a life in the province. The second half of the poem turns to cultural and mystical aspects of one's mission. The poet invokes Lesia Ukraïnka's (Larysa Kosach's) cycle "Spring in Egypt" (1910), which connects seamlessly with the next line's call to "breathe spirit into this land" (ibid.). The parallel with Lesia Ukraïnka's achievement – as seen by the poet – is continued in the concluding lines of the poem:

Якщо навіть наважимося її	Even if we dare
Надовго покинути,	To abandon it for a long time,
Її квіти на луках стоптати,	To trample its flowers on the meadows,
То прийме нас по смерті	It will still accept us after death
Й очистить нас, якщо тільки	And cleanse us, if only
Були ми синами достойними (ibid.).	We were its worthy sons.

Such an anthropomorphic concept of *zemlia* (land, soil) is directly linked to the concept of motherhood, in which the reader (as well as the poet) functions as the lost (prodigal) son and the land – as the mother who cannot refuse a repenting child. Midianka thus directly addresses those who in the course of repressions renounced their kinship with their land or even participated in the destruction of its culture, assuring them that all will be forgiven if they be "worthy" and return. The preceding reference to Lesia Ukraïnka allows one to interpret this "worthiness" as a cultural contribution to one's own country,

[139] Citations from *Porih* will henceforth be abbreviated as P with page numbers following. All translations from Ukrainian are mine unless otherwise indicated.

thinking of *ridna storona* (one's own homeland) while being away, as did Ukraïnka's narrator in "Spring in Egypt." The concluding lines also invoke a mystical aspect of homecoming: the promise of being "cleansed" from sin is reserved only for those who remained loyal. This programmatic appeal informs the larger framework of the collection within which other motives are realized.

Several other poems of the collection are dedicated to the creation of a community of those whose homeland Transcarpathia is and who love and cherish its nature, history, and traditions. In "Rokamy meshkaiemo pid polonynoiu…" [For years we've been living below pastureland [in the mountains]…"] the poet describes a collective experience that contributes to an identity firmly rooted in the local and the traditional. This occurs by way of depicting the region and its geographic places in an idealized, sentimental fashion: "Red silk of the fall / Covered the thinned bird-cherry orchard"; "Oh, how that wild sap from Rohneska runs down in tears"; "And shiny horses wander on mountain paths!" and so on (P 7).[140] The land that emerges in such a way may indeed appear as "a garlanded paradise", though the end of the second stanza already introduces both loss and revival (rebirth):

Але все ж у нас є ще Ворсисті шепшинові зернятка, Вони тут засіються, і – терня зійде, Невибагливе терня, чіпке і живуче... (ibid.)	And yet we still have Fuzzy little seeds of the dog rose, They will saw themselves here, and – thorny bushes will sprout, Unpretentious plant, tenacious and enduring…

The metaphor of the dog rose (*shypshyna*) that is known for its ability to survive in unfavorable conditions and for its healing effects signifies the irreparability of loss, since

[140] Here and in other poems, the use of diminutives is symptomatic: *haiok* (little orchard), *zerniatka* (little seeds), etc.

the dog rose is supposed to supplant other vegetation that did not survive. However, equally valid is also a more positive reading, in which the dog rose serves as the metaphor for the Transcarpathian people – unpretentious, hard-working and persisting – of which there is still enough to assure continuation and a new generation. The sympathy for and identification with the qualities of the honest and simple mountain folk, reflected in the image of the dog rose, is directed at the community of readers whom the poet mobilizes for action by the danger of their complete disappearance.

As a series of definitions of the essence of the Transcarpathian identity, the poems "Kryvolissia: pid vershynoiu Velykyi Plai" [Krummholz: Below the Mountain Top Velykyi Plai] and "Puchky zakarpattsiv…" [Transcarpathians' fingertips…] take the effort of the community-building further. "Kryvolissia" opens with a description of an exotically beautiful landscape seen from above, with "tropically colored butterflies" and a "[l]one little grandpa [who] shepherds his nanny goat" down below, and with the "roofs of the winter camps [that] reach for the sky" (P 18). Against this idyllic backdrop the sudden emphatic outcry – "Let us love these camps – they are ours!" – creates a clear caesura, after which the calm flow of the poem continues. A similar effect is achieved not by another interjection ("Revival of the dwarf mountain pine, green saplings!" (ibid.)), but by the sudden definition of the essence of the Transcarpathian identity through nature: "Your soul is krummholz, green soul" (ibid.). The method is similar also in "Puchky zakarpattsiv…" The poem makes a distinction between various sets of identity markers: labor and its fruits (red fingertips signify typical regional products and trades – tomatoes and strawberries, dye for yarn, and red brick), possessions (shiny vizors, houses decorated with mirror pieces, and colorful paintings), and the soul. This last marker is

again defined through nature and culture: Transcarpathians' soul is "Tysa during flooding," "pasturelands in the spring," and "reverberating songs / From Bács Bodrog, Srima, Ugocsa and Bereg" (ibid.).[141] The legacy of the national Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko is also present here: through the soft allusion to his "Dumy moï, dumy" [My thoughts, thoughts] in the rhetorical "A de zh dity kolyshniu skorbotu?! / Na muzeinykh bokorakh pustyty po ruslu sukhomu?!" [What to do with the past sorrow? / Let it flow down the dry river bed on museum rafts?] (ibid.). The very last component – and hence perhaps the most important one – is "rough Old Slavonic words, / That nowe you say without shame and fear" (ibid.). The use of *dnes'* (now, rendered in the English translation through its Middle English variant "nowe") exemplifies an attitude that encourages the readers – following the poet – to embrace the Rusyn part of their identity.

A considerable part of the collection is dedicated to documenting Transcarpathian sites. In regard to this Vadym Trinchii emphasizes the connection to acmeism that becomes apparent through the precision of his language that conflicts with an "approximate way of thinking" and thus leads to hermetism (22). Precise documenting of Transcarpathian reality usually occurs either directly, in poems that are entirely devoted to describing certain urban, natural, or rural locations; or indirectly, in poems that utilize them as a background. In general, Transcarpathian region and its material reality (contemporary as seen through its history) are the most important object of the poet's attention. In *Porih* the poems dedicated to the region's urban, rural and natural sites are "Potyssia," "Mandrivka v staryi Sevliush" [Travel to Old Sevliush], "Rokamy meshkaiemo pid polonynoiu…" [For years we've been living below pastureland…],

[141] Bács Bodrog, Ugocsa and Bereg were administrative counties of the Hungarian Kingdom at the beginning of the 20th century; Srima is a Dalmatian village in today's Croatia.

"Beladonna z Uhol's'koho zapovidnoho masyvu" [Beladonna from Uhol' Reservation], "Verkhovyns'ka nuta" [A Highland Note], "Kryvolissia pid vershunoiu Velykyi Plai" [Krummholz Below the Mountain Top Velykyi Plai], "Vechir u zelenii kolystsi" [Evening in the Green Cradle], "Seren spivuchyi i lehki syreny…" [The singing ice crust and light sirens], "Shcho zh, malen'kyi Provans…" [So, little Provence…], "Prysilok Stebnyi. Rakhivshchyna" [Little Village Stebnyi, Rakhiv District] and "Pisnia Mutsiana Ivan'ka" (Ivan'ko Mutsian's Song). These poems describe the region in its various facets, usually with a sentimental detail and a strong nostalgic component to it. Depictions of local residents (or simply people in the Transcarpathian setting) can be considered a variety of the same nostalgic documentation strategy, as the people are described primarily through their belonging to the region or to a regional landscape. Such are the poems "Puchky zakarpattsiv…" [Transcarpathians' fingertips], "Uhryn vesnuie" [A Hungarian Man Welcomes Spring], "Litnia rumunka v misti" [Middle-Aged Romanian Woman in the City], "Ia bachyv tebe na rakhivs'komu bazari…" [I saw you at the Rakhiv market…], "Dolynianka na rynku" [A Woman from the Valley at the Market], "Bereziv huliaie" [Bereziv Celebrates], and "Botanik" [Botanist].

"Potyssia," dedicated to the area of Transcarpathia along the Tysa river, continues the pathos of "Nam" but moves from the imagined collective to the individual – the poet himself. The rather abstract new generation thus becomes concrete in the figure of the poet. The poem stands out for a combination of low and high styles, especially when the latter is infused with pathos. Rural landscape motivates lower lexical choices such as *tiamyty* (to know), *hryzty* (to nag), *bytlyva* (one that tends to stab with horns (fem.)), or *smahliavyi* (partially tanned). These lower elements stand in stark contrast with phrases

such as the pathos-filled "[y]our parents' soul, your soul is in Potyssia," nostalgic "[t]his little towns' quiet secret [*taïna*] is for you," or the sentimental "[i]t is for you that the boatman sings on Tysa" (P 4). The inner dialogue that unfolds in such a manner marks the space as a personal microcosm that has personal meaning to the poet: his memories of encounter with nature and people signify the uniqueness of the space to him. Such encounters are singular events (e.g., when a local resident – an image of a typified resident of Potyssia – offers him water from a clean well, or when the boatman sings while rowing on Tysa, and so on), but together they amount to a manifold reiterated vision of the space where simple, hardworking, and creative people live and where nature harmoniously combines with those characteristics of the residents and their activities. Definition of the geographic space through meaningful events transcends the personal dimension and establishes exceptionality of the space in the last line of the poem: "Such land is unique" (Така земля – одна) (P 4). As an appeal, this is directed at the reader and the inner dialogue transforms into a moral urging to cherish the land that is so unique. If the opening poem of the collection addressed the loyalty to the land and the physical connection with it (like a mother, it will accept the body of its (faithful) child if it dies away from it), "Potyssia" focuses on the mystical belonging (your parents' soul and your own soul belong here). The triple invocation *tobi* (to you) – referring to immaterial phenomena – emphatically urges the reader to realize her or his connection with the space, to accept responsibility for something that belongs to them so intimately:

Ці пасма гір, що восени вогнисті, Тобі належать з палахтінням ватр. Тобі човняр виспівує на Тисі. Тобі – містечок тиха таїна (P 4).	These mountain strands, fiery in the fall, To you belong, along with blazing bonfires. To you the boatman sings on Tysa. To you – the little towns' quiet secret.

"Mandrivka v staryi Sevliush" [Travel to the Old Sevliush] is similarly framed as a very private travel in time rather than space.[142] The town of Sevliush emerges before the reader in its different historical manifestations indicated by the key events that the poet chooses. The town's first identity is Hungarian, communicated through mentioning the influential Hungarian composer Béla Bartók who lived in the town briefly.[143] Bartók's space is highly symbolic here: in Sevliush, young Bartók "felt the scent of his homeland," and witnessed "the blood of suffering and privation" (P 5). The latter image is filled both with pathos and romantic idealization (chances of Bartók's insight at the age of eight were rather slim), relying heavily on the image of a genius child whom the poet incorporates into the town's identity. The poet does not try to strip Bartók of his apparent patriotic feelings towards the town, or to repurpose these feelings towards another national cause.[144] The Hungarian dimension of the town – as part of the region's identity – remains standing as valid and rightful, without threatening other national or cultural components of the place. The town's next incarnation is as a transit Gypsy town, which balances out the high culture signaled by Bartók's figure (the Roma enter the town singing their "sad songs," that is, musically complementing the Hungarian and high culture component (P 5)). This middle part also connects the poet to the town and reveals the personal meaning it has for him: "My grandpa used to buy plain tobacco from the Magyar," the poet relates (ibid.). The town's multicultural identity thus informs the poet's own identity, in which different national and cultural components coexist. The

[142] The poem is subtitled as a diary entry.
[143] The footnote in the collection of poetry incorrectly identifies Sevliush (Ukrainian Vynohradiv, Hungarian Nagyszölös) as Bartók's birthplace, which in reality was the town of Nagyszentmyklós. However, as a child, Bartok indeed lived in Sevliush between 1888 and 1892.
[144] As was emphasized above, the main component of the Transcarpathian identity for Midianka is the region's cultural and ethnic diversity.

final manifestation of the town is through the experience of World War II, when "[a]t the train station echelons of trains used to stop – / To Germany they carried prisoners inside" (ibid.). This last side of the town reveals a connection to Soviet history of the town. The poet, therefore, acknowledges the Soviet part of the common memory and exhibits a nuanced approach to identity: one that includes different parts without denying any one of them. At the same time, the Soviet experience, represented through the war ("And white seagulls choked on blood at Tysa / And were falling into the shooting and smoke" (ibid.)). Remarkable is that the Ukrainian or the Hungarian names of the old town never explicitly come up in the text of the poem (although Vynohradiv is mentioned in the footnote on Bartók and therefore is present implicitly nevertheless). This foregrounds the Czech history of the town (as Sevluš) and endows the prosperous interwar period, during which the town was part of Czechoslovakia, with particular importance.

One of they key reasons for Midianka's success in approaching the traditional and the local is that, despite the general pathos and the appeal to embrace, remember and cherish the regional and local phenomena, there is no overwhelming enthusiasm in his poems that could be connected to the mission of restoring the past in the present. This has to do to a great extent with the prominent place that nostalgia, melancholy and mourning for loss occupy in his poetry. Midianka maps the past in the present day reality, reminisces about it, and mourns its loss, but he does not use it as a foundation for a new, compensatory project of a unified nation that takes revenge for the past humiliation and suffering (as is the case in the works of Shevchuk and Drozd, to a varying extent). The traumatic events of the past do not serve as a legitimation for a national project that competes with a narrative hostile towards it, although such events do justify the moral

position of commemoration that Midianka advances. Traditional, patriarchal views on society are indeed promoted in Midianka's poetry, but they are not coupled with a project of a homogenous nation. Midianka's self-positioning as the bard of the periphery plays a decisive role in this: marginal phenomena are essential to the validity of his works. The inherent multiculturalism of the Transcarpathian region – evident in its contemporary material manifestation – makes a reverse mimicking of the totalizing Soviet project impossible. What emerges is an odd combination of dynamism (openness to the world through polyethnic social composition that engenders multiculturalism) and rigidity (conservation of the traditional patriarchal way of life that all ethnic groups share, especially in the past). This project is indeed proposed as an alternative to the Soviet project – and in this Midianka falls into the modernist category, – but, because of its nature, the proposed project resists primarily the homogenizing effort of the Soviet totalitarianism, and thus favors decentering and periphery. This overarching attitude allows for more nuance and complexity in Midianka's works than in the works of Drozd and Shevchuk.

These strategies can be traced in various poems of the collection. In "Prysilok Stebnyi. Rakhivshchyna" [Little Village Stebnyi, Rakhiv District] the poet once again travels to a Transcarpathian site. Nostalgia is combined here – as in several other poems – with autumn as the time of the year that inspires sadness, melancholy, and the realization of loss. The past is dispersed in the village's surrounding landscape and its nature; the poet does not try to appropriate it, but simply acknowledges its penetrating presence. As in some other poems, the poet is struck by the particular beauty of the moment of his arrival – often it's either sunset or sunrise – which allows him to paint a dramatic picture

of the landscape: "In the fall you arrive in Stebnyi – / There are hay stacks, fiery from the morning sun" (P 23). The sudden character of these images that capture a short, passing moment points to a pseudo-naïve and impressionistic stance. The poet's figure emerges, therefore, in close proximity to the character of the local residents he depicts, especially when dialectal words are employed. The use of dialect allows the poet to include phenomena of reality that usually fall outside of the poetic sphere. At the same time, words unknown to the reader hide prosaic meaning that would otherwise disturb the poetic mode: such are, for instance, the "cherry branches, sprinkled with manure [*balyha*]" (ibid.).[145] Midianka's poems therefore often allow for two readings: one in which the dialectal words are judged entirely by their phonetic sound and are accepted by the reader as colorful details of the local identity (the meaning is often guessed based on allusions to Ukrainian, which in most cases fails to adequately render the correct meaning), and one that is accessible to the local, initiated reader who enjoys the energy the poetry draws from elevating a lower variant (dialect) to the higher sphere of poetic language. The inclusion of a small dictionary in later collections – *Dyzhma* [Tithe] (2003) and *Maramoros'kyi rozlom* [Maramoros Cleft] (2011) – partially addresses the issue of comprehensibility of Midianka's poetry, but it also signifies a change in the poet's self-positioning, now aiming for a national recognition. The second half of the poem focuses on material representation of the past: gutters that are cut into the rocks (*valoby*). These serve as symbolic markers of the place's historical events: a Hutsul carved them out when a Hungarian royal princes prayed nearby; and later the "Ruthenian infantry drank water

[145] The editor provides no footnote for this word. In general, footnotes are not consistent in explaining all dialect words. This changes in the later collections, to which Midianka adds a small vocabulary of dialect words used in the poems.

there / Under the roof. It was going far, / Thither, towards Danube" (ibid.). The turn to the past is based here on its concrete material representation in the present; it thus reinscribes the past into the present, establishing a connection to the past and renewing the historical meaning of familiar objects that are now estranged. The concluding two lines of the poem bring in its moral dimension:

Блудиш по Стебному. І по ночах сновигають До гражди твої предки забуті... (ibid.)	You wander around Stebnyi. And at night roam Towards farmstead your forgotten ancestors…

Events of the past that are mentioned in the poem honor the place as a historic, unique site. The mention of forgotten ancestors brings tension between the past and the present: such extraordinary places should not remain neglected, while the implicit community of the reader and the poet that the pronoun "your" (*tvoi*) creates urges the reader to follow suit.

