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The Canon Reversed: New Ukrainian Literature of the 1990s

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"What we are experiencing now may be called the decline of the 'poetry-as-opposition' tradition," Oksana Zabuzhko said in 1996. Indeed, in the Soviet period, literature served, on the one hand, as a vehicle of the official ideology by supporting the socialist realist literary canon and, on the other hand, as an aesthetic opposition to the totalitarian socialist culture and political society. With the collapse of the Soviet regime and the birth of the new independent Ukrainian state, Ukrainian writers, as well as writers of other nationalities, felt released from the pressures of ideology. Literature seemed to be a field of freedom, of the pleasurable, self-sufficient play of the imagination, and of individual self-expression. This sense of freedom predominated during the first half of the 1990s and was nourished by the idea of a national renaissance.

Ukraine's period of national romanticism in the early 1990s coincided with an information revolution in which the intellectual elite and mass audience gained access to Western liberal ideas and to an enormous number of previously prohibited or inaccessible authors, books, theories, and interpretative strategies. This was also a time of heightened interest in non-official dissident and underground literature. In an atmosphere of newly found freedom, young writers and provincial literary centres, such as Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Kharkiv, Zhytomyr, and Kirovohrad, assumed an important role, while the influence of the official Writers' Union of Ukraine (SPU) declined.

This process of decentralization and generational change undermined the homogeneity and universality of socialist realist literature. The character of writing itself changed. Ukrainian writers became playful and subversive of cultural codes. They began filling the information vacuum and rewriting national

cultural narratives. The post-colonial condition of the time was a kaleidoscope of different styles and ideas, a world in constant transformation and creation.

In this situation a new literary consciousness was born. My purpose here is to describe the new paradigm of Ukrainian literature that was adopted in the 1990s and the main tendencies to which it gave rise. The character of the literature of this decade was determined by several waves of literary development and three cultural and aesthetic models. The literary consciousness of the first phase, covering approximately the first half of the 1990s, was defined by a new sense of freedom and the belief that in order to create a "complete" literary model consisting of compatible national, aesthetic, and modern ideals the official codes and populist tendencies of Soviet literature must be rejected. In the second half of the decade the conflict among the different literary groups, tendencies, and ideologies intensified, disappointment with postmodernism spread, and, as a mass audience emerged, the incentive to write didactic literature became stronger.

During these two phases, three cultural and aesthetic orientations played a significant role in Ukrainian literature; namely, neo-modernism, postmodernism, and neo-populism. Neo-populist writers avoided formal experimentation and sophisticated literary stylization. They wrote for a large audience, offering it mostly emotional depictions of past national tragedies—e.g., Roman Ivanychuk's *Orda* (Horde) and Iurii Mushketyk's *Na brata brat* (Brother against Brother)—or of moral decadence in contemporary society—e.g., Anatolii Dimarov's *Zahublena dusha* (Lost Soul) and Volodymyr Drozd's *Zlyi dukh. Iz zhytiiem* (An Evil Spirit. With a Life). Interestingly enough, even writers who used to represent the so-called intellectual tendency in the Soviet literature (Drozd and Mushketyk) have combined neo-populist ideology with slightly modernist forms in their most recent works.

But the more interesting development was the increasingly visible and productive opposition between the practitioners of neo-modernism and postmodernism. I shall deal mostly with these two literary orientations, which define the work of the two most productive generations—the "eightiers" and the "ninetiers," and I shall pay special attention to their stylistic and ideological differences. My principal aim is to show how the rich diversity we observe in Ukrainian literature at the end of the twentieth century came about. Today Ukrainian prose embraces various discursive genres and styles, such as the feminism of Oksana Zabuzhko, the existentialism of Viacheslav Medvid, the apocalypticism of Oles Ulianenko, the bohemianism of Iurii Andrukhovych, the porno-eroticism of Iurii Vynnychuk and Iurii Pokalchuk, and the metahistoricism of Vasyl Kozhelianko. In poetry the intellectualist tendencies of Ihor Rymaruk, Oksana Zabuzhko, and Natalka Bilotserkivets coexist with the melancholic and metaphysical works of Oleh Lysheha, Vasyl Makhno, Marianna Kyianovska, and Ivan Andrusiak. The mythological poetry of Vasyl Herasymiuk stands next to the

neo-baroque stylization of Iurii Andrukhovych and the rock rhythms of Viktor Neborak's and Serhii Zhadan's futuristic metaphorics. The subversive tone of Oleksandr Irvanets's parodies contrasts with the prophetic pathos of Stepan Protsiuk's poems.

The Official and Unofficial Literary Canon

During the years of perestroika, literature seemed to be an integral part of the nation- and state-building process. Assuming their historic national mission, Ukrainian writers produced works that would satisfy not only aesthetic but also political, sociological, and cognitive needs. In the first years of perestroika the professional interests of Ukrainian writers coincided with the project of nation building.[1]

Politically tendentious criteria were then dominant in literary criticism. But at the same time a new assumption about literature that reflected the bankruptcy of Soviet literature as politically engaged consciousness emerged. The ideological shift towards the ideals of civil society, nation building, and Western cultural tradition was evident in the literary discourse, redefining and illuminating its new cultural codes. Ukrainian literature began to be approached from the aesthetic rather than political viewpoint as literary critics and scholars began to talk about the author's creative self-expression. Courses on the history of Ukrainian literature at academic institutions, for example, stressed the aesthetic value of the texts besides filling the gaps in the previous literary canon.[2]

In the early 1990s the SPU supported the re-examination of literary history, and by articulating demands for the development of the Ukrainian language and culture as well as democracy, it had some impact on public discourse. But the relicts of totalitarian thinking and populist myth in the SPU's outlook eventually led to a conflict between the new aesthetic demands and the SPU's predominant patriotic ideology. As the stream of new writings grew from about the mid-1990s, the SPU became increasingly conservative in its aesthetic views. The rejection of stylistic innovation, mass culture, postmodernism, and Westernization was clearly articulated in the SPU's paper, *Literaturna Ukraina*. The image of the besieged fortress and anti-modernist and anti-Western rhetoric have since dominated its discourse. SPU members have been unhappy with their decreasing readership and the nature of contemporary literature, which has changed

1. For more on the political engagement of Ukrainian writers during the first years of perestroika, see Volodymyr Kulyk, "Pysmennytske vidrodzhennia: Ukrainska derzhavna ideia v dyskursi 'opozytsii vseredyni rezhymu' pershykh rokiv perebudovy," *Suchasnist*, 1998, no. 1: 54–79.

2. See V. H. Donchyk, ed., *Istoriia ukrainskoi literatury XX stolittia v dvokh knyhakh* (Kyiv: Lybid, 1993); and M. T. Iatsenko, ed., *Istoriia ukrainskoi literatury XIX st. u trokh knyhakh* (Kyiv: Lybid, 1995–7).

significantly under the impact of mass culture. They have stressed the danger of aesthetic anarchy and have called for a return to the moral values of traditional literature. Paradoxically, their appeal has been supported by not only older writers, but also by younger ones who have proclaimed the nativist ideal of literature as the expression of the "true" national spirit and see their vocation as serving God, not society[3] These authors want to see a "positive hero" embodying the "national character" in contemporary literature. They have discussed the question of patriotism and its representation and have demonized postmodernism, which, they stress, merely "amuses and entertains" the public.[4]

The concept of a "complete" literature and its role in the cultural sphere were the focus of intense interest in the early 1990s. Such a literature was seen as the answer to Ukraine's post-colonial social and cultural predicament. It fitted into the vision of an innovative, highly-developed Ukrainian culture that was to arise under the new conditions of national independence and freedom.