Portraits of typical local residents, as well as of other people that are representative of the regional urban or rural landscape, form an important part of the collection. As Vadym Trinchii argues, "Midianka's monologism dresses itself as a historian's monologism, or, to be more precise, as that of a chronicler" (21). People portrayed in the poems emerge as remnants of the past, as outsiders in the new environment, standing out for their obvious alien status in the contemporary setting. At the same time, captured in their natural environment – which depends on the person described – they fit in perfectly and the loss of this harmony is the main focus of the poems. "Litnia rumunka v misti" (A Middle-Aged Romanian Woman in the City) represents a portrait of the Romanian woman in a way that manifests tragic aspects of the woman's situation and the poet's sympathy for her. The poem is an excellent example of

the possibility for a double reading by an initiated and a non-initiated audience. The opening line of the poem goes as follows: "Стару волошку змучила журба" which is open to a number of readings depending on the reader's cultural contextualization. *Voloshka* in the poem refers to the archaic form *volokh* (*vlakh*) in reference to the Wallachian (that is, Romanian) woman. But to the non-initiated reader *voloshka* may carry the more widely known meaning of cornflower, thus creating an entirely new metaphor in the poem where the initiated reader would only see a national denotation. It is also supported through the woman's description in metaphors of nature ("Sorrow exhausted the old Wallachian woman," "Her whole body faded [*vytsvilo*], 'cause it's time to fade" (ibid.)).[146]

The poem also exhibits a curious break in style. In the line "Wallachian woman, I do not write a madrigal" (P 11), the mentioning of the Renaissance genre of erotic, often ironic verse, addressed to an apparently uneducated, older woman results in a tension between the high and the low style that is intensified by the awkward rhyming of madrigal with a bread roll that the woman eats in that moment (*rohalyk – madryhalyk*: "Під ясеном жує крихкий рогалик. / ... / Я не пишу, волошко, мадригалик" [Under the ash tree she was chewing a brittle crescent roll; Wallachian woman, I do not write a madrigal (ibid.)], thus producing a comic effect. The use of vocabulary that records the physiological process of eating in detail (*zhuvaty*, "to chew" instead of the more neutral *ïsty*, "to eat"), especially with the mentioning of the roll's "brittleness." The discrepancy between the high and low thus intensifies further to create an image of sentimental fragility and touching pity, not least through the focus on her age and poverty ("Because

[146] See also my earlier discussion of this device in the poem "Prysilok Stebnyi. Rakhivshchyna."

violins of reverberating weddings are nothing now, / Worn-out rags are on her back" (ibid.)).

The old woman is also an exotic creature, and her exoticism in the city setting becomes apparent through her language, which is presented as her inherent, "natural" feature:

«Че фаче, світе, з мене, з моїх рух, Че фаче?» - шепче й непомітно плаче. І кожне слово в горлі, кожен звук – Ота тяжка мелодія «че фаче» (ibid.).	"Ce face, world, with me, with my hands, Ce face?" – she whispers and cries unconsciously. And every word in her throat, every sound – Is that heavy melody "ce face."[147]

The language of the Romanian woman connects deeply with her body and her identity, which clash with the surrounding city where she came "for begging, / Waiting" (ibid.).

Consistency of these strategies of depiction can be traced in two poems that are dedicated to younger women – "Ia bachyv tebe na rakhivs'komu rynku…" [I saw you at the Rakhiv market…] and "Dolynianka na rynku" [A Woman from the Valley at the Market]. The former one is imbued with Romanticism of a chance encounter under the most mundane circumstances. Here, too, the woman is described in powerful parallels to nature: "And you stood there dumbfounded, / Like a roe deer from the top of the Dumen mountain, / That accidentally made it to Rakhiv / And didn't know where to flee" (P 12). Against the background of the busy town ("This Sunday Rakhiv colorfully / scurried along the streets" (ibid.)) the poet stands out through his connection to culture – he "mumbles" Ivan Franko's sonnets, apparently "just for himself," but also concerning her (ibid.). The traditional, patriarchal role definition is entirely upheld here. The poem ends with an addition of a *femme fatale* notion: the woman has just what the poet has been

[147] The footnote to the phrase in the collection offers "what do you do" as translation for "ce face."

looking for, and what he, "probably, never, / Ever will find again" (ibid.). The latter poem – "Dolynianka na rynku" – is significantly more sexual as it zooms in on the feminine body of the woman. The poem opens with the image of the "fiery apron [that] / Coiled around the waist, / Like the serpent-seducer that / Once coiled around the paradise tree" (P 13). Through a reinterpretation of the original sin parable (in the poem, the serpent is female – *zmiia-spokusytel'ka*, not *zmii-spokusytel'*), the woman is effectively likened to the serpent and thus becomes the seducer of the poet. The "fiery apron" around the woman's waist points to the sexual desire that it enkindles in the poet. At the same time, the face of the woman – as the source of cultural information – is practically absent: it's "inexpressive," like a "pink plumpness" (ibid.). Consequently, while the poet is writing this poem about the woman, she is denied any language, entirely limited to the domain of her body: "And so you stand with the string, mutely" (ibid.). The physicality of the woman, her power over the poet are explained through connotations of dark magic that reflect popular rituals and allude to Gogol. From the very beginning the woman is depicted as corrupting, and thus she must be corrupt herself: she "ate the lightly rotten fruit of the pear tree / Together with brown little seeds" (ibid.). The magic of the encounter is threatened to be interrupted by the rooster's cry, but it could just be avoided. Finally, the mentioned string – that eventually became part of the apron – tied once the feet of a dead man, stealing which one believed to steal luck. The woman is, therefore, portrayed as a being of nature in the middle of an urban setting (market), possessing popular magical powers that capture the poet.

Traditional, patriarchal way of life is not presented as an absolute value. The poet does include a dialogic device to convince the reader of the importance of tradition. In

"Prychetnist' do ladkannia" [Involvement in Wedding Singing] this has to do primarily with the identity, which here is based on folklore, and its passing on from one generation to another. After marveling about *ladkannia*, a special kind of Carpathian and Transcarpathian wedding songs performed by women matchmakers, and the meaning concealed in it, the poet invokes the figure of the prominent ethnomusicologist Filaret Kolessa who recorded such songs in the beginning of the 20th century. The written culture, therefore, will ensure the folklore's survival, but the poet is concerned with the lived oral tradition in which he and his own descendants would be involved:

А хто ж тепер заладкає мені?	And who will sing those wedding songs for me?
Які свашки? Від Бескиду до Тиси?!	What kind of matchmakers? From Beskyd to Tysa?!
Ех, я нудний патріархал –	Ah, I am patriarchal through and through –
Завів собі на давнє...	Again about old times…
І згадав весільний епос дивних предків.	Recalling the wedding epos of my strange ancestors.
Чи виросте без колискової мій син?	Will my son grow up without a lullaby?
Без ладкання дочка моя віддасться?..	Will my daughter marry without wedding songs?
Невже нащадки, юна горда павіть,	Did the descendants, young and proud saplings,
Найкращий скарб втоптали в небуття? (P 16)	Trample to nothing the most precious treasure?

Strategy of self-deprecation that is meant to elicit the reader's sympathy and protest is supported by an emphatic "Oh, no!" from the poet (ibid.). Referring to folklore (*ladkannia* and lullabies) as to "the most precious treasure" already prefigures the poet's emotional rejection of its decline. Similarly, description of *ladkannia* melancholically as "[zh]urba, pechal', chy skarhy" (sorrow, sadness, or lament) negates the characterization of ancestors as "strange," an attitude that is clearly imported from outside and is supposed to reflect the popular opinion from which the poet distances himself (ibid.).

Even if the songs are not passed on to the next generation, the poet argues, the very nature of the region will carry on the beautiful tradition: "Even today, in cold storm winds, the spruce trees / Sing below Beskyd" (ibid.).

Perhaps the most complex part of Midianka's poetry – and one that directly affects its success in dealing with issues of national and regional identity as expressed through promotion of tradition and the local diversity – is the poet's self-positioning. As discussed above, Midianka sees himself as a bard of the periphery, and so his poetic effort is to a considerable extent dedicated to the nostalgic depiction and celebration of the history and traditions of the Transcarpathian region. In doing so, Midianka turns to poets and artists who serve as a model for one or another aspect of his own identity as a poet. Besides aesthetic influences, this also includes the poet's position vis-à-vis society, as Midianka offers parallels from artistic biographies of people he models himself on. The most important element of such modeling is the connection of the selected poets and writers to their land and their people in form of a moral obligation to become its voice.

In this regard, Bohdan-Ihor Antonych is the strongest and most important figure for Midianka. Antonych is directly mentioned only once in this collection, but his influence is felt throughout the collection. The programmatic impact of Antonych's two poems is particularly evident in Midianka's works: "Pisnia pro neznyshchennist' materiï" [The Song about the Indestructability of Matter] (*Knyha leva* [The Lion's Book], 1936) and "Vesna" ("Roste Antonych i roste trava…") [Spring (Antonych grows and grass grows)] (*Zelena Ievanheliia* [Green Evangelium], 1938). As mentioned above, Antonych is the closest to the model that Midianka tries to realize, since he is a Lemko and his poetry prominently features elements of the natural environment of the same region. The

two poems are programmatic as they express cultural autochthony that is deeply rooted in the natural world in which a people lives: hence Antonych's striking self-projection as a "wise dog" that lies under the magical fern flower, "covered by the sky and wrapped in songs" ("Pisnia pro neznyshchennist' materiï"). Similarly influential is Antonych's antropomorphization of nature that becomes a carrier of culture equal to humans: "Antonych grows, and grass grows, / Green curly alders stand above. / Oh lean over, just lean over closer, / and you will hear most secret words of all" ("Vesna"). We can find echoes of these foundational principles in many of Midianka's poems, most prominently in "Prychetnist' do ladkannia," "Rokamy meshkaiemo pid polonynoiu," "Verkhovyns'ka nuta," "Kryvolissia pid vershynoiu Velykyi Plai" and "Shcho zh, malen'kyi Provans," some of which were discussed in detail above. Midianka clearly sees himself as continuing and radicalizing Antonych's achievements, most importantly in the sphere of dialectal language. Antonych, therefore, serves as Midianka's departure point and defines his push for innovation. Publications of the 1990s – collections *Farametlyky* [Embroidery] and *Oseredok* [Midpoint] (both 1994) – carry this motivation even further, but the later publications in the 2000s and 2010s show a retreat from this program and an attempt to include a wider, all-Ukrainian audience – most evident in the attachment of vocabularies of Transcarpathian words and phrases, and of a commentary on the relevant place names that come up in the poems. Inconsistencies even within one interview when discussing these matters reveal the programmatic character of Midianka's stance as a regional poet. While earlier in the 2010 interview he states that he never considered his own reception among the readers (Panchenko 19), later he refers to Kotliarevskyi when explaining the addition of a vocabulary ("If Kotliarevs'kyi created a small dictionary for

Eneïda, then I shouldn't be ashamed either") (ibid. 27). Reference to Kotliarevskyi – the author of the very first and immensely successful work in vernacular Ukrainian – reveals not only that Midianka is aware of the language barrier his readers face, but also a change in his self-positioning and an attempt to free himself from the limitations that a purely regional identity imposes and to reach a wider audience receptive to his message.

An important figure for Midianka is Taras Shevchenko who appears here in a simplified, truncated form, presented as the poet of the idealized people and the land. Shevchenko is introduced through the figure of *khrushch* (May beetle), famously featured in his canonic poem "Sadok vyshnevyi kolo khaty…" [Little Cherry Orchard by the Hut] (collection *V kazemati* [In the Casemate], 1847). Shevchenko's presence only through this melancholic poem – written while waiting to be sent into exile[148] – that reflects his feelings of loss and desperation in one of the darkest moments of his life is symptomatic of a reduction of Shevchenko's depth for Midianka's own appropriation and legitimation purposes. Even within the collection *V kazemati* there are numerous examples of a portrayal of the people that deeply strikes with disillusionment and archetypal complexity (cf. "Za bairakom bairak…" [A gully after gully], depicting fratricide, or "Ne kydai materi…" [Don't abandon your mother…"], which presents a dark image of ruin and desolation in the Ukrainian countryside). We don't find anything of that in Midianka's "Travneva variatsiia z khrushchamy" [May Variation with May Beetles]. The poem is filled with images of May beetles as symbols of the idyllic Ukrainian countryside and traditions it represents: the poet delights in the "sweet" sound of the water and the

[148] The 2003 commented edition of Shevchenko's poetry mentions that some poems of the collection were likely written earlier, while they were finalized already in exile (cf. Shevchenko 549-550).

"ringing" humming of the beetles whose "little wings – pearl garments" – shine in "flower-decorated gardens" (P 8). For the poet, these are the images that make Shevchenko and young Antonych come "alive,"[149] while the poet enthusiastically affirms life in the moment and ties his local identity to the Ukrainian identity represented by his reading of Shevchenko: "But May is ours! Oh, how the May beetles hum, / Born all over Ukraine!" (народжені на всенькій Україні) (ibid.).

Authorial self-positioning in the collection also becomes apparent through a series of portraits of artists that exhibit cultural or regional proximity to the poet. In "Vitol'd iz Tsehol'nians'koï" [Vitol'd from Tsehol'nians'ka], the artist is a hard-worker, paying attention to nothing but his work: "He worked tirelessly. He didn't know that he was hungry, / That the ceiling in his hut was overgrowing with mold" (P 31). (The obsession with which the artist works on his paintings parallels the poet's self-description in "Ironichne" [An Ironical Piece], discussed further below.] The poem reveals sudden depth in the description of the content of the artwork:

З верхів'їв Ужа лемки на пониззі,	Lemkos from the head of the Uzh river now in the lowland,
В некрополі потомків черепи...	In the necropolis – skulls of their descendants…
Печальний етнос, трохи що не маври.	A sad ethnos, almost like Moors.
Що діється на тому полотні? (ibid.)	What's going on on that canvas?

This apocalyptic image is complemented by the imagery traditionally associated with apocalypse – serpents, slimy slugs and streams of human fluids (here – sweat), but the way the imagery is combined is highly ambiguous: some of the lines can be read as a description of the painting, or the portrait of the artist himself. The skulls of the

[149] This is a reference to Antonych's poem "Vyshni" (Cherry Trees) from his collection *Zelena Ievanheliia* (1938): "Antonych used to be a May beetle and lived once on cherry trees, / the same cherry trees praised by Shevchenko" ("Vyshni").

descendants certainly are meant to be a warning: displaced Lemkos, having lost their connection to the land that defines their identity, can produce only damaged ("sad") offspring. Although indirectly, this is one of the very few descriptions of the local population that lacks idealization in the collection.

The founder of the realism in the Hungarian 19th century painting, Mihály Munkácsy, is the hero of the poem "Munkachi." The poem mostly serves as a marker of Munkácsy's identity as a Transcarpathian, although it describes some of the motifs in his paintings, as well as a general statement on his artistic position ("How hard it is to be a master of realism" (P 32)), referring primarily to the social tension depicted in his works. A similar function fulfills the poem "Arkhitektor Hryhorovych-Bars'kyi" [Architect Hryhorovych-Bars'kyi] that features the most prominent representative of the Ukrainian baroque as a symbol of an exceptional Ukrainian achievement, especially in contrast to the lack thereof in the imperial sovereign. Inclusion of Hryhorovych-Bars'kyi also brings in the religious dimension as an important element of the Ukrainian identity, combining it with national and class struggle: "Faith was being built and our cleansing, / And the working hand was forming a fist" (ibid.).

"Shevchenko. Podorozh cherez Baliasne pid Dykan'koiu" [Shevchenko: Travel through Baliasne near Dykan'ka] continues the rather selective appropriation of Taras Shevchenko: the poem is filled with idealized images of tiny huts and little villages, and the Romantic landscapes with moon. The poem reiterates what was already discussed above: Shevchenko is important to Midianka primarily as a model in his radical devotion to his land and his people. The last two lines of the poem emphasize this particularly: "In my soul is my land! Ukraine! / In the traveler's warm calluses" (ibid.). Echoes of this

programmatic stance can be found in several poems of the collection, discussed above. Similar in this regard is invocation of the Ukrainian-Russian writer Mykola Hohol' (Nikolai Gogol). The poem "Ianovshchyna-Hoholevo" establishes the connection to Hohol' through geography that defines the writer's work: such are the "gopher's arabesques" in the steppe, or the "ingenious creations of the moles" (P 36). The presence of Hohol''s physical attributes (his house, collections of his works situated in the Ukraine or elsewhere) is juxtaposed with his absence, thus lamenting the writer's departure from the land that gave him inspiration:

Відьми й чортяки стогнуть у ярмі, Б'ючи жбани зі славної Опішні.	Witches and demons wail under the yoke, Breaking clay pots from the famed Opishnia.
Прийшли до Гоголя. А Гоголя нема.	They came to Hohol'. But there is no Hohol'.
Є дім. І «Рим». І «Миргород»...	His house is there. And "Rome." And "Myrhorod"…
Та слава! (ibid.)	And fame!

"Artemii Vedel'" introduces the figure of the prominent Ukrainian composer of the 18th century Artemii Vedel'. The poem on Vedel' is the most dramatic one in this series, as it outlines the life and work of the talented musician who was prosecuted for his beliefs and incarcerated in a psychiatric asylum. The poem comes very close to reproducing the state of despair and confusion of the composer. Its power lies in Vedel''s vulnerable proclamation of love to his homeland, his land and the nature around him. This also emerges as the target of the prosecution, revealing its absurdity and inhuman character. In a series of fragmented statements that project the stream of consciousness of the composer, the poem brings familiar topoi of the Ukrainian landscape:

Бреду степами, земленько кохана, Блакитні хори з півчими – не світ.	I wander in your steppe, my beloved land, It's not a world – but sky-blue chorus full of singers.

Але вітчизна!.. Вишняки, як рана...	What a fatherland!.. Cherry gardens like a wound…
Чи цій землі співати вже не слід?	Are we not to praise this land anymore?
Весь вік збирати житні околоти,	Ought we all our life collect rye sheaves,
Довіку порпатись у гноїщі, в ріллі?	Rummage in manure until we die?
Я гомоном козацької голоти	With the uproar of the poorest Cossacks
Перемузичу царських скрипалів (ibid.)	I'll outshine the Czar's violinists.

The poem strikes with its authenticity and clarity as it introduces a strong moral component: that is, it is unjustifiable to prosecute one for loving and praising their homeland. This poem also defines the background that in a major way defines Midianka's work: namely, the prohibition of a national expression unless it readily dissolves in the Soviet Russo-centric concept of the "family of the peoples." The many reiterative proclamations of love to the Ukrainian and Transcarpathian land and its people radically reject this approach showing its inhumanity and seek to empower the community of readers to embrace their culture and their history. Vedel' appears here as the first in a series of martyrs for their homeland's culture, and the last line of the poem makes him the predecessor of the many blind folk bards (*lirnyky*, *kobzari*) who fell victim to Soviet repressions.

The concluding poem of the collection – "Travneva vulytsia Erdeli" [Erdeli's May Street] – is dedicated to Adal'bert Erdeli (Hryts'), the founder of Uzhhorod Art School and a painter of international acclaim who made the decision to stay in his provincial city of Uzhhorod instead of pursuing a promising career in the West. Erdeli was educated at the Budapest Academy of Arts; he lived, worked and held exhibitions in the West (Munich, Paris, Prague, and prolonged stays at various locations in Italy); he painted in the style that showed the influence of Western impressionism and that he defined as "expressionist realism" (qtd. in: Nebesnyk, "Adal'bert Erdeli i natsional'ne

pytannia" 19). Erdeli is famous for his works in portraiture, landscape, and still life that were largely dedicated to the Transcarpathian region and its people (with more Soviet themes from the 1940s on). Although he was partially of German and Hungarian origin, which exposed him to harassment from the Soviet authorities, and despite considerable integration into the Western cultural world, Erdeli refused to leave his Transcarpathian homeland and directed his efforts at developing the art school he founded in Uzhhorod. In his Munich diary, Erdeli expresses his sense of an obligation before his people and his homeland:

> And yet, despite everything, I feel that I have to stay there, that I have to go there, at least so that its small icon lamp of culture may get a longer wick, so that I may serve as a torch that will shed more light on the strange romanticism of my beautiful Verkhovyna. Because its every little part is mine… … My mother bore me there out of the land of coniferous forests, my father embraced me with the thick ozone… (Erdeli 193; translation to English is mine).

Marginalized under the Soviet regime, Erdeli continued to work in the provincial Uzhhorod, staying true to his formal technique. The myth of Erdeli, along with Bohdan-Ihor Antonych's myth, form the foundation for Midianka's own self-positioning as a regional poet vis-à-vis Ukraine and the West. Antonych's and Erdeli's close focus on identity that is defined through the land finds immediate continuation in Midianka's works. Their dedication to depicting and promoting their homeland, and their integration into Western culture that stands in stark contrast with their marginal position in the Ukrainian/Soviet culture and society are the principal building blocks for Midianka's own stance as an artist addressing his audience.

"Travneva vulytsia Erdeli" constructs an image of a genius painter as a man who is lacking in social attributes or is even a social outcast: he is "[b]areheaded, barefoot,

without a skull cap" as opposed to the city dwellers where "women's hand palms are sprinkled with perfume" (P 37). Like Vedel' in the previous poem, Erdeli is walking through the landscape to which he is intimately connected. The inadequate treatment that the artist receives in his home city is signaled through the dimensions: the genius of the master is confined to alleys that are "too narrow" for him (ibid.). In defining the painter's Transcarpathian identity, Midianka employs the reverse technique from the one used in previous poems: now it's the artist's soul that is "invisibly present / In the oaks' open-winged blooming crowns" (ibid.). The social aspect of the artist's position is then revealed through the juxtaposition in which the city whose identity he defines does not know the artist ("It [soul] is present in the inner yards where no one knows you" (ibid.)). Finally, the poet appeals to the genius artist to forgive the city dwellers and to turn to the city itself that is both the carrier of a past, idyllic identity (that is, of a time when the city dwellers did appreciate their own cultural leaders) and the source of the artist's inspiration: "Don't rebuke them [for it]. Love the inner yards [instead]" (ibid.). In this way the concluding poem provides the final components of the poetic program to which Midianka subscribes in his first collection of poetry: the poet's task is to praise the land that bore him and inspires him, not to criticize its people for their shortcomings. This forgiving attitude reveals the concept of a people that remains infantile and essentially cannot accept responsibility for its own actions, as it continues to be a victim of the circumstances. The poet then has the mission to enlighten them: often against their will, he forces them to take a close look at their surroundings and their history and in this way to overcome their own ignorance and begin to love and cherish the land of their ancestors. The poet himself may be exposed to ostracism and has to be ready to accept it

for the greater good of bringing his people back to the lost paradise. This is particularly well expressed in "Ironichne" [An Ironic Piece], which in many ways parallels the portrayal of Erdeli in "Travneva vulytsia Erdeli": the poorly dressed poet ("A piece of muffler showing from beneath the old sheepskin coat") is juxtaposed with the elite of the little town, "as gaudy as a peacock," that calls to avoid the poet like a leper (P 25). This social rejection the poet then uses as motivation to turn to the land, (literally) grow deeper into the land, draw inspiration from it and create for it. The concept of the "land" undergoes a transformation that makes it a divisive instrument: it separates the autochthonous people from those who are alienated from the land. The latter one are generally defined in opposition to the simple, natural way of life as represented by the mountain and valley residents: simple, good-hearted, hardworking and sincere peasants who love their land and its traditions. Essentially, the local identity the poet promotes is their identity and he sees himself as part of this collective as well. Although urban landscape signifies culture and, therefore, is important, it is secondary to the rural and natural scenery in Midianka's poetry: those who lost touch with their land and adopted a different set of vaules are, therefore, for the most part (Soviet) city dwellers.

Porih also contains a small number of poems that are less concerned with the myth of local identity and its promotion and focuses instead on impressions. Such works are examples of the aesthetic function's dominance and they are artistically highly successful. "U troiandovykh uhiddiakh zelenhospu…" [In the rose fields of the zelenhosp"] is dedicated to the memory of a place (*zelenhosp*, the Soviet-style flower nursery with open fields) and a person (the florist), and realizes the meditation on a lost paradise through an elaborate interplay of the colors red and black and through two

thematic circles. The poem begins as a description that has a clear revelatory and mystical meaning: “In the rose fields of the zelenhosp / Two black hens, / Dressed in red combs, / Graze” (P 29). The connection of this image to the mad nun (who “mixed up her rosary” prayers again because of the hens) introduces dark symbols that are realized in the death of the florist (ibid.). This death functions in the poem as the marker of the end of the ideal, paradisiac period that occurs once the divine departs from the place: while the florist was still alive, the poet could get “whole sheaves of daffodils,” but now one had to beg even for “flower stems” to put on the florist’s grave (ibid.). This completes the inner thematic circle – the story of the florist. The concluding lines of the poem close the outer thematic cycle which is a parallel between the idyllic, poetic, and paradisiac state (red roses in black soil) and the nightmarish, trivial, and infernal state (red combs of the hens on their black bodies):

Залишилась парость кволенька й дочасна,	Only scrubs remained, sickly and premature,
Та й ту згребли кури на грядці,	Yet even that the hens on the garden bed scraped up,
Згребли як на зло.	Scraped up as if out of spite.
І ти самовільно враз хочеш	And suddenly you want willfully
Зірвати із чорного торфу...	To pluck from the black peat…
Курячий гребінь! (ibid.)	A hen’s comb!

The destructive impetus of the last two lines is highly symbolic and is meant to achieve a change in the present-day reality that brings back the paradise: plucking the hens’ combs, the poet symbolically reverses the flow of time, brings back the idyllic state of plentitude and undoes death.

In conclusion, Petro Midianka’s first collection of poetry *Porih* exhibits a number of strategies that point to nostalgia and melancholia as the primary vehicles for his

work.[150] Nostalgia is realized here as a longing for a time and place that lie in the past and only whose remnants are still accessible in the present. Documenting, marveling, even delighting at the beautiful nature of the Transcarpathian region, the poet establishes a close connection between the natural world and the identity of the people that inhabit it. This environment is what deeply and irrevocably defines the people who live there; it is their homeland to which they remain loyal during and even after their lifetime. Localized natural sites as homeland are usually represented by the use of the term *zemlia* (land, soil) that plays the role of the mother figure in the Transcarpathian family myth that the poet advances. The connection between the mother-soil and her children, local residents, is the most immediate, even literal link that is poetically manifested in equating the essence of the person with an element of the natural environment that is particularly typical or striking.

In this regard Midianka continues and develops further Bohdan-Ihor Antonych's and Adal'bert Erdeli's poetic gestures, while they serve as models for his own self-positioning as a poet vis-à-vis his readers and the broader identities of Ukraine and the West. Having repeatedly established the connection between the land and the local people, and thus also having created a community of readers who share this heritage, the poet addresses them with an appeal to cherish and preserve their local homeland. A very important part of this effort is based in constant actualization of the local identity as one that is equally removed from different centers of cultural influence, and thus original and unique in its multicultural, multiethnic, and traditional patriarchal makeup. Midianka's

[150] The significance of the nostalgic mode and the authorial awareness of it demonstrates the fact that Midianka's collection of early and previously unpublished poetry opens with a poem titled "Nostal'hiia" (Nostalgia). Cf. Midianka, *Virshi z podu* (2011).

nostalgia is therefore more reflective than restorative, as the past retains its validity for him in the objects of material culture that are still available to him and his readers. The very identity he promotes further resists a restorative effort: it is a fragmented identity of a people that embraces its position on the periphery of several empires or nation-states and which draws its legitimacy from its direct connection to the Old Slavonic, Rus' heritage. The complexity of the project of such local identity, its composition of many incongruous elements that are yet harmonized by the traditional, patriarchal way of life prevents it from mimicking competing totalizing projects that seek to privatize history and homogenize language and ethnic background as part of their myth of a common identity. The reflective nature of Midianka's nostalgia and the type of identity structure he embraces makes his emphasis on the local and traditional so much more authentic, persuasive, and artistically successful – despite remaining romantic and sentimental in their essence. In this he differs greatly from a Drozd or a Shevchuk.

Another major difference lies in Midianka's vision of himself vis-à-vis his audience that becomes apparent in the self-positioning of the poet in his works. While the mentioning of some prominent predecessors serves merely as a way to map the cultural landscape of the region, the influence of the work and the personal myth of others is directly perceptible in his works (Antonych and Erdeli in particular). This mythology prescribes geographic and linguistic borders to the mission of the poet: in *Porih* they are realized by the locus of the poetry and its language that is infused with the local dialect. These parameters are even more pronounced in the collections of the 1990s (*Farametlyky* and *Oseredok*), before they begin to transform and disintegrate in an attempt to reach a mass audience in the 2000s and 2010s. The poet's mission lies therefore primarily in

shedding light onto his homeland for the outside world, in presenting its peculiarity and uniqueness. There is no serious challenge to this project from competing large narratives that the poet would need to overcome, as the autochthony and legitimacy of the project is rooted in nature itself and in the deep cultural roots that are visible in language, as well as in a multicultural and multiethnic history that is still accessible through the material reality. This set of factors allows the poet to approach the question of the local and the traditional in a significantly more nuanced way, and it leaves more space for aesthetic considerations of his work. The result is a range of neo-modernist experimentation with language, structure, rhyme, and metaphors that is productive in expanding the expressive possibilities of the work.

Chapter Six:

The Poet as a Bridge: The Sublime in Oleh Lysheha's Poetry

The preceding chapters of this study illuminate various modes of participating in the Soviet system (that is understood primarily as a set of prescriptive discursive practices) and strategies of withdrawing from it – indeed, "disengaging" from it. As I have shown thus far, the circumstances of such disengagement in fact describe the manner in which poets and prose writers attempt not to participate in the systemic discourse. "Engaging" the system in this regard signifies primarily a negotiation between the artist and the system (the latter is never a homogenous and unitary force), working out of a compromise that is acceptable for both the artist and the system. Their positions are never equal in such a negotiation, as the power lies clearly with the system. A radical case of engaging the system that my study briefly discusses is Vasyl' Stus, the Ukrainian poet and activist who directly and openly challenged the totalitarian Soviet system and refused to yield to pressure. Stus paid a high price for this and sacrificed his own life in the end. Other examples of this engagement strategy are less radical and significantly more conforming to the official demands. While Valerii Shevchuk challenges the system by proposing alternative narratives of Ukrainian history and cultural heritage, during the Soviet period he also largely complies with the basic expectations towards Soviet literature. His challenge to the system consists in opposing any marginalization of the Ukrainian national component and in educating his reader about the Ukrainian cultural achievements of the past. Volodymyr Drozd participates in the system to a greater extent – by producing literary works that fulfill the ideological expectations from a Soviet

writer. At the same time, however, he also writes prose that is more ambivalent towards the official Soviet narrative about Ukraine's culture and history. Petro Midianka only marginally participates in the systemic discourse, which has also to do with the period of perestroika and glasnost in which his first publication falls. Liudmila Petrovskaia yearns for greater audience but ultimately refuses to adapt her writing to fit the demands of the Soviet censorship. She shifts instead to writing drama and becomes successful and well-known in the theater scene of Moscow. Elena Shvarts withdraws from participation in the state-sponsored literary discourse, publishes her poetry mostly in clandestinely (in *samizdat*) and begins public readings only at the height of perestroika. Yet the most radical of them all is the poet Oleh Lysheha who not only does not compromise with the system in his creative work, but entirely withdraws from society and indeed embraces his marginality. This attitude is unique in the Ukrainian literature of the 20th century and thus deserves to be included in a study like this.

In the early 1970s, Lysheha – among other Ukrainian poets and writers – fell victim to the KGB crackdown on Ukrainian intellectuals. The official pretext was his publishing of poems and an essay in the *samvydav* journal *Skrynia* [The Chest], in 1972. In the Soviet Union, this was also the time of "screw tightening" against the pockets of freedom that the Thaw made possible. Lysheha, who was then only 23 years old, was expelled from the university where he studied foreign languages (English). He then was drafted into the Soviet army and sent to the Buriat Republic in the Soviet Far East. Because of his knowledge of English, Lysheha is given the opportunity to teach in a local school where he stays for one more year after his service term is over. It is here that he

encounters Tibetan Buddhism, traces of which we find in his poetry. Only in 1975 does Lysheha return to Ukraine and settles first in Tysmenytsia, and then in L'viv.