In the early 1990s many Ukrainian scholars became acquainted with Dmytro Chyzhevsky's works and his claim that modern Ukrainian literature was incomplete.[5] Chyzhevsky had pointed out that the strong populist sense of "one family" that modern Ukrainian writers had expressed restricted their range of styles and genres. In his opinion this was due to the colonial status of Ukrainian culture in relation to the Russian imperial culture. Chyzhevsky had also pointed out that as a result of the alienation of the Ukrainian elite from Ukrainian culture, Ukrainian literature consisted mostly of the lower literary genres and was permeated with a populist consciousness. Hence the modernization of Ukrainian literature coincided with the decolonialization of Ukrainian culture. But the process of modernization was never fully completed, because the new Soviet ideology rejected the very notion of literary modernism. At the end of the twentieth century the thesis of incompleteness has been revised. In the new postmodern context the post-colonial feeling of resentment has redefined the idea of a complete literature.

It is worth noting that the notion of an incomplete literature was discussed largely during the second half of the twentieth century[6] and stimulated modernist experimentation by Ukrainian writers at the cost of populist writing. Throughout the twentieth century many Ukrainian modernist writers strived to attain a

3. See Oleksandr Iarovy, "Virtualnyi vystup na zizdi pysmennykiv Ukrainy," *Literaturna Ukraina*, 2001, no. 29.

4. See Orest Slyvynsky, "Zapiznila myt prozrinnia, *Vitchyzna*, 2002, nos. 5–6: 81, 82.

5. See Dmytro Chyzhevsky, *Istoriia ukrainskoi literatury vid pochatkiv do doby realizmu* (New York: Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Scences in the U.S., 1956).

6. See George Grabowicz, *Toward a History of Ukrainian Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981); and my article "Istoriohrafichna formula Hryhoriia Hrabovycha," *Suchasnist*, 2001, no. 6: 116–29.

literature with a complete European structure. Although many Ukrainian scholars in the 1990s did not accept the idea that Ukrainian literature is incomplete, they were impressed by this explanation of its inferiority.

In the process of revaluating Ukrainian literary classics after the collapse of the Soviet regime, the appeal to a European-type modern Ukrainian literature was revived. It legitimated the repossession of the literary canon.[7] This repossession consisted of filling in the "white spots," that is, the blank spaces in texts made by the censors, as well as the gaps left in the literary canon by the Soviet regime's ban on many authors and works. This operation required changes in the ideological presuppositions and reception frames of literary works.

The filling-in of blank spots in Ukrainian literature included not only the restoration of expunged works to the literary canon but also the reassessment of its populist and socialist realist codes. Before Soviet literature could be rejected, it was necessary to re-examine the populist conception of literature, since Soviet literature was a mixture of populist and socialist-realist elements, such as didacticism, peasant thematics, and sociologizing. Soviet literature also shared the ideal of the people's poet, the patriarchal cult of tradition, and a conception of literary evolution that is sharply opposed to formal innovations. The codes of populist literature intimated, as one of the first Ukrainian modernist critics Mykola Ievshan noted, "the ceremony of public life,"[8] or according to Ihor Kostetsky, who represented mature modernist thinking, they are based on the "liturgical style of traditional Ukrainian criticism."[9] Bohdan Rubchak has called it the reification of imagined traditional values embodied in the meta-narratives of populist writing.[10]

The revaluation of the cultural model of Ukrainian literature in the post-Soviet period also covers the idea of Europeanness. The myth of Europe continued to function in Ukraine in the early 1990s, when dissidents, young people, and intellectuals longed to "return" to Europe and wanted Ukrainian literature and culture to be recognized as European. This ideal of Europeanness served as a strong discursive strategy of alienation from the totalitarian and colonial reality of the past. The previous symbolic order of Soviet ideology was replaced with a sphere of mythological imagination and nostalgic ideals. The

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7. See Marko Pavlyshyn, "Aspects of Literary Process in the USSR: The Politics of Re-Canonization in Ukraine after 1985," *Southern Review* 24, no. 1 (March 1991): 22.

8. Mykola Ievshan, "Borotba generatsii i ukrainska literatura," *Ukrainska khata*, 1911, no. 1: 35.

9. Ihor Kostetsky, "Stefan George: Osobystist, doba, spadshchyna," in *Vybranyi Stefan George po-ukrainskomu ta inshymy peredusim slovianskymy movamy*, comp. Ihor Kostetsky and Oleh Zuievsky, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Na hori, 1968), 129.

10. Bohdan Rubchak, "Avanhard dopomozhe ukrainskii literaturi pobuty v sviti, koly rozviie narodnytsko-prosvitianskyi tuman," *Suchasnist*, 1996, nos. 3–4: 214.

myth of Europeanness nourished the Ukrainian cultural and literary elite during the first half of 1990s and was modified somewhat at the end of the decade, when the ideal of European identity was recognized as a nostalgic and mythical issue.[11]

Another influential discursive idea of the 1990s is that of modernization, which has led to an emphasis on literary modernism. Several literary periods became very attractive to post-Soviet Ukrainian literary critics; namely, the baroque and the Soviet Ukrainian renaissance of the 1920s. During the Soviet period the most interesting and innovative literary forms and experiments that were not connected with realism or populism were off limits to literary researchers. Even whole periods of Ukrainian literature, for instance, the periods of literary modernism and the early twentieth-century avant-garde, were dropped from the literary canon. With the collapse of the Soviet system, these areas attracted a lot of interest from many Ukrainian scholars.

In the early 1990s many Ukrainian modernist writers were rehabilitated, and their works were republished. Thus, the new literary canon was greatly enriched with Mykola Khvylovy's essays, Valeriian Pidmohylny's novels, Mykhail Semenko's poetry, Ievhen Malaniuk's essays and poetry, Iurii Shevelov's literary criticism, the poetry of the New York Group (Bohdan Boychuk, Bohdan Rubchak, George Tarnawsky, Patrycija Kylyna), Emma Andiievska's poetry and prose, and Viktor Domontovych's experimental prose.

The ideology of the national renaissance of the 1990s called upon literature to enlighten popular consciousness and serve national goals. This led to a collision between the "populists" and the new avant-garde Ukrainian writers. On the one hand, postmodern writers began to play with cultural taboos and national narratives, trying to overcome cultural provincialism and populism. The literary establishment, on the other hand, embraced a populist ideology. For example, the Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine republished the works of Serhii Iefremov, one of the leaders of the populist movement in literature at the beginning of twentieth century. The populist ideas that were expressed back in the 1960s by the current leaders of the post-Soviet national renaissance were re-examined. The rehabilitation of the "sixtiers" legitimized moderate ideals that were close to populism.

In the 1990s essays written in the 1960s by former dissidents such as Ievhen Sverstiuk and Ivan Svitlychny, as well as Ivan Dziuba's *Internatsionalizm chy rusyfikatsiia?* (Internationalism or Russification?) were recognized as the intellectual sources for defining Ukrainian cultural consciousness. The ideological

11. For more on this issue, see my "Nostalhiia ta revansh: Ukrainskyi postmodernizm u labiryntakh natsionalnoi identychnosty," *Kurier Kryvbasu*, 2001, no. 144: 165–72.

climate of the early 1990s was grounded in the intellectual thought of the 1960s. Even today some people believe that the criterion of Ukrainian cultural identity has been unaltered since independence and is rooted in the ideals of the 1960s. But the young literary generation is increasingly skeptical about these ideals, particularly about their populist presuppositions, and is displeased with the leadership of former "sixtiers" who now constitute the official cultural elite (Dmytro Pavlychko, Ivan Drach, and Pavlo Movchan).

During perestroika Oles Honchar and his 1968 novel *Sobor* (The Cathedral), which had been banned for depicting the Soviet destruction of Ukraine's cultural heritage, were placed at the centre of the new canon. This interpretation reflected the values proclaimed by the dissident authors of the 1960s. But pointing to Honchar's didacticism and romanticism, some critics regarded his writing as an example of socialist realism and also called for an analysis of the very phenomenon of Soviet literature, something that so far had not been done.[12] Decreed by the government and supported by the Institute of Literature, the publication of Honchar's collective works in twelve volumes has commenced, but there has been no serious reassessment of his socialist-realism. With the publication of the poetry of Vasyl Stus, Ihor Kalynets, Ivan Svitlychny, and other persecuted writers of the 1960s and 1970s, dissident literature has been added to the official canon. Regardless of the proclamation of the aesthetic values of literature, political content has continued to be decisive in the reception of literary works. In his symbolic biography, the image of Stus as a victim of Soviet prison camps has overshadowed his image as an excellent poet.

Literary Generations

The new cultural criticism has focused on the image of the Ukrainian writer. Traditionally, the Ukrainian writer was defined by his mission as teacher and prophet, but today it seems he no longer articulates the message people want to hear. After 1991 many Ukrainian writers felt that the proclamation of independence had not released them from the duty of serving their country. Thus the patriotically oriented poet has retained a very prominent role in Ukrainian literature. But at the same time, the younger generation of writers has not felt bound by patriotic duty and has playfully mocked the image of the patriotic poet. These rebellious, anarchic writers have taken their subjects from private life, depicted bohemian behaviour, and stressed close human relations and authenticity in contrast to the hypocrisy of the social and cultural hierarchy they have carnivalized.

12. See, for example, Ivan Koshelivets, "Mozhna odverto?" *Suchasnist*, 1997, no. 10: 112–21.

The self-consciousness of literary generations has played a significant role in the literary process of the 1990s. The impact of generational change on literature has not been a subject of literary criticism. The "sixtiers" were writers who did not separate themselves from the writers of the previous decade. Their name refers to their otherness as the political and cultural opposition to the Soviet regime in the 1960s and to their more or less coherent cultural and political ideology and style of writing. The post-"sixtiers," such as Mykola Vorobiov, Vasyl Holoborodko, and Mykhailo Hryhoriv, distanced themselves from the political engagement of their predecessors and, stressing individual autonomy, developed forms of modern metaphysical lyricism often grounded in Eastern philosophies.

In general, the literary situation of 1990s was determined by three literary generations. The first consisted of older writers who belonged to or were close to the "sixtiers" (Lina Kostenko, Valerii Shevchuk, Dmytro Pavlychko, Ivan Drach, Iurii Mushketyk, Volodymyr Drozd, and Volodymyr Iavorivsky), as well as dissident writers (Mykola Rudenko, Ihor Kalynets). The second encompassed authors who reached maturity and started to publish in the late Soviet period. They announced themselves as the "eightiers" and they include Ihor Rymaruk, Vasyl Herasymiuk, Oksana Zabuzhko, Liudmyla Taran, Natalka Bilotserkivets, Iurii Andrukhovych, Kost Moskalets, and Viktor Neborak. Their outlook was modernist, existentialist, and politically less engaged. Some members of the group have shared avant-garde and postmodern tendencies (Iurii Andrukhovych, Volodymyr Tsybulko, Viktor Neborak, Iurko Pozaiak). Others, Vasyl Herasymiuk for example, have demonstrated a deep interest in mythology as a vehicle for expressing the Ukrainian mentality. The first anthology of their poetry, *Visimdesiatnyky* (The Eightiers), was published by the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies in 1990.

In the 1990s the next generation of writers, the "ninetiers," asserted itself and defined its outlook in a number of anthologies: *Teksty* (Texts, 1995), *Molode vyno* (New Wine, 1994), *Imennyk: Antolohiia devianostykh* (Noun: An Anthology of the Nineties, 1997), and *Deviatdesiatnyky: Antolohiia suchasnoi poezii* (The Ninetiers: An Anthology of Contemporary Poetry, 1998). These authors have rejected the melancholic and hermetic writing of the preceding generation as well as their irony, replacing them with aesthetic pluralism from classicism to the avant-garde and imitating and refiguring stylistic clichés. They like metonymy and have not been afraid to be tendentious. Serhii Zhadan, a poet whom critics have called the "Ukrainian Arthur Rimbaud," could be taken as the leader of this generation. He has combined futurism, Che Guevarist militarism, and nihilism with meditative stanzas and psalms to express teenage rebelliousness and homelessness in post-totalitarian times. Zhadan has written ballads about the period in which young people drink Pepsi Cola (*Pepsi,* 1998) and juxtaposed Western slogans with mottos from the times of perestroika (e.g., *Balady pro*

viinu i perebudovu [Ballads about War and Perestroika, 2001]), while Ivan Andrusiak has analyzed the necrophilic mind of the contemporary world (*Otruiennia holosom* [Poisoning by Voice, 1996]). Taras Prokhasko has been attracted by the fragmentation of time and body and written auto-thematic prose about the process of writing itself (*Inshi dni Anny* [Anna's Other Days, 1998]). Marianna Kyianovska has tried to catch echoes of eternity in her sonnets (*Vinky sonetiv* [Garlands of Sonnets, 1999]). A recently published anthology, *Pozadesiatnyky-2* (Beyond-decaders-2, 2000) may be considered as an ironic response to this kind of generational self-definition and an appendix to the nineties.

These generations have had different literary icons in the literature of the 1920s. For the "eightiers" it was Mykola Zerov, the Ukrainian neoclassicist. The "ninetiers" have been fascinated by the so-called avant-garde and neo-realism of Maik Iohansen and Arkadii Liubchenko. The cultural establishment, on the other hand, has adopted an eclectic literary iconography in which even avant-garde works have appeared as acts of civic duty. The inversion of the official Soviet cultural codes has not made the alternative literary canon any more acceptable to the younger writers, whose rejection of populist premises has led, eventually, to an institutional rift with the writing establishment.