Lysheha's work stands in stark contrast to literature produced in the same period within the domain of what can generally be described as "state-sponsored literature." In fact, the extent of Lysheha's experimentation and innovation is revolutionary both among his clandestine contemporaries, and to this day. His forcibly restricted reception in the 1970s and 1980s, and very late wider reception just before the collapse of the USSR, as well as his own preference for secluded life away from the maelstrom of the Ukrainian literary process, contributed to his perceptible influence only in the 2000s and 2010s. His passing away in late 2014 might contribute to an increased interest in his works and concerted efforts towards a systematic study of his oeuvre.[151]

In my view, the unique quality of Lysheha's poetry has to do with his concept of the implied audience, his self-understanding as a poet, and his orientation towards a certain poetic and cultural tradition. In this chapter I argue that Lysheha progressively abandons any remnants of a popular appeal that he had, which we can observe in his earlier collection as reflected in his minimal interest for questions of social life. His lack of interest in a mass audience is visible primarily in his poetic works that, while seemingly very lucid, in reality conceal considerable depth of the philosophical argument that requires from the reader extraordinary efforts in its decoding. The high complexity of

[151] In 2015, the Kyiv-based publishing house A-BA-BA-HA-LA-MA-HA published *Potsilunok Elly Fitsdzheral'd* [Ella Fitzgerald's Kiss], the last book Lysheha prepared for publication himself. The book has a strong American component as it contains Lysheha's essays and translations of Native-American mythology, excerpts from Henry Thoreau's diaries, of poems by Robinson Jeffers (its alternative title was "America Emeralda"). Also in 2015, Lviv publishing house Piramida published a collection of Lysheha's essays entitled *Stare zoloto* [Old Gold]. Regrettably, this collection does not contain any commentary and does not date any of the essays published.

his works makes them truly accessible only to a handful of readers who share Lysheha's erudition and intellectual capacity. I argue that this also connects seamlessly to Lysheha's own self-understanding as a poet. The main impetus of his works lies in achieving a transcendental knowledge that is uniquely accessible to the Poet through the act of revelation. The locus of this knowledge lies in the sphere of the sublime which the poet can reach only at a high cost to wholeness of his Self. It is the achievement of this knowledge and its representation in poetry which reflects the fleeting and fragmentary nature of the world as well as the human experience of it that motivates Lysheha's poetic drive. I argue that, unlike writers such as Valerii Shevchuk and Volodymyr Drozd, Lysheha is not interested in adopting the position of a Messiah (realized in the figure of a Prophet and Chronicler in the works of these writers) who imparts his knowledge upon the audience that is thus infantilized by that act. In this regard Lysheha exhibits proximity to Elena Shvarts's stance. Finally, I emphasize the importance of Lysheha's orientation towards the Western modernist poetic tradition: although Lysheha possesses deep knowledge of the Ukrainian literary heritage, it is Western tradition that, next to contemporary Ukrainian poets such as Hryhorii Chubai and Mykola Vorobiov, becomes the main source of his inspiration. These observations draw on my close reading of two cycles of Lysheha's poetry: "Zyma u Tysmenytsi" [Winter in Tysmenytsia] (written in 1976) and "Velykyi mist" [Great Bridge] (written in 1983-1984) that were both published only in 1989.

6. 1. Poetry of the Long Freeze: "Zyma u Tysmenytsi"

The light has entered the cave! Io! Io!
The light has gone down into the cave,
Splendour on splendour!
By prong have I entered these hills:

That the grass grow from my body,
That I hear the roots speaking together,
The air is new on my leaf,
The forked boughs shake with the wind.

Ezra Pound, "Canto XLVII" (Pound 86).

Oleh Lysheha's work is often described as one that escapes easy categorization.[152] Indeed, focused on very mundane yet estranged experiences and unfolding as narratives, his poems appeal to the deepest images and memories of the natural world that are hard to reduce to simple generalizations. In his poems, circumstances of human life are mostly limited to descriptions of very private moments of encounter with nature, although instances of social interaction are not entirely absent from the poems. The narrating voice usually points to the poetic Self of the author: various instances of very corporeal experiences in the natural world, memories and impressions that match the author's biography are a clear reference for it. Certainly, there is no full overlapping of the author and the narrator. The most striking cases of a divergence occur when the reader cannot discern whether the narrator represents a human voice, or not. In the poems I analyze below the narrating entity sometimes makes a full circle: from an observing human to an animal, and to an inanimate object that in the beginning was the object of human observation, and back to the human.

At all times the narrator communicates to us an awareness of inherent consciousness, no matter who or what the narrator appears to be in each moment. Because consciousness that narrates its own experience is usually ascribed to the human mind, Lysheha's approach establishes a perplexing equality among various inhabitants of the natural world – humans, animals, inanimate objects, and nature in its entirety. In this

[152] See Kost' Moskalets's argument to this effect.

regard the poet locates language as a tool of experience of the world not only with humans, but also with other living beings and objects of the material reality. Social structures that rarely appear here are almost never mirrored through the lens of the animal world and its determinism, and there is also no simple opposition between the two. Although humankind is often an intruder and destroyer, it is also an undeniable part of the natural world: human qualities – even the more stereotypic ones such as cruelty and selfishness – are already a part of nature, too. Agency receives a very interesting treatment in Lysheha's poems, as it is not reserved exclusively for the narrator or the human world: as before, animals and inanimate objects are endowed with remarkable agency, while the human narrator is often devoid of any agency at all. As my discussion will show, Lysheha's poetry yields fascinating results for formal analysis. The most prominent features are the non-linear syntactical organization, a complex reference system within poems, non-standard lexical choices, and spelling and punctuation.

The song cycle "Zyma u Tysmenytsi" [Winter in Tysmenytsia] was written in the winter of 1976, shortly after Lysheha returned from his army service and it in many ways reflects a worldview that emerged both from his very direct encounter with the Soviet system and from human contact he experienced in Far East. Lysheha's choice of form for this collection vaguely points to the tradition of art songs that are brought together in a cycle, designed to be performed in a sequence as a unit (best known examples of this form are song cycles by Schubert or Schumann).[153] The musical reference is consistent throughout the cycle: it implies an intimate setting, but it also invokes the performative

[153] One has to wonder whether Lysheha, a student of American literature and culture, was aware of one of the first examples of American art song cycle, *Hermit Songs* by Samuel Barber, a collection of ten short poems set to music about simple observations on life, nature, animals, and God by Irish monks of the 8th through the 13th century.

character of the poems ("Song 212" also mentions Ella Fitzgerald's performance). Even more important, however, is the possible allusion to Ezra Pound's *The Cantos* (1915-1962) that Lysheha, given his academic studies and his interest in Pount, must have known very well. Pound's politically controversial collection of "songs" stands out for the extreme complexity of its structure as a whole, lack of any kind of formal closure, their being built on references, images and quotations from within the collection itself.[154] Ezra's collection contains a total of 120 cantos, thus Lysheha's 13 poems of "Winter in Tysmenytsia" – which are numbered and organized without any apparent sequence – refer to a large corpus of which they are a part. (Similarly, Pound's cantos are titled using Roman numerals.) The impression that "Song 551" creates is thus one of embeddedness in a larger, international modernist tradition which stands in stark contrast to the kind of populist (*narodnytskyi*) isolationism we encounter in Shevchuk or Drozd. Furthermore, it playfully suggests that the published songs are only a small part of a body of texts that the poet draws upon, adding an ironic dimension to the cycle. As in Pound, Lysheha's poems lack rhymes: they are written in free verse but are held together by a strong sense of rhythm and melody of language. The poems are short narratives that focus on the poet's sensory as well as mystical experiences and, rather marginally, their contrast with social reality. Unlike Pound, however, Lysheha's language lacks any artifice and shies away from showing off the poet's erudition (Pound's cantos contain quotes in many languages, including Greek and Chinese, for instance). Already in this cycle Lysheha's language is stripped of metaphors and in this he is close to Liudmila Petrushevskaia. An

[154] The main controversy of *The Cantos* consists in their partial expression of Pound's anti-Semitic views, which has been the topic of much discussion and a number of comprehensive literary studies (which consider the juvenile character of Pound's fascist views and put him in the context of prominent thinkers such as Heidegger and de Man whose fascism was systematic and had influence among their students and colleagues). Cf. Perloff.

important influence on Lysheha's language was D.H. Lawrence whom Lysheha credited for transitioning to a more narrative style of poetry writing. This influence is more visible in Lysheha's later poetry ("Great Bridge" in particular) as it coincided with his translation work on D.H. Lawrence and Robert Penn Warren (Brasfield xxi). Lysheha's affinity for Lawrence and Warren seems almost self-explanatory, given the thematic focus on nature of both poets and Lawrence's voluntary exile from the United Kingdom (his "savage pilgrimage").

13 poems of "Winter in Tysmenytsia" count between 14 ("Song 43") and 25 lines ("Song 3") and thus are rather short, filling one page each. The collection is full of winter images and contains clear references to Lysheha's very personal memories and experiences. However, it also offers a rich social allegory that could be read against the backdrop of the Stagnation Period.[155] The song cycle was published only in 1989 in the series "The Poet's First Book" from the Komsomol publishing house "Molod'" [Youth], as part one of the book *Velykyi mist* [Great Bridge] which contained only nine songs of the cycle. Four more songs were added to the collection in later publications.[156] While certain themes can be singled out in the songs, simultaneity of numerous layers of meaning require that the songs indeed be performed – read – over and over again, in order for each layer to come through adequately.

Some songs of the cycle form closer circles through thematic proximity. In songs 7, 55, 43, and 2 the state of sleeping, dreaming, or trance dominates the narration. Songs

[155] James Brasfield reads this collection as "the 1970s, as a cold decade" (xxi), while Oleksandr Hrytsenko earlier offered the metaphor of a "long winter" in his 1990 article ("Poety dovhoï zymy"), drawing on a line from Lysheha's poem. Hrytsenko's article is discussed later in this chapter.

[156] In *Velykyi mist* (2012), "Song 4" is replaced with "Song 8" which now comes after Song 43 (the last song in the original edition 1989), which is followed by three more songs (12, 5, and 3). Citations referred to as *Velykyi mist* come from the 1989 edition.

2 and 43 in various ways address the question of the poet in his society, of access to mystical knowledge and failure of attempts to communicate that experience to his audience. Songs 822 and 8 are highly allegorical and can be read in the context of social and political challenges artists and intellectuals faced during the Stagnation Period. Songs 551, 352, and to some extent 212 are centered around issues of human nature, progress, and community, with a general optimistic outlook on them. Songs 4 and 12 explore the relation between nature and civilization and are loosely connected by the metaphor of men as hunters or anatomists of nature, and by a fragmented, often expressionist depiction of the social milieu – the latter connects it also to "Song 5," a circular, repetitive dialogue and reminiscence. "Song 3" stands largely alone due to its expressionism and symbolism of images, its associative descriptions, and fragmented structure. As I argue above, the seemingly random titles can be read as both an ironic device and a method to indicate connection and integration with a literary canon that is Western, or classical ("Song 822" is a very good example of that). At the same time, the refusal to begin with a foundational, programmatic piece signals a strong opposition to the didactic mode prevalent in both the state-sponsored literature of the time and in the works of writers such as Valerii Shevchuk who are actively pro-Ukrainian in their writing. Fragmentation and a general rejection of hierarchical structure in "Winter in Tysmenytsia" suggest the poet's deconstruction of such a didactic mode.

Lysheha's unique style and language combine tangibility of objects and experiences described in the poems with transcendental ideas that reveal themselves in the material reality depicted in the poems. There are hardly any abstract terms in them, and references to literary or philosophical works are scarce. Yet each poem is a powerful

representation of an idea about our existence. "Song 551" that opens the cycle appeals to the humanity in us and advocates for a striving towards freedom.[157] The idea of freedom, however, is not defined in political terms, it rather presents itself as a striving for knowledge, for openness and for integration with the world:

Поки не пізно – бийся головою об лід!	Before it's too late – knock your head against the ice!
Поки не темно – бийся головою об лід!	Before it's too dark – knock your head against the ice!
Пробивайся, вибивайся –	Break through, break out –
Ти побачиш прекрасний світ!	You will see a miraculous world (Lysheha, *The Selected Poems* 3).[158]

The reader is addressed directly and given the task to strive for her or his humanity. The meaning of being human is contrasted with the image of a carp that "tends to plunge, / Escaping to the very bottom, / Born to be caught, sooner or later.." (SPOL/a 3).[159] Given the historical circumstances that surround this collection of poems, this imagery can be interpreted as an allegory of the Stagnation Era. This statement is clearly endowed with anti-colonial meaning, but the message to the reader is cast in broader terms: it goes beyond the national identity, defines the boundaries of humanity and establishes a human's closer connection with the natural world.

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[157] After the publication of the collection *Snihovi i vohniu* (For Snow and Fire) in 2002, every next collection of poetry (in 2012 by Piramida publishers and in 2014 by A-BA-BA-HA-LA-MA-HA) retains the same structure of cycles, with some variation of order and addition of new poems to the same cycles.

[158] The 1999 bilingual publication of translations of Lysheha's selected poems – *The Selected Poems of Oleh Lysheha* – serves as the basis for quoted passages. Citations from this edition will be abbreviated as SPOL, followed by the page number. Where translation significantly differs in its imagery from the Ukrainian original, it is adapted by me. Such quotations are indicated by the abbreviation SPOL/a, followed by the page number of the published translation. Poems that were not included in the bilingual edition will be quoted from the 2012 edition of *Velykyi mist* and translations are mine. Poems will be quoted in both the Ukrainian original (given in the Cyrillic alphabet) and its English translation where the translation struggles to capture the subtlety of the original expression.

[159] Lysheha uses ellipsis that consists of two periods very consistently and on the level of rhythm it indicates a half-pause, thus structuring the poem in terms of its flow. Cf. also Trinchii's definition of this device as "shallow dissection" (23).

Lysheha exhibits fascination with the images of water and fish in many of his poems, as they appear to be intriguing in their eternal fluidity and hermetic nature. A comparison of humans with fish might seem improbable at the first glance, but the silent, apathetic figure of a carp that slowly descends onto the river bottom serves as an effective counterexample to the kind of human nature that Lysheha intimates. Our humanity thus consists in resisting the urge to fall into passivity, to revert to comfortable ignorance, to be content with tranquility that reigns on the bottom of the river. Lysheha's criticism goes beyond just the Soviet Union – he accuses the entire 20th century, all of humanity of likening itself to the carps: "Don't you see, our century has been long rushing after them? / Like with a hand, its fin touches their fins, / It slips away" (ibid.)). The poem uses a very peculiar figure here: the century's hands are already fins and with these fins, as if with hands, it touches the fins of the "carps" and escapes into darkness. The poet's contemporaries, therefore, have already succumbed to ignorance and isolationism and his appeal is directed to those who feel alone in their struggle for humanity. In this context, being human means courage to swim against the current, to resist the herd instinct, and to strive for knowledge and openness, which establishes an alternative ideal of human nature. Lysheha's appeal is therefore both encouraging and asserting, and it is kind in its belief in human nature: "You're alone? / But you are human, aren't you? / Don't worry, you'll break through.." (ibid.) The ultimate striving forward and upward, to the outside that pertains to the human condition is movement towards the open world, that "miraculous, wide and snowy world" that seems so close and yet almost unreachable from below the ice (ibid.).

"Song 352" is imbued with a similar momentum, but its direction is opposite to that of the previous poem: in seeking human warmth and company, the poet urges us to go to the "hut of a horseradish" that sits lonely at the edge of the vegetable garden. Just as previously with the image of the carp, the "hut of a horseradish" is a paradoxical, even absurd figure, and yet it very effectively captures the meaning Lysheha is after. A similar figure is also used in "Song 55" ("house of a reed") where it serves as a metaphor for safety and warmth. Likewise, the hut of a horseradish signifies a special place where one's rootedness in both nature and culture manifests itself: to seek human company means also to go away from humans, to join nature in its place of solitude and sleep. Playing on the phonetic proximity of words (*хата хрону* [hut of a horseraddish] as *хата схрону* [hut of shelter]), the hut of a horseradish refers to a place of refuge where one finds a feeling of self-sufficiency and self-fulfillment when turning to nature. The snowy vegetable garden becomes the symbol of intense, fulfilled solitude. It stands in opposition to the trees whose "cosmic architecture" provides no warmth. Trees thus become the metaphor for civilization and for city as its ultimate representation; the elaborate, perfected architecture of the skyscrapers stands in stark contrast to the poor hut in the vegetable garden. There, among the accomplishments of human technological efforts, one can find little understanding and faces the danger of rejection or humiliation:

Коли вам так забаглось погрітись,	When you need to warm yourself,
Коли вам так хочеться перекинутись хоч словом,	When you are hungry to share a word,
Коли вам так хочеться хоч крихту тепла –	When you crave a crumb of warmth,
То не йдіть до дерев – там вас не зрозуміють,	Don't go to the trees – you'll not be understood there,
Хоч архітектура в них просто космічна	Though their architecture achieves cosmic perfection
І з комина в'ється прозорий димок..	And transparent smoke winds from their

	chimneys..
Не йдіть у ці гори хмарочосів –	Don't go near these loads of skyscrapers –
З тисячного поверху	From the one-thousandth floor
На вас можуть висипати жар..	They might toss embers on your head.. (SPOL/a 5).

The hut of the horseradish becomes the place of self-exploration, of wisdom, and of acceptance. The language of the verse strongly suggests a biblical reference here. This part of the poem engages the reader in a performative action: acknowledging the reader's desperate need for warmth ("Коли вже вам так не терпиться за теплом" [If you are so starved for warmth]), the poet offers a solution ("То йдіть на завіяний снігом город, / Там скраю стоїть самотня хата хрону.." [Then go to the snow-bound vegetable garden, / At its edge there sits the lonely hut of the horseradish..] (ibid.)) and invites to follow it. As if in a theatrical script, the poem then briefly pauses (indication of which are Lysheha's famous two periods), as if waiting for the reader to make it to the edge of the vegetable garden, and then continues with a demonstrative gesture: ".. А ось і вбога хата хрону.." [… And here is the poor hut of the horseradish]. The figure of the horseradish rises here to the image of the ever-present mother nature that is always there to humbly accept her children: "Світиться? – світиться.. він завжди вдома –" [Is there a light on inside? – Yes, he's always at home..] (ibid.). The poet's urgent command to action concludes this journey with a biblical plea for mercy that will be answered: "Knock at the door of the horseradish.. / Knock on the door of this hut.. / Knock, and it shall be opened to you.." (ibid.).[160]

"Song 822" is one of the very few poems where the reader can clearly detect a hint at social or political criticism. The poem reveals the mechanism of Lysheha's dealing

[160] A reference to the well-known phrases from Luke 11:9 and Matthew 7:7.

with socio-political issues: instead of a head-on confrontation, criticism is dispersed in the poem and ironic poetic references and allegories are used in place of direct criticism. Such a strategy corresponds fully with Lysheha's non-engagement in the systemic discourse of the Soviet Union – not even in a negative way (as does, for instance, Vasyl' Stus discussed in Chapter Two on Volodymyr Drozd). In fact, as George Grabowicz argues, there is no place in Lysheha's poetry for "issues" of social, political, or national character: his poetry reduces such "man-made semiotic systems" to "shards, to units of meaning no more privileged than 'a few crows… dusted with frost'" ("Foreword" xvi). This approach clearly differs from "inner emigration," as it acknowledges the problems but chooses to treat them as phenomena of the natural environment. Similarly, this stance also distances itself from an anti-colonial struggle. Oleksandr Hrytsenko, in his insightful article on the generation of "poets of the long winter" (in which he includes Oleh Lysheha, Mykola Riabchuk, and Kost' Moskalets') sees the main criterion for such a categorization of these poets in their very particular way of dealing with the circumstances of life "under siege," when defense becomes the primary motivation of cultural production, not an offensive against or participation in the Soviet system, as was the case with earlier generations that ultimately failed (161). Thus Lysheha's quiet, sensual narrative poems are his way of co-existing with the "social winter" – in a way, it is also an "element of nature" that one has to learn how to live with and how to survive without losing oneself (ibid. 166). Hrytsenko points not only to a conflicting approach to social matters that results from such an attitude (Lysheha both condemns the winter and summons it),[161] but also to a dark irony that imbues his poetry, in which he sees T.S.

[161] The following lines in "Song 4" encapsulate this paradox: "Зимо, не йди від нас.. / … / Не

Eliot's influence (ibid. 167). This strategy consists primarily in carving out an alternative space in which the poet – and culture in general – can exist; a space that will always remain inaccessible for any system's ideological demands. Lysheha's stance proves significantly more productive in creating literary works of high aesthetic quality, even though – or precisely because – the poet gives up a direct struggle with the system and the prospects of reaching a wide audience are non-existent. This stance is also crucially different from the indirect challenge to the system of writers such as Shevchuk or Drozd in that Lysheha refuses any participation in the system (becoming part of its organizational structure (Soviet Ukrainian Writers' Union), publication, distribution, benefits and other forms of participation). Lysheha pays the price for his full disengagement from the system, but his moral stance remains uncompromised in which he stands close to Vasyl' Stus, a poet and activist who engaged the system fully. Lysheha's disengagement creates a space for the culture's survival, it purifies it from the tradition of ideologization that Ukrainian national literature was imbued with since its very inception under the hostile conditions of imperial Russia, and therefore opens the opportunity for artistic freedom far away from the mission of national struggle against the Soviet narrative of Ukraine.

The many layers of the poem cannot be interpreted unidimensionally. The first layer could be that of a walk in the nature, when a group of friends is admiring the dried out and frozen leaves that remain on the trees' branches in the winter. The first three lines support this reading, but it begins to break down with the fourth line ("Та не такий там

йди від нас.. / Хай уже всі довкола і сіють, і орють, / І цвітуть сади, / А ти будь з нами.." [Winter, don't leave us.. / … / Don't leave us.. / Even when others already saw and plough, / And when gardens bloom, / But you be with us] (*Velykyi mist* (2012) 18; translation is mine).

уже й мед" [Yet it's not exactly wine and honey over there] (SPOL 7)), which suddenly points to an entirely different context. The initial interpretation continues to disintegrate with the remaining lines of the first speaker, letting the reader struggle to come up with an overarching paradigm. The closing line finally offers a reference that allows to place the poem in a meta-narrative context: the speaker's admission that a dictionary is useless in describing the surrounding scenery points to the fact that this is a conversation about poetic language, or the relation between poetry and reality of our life in general.

The next two lines that are spoken by the second speaker confirm this interpretation and introduce an ironic commentary that opens an entirely new dimension of the poem: "Шапки нема, / Кожуха нема – хіба це зима?" [Without a hat, / Without a sheepskin coat – what kind of a winter is that? (SPOL/a 7)]. Severity of a winter is thus defined through elements of human clothing that accompany it: how can this be a severe winter if we have no hat or coat to protect ourselves? The striking lack of protection paradoxically negates the conditions that call for such protection. These lines offer a number of possible interpretations for the bitter irony they contain: If there is no literature or culture, how can we speak of repressions against them? Where cultural production has been marginalized or silenced, repressions are useless. Where cultural production avoids circulation, or where it adopts a new mode, it effectively escapes repression. In this regard, the poem parallels and continues the commentary from Pavlo Tychyna's famous poem "Ispyt" [Exam] (1920).[162] The irony of the second speaker devolves into the third

[162] "Тільки що почали ми землю любить, взяли / заступа в руки, холоші закачали… — / — ради бога, манжети надіньте, що-небудь їм /скажіть: вони питають, чи єсть у нас / культура!" [We just started to love our soil, took / a shovel in our hands, rolled up our trouser legs… – / for God's sake, put on your dress shirt cuffs, something / tell them: they are asking, if we have / culture!] (Translation is mine.)

speaker's sarcasm: apparently, he wrote an "ode" in Latin that begins with "Denunciation." With high pathos, the "ode" reports that – "at last!" – the river "received ice" (that is, in mockingly poetic language, it was clad in ice). The content of the "ode" and the apparent speaker's insecurity about the proper punctuation to be used ("exclamation point, / Or, perhaps, a comma") deconstruct the original statement, as both contribute little to creation of genuine meaning: it now serves as an example of the cultural production that is the target of the poet's scathing criticism.

The quote of a line from the "ode" serves as commentary on the thematic and stylistic rigidity of the time: "'Дала поцілувати рученьку свою'" ["She (river) deigned to give her little hand for a kiss"] can be read as a reference to the neoromantic style of writing perpetuated by Lysheha's successful contemporaries ("Що не кажіть, а в наш час / Просто неможливо без латини" [Well, whatever, but these days / You simply can't get along without Latin (SPOL 7)]. The poem concludes with an affirmation that it is a winter after all, and with a cry for help in surviving it: "Ох, дай Боже пережити цюю зиму" [Oh God, give us strength to survive this winter (SPOL/a 7)]. Thus the reader goes through various stages of reading and interpreting the poem as it proceeds from beginning to end. The poem invites and demands rereading with early stanzas now reinterpreted in the poem's overall direction: herbarium and "money hanging from trees" become powerful allegories of the state of culture and society, and they delineate the poet's position in it vis-à-vis official culture. An immediate, even naïve reading becomes impossible, yet the poem is never explicit enough and a censor won't be able to pin down its social criticism. The most significant figure of thought in this regard – and an indication of the entire attitude towards the epoch – is the poem's equation of the

historical moment with a natural force that cannot be fought directly, but has to be reckoned with in other ways. One such way is to survive it as it passes in its own time.

"Song 2" from this collection of poetry epitomizes this stance even more clearly. As George Grabowicz aptly notes, Lysheha's poetry is "devoid of pathos, and rhetoric, and the sense of an implicit popular audience, and with it the poet's implied task of addressing (loudly) the entire nation" ("Foreword" xii). Yet Lysheha does not entirely avoid problematizing his audience and his reception. Problems of the poet's relation with his readers are elevated to questions of meaning production within the framework of civilization. In the poem, this finds expression in the projected image of the poet's Self as a holy fool. The poet's figure is radically separate, even opposed to the mass of his readers who inhabit a small town:

Це містечко вночі по мені	This little town, at night, in my commemoration,
Заграє на губній гармоніці..	Will play a harmonica..
Мене тут не буде..	I won't be here..
Я знаю, коли сплю, перекривлює в гримасах	I know, when I sleep, it mocks in grimaces
Мої слова, мою покручену ходу.. (*Velykyi mist* (2012) 14)	My words, my disfigured walk.. (Translation is mine.)

Urban space is here primarily a symbol of human civilization and as such it imposes on the poet an entirely different perception of reality and relation to it: "Ця застигла лава під ногами / Змушує тверезіше дивитись вперед, / Роздирає повіки" [This lava, frozen beneath your feet, / Forces to look forward much more soberly, / It pulls your eyes wide open][163] (ibid.) These metaphors suggest that the poet confronts this reality as if against

[163] In the Ukrainian original, the imagery is even stronger: "It tears your eyelids apart," it literally says.

his will; thus the social reality is set up against an alternative, inner world which is given a much higher priority.

The boundary between the two is very ambiguous: outer, social events and internal events merge as equal phenomena at the point of their emanation in the poet's sensual perception, but the author follows the path of probing events within, the urgency of participation in which is much higher for him:

Я відчуваю, десь під ногами	I feel, somewhere below my feet,
Вночі щось сталось, може, вчора..	That something happened at night, perhaps, yesterday..
Глибинний, неясний гул..	A deep, unclear rumble..
Щоб почути його,	In order to hear it,
Щоб розбудити в серці	In order to wake up in your heart
Голос далекого пробудження,	The voice of a distant awakening,
Мусиш заснути,	You must fall asleep,
Вдати глибоку втому.. (ibid.)	Pretend to be deeply tired..
	(Translation is mine.)

The realization of tragic events on the outside triggers an intensified consideration of the internal life. At the same time, comprehension of these "unclear" outside events is only possible through an inner awakening: the poet as the creator of meaning can be brought to life through distance from the outside reality, even if he has to "pretend to be deeply tired," or "asleep," to carve out his creative space. After all, the projection of that meaning to the outside is destined to be "mocked in grimaces," that is, to be perverted – not just because of the particular society the poet lives in, but primarily because of the nature of the meaning's manifestation in the material world. Therefore, although outside world appears to be in control over the seemingly passive, withdrawn poet, the power relationship is indeed inverted since internal life – that "voice of a distant awakening" – is preeminent for the poet. In this regard, the way to cope with the events of the outside

reality (social, political, financial, and so on) is defined by its decidedly inferior position vis-à-vis the poet's creative process from within:

Колись і я змагався з часом..	I, too, once struggled against time..
Він підхоплював мене смерчем,	It used to lift me up like a tornado,
І крутив як хотів високо над дахами..	And to toss around, high above the roofs..
Тепер я знаю, він замкнутий, темний,	Now I know, it (time) is closed, dark,
Тісний, як хліб у будці,	Cramped, like bread in a carriage,
Дощанім серці.. (ibid.)	In a heart made of wood..
	(Translation is mine.)

"Song 43" that concluded this cycle in the original collection of 1989, echoes the actualization of the audience and once again establishes the position of the poet as an outcast who by definition cannot be understood by society. The poem explores the limits of the knowable and perceptible, and it has a strong mystical component. The first four lines are particularly striking in this regard, as they elucidate Lysheha's key technique in marking a dissociation of sensory perception and mystical knowledge:

Все видно, рукою доторкнешся – а ніби ніч..	Everything is visible, when you touch it with your hand – it's like night, however..
І тільки очерет блищить на сонці..	And only reed shines in the sun..
Так ніби чиста річка перебігла,	As if a clear river ran through,
Омила все у місячному сяйві..	And washed everything in the moon's light..
(ibid. 17)	(Translation is mine.)

The mystical component unfolds in the poem as a deep connection with nature to which the poet owes knowledge of otherwise imperceptible events: potatoes in the soil "sigh with their unwashed angel faces"; "a pit breathes," covered by saplings (ibid.). The manner in which the poet gains access to such knowledge is rendered through powerful imagery that indicates his hard labor: "Рука розгребла те, що було снігом, / Пробившись у потаємний світ, завмерла" [The hand dug into that which was snow, / Having broken through to the secret world, it lingered] (ibid.). This exploration of the

world beyond sensory input of the body – although described in its metaphors – precedes the concluding statement of the poem on being misunderstood and distorted by the audience. The poet's position as an outcast can therefore be read as a result of his access to other, ethereal world of knowledge that, however, is deeply rooted in material reality of nature. In addition this position is also open to the interpretation as immanent impossibility of articulating knowledge in a way that would not be prone to distortion:

Вони спотворили мою пісню..	They disfigured my song..
Це була добра пісня,	It was a good song,
Але вони не зрозуміли і спотворили її..	But they did not understand it and disfigured it..
А я ж вклав у неї все своє життя..	But I put my entire life into it..
(ibid.)	(Translation is mine.)

Drawing preliminary conclusions, my discussion shows that the song cycle "Zyma u Tysmenytsi" stands alone in the Ukrainian literature of the 1970s for its very intimate character, and for immediacy of related feelings, perceptions, and impressions. The narration is very personal, for the most part private experiences that are related in a language free of artifice or formal literary references (such references are in fact in the very style and topics of Lysheha's poems, which is discussed at the end of this chapter) form its focus. Lysheha's language here is very effective and clear, which brings it close to the imagist tradition of Pound and his circle. The free verse form combines very successfully with this translucent language to convey genuine experiences and observations that are part of the poet's worldview. The sense of rhythm and melody place the songs also very close to Hryhorii Chubai's style of poetry – a close friend and colleague of Lysheha's whose work had profound influence on him. This proximity becomes evident if we look at one of Chubai's early poems from 1968:

так спроквола надходить	somehow very weekly

найтемніша на світі ніч	the darkest night on earth arrives
і заступає одним-єдине моє вікно	and blocks my one-and-only window
і заступає зеленими очима	and it blocks with green eyes
заступає червону потоптану траву	it blocks the red trampled grass
що здавалась мені птахом підстреленим	that seemed to me a shot bird
а птах той ніяк злетіти не міг	and that bird could never take off
ніч заступає руками всохле дерево	the night blocks with its hands a withered tree
і заступає вустами палюче сонце	and it blocks with its lips the burning sun
і заступає розважливими словами	and it blocks with its reasonable words
якусь дуже сумну мелодію	some very sad melody
(*P"iatyknyzhzhia* 37)	(Translation is mine.)

In his lyrical afterword-eulogy to the collection of Chubai's poetry, Lysheha writes:

> Maybe in the same way, having closed his eyes, Pound struck the first cord 'And then went down to the ship' in his first 'Canto,' because, perhaps, in exactly the same way blind Homer began his 'Odyssey,' having touched the strings on his instrument.. How daringly Odysseus went on his journey.. How enthusiastically Pound began his epopee, his brilliant defeat.. You looked for a long time at your hand, suspended in the air, you listened to it for a long time and marveled at it: only you alone saw on the pale, not tanned skin invisible signs.. ("Post Scriptum" 247).

Similarly, in "Winter in Tysmenytsia," Lysheha thematizes connection to the modernist poetic tradition, brings up the relation of the artist and society, as well as the overall political and social circumstances of his time, but does it quietly, without pathos and didacticism, pointing to a greater, mystical knowledge. In this regard, Lysheha decidedly breaks with the tradition of the *shistdesiatnyky* (generation of the 1960s), but also with the heritage of the Ukrainian literary populism (*narodnytstvo*). At the same time, a sense of sympathy and empathy for the *narod* is always present in Lysheha's poems, but it's devoid of any missionary aspirations towards it that would have implications for his stance as a poet.