In 1996 some Ukrainian writers, mostly of the 1980s and 1990s generations, demonstratively resigned from the SPU in order to make a radical discursive break with the totalitarian past and to define themselves in opposition to "official," state-supported literature. They set up an alternative organization—the Association of Ukrainian Writers—and eventually acquired their own literary newspaper, *Literatura plius*. This breakaway group has been inspired by the ambition to create a new Ukrainian literature free of ideological pressure and opposed to the populist tendency of the SPU, which has been compromised by its links with the Soviet regime.

Historical Literature

The expectation that Ukrainian writers liberated from the ideological pressures of the Soviet regime would shower the reading public with masterpieces they could not have published in previous years because of censorship was disappointed. Former Soviet writers continued to follow the old, well-trodden path. Nor were all the former literary tendencies obsolete. The whimsical prose of Vasyl Zemliak and Volodymyr Drozd, the vigorous realistic prose style of Hryhir Tiutiunnyk, and the neo-baroque novels of Valerii Shevchuk had an impact on the literary situation at the beginning of the nineties. They represented mature and enduring literary forms. Some of them departed from the epic or heroic descriptions of peasant life practiced by writers such as Mykhailo Stelmakh, while others depicted urban reality in an ironic-mythological tone reminiscent of Latin-American magic realism.

The tradition of the short story (Hryhir Tiutiunnyk, Ievhen Hutsalo) with psychologically and socially marginal characters and a strong sense of human values often associated with a locality and a "natural" way of life was continued in the 1990s. Dealing mostly with peasant life, this prose examined cross-boundary conflicts in national and social consciousness and undermined the romantic view of the common people.

The prose of the early 1990s included also larger forms of interwoven narratives representing the history of a family or village. Volodymyr Drozd's novel *Lystia zemli* (Leaves of the Earth, 1991) is, according to the author, "a book of fates and days that have passed away." It presents the historical drama of Pakul village under communism through the eyes of its inhabitants, who differ in gender and ideology. This genre conveys the sense of belonging to a small, tightly knit homeland in contrast to the universal communist utopia envisioned by the Soviet leaders.

There was a remarkable increase in the demand for documentary, non-fictional literature and biography in the 1990s. Drozd's novella *Muzei zhyvoho pysmennyka, abo moia dovha doroha v rynok* (The Museum of a Living Writer, or My Long Road to the Market, 1994) is an ironic autobiography. Iryna Zhylenko's *Homo feriens* (2002) is a personal memoir of the 1960s generation. The diaries and memoirs of Iurii Sherekh (Shevelov), George Luckyj (Iurii Lutsky), Serhii Iefremov, Arkadii Liubchenko, Oleksandr Dovzhenko, and Nadiia Surovtseva were all published in the 1990s and have added considerable detail to the canvas of Ukrainian cultural life in the twentieth century.

As a genre, historical novels are not intended to be realistic and documentary. They fictionalize historical epochs by contracting historical time and heroically symbolizing them (e.g., Lina Kostenko's *Berestechko*, 1999) or convert the past into a parable of the present, as Valerii Shevchuk, one of the most prolific and prominent writers of the 1980s and 1990s, does in his historical novellas *Oko prirvy* (The Eye of the Abyss, 1996), *U cherevi apokaliptychnoho zvira* (In the Belly of the Apocalyptic Beast, 1995), and *Bis ploti* (The Devil of the Flesh, 1999). These works are of a melancholic, not a heroic, nature. Using baroque metaphors, quotations, and rhetorical devices, Shevchuk depicts the moral drama of reflective individuals trying to balance the demands of spirituality with the drives of sensuality. The main idea behind his metaphysical searching is not the ambiguous and demonic nature of so-called reality, but the possibility of redemption by accepting dread as a consequence of divine playfulness.

Besides writing apocalyptic historical prose, Shevchuk has depicted the life of the urban lower classes. His more popular characters are young men who first experience love, art, or monastic life. He is also interested in the collision between male and female attitudes to life and has used the baroque association of feminine seduction with the devil.

Besides Shevchuk's neo-baroque prose, historical fiction produced in the 1990s includes Roman Ivanychuk's and Roman Fedoriv's idealization of important events in Ukrainian history; Pavlo Zahrebelny's mixture of the historical, romance, and detective genres; Volodymyr Iavorsky's short-story cycle *Napivsonni lysty z Diamantovoi imperii i korolivstva Pivnichnoi Zemli* (Half-Dormant Letters from the Diamond Empire and the Kingdom of the Northern Land, 1999); and Oleh Hutsuliak and Volodymyr Ieshkiliev's novel *Adept* (The Expert, 1995), which combines history with fantasy.

The postmodern deconstruction of history has introduced new forms of meta-historical discourse and resulted in very different historical narratives that have inscribed Ukrainian life within the already written text of world history and served as a therapy for Ukraine's post-colonial national memory. For example, Vasyl Kozhelianko's *Defiliada v Moskvi* (Military Parade in Moscow, 1998) deconstructs the utopian discourse of Ukrainian *Historiosophie* in the twentieth century and the mythology of the Second World War. His multigeneric novel mixes anecdotes and clichés of contemporary mass culture with textbook images of Ukrainian history.

Past Underground or Ironic Literature

In the late 1980s underground literature offered an alternative to the Soviet literary paradigm. Philosophically and aesthetically, this literature was influenced by high avant-garde culture, but it also practiced forms characteristic of mass culture. In contrast to socialist realism, this literature was often hermetic and reflected the quest for individual self-expression. Its reaction against Soviet reality sometimes led to escapism into aestheticism, metaphysics, or alcoholism. The authors who wrote underground literature in the 1980s published their works and became well-known in the 1990s. Among them, the poetry of Oleh Lysheha and Mykola Vorobiov is meditative and philosophical. Its dominant tone is a lyrical melancholy. Volodymyr Dibrova, Bohdan Zholdak, and Les Poderviansky explode ideological clichés and myths of the late Soviet period and paint a garish cultural collage using *surzhyk.* They use "socialist kitsch" to parody socialist realism by grotesquely distorting or ironically reversing it. The absurdities of the Soviet world have also been exposed in the anecdote genre, which was very popular in the 1990s. A sudden reversal of official discourse has shattered the totality of socialist ideology and broken its hold over the individual subconscious. A new sense of freedom has suffused banal Soviet reality and exposed the vulnerability of "little people" when a line sung by the Beatles is heard and repeated in Dibrova's collection of short story *Pisni Bitls* (Beatles Songs, 1991). Diverse languages and the polylogism of different consciousnesses in Dibrova's short stories undermine the monologism of Soviet reality, while his many-faced hero, Peltse, symbolizes the total Soviet man.

The violation of communicative space in totalitarian Soviet society is depicted by Poderviansky in *Heroi nashoho chasu* (Hero of Our Time, 2000]) by mixing *surzhyk* and soldiers' argot. His "Gamlet, ili fenomen datskogo katsapizmu" (Hamlet or the Phenomenon of Danish Russophilism), "Pavlik Morozov," and other dramatized scenes from everyday life are examples of black humour from late Soviet times. *Surzhyk* has served to express the meanderings of a marginal subject that undermine Hamlet's lofty philosophical dilemmas. Zholdak's use of *surzhyk* in his collection of short stories *Ialovychyna (makabreska)* (Beef [Macabresque], 1991) imitates the spoken language and questions the current code of moral and social norms. Echoes of the Western literature of the absurd often reverberate in these forms of inverted discursive practice.