6. 2. The Poet and the Sublime: "Velykyi mist"

And who has seen the moon, who has not seen
Her rise from out the chamber of the deep,
Flushed and grand and naked, as from the chamber
Of finished bridegroom, seen her rise and throw
Confession of delight upon the wave,
Littering the waves with her own superscription
Of bliss, till all her lambent beauty shakes towards us
Spread out and known at last, and we are sure
That beauty is a thing beyond the grave,
That perfect, bright experience never falls
To nothingness, and time will dim the moon
Sooner than our full consummation here
In this odd life will tarnish our pass away.

D. H. Lawrence, "Moonrise" (*The Poems* 155).

The second cycle of poetry in the 1989 edition, entitled "Velykyi mist" [Great Bridge], contained a total of 18 poems, which were written in Kyiv in 1983-84 (Brasfield xxi). This cycle shows a considerable development of Lysheha's poetic and philosophical apparatus, which reaches here its peak. The narrative style is considerably intensified here, as is also the mystical component. Lysheha acknowledged that his transition to an even more narrative style of writing was influenced by his translations from D. H. Lawrence and Robert Penn Warren (ibid.) The full edition of this collection, published in 2012 under the title "Snihovi i vohniu" [For Fire and Snow], contains 44 poems that include also poems written later. Below I will focus mostly on the 1989 edition as it reflects the state of Lysheha's poetic mastery of the mid-1980s that are within the period of interest here.

The poems in the 1989 edition are thoughtfully organized as a cycle with a clear movement from the opening poem to the closing one. The collection opens with the poem "Bear" in which the author invokes the image of a prehistorical bear that leaves a gift – a

pile of his prey's bones – for the human whom he already anticipates as his symbolic heir (and, as we find out later, his killer). The poem "Uniava" comes next and through a fine net of memories thematizes the river, a symbol for the flow of time. The next five poems – "Turtle," "Dog," "Hare," "Muskrat," and "Crucian" – are dedicated to different animals and in a complex way depict intertwinement between the human and animal worlds, and their fragility and mortality. The poem "Father" extends this attention to the ageing or decaying human body further, and introduces the tension between old and young generations in mystical terms. "Mulberry Tree," continues the dialogue from the previous poem and could be read as a conversation between son and father. Two following poems – "Rooster" and "Horse" – explore mystical connections between art as representation of reality, and the physical reality itself. "Mountain" is a multi-layered reflection on history and society and their protruding into the present and into sensory perceptions; it also brings back the images of the dead dog and the dead bear mentioned earlier, as if contextualizing them in the fabric of everyday life of the society. The following three poems – "Hawk," "Marten," and "Kingfisher" – are again complex compilations of references to wild animals that are used as devices to introduce closely tied layers of memories, sensory perceptions, and mystical symbols. The poems "Moon" and "Heat" are dedicated to the concrete experiences of physical labor and the abstract concepts they open access to; the figure of the bear reappears here again. The concluding poem, "He," completes the symbolic journey in which the past (bear) and the future (man) recognize their mutually dependent fates – through the poetry of the poet now written as a poem.

In his article on this collection of poetry, Vadym Trinchii aptly points to the parallel existence in Lysheha of a direct and a "mystical narration," to his language that is

"devoid of metaphors" and to its "basic" character (23). Trinchii is mostly interested in several "motif threads" that he separates out of the cycle: parenthood, sensual experience in states that border on unconsciousness, the "great return" (that is, Lysheha's "orpheusness"), the transition from oral to written poetry which takes place in the setting of nature and at nature's cost (ibid.). Most importantly, responding to attempts to read Lysheha's stripped-down language as a marker of infantilism or childishness, Trinchii emphasizes the deeply inherent adult character of this collection which he pins down to such attributes as "consciousness of speech" and its "didacticism," both of which he believes to find in Lysheha's 1989 collection (ibid.).[164] The term "didacticism" is perhaps not very successful when applied to Lysheha, because he, as I have tried to show, consistently avoids the stance of moralizing and prophesizing that Shevchuk and Drozd, and to some extent also Midianka engage in. Taken in the sense of fixing its gaze on questions of death and decomposition, which Lysheha approaches in a very Rilkean way, Lysheha's second collection of poetry, written in the early 1980s, is considerably more mature in the topics it raises and more consistent both in the imagery and its organization to realize a particular trajectory in the cycle. Trinchii thus correctly identifies Lysheha's interest for the "dead and liminal (sick, unconscious, and so on) body" – that is, his focus on the topic of death as a defining moment of adulthood and full consciousness (ibid. 24).

[164] A very interesting argument that Trinchii makes is about the "ideal author" in Lysheha's poetry. In most examples of literary work the instruments of literary criticism often surpass the actual complexity level of the works. Yet the critic still always applies the method of substituting the real author for a "fully conscious and over-equipped" author, in the sense of postmodern perfecting of the writing method and complication of its devices, even if that is not the case for the concrete example in question. In Lysheha's case, Trinchii argues, there is no need for such substitution of the real author with its ideal image, because the author already is practically ideal – that is, adult (25).

The encounter with the material world in this collection is generally much broader than in "Winter in Tysmenytsia." As the overview over the poems included here shows, the poet approaches all phenomena of the material world with equal attention, be they humans, animals, or inanimate objects.[165] Interest in death and liminality is expressed in a repeated return to bodies that undergo transformation towards death, or are decomposing and becoming part of the natural landscape (the poem "Dog" is particularly striking in this regard). Nature itself is equally an object of the poet's attention, especially in its function as home to humanity that is gradually destroying it. As such, civilization is not directly opposed to nature. As Trinchii correctly observes, "civilization is being written as a human and, even clearer, as capable of being humanized, nature" (ibid.). A very important element of this world is a connection that exists among all its inhabitants. This is realized both on the level of biological and chemical connection, and on the level of mystical connection between the ancestors and their descendants. Although dark, the imagery therefore is not threatening, but warm: even the destruction that humans and their civilization cause to nature is a part of it. Tactile experience easily transitions here into symbolic imagery that merges different realities: the touch of a cool shell of a turtle transforms a human life into that shell, and takes on a life of its own; the limp, dry body of a dead fish that got tired of watching over a sleeping boy; the wrinkled face of the moon that the poet strokes – an image in a bowl full of soil. Circularity of life, unity of its substance throughout different forms of life (even the one we consider "dead"), yet

[165] The 2012 edition that includes several more poems expands the scope of that encounter, complicates and intensifies the density of the collection's message, but stays true to the overall original design.

devoid of any sentimentalism towards nature, defines the collection's movement through sensory experiences, impressions, memories, and visions.

The symbolic journey of the cycle begins with the poem "Bear," in which a prehistoric bear – still a powerful animal in its own domain – already foresees his own demise and succession. A beginning with a foundational myth, or, rather, mystical reference, sets this collection clearly apart from the previous one. If the previous collection of songs was rather a series of impressions and reactions, the present collection reflects a fully formed philosophical stance that is complex and multi-dimensional. Already the first poem charts the main questions of this philosophy: human encounter with nature as an attempt to privatize nature, to master it; the result of such an approach as being ruinous to both nature and humanity as its part; poetic and artistic activity – as an attempt to capture the world and create meaning about it – as being tainted with such inherent responsibility. Lysheha's "didacticism" – if it can be called that at all – is therefore fundamentally different from that of a Shevchuk or Drozd: rather than preaching to the masses, the poet shows and performs himself what he believes means to be a human being.

The key moment of the first poem is therefore the moment of inception that is accompanied by passing on of a token, a message from the prehistoric bear to his anticipated heir, the human being. The bear is endowed with attributes of humanity and civilization, not yet achieved by his contemporary human being. The reference, therefore, is directed at a future human society that the bear communicates with. In the poem, the bear "dines by the moonlight" and then "orderly" sorts the bones left from his supper. Humanization of the bear also results in "naturalization" of the human being that is

conceived here as part of the natural world. Thus the civilized bear reflects upon the possibility that a man will arrive who "will want to drill holes" in one of the bones to make a flute out of it. This thoughtful anticipation is presented rather quietly, as an ordinary thing, without dramatism, almost as a technical description. Yet underneath is hidden a truly revolutionary moment that has to do with the leap in human development that will create a meaningful rupture: it is the first step towards the ability to master nature, and the advent of art. The moment of anticipation already contains the bear's weakening – and with it the nature's decline as home to both man and bear.

As Trinchii points out, the journey that this collection charts is one from oral to written artistic expression – the collection ends with the advent of the written word (24). Thus Lysheha points to acts that set humans apart from nature in a most radical way: art and written word become tools for self-awareness and self-reflection of the human *outside* of nature. In the course of this change nature becomes the *object* of human self-realization, a repository of building blocks for human civilization. Therefore, Lysheha records a crucial moment in the history of the world and effectively contrasts it with the quotidian context in which it occurred:

А так усе ніби те саме –	Everything seemed the same otherwise –
Темніє дикий часник, наливається ожина..	Wild garlic loomed out of the darkness, blackberries ripen..
Його лапа ще досить страшна,	His paw is still scary enough
Щоб захистити цю ніч..	To protect this night..
(*Velykyi mist* (1989) 12)	(Translation is mine.)

The darkness of the looming garlic testifies to the fact that nothing is the same anymore. The metonymical use of "paw" fragments the bear and points to the physical act of violence against him – the real cutting off of the paw in a process that makes human hand the ruler of the new world.

Figures of interchanging dichotomy and sameness between the human hand (*рука*) and the animal paw (*лапа*) persist throughout the collection. It finds a powerful realization in the poem "Turtle" where the poet experiences a lasting mutual merging with the body of the animal. While the language remains largely bereft of metaphors, Lysheha very successfully transports impressions that appear as direct sensations. As often, a number of sensory experiences are hidden in a narrative story that unfolds in the poem. The poet went on a mushroom hunt and, looking for mushrooms, finds a turtle. There are several shifts here that occur on the level of narration. The popular topic of looking for mushrooms is ironically deconstructed here ("I could smell it – somewhere here ought to be a mushroom.."; "I made a few steps to the side and turned around abruptly – / A maneuver, so it won't manage to hide from me" (*Velykyi mist* (1989) 15)). The actual prey of such a hunt is not a mushroom, but a turtle the hunter finds majestically spread on a pillow of moss. The turtle immediately becomes a totem as it fascinates the hunter so much that he is ready to worship it. At this point, a partial merging occurs that lasts for several days. Finally, back in the forest, a complete merging occurs when the human hand transforms into the turtle and acquires autonomy from the human being, it the "falls" into an anthill where a symbolic act of killing occurs. At this moment the separation between the two beings occurs that ends the fragmentation of the human being. Retrospectively, the merging is questioned by the rational mind that awakens from a dream (a kind of trance), and it logically confirms the reality of the encounter.

Such a trajectory is typical of many poems in the collection – this is perhaps also the reason that the very few scholars who did write on Lysheha routinely addressed his

"shamanism."[166] Multiple instances of apparent shape shifting take place on the level of the text itself, where they are bereft of the fantasy part that is so characteristic, for instance, for Magical Realism. Instead, Lysheha writes in such a way that the narrator's consciousness seamlessly changes bodies, leaving only a faint trace in the text. The turtle is a great example for this. When the poet makes the first approach, what was originally supposed to be a mushroom is already referred to as "someone" (not "something"), but then, through a series of guesses, is gradually revealed as yet something entirely different:

За кущем хтось принишкнув.	Behind the bush, someone lurked.
Я опустив голову, знов пішов ніби далі,	I lowered my head, walked again as if farther,
Але все ближче, ближче.. ні, то не дубовий лист..	But closer and closer.. no, that is not an oak leaf..
Не камінь.. якась бронзова посудина?..	Not a stone.. some bronze vessel?..
На високо збитій моховій подушці,	High up on the fluffed up pillow of moss,
Якраз де впало сонце, розкинувши лапи,	Exactly where the sun was shining down, having spread its paws,
Лежала черепаха (*Velykyi mist* (1989) 15).	A turtle lay. (Translation is mine.)

Equating the "lurking" animal with "someone" already opens the possibility for an encounter at eye level. The turtle fascinates the poet because of its hybridity that locates it between animate and inanimate worlds. "A bone plate, but alive," he wonders, and continues how he "would carry such a freight forever," and then addresses it directly: "You need only to tell me where to carry you" (ibid.). The lower plate of the turtle goes from being *like* the palm of a hand ("a pale bone, scuffed like the palm of a hand") to actually *being* the palm of a hand ("Probably, there is engraved the line of love, / And the

[166] George Grabowicz's is one example of such successful reading: "The shamanic undercurrents of this poetry are evident – the ability to hear and understand the languages of nature, to transcend space and time, to shift shapes and take on the identity of the primal other, and, not least of all, the ability to bring back insights for his audience that will help heal the long-festering wound" ("Foreword" 17).

road, and death" (ibid.)). Lysheha frequently uses grammatical and syntactic structures that are meant to create ambiguity for the attribution of these phrases. For instance, such a device in the beginning of the poem creates an additional hurdle before the discovery of the animal: the phrase "having spread its paws" could grammatically be also attributed to sun. Similarly, at the end of the poem, the reader is unclear about which of the two experiences – the holding of (and merging with) the turtle or the placing of the hand in the anthill – was a dream, and follows the author in logically concluding that one must have been real because the other one was real, too.

While the merging with an animal was only partial in "Turtle," there are multiple examples of complete transformation, as well as several instances of going back and forth. The collection frequently thematizes shape shifting as a fundamental sameness of all beings. Fluid transformations of one into the other functions as transfiguration: a mystical experience in which the spiritual form of life is revealed. Revelation as a crucial experience of the poetic life figures prominently in Lysheha's poetry, and transfiguration is an instrument of this experience. Revelation here shatters the "normality" of everyday life, forcing its subject to reconsider the surrounding reality in a new light. Revelation thus poses a radical challenge to the "normal," common reality of life, triggering a response that questions well-known coordinates of the comprehensible world. In this regard Bernd Hamacher points to a connection between revelation and violence, as both amount to a similar effect of disruption of the everyday reality (11). Violence is already alluded to in "Bear," and it will make a comeback at the end of the collection, but in form of a sacrifice that refuses to use the Other as a "sacrificial outlet" for one's violence (Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* 4). Revelation is instrumentalized in Lysheha to the

extent that it shows universal equality of all being; the traditional sacrificial substitution "of one brother for the other, and … of an animal for a man" thus becomes impossible in his world (ibid. 5). The mystical ritual of sacrifice, therefore, has to be performed by the poet himself – as self-sacrifice. Various transformations – partial and full – into animals or even inanimate objects that accompany corresponding focalization of narration pave the way for the eventual revelation of the sameness of being in all its forms and the realization of the moral impermissibility of any kind of violence towards the Other except for self-sacrifice.

While some poems are quite obvious about the change of the focalization, in others indication of such a shift is miniscule and based on context. In the poem "Horse," already the title signals to the reader that the first person narrative voice belongs to a horse. As frequently the case in Lysheha's poems, however, the true nature of things is revealed only at the very end of the poem. The poem is written in the style of poetic prose: it runs on without any divisions into lines or stanzas, intimating that this is a sort of a stream of consciousness, which is indeed very convincing.[167] As in the poem "Bear," there is a sense of a post-apocalyptic situation in which loss and decline are firmly engraved into the depicted reality. At the same time, tension exists between the ideal state (before) and its corruption (now), and between appearance (the past is not entirely lost) and "true" reality (in fact, it is lost). In this poem, the poet carefully approaches these

[167] Interestingly, Lysheha fundamentally reworked the poem for his 2012 edition. The most invasive change was putting the poem in the "proper" poetic form: now it is visibly a poem, broken down into short lines, each beginning with a capital letter – the clearest caesura in Lysheha's writing, as Vadym Trinchii argues (23). Most changes are of stylistic nature (moving parts of the text around, replacing some of the words), but the consequences of some changes are very meaningful. For instance, the transformation of the alder into a human being becomes possible now; the figure of a "smiling" dog is introduced, who is the horse's companion in the human domestication effort; the new version also reduces the reference to the destructive influence of civilization (digging of tunnels and laying of railways disappear).

radical statements. They also find various realizations in different poems of the collection, without entirely losing ambiguity of each assertion. In "Bear," it's the paw of the bear that is still "scary enough, / To protect this night"; in "Horse," the horse "can still bite"; and in "Dog," the dog "can still get up and shake it off" (although the transition here is significantly closer to loss and decay, because the chance of his "growing over with nettle" is present as well). At the same time, this loss is never a tragic or even dramatic event, as was discussed above ("Bear").

Lysheha's apocalypse is never final, or it's not quite an apocalypse: while the loss is there, there is also a possibility for renewal, although perhaps in a different, unexpected form. Such is the bear's orderly sorting of his supper leftovers (having picked it up to make the first music instrument, a bone flute, man indeed revives the bear); such is also the dead dog's merging with the landscape of the forest in which "[o]ld wounds are healing.. / Crushed joints grow back together.. / Muscles swell like trees.." (*Velykyi mist* (2012) 17). And such is also the horse's decision to stay with the human that concludes the poem: by staying to keep him company out of compassion, the horse fulfills the idea of equality of all beings (horses, namely, can be as good friends to humans as humans can). This universal equality and fluidity of beings is addressed also earlier in the poem, in relation to the alder:

Я люблю стояти під вільхою, щоб на мене скрапував її гіркий сік – у нас подібна доля, така ж темна, крихка – ще кілька таких тисячоліть і її не стане – а поки що лише завдяки дарові перевтілення може уподібнюватися сосні чи іншій прирученій істоті, хоч насправді вона родичка іхтіозавра.. (*Velykyi mist*	I love standing beneath the alder, so that her bitter juice drips down on me – our fate is similar, equally dark and brittle – a few more of such millenia and she will perish – but for now, only because of her gift of shape shifting, she can appear as a pine, or some other domesticated being, although in reality she is related to ichtyosaur..

(2012) 28) (Translation is mine.) [168]

The poem is filled with reminiscences about the connection to nature, about how much of the wilderness still remains inside the tamed animal. The question of authenticity that is raised in such a way is resolved rather unconventionally: the horse's decision to stay ("The festering wound aches each night.. It forces me to plan escape.. But how will I now leave him alone?" (ibid. 29)) is a surrendering of an ideal identity that has become a distant memory for the sake of an identity defined through proximity and connection. Civilization becomes an ambiguous concept under such circumstances: on the one hand, it is the human being – the representative of human civilization – that inflicts the wound (on the hourse, but also on nature as a whole: "But someone dug a tunnel all the way to it, and poured metal into the tracks, and now his [tur's] roar is in the heart, and clatter of hoofs – behind his back.. And I imagine whose fault it is" (ibid.)). Yet on the other hand this does not lead to condemnation or any kind of moral judgment (although the human fault is evident, the horse abstains from direct blame), thus the poet rejects the stance of didacticism. (This becomes even more apparent in the last lines of the last poem of the collection.)

The second half of the poem reveals the intricate edifice of its motivational structure. An attentive reader will realize that the poem cannot be reduced here to the Romantic *Naturphilosophie* (in the sense of unity of nature and the nature's autonomy of consciousness), because the agent of the narrating voice owes his existence to the human artist: "Indeed, I am thankful to the one who, commemorating us, outlined our shadows

[168] Lysheha makes this claim for universal equality through the device of shape shifting significantly stronger in the 2012 edition of the poem, where the alder can transform itself also "to another human being" ("Snihovi i vohnyu" 125).

with red soil, having added blood to it, in order to adorn a little the world before him" (ibid.). The horse, his festering wound, and the alder, although grounded in natural reality, are creations of the human artist and his consciousness. Even the extinction of the wild tur is the result of the paint's falling off of the wall. Lysheha thus immediately deconstructs the unity of nature that began emerging in some of the poems, presenting the autonomous consciousness of the natural being as a projection of the human mind. Here, art emerges as a powerful tool to manifest reality which ceases to exist outside of it. Writing about surrealism and intuition in Lysheha's poetry, Roksolana Sviato emphasizes precisely this quality: "In the consciousness of the poetic subject the entire world that he depicts exists as the 'real' reality, one that he feels and trusts, without perceiving it as in any way fantastic" (61). It is the mind of the artist (poet) that becomes the center of Lysheha's attention. The intuitive perception of reality is not equal in Lysheha to sentimentalism (as seen in Shevchuk, Drozd, or Midianka): indeed, "[e]ven when the poetic subject sees the pain of the other being, he does not *pity* it, but instead begins to feel it, too" (ibid.).

Art figures in other poems as well, and artistic activity forms an arch that unites the collection of poetry. Two poems are particularly successful in this regard: "Rooster" and "Embers." In "Rooster," the poet describes the genesis of a work of art, and its place in a social framework that is defined by concerns that are far from artistic deliberations. In an allegoric form, the poet elaborates different stages of making art. It begins with using the simplest materials to create something beautiful and unique: a giant clay rooster that is supposed to be "puffy" is kneaded from "little foam, from cream, / That remained on the bottom of a pit with rain water" (ibid. 26). Very prominent here is the tension

between rational and purely artistic considerations about art: the voice of the father instructs to pay attention to "functionality," "fullness," and "reliability" (ibid.). The father's voice is a representation of the common sense and general logic of social success, but also of a tradition that could be read as literary canon calling for literature to be devoted to a purpose. In either reading, following these rules, one has a chance to become "a human being," that is, reach success in the meaning of accepted practices of self-realization in a society. Yet the poet goes against those prescriptions, he remains concerned with issues far from practical matters: "– My dear, fire awaits soon.. are you ready?"; "Are you really so taken/ By your role as a clay pot [filled] with pork fat?" (ibid.)). The failure of the effort in practical terms (explosion of the pot in the process of firing because the practical rules of production were not followed) is in no way a failure of the act of artistic creation. Lysheha makes a prominent statement to the contrary, showing that what is perceived as failure by social standards indeed is success in artistic domain. Thus in the poem the clay pot's artistic function – as a rooster that "sings" – becomes only realized because it does *not* fulfill its practical purpose, that is – become a "clay put with pork fat":

..Я думав, колись він буде повний, І приробив до шиї масивне вухо. ... Але він став інакшим – Дитина могла підняти одним пальцем Тонкий задимлений тулуб без голови, без крил, І лише трохи видовжена опуклість Вказувала на хвіст могутнього колись птаха.. А там, де мала початись шия, Потріскана форма гинула в дикому співі З ями, засипаної осколками і попелом..	..I thought, sometime he will be full, And attached a massive handle to its neck. … But he became different – A child could lift with one finger His thin, smoky torso without a head, without wings, And only a somewhat elongated protrusion Pointed to the tail of the once powerful bird.. And where the neck was supposed to begin, The cracked form was dying in a wild song From the pit, filled with shards and ash..

(ibid. 27) (Translation is mine.)

However, art is not entirely "useless" to the society. As in other Lysheha's poems, another layer of meaning opens with a second round of reading, against the backdrop of the poem that was seemingly fully unfolded. In fact, the poem narrates that art that is privatized for political, ideological, and other practical purposes loses its poetic function. As a container for "pork fat," the clay pot would fulfill its practical destiny, useful and all. Only having died in its utilitarian dimension, the clay rooster achieves his higher function: to "sing." The message that art is entrusted to communicate is harrowing, it's a warning about an impending assault on what defines humanity and its civilization:

- Як, ви ще спите? довкола повно вовків!	- What, you are still asleep? it's swarming of wolves around here!
Недавно приручені собаки	Dogs, domesticated not too long ago,
Об'їлись кістками вепра!	Stuffed themselves with a boar's bones!
Вже недалеко й до вас!	They're closing in on you!
(ibid. 26)	

As we can see, the prophetic function is present in Lysheha's work, but it's largely ascribed to art itself, with the figure of the poet in the background. Such a framing allows for criticism that is addressed to society and its elites, without dedicating the entire poetic effort to it and without losing artistic depth.

In a similar, perhaps somewhat more direct way Lysheha also addresses the issue of giving in to social pressure – real or imagined – and to temptation of vanity and yearning for success. The poem "Embers" begins with a confession that the poet did succumb to the temptation of the fair whose attraction is defined in an inner dialogue that rationalizes the decision: "The fair did seduce me [after all]. / It's going to be merry there, so many people – / And at some point one ought to sell something" (ibid. 41). This compromise with consciousness is presented as a moral one, performed in front of several

"witnesses." The poem is remarkable in its staging of the process, and that the narrator at one point switches to a "we" voice, including the reader and other witnesses in the performance of an act of theatrical revolt against the original rational decision. Creating under the external pressure (time, as the fair in the city has a limited temporal window), the poet reduces the value of the artwork produced: it is rushed, created under the wrong premise, and therefore raw (clay pots are a perfect medium for communicating that) and are worthy only of returning them to "snow and fire":

Хтозна, якби трохи раніше, –	Who knows, perhaps if it were a bit earlier, –
	They could have been filled with pennies..
Могли б наповнитись копійками..	But, clearly, hands new their worth,
Але, видко, руки знали їм ціну,	Because, cut to blood
Бо, здерті до крові	They decided to gift all that money
Вирішили подарувати усі ті гроші	To snow and fire – the only witnesses
Снігові і вогню – єдиним свідкам	
(ibid.)	

Admittedly, snow and fire were not the only witnesses. "Interested ants" that gather on the patch of earth warm from fire observe the poet as well: "For them, such an event could also be / An extraordinary experience in life" (ibid. 42). Theatricality of the scene is revealed when the stage is presented to the internal and external interlocutors: "..And now we suddenly find ourselves / At the heart of a very tricky constellation"; "You can't escape from such a trap until night" (ibid.). The escape is radical and is performed for the observer as a burial ritual, referring to the Biblical story of Genesis:

А тепер дивіться, що роблю:	Look now, what I'm doing:
Поки ще не зовсім потьмянів жар –	Before the embers start dimming –
Беру дрючок і з усієї сили руйную	I take a stake and with all might destroy
Навислий над випаленою ямою земляний дах –	The earth roof that hangs over burnt out pit –
Землю до землі!	Soil back to soil![169]

[169] The original verse from Genesis 3:19: "for dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return" (Kind James version).

(ibid.) (Translation is mine.)

The ritual is mystical and it returns the artwork that was tainted by ill intention – practical intention, that is – back to non-existence. The breaking of a poet's unspoken contract with the realm of art can be atoned for, but it cannot be undone. The curious ants observing the process are fragments of the poet's own personality that will testify that he, too, succumbed to the temptation. As a symbol of sacrifice, the prehistoric bear reappears here: "This is how, with one stroke of his scary paw / The bear collapses at the end of the winter / His lair with all its warm sleep" (ibid.43). The poet's personality that is multiplied and externalized to be the outside audience that watches from its "warm spot of earth," transforms the poem into the bear, a wild animal or a holy fool in an act of mystical transfiguration: "Don't I appear to you from there, from the warm spot of earth, / Such an impatient animal on snow?" (ibid.). The symbolic return of the bear that ruins his own shelter – "Earned honestly by endless search / And solitude" (ibid.) – and the pain he goes through when destroying his own creation that has become tainted prefigures the mystical act of suicide that is the only way out of the compromise – not just with society whose pressure the poet succumbed to, but also of creation of meaning itself that necessarily is a fruit of compromise and thus impure. Lysheha's poem once again functions on many levels at once: both as allegory for a radical withdrawal from society and creation of "purposeful" art, but also as recognition of perils of accessing and transporting the poetic truth about being and the world.

The journey comes full circle in the poem "He," which concludes the collection of poetry and sums it up.[170] As Vadym Trinchii correctly points out, "He" is the only poem that is dedicated to poetry and is thus programmatic for Lysheha (24). "He" is the same prehistoric bear that in the beginning of the collection orderly puts together small and big bones, as if waiting for the human being to repurpose them for art. But "he" is also the bear from "Embers" that immediately precedes this poem: it is the artist who does not fit in the society and thus appears as a wild animal to his spectators. In "He" this image develops further – it degenerates from the powerful, although out of control, animal and a holy fool into the circus bear that is chained by his neck and dances on a scorching sheet of metal. Many of the collection's images and allegories disintegrate in the last poem, including the somewhat romantic mode of writing about and in the nature. Continuing the manner of dialogue from the previous poem, the poet addresses directly his audience, part of which is also his own split self:

Як міцно треба було стискати	With what force one had to clench
Затесаного дрючка аж доти,	The sharpened stake until
Поки в глухому закуті кам'яної нори	Finally in the dead corner of a stony lair
Зі здибленої тіні великого самітника	From the reared-up shadow of the great hermit
Не хлине з горла тобі на груди кров..	The blood will rush onto your chest..
(ibid. 44)	(SPOL/a 23)

[170] In the 2012 edition that expands the collection, "He" is placed after "Mountain" and situates the poem geographically and symbolically. In "Mountain," two travellers wander in the mountains looking for traces of past times. The poem concludes with the image of a wall "thickly overgrown by blackberries" with voices that sound above it (вгорі). "He" opens with a direct continuation of these references: "В горі, аж мокрій від перестиглої ожини" (In the mountain, practically wet from overripe blackberries). The 2012 edition ends on a different note that seems to be more appropriate for the late edition – the poem "Trace." A story of catching fish by hands from a river, it allegorically tells the story of poetic craftsmanship and the access to archetypally deep knowledge that could be dangerous or deathly. The poem also addresses the question of legacy – a trace of white clay that carries the message that the poet was still alive and working.

The poet's interlocutor is introduced through the impersonal construction in the third line of the poem ("Як міцно треба було стискати"), the answer to which (*кому* треба було? – for whom?) is the second person singular (in Dative) in the seventh line: хлине кров ... *тобі* на груди (you). With this elaborate construction Lysheha implicates in the original sin – humanity's ruthless subjugation of nature – also himself as a poet and as part of the humankind. The burnt stake from "Embers" that the artist used to destroy "tainted" artwork becomes a weapon of murder, and the artist-killer inherits the bear's "flayed skin, and his cut off paw, / To which his power clung" (ibid.). The bear's power, however, is not defined through his physical strength, but through his being the precursor of the written word and art: imitating the bear's claw marks on the cave's wall, humans invented an instrument for self-reflection and "self-ownership" – one that makes them immortal but also one that kills them. Human distance to nature, approach to it as an object – the bear on the chain now becomes a symbol for the tamed nature designed to satisfy humanity's needs and desires – is also what leads to its decline. The poem shifts time and framework of its narration halfway through the poem, moving from the prehistoric to modern times, before it moves to an even greater scale of things at the end. Making the leap from primitive drawings from drawings in blood on a bone or the tree bark to writing on paper, Lysheha addresses the modern day, raising the question of collective responsibility for the nature's exploitation:

Але що таке папір?	But what is paper?
Чи знала рука, що то підрубаний ліс,	Did the hand know that it is cut-down forest,
Обвалені шахти, занедбана земля?..	Collapsed mines, deserted land?..
Певне, ще не хотіла знати,	Certainly, it didn't want to know,
Бо весь час пробувала	Because it tried all the time
Вибілитись від гною, диму,	To bleach itself from dung, smoke,
Стати делікатною, власністю самої себе,	To become delicate, its own property,

Досконалим інструментом, чого нема в нікого (ibid. 44-45)	A perfect instrument, which no one has (Translation is mine.)

Human mortality and despair over it are seen with distance, even light sarcasm, as something the poet does not share and is not afraid of. Death is merely a return "back to acid brine, / To the native stony ground" (SPOL/a 25). The concluding lines of the poem intimate a picture of a hill bursting with blackberries: but even a quick bird cannot peck the whole berry without sitting on the thorny twig. In this allegory, the poet introduces death as a logical and predictable consequence of the desire to have it all. Projected onto the level of artistic activity, however, this allegory points to torture and perhaps a symbolic death that the poet – now the killer of the bear, and now the bear himself – willingly faces for the desire to gain access to the mystical nature of being and to write pure poetry. Spilling the blood of the "great hermit" that is used for writing and painting, the "you" of the poet – his own split self – is both the victim and the killer who sacrifices himself to atone for writing poetry. "Поки ... / Не хлине з горла тобі на груди" (Until … / The blood will rush onto your chest) thus receives a new meaning: it is *your* blood that will rush onto your own chest, and with this blood you will paint the shadow of the great hermit, your own image. Discussing the metamorphoses depicted in the poem, Trinchii interprets the suicide motive as a journey of return: "the poet has to return to the sacred cave, through suicide symbolically turning his home into a cave" (24). Trinchii convincingly argues that the bear, therefore, is a sacrifice whose blood was the price of becoming a poet. Since writing is initially connected to the act of killing, undoing it requires "destruction of the process of the author's civilizing/growing up, return to the

cave as a sacrifice for himself, … and returning the paw back to the bear (ceasing to write)" (ibid.).