The tragicomic hero of Dibrova's novel *Burdyk* (1997) represents the so-called Soviet lumpen-intelligentsia, a lost generation destroyed by the sharp clash between ideology and life leading to cynicism and apathy. He is unfit for the Darwinian struggle for survival in Soviet society. In his collection of short stories *Zbihovyska* (Gatherings, 1999), Dibrova depicts the unavoidable chance encounters and conversations of the members of that society. The title itself hints at the senseless motion of atomicized individuals, who, according to socialist slogans, are equal and identical but at the same time completely isolated. Their only chance of breaking out of the narrow confines of their collective existence and returning to a normal human life is to be recognized by the "other," in this case, the narrator who knows their real selves and can liberate them by his irony.

Dibrova's play *Dvadtsiatyi zizd* (The Twentieth Congress, 1994) is a fine example of a post-Soviet conceptualist pastiche composed in the ideological jargon of the Communist leaders. The clichés of Communist discourse, specially of Stalin's *Short Course of the History of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolshevik)*, expose the mechanical, puppetlike nature of the leaders and the remoteness of their ideology from any reality.

Carnival as Ukraine's Postmodern Condition

In the early 1990s the notion of postmodernism appeared in the literary discourse in Ukraine[13] and gave rise to a discussion on Ukrainian postmodernism and its authenticity.[14] This was an attempt to redefine Ukraine's postmodern

13. See Natalka Bilotserkivets, "BU-BA-BU ta in. ukrainskyi neoavanhard: Portret odnoho roku," *Slovo i chas,* 1991, no. 1: 42–52; Marko Pavlyshyn, "Ukrainska kultura z pohliadu postmodernizmu," *Suchasnist,* 1992, no. 5: 117–25; idem, "Shcho peretvoriuietsia v 'Rekreatsiiakh' Iuriia Andrukhovycha?" *Suchasnist,* 1993, no. 12: 115–27; and my, "Postmodernistska fiktsiia Andrukhovycha z postkolonialnym znakom pytannia," *Suchasnist,* 1993, no. 9: 79–83.

14. Oleh Ilnytsky, "Transplantatsiia postmodernizmu: Sumnivy odnoho chytacha," *Suchansnist*, 1995, no. 10: 111–15; and Marko Pavlyshyn's reply, "Zasterezhennia iak

condition as a post-colonial situation, in which the main question was the necessity to bridge the gap between the high and low cultures. Some critics have viewed the postmodern tendency in Ukrainian literature only as an esoteric amusement embraced by a national elite that has renounced any social ideals and responsibility. Others have seen it as a continuation of the literary avant-garde of the 1920s and called it a neo-avant-garde.

Some critics have defined two types of Ukrainian postmodern literature—that of the 1980s and that of the 1990s.[15] Others have opposed Stanyslaviv, that is, Ivano-Frankivsk, and Zhytomyr prose[16] or have divided contemporary writing into Western- and native-oriented.[17] The typology of the postmodern imagination in Ukrainian literature in the 1990s includes, according to Ieshkiliev, such metaphors as the "small apocalypsism" of Iurii Izdryk, the "nostalgia for Vienna" of Halyna Petrosaniak, the "carnival" of the Bu-Ba-Bu group, the "rat city" of Iurii Vynnychuk, the "post-carnival syndrome" of Andrukhovych, and the "recombination" of memory of Taras Prokhasko.

Ukrainian postmodern writers have redescribed the national culture by going beyond the populist-modernist opposition. Although postmodernist discourse has been legitimized in Ukrainian literary criticism, it is still an object of controversy and misunderstanding. Frederic Jameson's neo-Marxist view of postmodernism as the logic of late capitalism has influenced some Ukrainian critics ideologically opposed to postmodern anti-totalitarian practice.

The new postmodern writing in Ukraine has reflected what Umberto Eco calls "non-naïve" thinking. As a post-totalitarian phenomenon, it has revealed revenge and resentment by distancing itself from socialist realist and populist meta-narratives of the "azure commune" (*blakytna komuna*) and the national "ideal of the poet." Postmodern authors have fostered the symbolic inversion of national cultural codes and testified to the transformation of post-totalitarian society into a spectacle society. By means of verbal play and carnivalization, they have subverted hegemonic notions of stable social and personal identity, gender, and language. This has led to a form of liberation from the totalitarian past. The post-Chornobyl syndrome has added an eschatological and ethical colouring to the postmodern consciousness.

New literary works, namely, Andrukhovych's *Rekreatsii* (Recreations, 1992) and Zabuzhko's *Polovi doslidzhennia z ukrainskoho seksu* (Field Research in

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zhanr," *Suchasnist,* 1995, no. 10: 116–19.

15. *Pleroma*, no. 3 (1998): 91.

16. Volodymyr Danylenko, "Zolota zhyla ukrainskoi prozy," in *Vecheria na dvanadtsiat person: Zhytomyrska prozova shkola* (Kyiv: Heneza, 1997), 10–1; Natalka Bilotserkivets, "Literatura na rozdorizhzhi," *Krytyka,* 1997, no. 1: 28–9.

17. Roksana Kharchuk, "Pokolinnia postepokhy (proza)," *Dyvoslovo*, 1998, no. 1: 8.

Ukrainian Sex, 1994) became the first examples of the Ukrainian bestseller and provoked a wide public discussion on the writer's right to violate taboos. Andrukhovych's text sharpened the concept of the national poet. Zabuzhko's work uncovered intimate feminine feelings and, through their prism, examined the illness of Ukrainian post-Communist society.

To many people who believe in the educational and civic mission of literature, the postmodern ideal looks dangerous. They want Ukrainian literature to inculcate pro-state thinking and patriotic feelings. Instead, the postmodern writer cultivates ambiguity and irony. His texts are not linear but multi-layered structures of different cultural codes, an intertext of national and international traditions. Generally speaking, Ukrainian postmodern writers have produced both elite and mass literature that has challenged the symbolic order of the national culture. They have tried to combine high genres with subcultural genres that inspire avant-garde practices and exploit forms of youth punk, the avant-garde, the neo-baroque, and modernism to convey the dynamism of reality. Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the carnival as the symbolic inversion of a society's hierarchy of values has been employed in interpreting recent developments in Ukrainian literature.[18]

In 1985 Iurii Andrukhovych, Viktor Neborak, and Oleksandr Irvanets formed a writers' group, which they called Bu-Ba-Bu. The name stands for burlesque, bluster, and buffoonery, the chief literary tools of the group. As Neborak pointed out,[19] they assumed postmodern masks and played the role of a gangster destroying the traditional populist understanding of literature as a vehicle for political ideas. Andrukhovych called it a bold rejection of the "bland, undereducated seriousness about all things Ukrainian" and noted that "literature tempted us with undomesticated nooks, empty spaces, and repressed taboos, and it was not we who created in this culture, but the culture created us."[20]

The carnival became a metaphor of cultural reversal in post-totalitarian Ukraine. This metaphor applied not only to literature where the Bu-Ba-Bu and other avant-garde groups, such as LuHoSad in Lviv, Propala hramota in Kyiv, and Chervona fira in Kharkiv upset the public with their masquerades. It also represented the socio-cultural expectations and post-totalitarian euphoria of Ukrainian society in the early 1990s. From the perspective of the mid-1990s, as

18. See Alexandra Hrycak, "The Coming of 'Chrysler Imperial': Ukrainian Youth and Rituals of Resistance," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 21, nos. 1–2 (June 1997): 63–91.