The scope of this study does not allow for an in-depth exploration of Lysheha's well-documented interest in D.H. Lawrence, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Robert Penn Warren, but it should become an object of close scholarly interest in the future. As a translator of their works, Lysheha certainly was influenced by their poetic program, imagery, and key themes, as I briefly emphasized earlier in this chapter. Lysheha is unique in the Ukrainian context in this regard as his case reveals a telling example of transnational continuity: skipping the Ukrainian predecessors, Lysheha looks to prominent English and American poets of the past and the present with whom he shares artistic principles. A virtual communication with these poets also defines Lysheha's search for expressiveness within the Ukrainian context, but unlike other Ukrainian writers and poets discussed in this study the national element is never emphasized in his works. Most prominent in this regard is Lysheha's abandoning of a rhymed verse – a move championed by Hryhorii Chubai, although it remains exemplary in the Ukrainian poetry where rhyme continues to dominate poetic practice. Very promising is also an analysis of Lysheha's interest in the works of Henry David Thoreau (especially his journals and the book *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (1854)), which points to an affinity between the worldviews of the two writers. Overall, Lysheha's work shows the extent of artistic development that was accomplished by the Ukrainian literature in the 1970s and especially in the 1980s – for the most part entirely unbeknown to the broad Ukrainian public.

Concluding, it is important to emphasize some of the key motives and unparalleled achievements of Lysheha's poetry. Already in his early poetry, Lysheha puts forward an entirely different approach to writing and to poetic language. Escaping the Ukrainian canon of the 19th and 20th century literature, Lysheha builds a line of continuity with American version of Romanticism (Transcendentalism by way of Henry Thoreau) and the European and American modernism (by way of D.H. Lawrence, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot). Connection to Transcendentalism with its belief in a priori experience and knowledge – very much aligned with Kant's philosophy of idealism – yields for Lysheha a yearning for pure poetry and access to inherent knowledge of the essence of the world and being in it. This also defines his complex approach to nature and the human civilization's influence on it. Lysheha effectively disconnects himself from the tradition of Ukrainian Romanticism with its focus on national suffering and national realization in favor of focusing on issues that are inherently universal. Writing poetry according to principles embraced by modernists such as Lawrence, Pound, and Eliot resulted in economy, precision and utmost clarity of language that remains unprecedented in Ukrainian literature. Circumstances of life under an oppressive regime do emerge in Lysheha's poetry, but mostly within the larger framework of a poet's interaction with society where crucial question is that of transmission of the knowledge and experience acquired by the poet. In a similar way, Lysheha touches upon questions of audience, success, and literary process. The "national question" never surfaces in his poetry.

A prominent place in Lysheha's poetic effort belongs to sensual and mystical experience of the world and to poetry as a vessel for that experience. The image of a great bridge is perhaps fitting as a larger metaphor for Lysheha's work: the poet's mission is to

build such a bridge between different dimensions of knowledge and experience. This is eloquently expressed in the poem "River" that became part of the 2012 edition of the collection *Great Bridge*:

Заплющившись, Ворона	Having shut her eyes, Vorona
Минає Великий міст..	Passes by the Great Bridge..
Птаха-ріка, що бачила все..	A bird-river that has seen everything..
...	…
Все, все мусиш забути,	Everything, everything you must forget
Минаючи Великий міст..	Passing by the Great Bridge..
(*Velykyi mist* (2012) 79)	(Translation is mine.)

Lysheha's focus on the topic of death and his depiction of death as a natural progression towards a different mode of existence in the nature deprive death of its mystical dramatism and tragic undertones (in fact, Lysheha mocks such an approach in "He"). We detect here Lysheha's proximity to Rainer Maria Rilke and the dark poetics of his works. Lysheha's interest towards the dead body, as well as liminal states of body and mind (between life and death, between consciousness and unconsciousness) define his reaching into the harrowing, archetypal experience of human civilization such as murder and suicide. Lysheha's interest for these questions make him a profusely "adult" author. His stance, however, is far from pathos and preaching that was practiced by many *shistdesiatnyky* or the Romantics before them. Because of Lysheha's unique aversion against the literary process and the compromises it required for the sake of success, the audience for his works is defined crucially as a limited circle of other poets and intellectuals. Lysheha, therefore, does not calibrate his poetry to reach a mass audience, and rather engages in a conversation with kindred minds than teaches anyone. While his poetry is instructional, as Trinchii argues, it does not prescribe: instead, it performs what it believes in. Integrity and sincerety of Lysheha's moral position stand in stark contrast

to the works of Shevchuk and Drozd, as analyzed in earlier chapters. Lysheha deconstructs the systemic discourse without engaging it, for which the performative aspect of his poetry (as an ironic device) is highly important.

As to the overarching question of Lysheha's place in Ukrainian literature, one has to approach it within the framework of the extent of unfolding of certain literary and artistic paradigms in Ukrainian culture. Ukrainian modernism was cut short and did not fully exhaust its expressive potential for the Ukrainian context. Lysheha's turning to modernist models signifies productivity of their artistic exploration for the Ukrainian experience (such is the setting around Tysmenytsia, for instance, or various other geographic marks). His expressivity is therefore not limited by the prescriptive practices of Socialist Realism but measures itself against the global artistic developments. Lysheha goes further than his literary models and begins to deconstruct the modernist devices, allowing for their fragmentation. In this regard, irony is perhaps the most powerful tool used in his works. Against the backdrop of the Soviet and Ukrainian literary production in the 1970s and 1980s (as well as the 1990s), Lysheha's achievements stand out as an example of poetry that is poetically unique and structurally highly complex. Although little known to his contemporaries in Ukraine and abroad, his poetry is a testimony to the universal quality of poetry even under oppressive regimes. In radically "disengaging" from the Soviet system, Lysheha achieved artistic freedom that made it possible for him to entirely ignore ideological demands for creative output both from the Soviet as well as from the competing Ukrainian national projects. Orienting himself on a very limited audience, avoiding sentimentalism and pathos, and rejecting the messianic stance

Lysheha achieved perhaps the highest quality of artistic production that Ukrainian culture has seen in its entire history.

Conclusions

In the beginning of this study, its most basic and fundamental goal was formulated as an examination of strategies of an artist's engagement with or disengagement from a repressive political regime that imposes censorship over the artistic production of its people, and of the far-reaching consequences these assumed strategies have for the aesthetic quality of the artist's work. The immediate generalization that my study allows to make is not only that the aesthetic quality of a work of art directly correlates with the degree of the artist's disengagement from the political system within which she or he lives, but also that such disengagement defines the primacy of the aesthetic criterion as the governing principle of art and relegates ideological motivations either to the background or eliminates them altogether. Works of prose and poetry by prominent Ukrainian and Russian authors that I analyzed in my study demonstrate that engaging the system even in a way that attempts to overcome it and vanquish its oppressive influence over the spheres of collective memory, cultural or social reality usually leads to adoption of the same rhetoric stance (emotional, *pathos*) that necessitates an instrumentalization of art for the sake of an ideological struggle. This very stance by definition reduces the weight of aesthetic considerations in a work of art and opens the door for integration of structural elements of the very system that the work of art attempts to overcome. The artistic practice of those authors who participate in such a struggle with the system becomes limited to the structures of artistic expression offered by the system itself, even if those writers see their work as innovative in comparison to the artistic production of their immediate predecessors. In my study, Valerii Shevchuk entirely and Volodymyr Drozd to a lesser extent represent this possibility. A radical subversion of the

oppressive system becomes possible only when the author entirely disengages from the system's categorical apparatus and participates in a dialogue with an alternative discourse whose artistic considerations are defined by the aesthetic principle. Poets Oleh Lysheha and Elena Shvarts, and prose writer Liudmila Petrushevskaia are representatives of this possibility in my study, while the poet Petro Midianka in his collection of poetry *The Threshold* occupies a transitional position between the two.

Another goal of my study was to scrutinize the significance of the author's concept of implied audience and of her or his self-positioning vis-à-vis that audience for the aesthetic quality of their work. In this regard my study shows that the broader of an audience an author seeks to reach the lower a priority she or he ascribes to the aesthetic quality of the work, and the higher priority the emotional component receives. This also results directly from the author's self-understanding in addressing the audience: the more the author sees herself or himself as the speaker for a large audience, the more central position she or he seeks to assume in the definition of the public discourse, the more she or he is going to lapse into a messianic stance that is governed by didacticism and moralization that reduce possibilities for inclusion of conflicting motivations and nuance of their representation. On the level of the literary work this translates into a less intricate depiction of reality, which seeks to single out certain elements that become the target of a moral utterance and by this to reduce the complexity of depiction of reality in order to reach a wider audience. Representatives of this tendency are Valerii Shevchuk and Volodymyr Drozd, while Petro Midianka occupies an ambiguous position in this regard. The opposing strategy, represented by Oleh Lysheha and Elena Shvarts, as well as to a slightly lesser extent by Liudmila Petrushevskaia, embraces its marginal position in

relation to the public discourse and seeks to include in the reality's depiction a maximum of conflicting motivations to present a complex narrative that prevents the possibility of a linear moral judgment. The latter strategy also allows more space for formal experimentation, as I show in my readings of specific works by the above authors.

A further objective of my examination was to scrutinize the role of the repressive regime in the development of one or the other artistic tendency as explicated above. My findings here show that the aesthetic achievements of those authors who embraced their marginality vis-à-vis the public and who were able to continue working for a small, dedicated audience by far outweigh the respective achievements of those who struggled to occupy a central position in the public discourse. Prime examples of the former are Oleh Lysheha and Elena Shvarts, while the latter are represented by Valerii Shevchuk and Volodymyr Drozd. Once again, Petro Midianka and Liudmila Petrushevskaia occupy an intermediary position here.

My study also shows that, although both forms can be used for ideological instrumentalization, in dealing with the challenges of creative autonomy under the conditions of a repressive political regime poetry lends itself better to subverting the rigid stylistic and ideological demands impressed by the regime upon artistic creation. This has to do, on the one hand, with a higher level of semantic compression – and, therefore, ambiguity – that poetry achieves due to its form. On the other hand, poetry that pursues primarily ideological goals by definition tends to assume less daring forms, since its message has to be very clear to a broad audience; therefore, such poetry becomes easily recognizable and can be quickly dismissed (the subversive potential of Pavlo Tychyna's and Vladimir Maiakovskii's ideological poetry is a good illustration for this general

tendency). The prosaic form, however, complies more with the verboseness (even graphomania) and the tendency for reiteration of the ideological impetus and can successfully resist it by circumventing the appeal of the big form and by turning to a restrained style of narration (as we see, for instance, in Liudmila Petrushevskaia).

My analysis of the works of Valerii Shevchuk and Volodymyr Drozd shows that they fit well in the paradigm of the late Socialist Realism: while some features become of secondary importance and largely disappear (such as explicit praise of the communist ideology or the Party, etc.), many other structural elements remain constant. Such elements are primarily connected to the "classical" features of Socialist Realism: its striving for a harmonious and idyllic depiction of reality, a certain sense of wholesomeness, general heroization, pathos and tendency for monumentality. Some features of the socialist realist novel remain and are fragmented or multiplied – for instance, the positive hero, or the plot's progression from darkness to light. I show that a form of Ukrainian populism (*narodnytstvo*) is a comfortable alternative for the socialist realist writers because both styles share their opposition to Modernism and, through their proximity to Romanticism, share several elements of structure and form. Both forms are highly ideological forms of art, with the concrete type of ideology being the only significant difference between them. Replacing the ideological element is for these authors a step that requires significantly less energy than a possible realignment towards formal experimentation of modernist literature. Works by Valerii Shevchuk (*On the Field of Humility*, *The Tree of Thoughts*) and Volodymyr Drozd (*The Leaves of the Earth*) represent the genre of the big prosaic form (novel and its variations) that are marked by verbosity that borders on graphomania: as I show in my analysis, their relevant

characteristics are self-referentiality and endless reiteration of the same structural elements that add little to the aesthetic or ideological achievement of their works. In working with these texts, such qualities translate into problems with finding succinct representative quotes, since their style resists any language economy.

As I demonstrate in my reading of the novels by Shevchuk and Drozd, heightened sentimentalism, traces of magical realism and whimsical decorations of narration, as well as populist themes define the Ukrainian version of the late Socialist Realism. Both writers resist marginalization of Ukrainian themes and their own marginalization as authors and resort to pathos and apocalyptic imagery in their writings that address a broad audience. Their self-positioning vis-à-vis their implied audience fashions them as modern-day prophets who are dedicated to either chronicling the history of Ukrainian suffering (Drozd) or educating those Ukrainians who in the course of the Soviet experience strayed away from their homeland about the admirable history of their ancestors (Shevchuk). At the heart of such narrative strategies lie issues of identity formation which emphasize patriarchal, traditionalist, and puritan values. An important role in this process play efforts at reappropriation of the pagan, Medieval Slavic, and Romantic cultural heritage, which defines the importance for these writers of foundational myths (*The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, *Patericon* and *The Primary Chronicle*) and figures (Rusian princes, Nestor the Chronicler, Mykola Hohol'/Nikolai Gogol, and many others). The strength of the ideological stance also varies: Volodymyr Drozd is significantly more inconclusive in that he is clearly pro-Ukrainian but only cautiously anti-Soviet. For both writers this points to the past concessions they had to make to the Soviet regime in order to be published and receive the benefits traditional for Soviet writers. Although their works are

clearly experimental and innovative, especially against the background of the Soviet state-sanctioned literature of preceding decades, the extent of their experimentation remains limited by their position within the framework of late Socialist Realism.

The Russian prose writer Liudmila Petrushevskaia serves as a contrast case in this regard. As my analysis of her short prose ("A Case of Virgin Birth" and "The Lookout Point") shows, Petrushevskaia radically disengages from the Soviet "official" culture and resists narrative expectations of an audience that is used to the conventions of Socialist Realism. Petrushevskaia is very interested in reaching a wide audience because her prose carries a broad humanist message, but she refuses to make concessions that would undermine her artistic integrity. As a result she returns to the concept of an attentive, initiated reader who understands her literary strategies of anticlimactic narration, depiction of quotidian situations and of human relationships under conditions of stress and deprivation. As my analysis demonstrates, Petrushevskaia is not interested in big narratives of national or imperial scale; instead she turns to *byt* [everyday life] primarily of Soviet women who struggle with complex and paradox circumstances of their personal lives. She narrates with great restraint and in language that is marked by reduction and omission, requiring of her reader a reconstruction of the full, often horrifying picture she reveals. Such a narrative strategy makes impossible high pathos or any kind of epic dimension in her prose; in fact, most of the relationships she describes are between individuals in a tight physical space. The use of the genre of oral narration and the deployment of *skaz* allows Petrushevskaia to turn to the internal world of her characters, describing deformations of their psyche. Unlike Volodymyr Drozd who also employs *skaz* her characters' stories represent independent and complex contexts that resist any

instrumentalization towards a larger ideological agenda. My reading of Petrushevskaia's short prose shows that the main impetus of her works is to elicit in her readers empathy for and reflection on the individual fates she portrays, as to prevent the possibility of moral judgment or expressions of violence on the part of her reader.

All three poets analyzed in my study stand out for their embracing of their marginal status in relation to the public discourse of the Soviet regime. Oleh Lysheha and Elena Shvarts are examples of the most radical disengagement from the Soviet system: they both seek interlocutors outside of the Soviet "official" culture and look for inspiration either to prominent Western (Lysheha) or outstanding domestic modernist poets (Shvarts and Lysheha). My readings of Petro Midianka's poetry show that he assumes an intermediary position in this regard: while he is primarily interested in the local audience of his Transcarpathian homeland, he also makes concessions that allowed him to be published in Soviet Ukraine (inclusion of oblique ideological references) and to reach a wider audience (compilation of a vocabulary of dialectal words that populate his poems). Both Oleh Lysheha and Elena Shvarts are deeply interested in questions of the Self and poetic revelation, deformations of the human body and its vulnerability and mortality in juxtaposition with the metaphysical nature of poetry and mystical knowledge of the world. Questions of social and political interaction are either secondary or entirely insignificant to their poetic programs, while social existence is grasped primarily through their being a poet. The latter also justifies a strong projection of their poetic Self. Both poets are interested in the revelatory potential of liminal states of mind and body, physical hybridity and deformity, death and loss. For Shvarts, this explorations assume a more violent form, while Lysheha's approach is marked by a harmonious fitting into the

reality of the natural world. Petro Midianka differs somewhat in these respects, as the regional identity and the nostalgia for the region's multicultural past occupy a significant part of his work.

Given the fact that the Ukrainian poets and writers discussed in my study remain largely outside of scholarly attention and scrutiny, my analysis and readings of their works will contribute significantly to raising awareness among scholars of the vibrant experimentation that these authors pursued under conditions of severe political pressure and censorship. Oleh Lysheha in particular deserves an in-depth study as one of the most significant European poets of the 20th century. Equally, the phenomenon of the late Soviet Realism and its Ukrainian version merits a closer attention of scholars of literature and culture. A deeper understanding of both the experimentation of poets and writers who embraced their marginality and of those who continued engaging with the paradigm of Socialist Realism will contribute to an adequate interpretation of cultural and literary developments in Ukraine and Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is my belief that the vibrant though widely unknown experimentation of the 1970s and to a 1980s prefigured most of the prolific and often contradictory developments of the post-Soviet time.

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