19. "Z vysoty Litaiuchoi holovy, abo Zniaty masku: Rozmova z V. Neborakom," *Suchasnist,* 1994, no. 5: 57.

20. Iurii Andrukhovych, "Ave, 'Kraisler!' Poiasnennia ochevydnoho," *Suchasnist*, 1994, no. 5: 14.

Solomea Pavlychko pointed out, the preceding decade looked like "a turbulent and ultimately lucky adolescence."[21]

Bu-Ba-Bu's provocative stance relied on a series of cultural metaphors, in which the "Chrysler Imperial" occupied the leading position. It became an erotic symbol of the new mechanical age and singled out America as the world of contemporary popular culture that Ukraine was rushing to enter. The road chosen by the postmodernists ran through irony-land,[22] not through the holy land of high art, and was unmarked by the road signs of traditional culture.[23]

By the end of the 1990s the revenge of the literary carnival groups upon traditional culture came to an end. The years of youth had passed. The society of the spectacle was established and literature was different. Furthermore, it turned out that the most scandalous carnival of the Bu-Ba-Bu was narcissistic and had only one superhero—the bohemian poet. In tearing down the traditional image of the poet-prophet, the Bubabists replaced it with the image of their new superhero. The carnivalesque aesthetics of the Bu-Ba-Bu deconstructed national sanctities but preserved the idea of the superhero and gave birth to mass culture.

The most vivid expression of the Bubabist carnival were Andrukhovych's novels. In *Rekreatsii* he demystified the image of the Ukrainian poet, dividing him into a mask and a person (patriotic, erotic, historical) and immersing them in the atmosphere of the carnival celebration of the Resurrection of the National Spirit. The profane transformations of such a many-sided hero were supposed to symbolize the mystery of national unity, but in reality they demonstrated the power of imitation that suffuses all life. Behind everything one could sense the demonic hand of the stage director who easily transforms carnival into a putsch and vice versa.

Andrukhovych's next novel, *Moskoviada* (Moscowiad, 1992), which the author called a "novel of horrors," was a collection of late-Soviet ideologems, discourses, and characters. Immersing his hero in the atmosphere of Moscow, the metropolis of the Soviet Empire, and employing the form of wandering, he turned the centre and periphery topsy-turvy and showed the necrophilic revenge of the post-colonial subject on the corpse of the dead empire. In his third novel, *Perverziia* (*Perversion*, 1995), in which the hero, a marginal man, wanders across Ukraine, Russia, and Europe, Andrukhovych created a collage of various discourses and counterposed an almost romantic, Orphic-like erotic mystery of

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21. Solomea Pavlychko, "Facing Freedom: The New Ukrainian Literature," introduction to *From Three Worlds: New Writing from Ukraine,* ed. Ted Hogan (Boston: Zephyr Press, 1996), 18.

22. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* Cambridge, U.K. and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 9.

23. Tamara Hundorova, "Bu-ba-bu, karnaval i kich," *Krytyka*, 2000, nos. 7–8: 13–18.

Man and Woman to Western decadent, phallocentric culture rooted in classical Venice.

Post-Carnival Morphology

The postmodern carnival not only raised the lower burlesque style to a commanding position, it also decentralized the cultural space of Ukrainian literature by opposing, for example, Lviv to Kyiv and Zhytomyr to Ivano-Frankivsk. A new literary centre, called the Stanyslaviv phenomenon (Andrukhovych, Izdryk, Prokhasko, Petrosaniak, and Mykytsei), arose at the periphery of the literary world.[24] The members of this phenomenon viewed themselves as the sole representatives of Ukrainian postmodernism and contrasted themselves with the Kyiv-Zhytomyr school (Pashkovsky, Ulianenko, Medvid, and Danylenko), accusing the latter of having a rustic-peasant syndrome. The new wave of postmodernists was interested mostly in the marginal individual, his existence at the boundary between the real and the unreal, between psychological normality and hallucination or illness. This kind of hero lives in a world on lost intimacy. Previously the carnival created an illusion of closeness; now the dematerialization and depersonalization of the individual interfere with relating to the "other."

By the end of 1990s it became clear that Bu-Ba-Bu had ceased to exist and that the period of the carnival was finished. The new literary generation, the "ninetiers," did not want to join the carnival. They had a different vision of reality. Instead of the heroic bohemian-Bubabist, the postmodernist "ninetiers" have created anew the schizophrenic consciousness of the marginal man who escapes into a new idealized empire, into hallucinations or intoxication. Other "ninetiers" have developed classical, refined writing and object-oriented poetry. These writers are fond of the sonnet form (Kyianovska), metaphorically textured prose (Andrusiak), and metaphysical (Iurii Bedryk) and modernist (Tymofii Havryliv) poetry.

The postmodern discourse of the late 1990s has reduced the playful impulse of the Bubabists and represented rhizomatic (Gilles Deleuze) structures of thinking. The works of Taras Prokhasko and Iurii Izdryk have combined and recombined fragments of reality, constructed landscapes of thought, and use the morphology of the human body for the topographic inscription of memory traces. For example, Prokhasko's biomorphism inscribes within memory traces of reminiscences of architectural projects and microbiological schemes resembling tomograms of the brain or herbaria. An imaginary territory of dreams and

24. *Pleroma*, no. 3 (1998): 91. See also Volodymyr Ieshkiliev, "Tin stanislavskoho fenomena," *Literatura plius*, 1999, nos. 9–10. Stanyslaviv was the name of Ivano-Frankivsk under the Austro-Hungarian Empire and interwar Poland.

daydreams reminds us of the old villages and lost age of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The representatives of the "Stanyslaviv phenomenon" have tried to preserve or reconstruct the mentality of a long-gone period. Their characters feel lost and frustrated by being separated from Central European culture, and their texts are focused on mirroring this culture and searching for substitutes. Izdryk, Andrukhovych, and Prokhasko have provided a nostalgic model of the multiethnic society and culture of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire and tried to restore it in the form of small narratives (a grandmother's memories, an old map, a lost lover, an old architectural monument). To reappropriate Western cultural identity for them means to rebuild verbally using the surviving traces of the walls, loves, and dreams of the past.

The juxtaposition of the past and the present, the central and the peripheral, and the sacred and the profane has haunted Prokhasko's and Izdryk's protagonists. Their narrative depends on the verbal deconstruction that is a part of the transgression strategy of literary communication. The messages are tautological or disintegrate into fragments. Izdryk's novellas such as *Ostriv Krk* (Krk Island, 1994), *Votstsek* (Wozzeck, 1996), and *Podviinyi Leon* (Double Leon, 2000) deal with the depersonalization of a character who lives in a Kafkaesque world of repetition and metamorphoses and who resists the sluggish flow of time. The substantiality of human existence shatters into microwaves of feelings, temporary sensations, and memory. Then a new living being is constructed by recombining the fragments left at the end or the periphery. Bio-genesis and morphology, life and death, mirror and replace each other.

This type of postmodern writing deals with the fragmented identity of the post-colonial Ukrainian subject fascinated with the dead culture of the Austro-Hungarian Empire or taking revenge on the now defunct Soviet empire. This kind of imagination intensifies the eschatological sense of the approaching end. All temporal things seem to be finished and fulfilled, and the present is only a reminder of them, a mere repetition or recombination of the past.

Gender-Oriented Literature

The literary workshop and the anthology *Psy sviatoho Iura* (The Hounds of St. George, 1997) brought together Iurii Pokalchuk, Iurii Andrukhovych, Viacheslav Medvid, Ihor Rymaruk, Vasyl Herasymiuk, Viktor Neborak, and Oleksandr Irvanets. They embraced the ideal of the "Christianized hero," neo-paganism, the struggle with "carnal evil," and the affirmation of "all-conquering male power" as a spear that "pierces that which 'is not' and asserts … that which 'is.'"[25] Such heroism is connected with the masculine conquest of nature,

25. Iurii Pokalchuk, "Vershnyk letyt nad svitom," *Psy sviatoho Iura: Literaturnyi almanakh* (Lviv: Prosvita, 1997), 15.

which is feminine. This trend is reminiscent of the reversal strategy introduced by Bu-Ba-Bu's superhero. In Ukraine a gender-oriented literature has taken shape. Iurii Pokalchuk, in his *Te, shcho na spodi* (That Which is on the Bottom, 1998), and Iurii Vynnychuk, in *Zhytiie haremnoie* (Harem Life, 1999] and *Divy nochi* (Girls of the Night, 1991), filled in the gaps in the post-Soviet body of literature by developing Ukrainian porno-erotic prose. George Tarnawsky's collection of plays *6x0* (1998) displayed a strong avant-garde tendency. The author, who is a postwar émigré in the United States, deconstructs the feminine capacity to love by depicting it in grotesque and absurd images. To him the conflict between the sexes is the fate of modern life. Tarnawsky's mixture of postmodern intertextuality and mathematical structures represents another form of contemporary Ukrainian literature that is linked with the American tradition of the avant-garde.

In Oksana Zabuzhko's post-colonial feminist works, an intellectual style and autobiographical voice are combined with narcissism and eroticism. In her novel *Polovi doslidzhennia z ukrainskoho seksu*, the author presents a Ukrainian intellectual couple whose sexual life is distorted by the past traumas of Ukraine (whose nominal feminine gender is significant). The female heroine cannot find satisfaction in love and is tormented by her partner's sexual obsession. Like a little girl crying in the dark, she is lost in Ukraine's colonial past, which emasculated the men and forced the women to treat them as brothers rather than lovers.

Zabuzhko has employed the genres of Western popular fiction to produce a sophisticated form of a Ukrainian bestseller that would appeal to readers in every region of Ukraine. She has offered her reading public a non-science fiction novel *Inoplanetianka* (Woman from Another Planet, 1989); a Gothic-styled novella *Kazka pro kalynovu sopilku* (*The Tale of the Viburnum Pipe*, 1999); and a teenage lesbian's story *Divchatka* (Nice Girls, 1998), which explores the moral implications of betrayal and conformism. Zabuzhko's "new heroine" is a loveless rebel who strives for freedom, but in the demonic male society where she has to live she resembles a witch violating the limits of what is acceptable.

Women's space in Ukrainian literature of the last decade has been represented by Ievhenia Kononenko's unromantic female voice, Sofiia Maidanska's intimate confidentiality, Liudmyla Taran's reversed personality, Natalka Bilotserkivets's poetic elegy, and Nila Zborovska's confidential gossip. They have displayed an openness of feeling and sensitivity to the feelings of others.

Halyna Pahutiak has produced women's metaphysical prose. A sense of loss and longing for utopia, for what does not exist, pervades her works. The utopian message is stated explicitly or conveyed by the language and style. The main character of Pahutiak's stories in *Zapysky biloho ptashka* (Notes of a Little White Bird, 1999) is an immature, speechless woman who has run away from the hypocritical world of culture to search for harmony between her self and words.

The female narrator speaks about women whose children have died or are yet unborn, and leads the reader into a strange world where language has failed and only imagery carries the thought forward.

The Post-Chornobyl or Post-Mortem Text

Many Ukrainian writers did not accept the postmodern and avant-garde groups' linguistic irony and cultural reversal. Ievhen Pashkovsky and Viacheslav Medvid, for example, defended the neo-modernist ideal of high literature, because only it, they claimed, could pierce the silence of human existence and lift it above the flux of time. According to them, literature has a higher purpose than amusing oneself and the public. These authors have developed modernist and neo-realist models of literature, taken a strong moral position, and practiced stream-of-consciousness forms.

Pashkovsky's novel-essay *Shchodennyi zhezl* (The Daily Baton, 1997) is part of the apocalyptic literature that developed in the late 1990s. It is reminiscent of the baroque preacher Ivan Vyshensky and his passionate denunciation of hypocrisy and secular culture. Pashkovsky has striven to restore the mighty power of the verbal spell and believes in the "archipelago of the book" and the authenticity of the literary art. The style in his novels *Bezodnia* (*The Abyss*, 1992) and *Osin dlia anhela* (Autumn for an Angel, 1996) is reminiscent of Old Testament prophets. It is even more threatening and commanding in his last novel *Shchodennyi zhezl,* for which was awarded the SPU's Shevchenko Prize. The novel is meta-fictional, encompassing many foreign voices, quotations, names, and associations. It is full of echos of twentieth-century Western culture. Accusing the West of repeatedly betraying Ukraine in the last century, the narrator creates a kind of museum of disasters: he writes letters to Salman Rushdie and recounts his meetings with Milan Kundera, Joseph Conrad, Marcel Proust, and James Joyce. Chornobyl becomes for him the new Rome, the saviour of Western culture, and his criterion is the moral responsibility of literature. In this post-Chornobyl text the narrator condemns the entire modern world of hypocrisy, carnivals, and games.

Viacheslav Medvid also fits into this prophesying mould. He experiments with the traditional stylistic devices of nineteenth-century literature about the peasantry and tries to construct a new metaphorical world that, according to him, is more natural for Ukraine than the postmodernist carnival. He intentionally imitates the style of Vasyl Stefanyk and Arkhyp Teslenko, early twentieth-century authors who focused on the psychology of their peasant heroes. Medvid seeks a new model of modernization for Ukrainian literature in a synthesis of modernist forms with peasant themes. Thus, he reverts to the populist conception of literature and tries to reformulate it in a more sophisticated way so as to "restore their true names and meanings to things and concepts."

Medvid's novella *Selo iak metafora* (The Village as Metaphor, 1986) is a stream-of-consciousness account of a boy's liberation from his fear of the female world and of his initiation into the male world. The village is a cultural universe divided along the male-female axis. A similar initiation is depicted in his novella *Lokh* (The Cellar, 1992), in which the dominant metaphor represents the womb of mother Earth and the underground of (male) civilization. Initiation endows the hero with his own language, which is closer to the language of Joyce's or Faulkner's characters than to that of a peasant boy. Nevertheless, it expresses the hero's distinctive features and his unique view of the universe.

Contemporary Ukrainian writers have often turned to the topos of childhood or youth. This interest reflects the condition of a new cultural consciousness that has arisen from the wreckage of post-Soviet Ukraine, where the people are mastering a language enabling it to come to grips with its past and overcome its anxiety about the future.

Oles Ulianenko's works also belong to this apocalyptic literature. His narrator often identifies himself with the angel of death and witnesses in his visions "the fall of man into the Great Black River" in which God and the devil, life and death, are inseparable. Ulianenko's characters are marginalized individuals doomed to an almost inescapable existential darkness. The heroes of his novels *Stalinka* (The Stalin District, 1995), *Bohemna rapsodiia* (Bohemian Rhapsody, 1994), and *Vohnenne oko* (The Fiery Eye, 1997) feel the vulnerability of homeless existence and must struggle to survive physically and morally. The demonic forces in Ulianenko's writings contrast sharply with the playful wanderings of Andrukhovych's heroes, and the horrors of death and degradation overwhelm the latter's enchanting eroticism. Ulianenko's naturalistic depiction of the lower depths of humanity has a characteristic post-Chornobyl tenor of the post-Soviet transition.

The Birth of Popular Culture

A new horizon of expectations has arisen among younger writers who have become disappointed with postmodernism. Oleh Solovei considers it no more than a "paradoxical verbal mixture," the "noise of postmodern buffoonery" devoid of "serious life experience."[26] Word play and clever intellectual acrobatics cannot conceal the reality that haunts the young writers and their readers. At the end of the millennium, the "ninetiers" see themselves as the generation of the "post-epoch" and of a "national depression,"[27] an allusion to their existential role in the revaluation of the ideals of national revival pro-

26. Oleh Solovei, "Tantsiuiucha zirka," *Literaturna Ukraina*, 2001, no. 29: 6.

27. Roksana Kharchuk, "Pokolinnia postepokhy (Proza)," 6–12; Volodymyr Danylenko, "Pokolinnia natsionalnoi depresii," in *Imennyk: Antolohiia devianostykh*, ed. Andrii Kokotiukha and Maksym Rozumny (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 1997), 248–62.

claimed at the beginning of Ukrainian independence. The "ninetiers" agree with the traditionalist writers and critics tha the serious genres in Ukrainian literature are in crisis.

The carnival age, which ended in the mid-1990s, symbolized the end of the search for meta-narratives and a cultural hierarchy in Ukrainian literature. It was also a fitting conclusion to Ukrainian modernity, which began with Ivan Kotliarevsky's mock *Eneida* (Aeneid) in 1798, a carnivalesque inversion of high imperial culture. In the nineteenth century the burlesque style was viewed as a "lower" genre and was relegated to popular literature, while serious writing was reserved for the propagation of lofty romantic and populist ideals. The strict segregation of "lower" popular culture from "higher" elite culture has been characteristic of modern Ukrainian literature ever since.

The reversal of this hierarchy of values in the 1990s stimulated the development of literary forms suitable for mass culture. The postmodern subcultures of the 1990s, in which neo-baroque, avant-garde, modernist, and punk styles have merged, have generated a literature with mass appeal, such as Svitlana Pyrkalo's novel for young people *Zelena Marharyta* (Green Margaret, 2000); Liubomyr Deresh's *Kult* (Cult, 2001); Natalka Sniadanko's erotic novel for women *Kolektsiia prystrastei* (A Collection of Lusts, 2001]; the detective stories of Leonid Kononovych, Andrii Kokotiukha, and Irena Rozdobudko; and Ievheniia Kononenko's pseudo-detective novel *Imitatsiia* (Imitation, 2000); Vasyl Kozhelianko's meta-historical fiction; Vasyl Shkliar's action novel *Elemental* (2000); and the postmodern kitsch of Volodymyr Tsybulko's poetry collection *Main kaif* (My High, 2000).

The reverse canon of the 1990s embraced not only Ukrainian-language but also Russian-language mass literature. The preceding literary canon was mono-cultural and excluded works by Ukrainian authors written in Russian. In the 1990s Russian mass literature swamped the Ukrainian book market. By the end of the decade new printing houses and publishers had launched several fiction series, including Ukrainian detective stories, thrillers, science fiction, and romances. Some Russian-language authors, such as Andrei Kurkov and Marina and Sergei Diachenko, live and work in Ukraine and call themselves Ukrainian writers.[28]

Conclusion

During the 1990s the character and functions of Ukrainian literature were transformed. Once it was freed from ideological controls, this literature could no longer be called "Party-minded." Two parallel process occurred: the rejuvenation of the socialist realist canon and the creation of a new official (state-supported)

28. Inna Bulkina, "Maiemo shcho maiemo," *Krytyka*, 2000, no. 6: 27.

national canon by institutions such as the SPU and the Institute of Literature of the National Academy of Sciences. This post-Soviet canon has consisted of a list of authors and works that have been included in various educational (school and university) programmes, and certain, mostly didactic patriotic and populist, ideas. At the same time, a certain official policy has been followed in awarding literary prizes. And yet, the process of decanonization has become increasingly evident and has been accompanied by the emergence of new canons—every anthology that came out in the 1990s represented a distinctive canon of contemporary literature. Eventually, by the end of the 1990s, the official literary canon had become broader and more diverse: it now encompassed writers of the 1980s, such as Ievhen Pashkovsky, Viacheslav Medvid, Ihor Rymaruk, and Vasyl Herasymiuk, who were awarded the Shevchenko Prize.

As Ukrainian writers gained access to new information sources and opened up to Western influences, they began to experiment with different genres and to reach beyond the traditional, well-established forms of Ukrainian literature. The new writing is an ambiguous mixture of high and low genres and is aimed mostly at a wide, not a hermetic, readership. It is quite diverse in subject matter, genre, and style and is rich in verbal masks, discursive hybrids, and marginal characters. Different verbal codes, such as *surzhyk*, slang, and argot, and a sprinkling of English, French, Polish, and Russian words and sentences create a colourful and dynamic texture. The heroic and epic narrative has been displaced largely by the subjective narrative of self-examination and self-construction, in which marginal characters play a prominent role. Both the neo-baroque stress on mortality and apocalyptic expectations fed by post-totalitarian anxiety enshroud the world in unrelieved gloom.

The hope that, under the new conditions, Ukrainian writers would create something similar to Latin American magic realism has not been justified. A mythological trend blending the past and the present in one synthetic vision has not appeared. Ukrainian authors have preferred to demythologize the grand narrative of Ukrainian history. The traditional Arcadia of Ukrainian literature has been replaced with a very different urban or intellectual topography.

Postmodern, neo-modern, and populist conceptions, which in some ways oppose one another, have nourished the new literature. The romantic idea of literature as the manifestation of the national spirit has been shaken, but there is still some faith in literature's healing and reforming power. The canon has been greatly enriched but is under constant challenge and highly unstable. The tension between unlimited freedom and the threat of resurgent totalitarianism is the hallmark of the post-postmodern condition of contemporary Ukrainian literature.