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ESSAY

Ukrainian Literature and the Erotics of Postcolonialism: Some Modest Propositions

MARKO PAVLYSHYN

In addressing the subject of this paper—a phenomenon in contemporary Ukrainian literature—it is useful first to draw attention to related developments in the extraliterary context—in the culture of everyday life. In the wake of practically complete cultural liberalization (by about 1990), of national sovereignty and then independence (in 1991), there have been great (though, perhaps, not profound) changes in what ordinary people apprehend as they go about their daily lives or absorb the communications of the print and electronic media. The political messages that circulate in the Ukrainian public sphere in the early 1990s are characterized by plethoric variety. The public discourse on history, culture, and current affairs is diversified and gives voice to competing points of view. Some areas of human experience, largely overlooked or suppressed in the Soviet decades, have received a new prominence. Religion, in addition to attracting many new active participants, has become an object of general public attention, as has the activity of more or less eccentric religious cults. The domain of the parapsychological, and the activity of those who claim to be its adepts, have received wide media attention. Of special interest to us, finally, is the new exposure of the ordinary person to the sexual—as information, as image, and as a component of a great many communications in the public arena.

The emerging culture of television broadcasting permits and encourages a moderate amount of nudity on the screen. Locally made films and television shows, few as they are, contain practically obligatory scenes incorporating female nudity. A substantial proportion of the daily press and of general-interest periodicals carries reportage of sexual issues, as well as sexually titillating stories, with the corresponding illustrative material. There is even an embryonic specialized sex-oriented press: *Lel'*, a journal described in its subtitle as a "Ukrainian erotic journal," is available in many news kiosks, and *Pan i pani*, a newspaper dedicated mainly to contact ads, is published in Ternopil'. Illustrated sex-education books for children have become available, as has a range of manuals for adults (including such international classics as the *Kama Sutra*). Popular fiction, imported from

Russia or printed in Russian in Ukraine, favors soft-core pornography almost as much as it does sentimental romance: novel versions of the various *Emmanuelle* films are abundant, though not as abundant as novel versions of Mexican and other Latin American soap operas. The Polish edition of *Playboy* and Western men's magazines are generally available, though at very high prices, at news kiosks. Representatives of high culture, too, have signalled a growing interest in the erotic through such publications as *Bila knyha kokhannia* (*The White Book of Love*), an anthology of twentieth-century Ukrainian erotic verse that places such classics as Emma Andiievs'ka and Maksym Ryl's'kyi alongside such newcomers as Oleksandr Bryhynets' and Mstyslava Chaika.[1]

The extent to which the new availability of the sexually explicit corresponds to actual changes in social and sexual behavior has not yet been studied in an authoritative way. It is too early to say whether the phenomena enumerated above are symptoms of a "sexual revolution," or merely facets of a transitory mimicry of an easily-imitated Western phenomenon. The common-sense explanation that enjoys a certain currency in Ukraine and the West detects here a return of the repressed at the level of a society: there is a pent-up interest in the sexual, the consequence of the taboo placed upon the entire subject during the Soviet years; after a brief period of intense interest, the visibility of the sexual among the other concerns of the public sphere will subside.[2] It is possible, indeed, that in the sphere of intimate sexual relations, the situation today may not differ very greatly from the one described by Mikhail Shtern in 1980. Shtern observed a low level of openness about sex within the family, a high level of juvenile sexual activity unsanctioned by public morality, a substantial level of sexual disorders, and considerable sexual license by the privileged of both sexes.[3]

We are interested here in a narrower band of questions: first, in the evolution (if any) of the role of sexual material and its erotic use in literature and the literary process, and second, in these phenomena as they relate to changes in the colonial power relations that affect Ukrainian culture. The term "erotics," used in the title, we shall apply broadly, to cover the sum of sexual issues, preoccupations, values, myths and signs that occur in literary texts; the system of conventions governing the literary representation of the sexual; and the strategies in literary texts which may be observed, as one Australian critic has put it, to "summon readers as active agents, as cocreative participants in an unfinished act of desire."[4]

The fact that much of the material to be presented here comes from the period after the declaration of Ukrainian independence should not be taken to imply that the term "postcolonial" in this essay has a simply chronological meaning. I have sought elsewhere, against a background of widespread, but unstable, critical use of the term "postcolonial," to establish typological distinctions between the colonial, the anticolonial and the postcolonial in culture. As "colonial" I have understood those cultural phenomena which may be interpreted as promoting and maintaining the structures and myths of colonial power relations, and as "anticolonial"—those which directly challenge (or seek to invert) such relations. The

attribute "postcolonial" I have regarded as applicable to those entities in culture which signal an awareness of the relativity both of the term "colonialism" and of its negation, and which benefit from this relativity—in the work of art through exploring the consequences of the simultaneous historical availability of the heritage of the colonial and anticolonial, without any obligation to confirm or deny either, and with every right to play with both.[5]

Finally, by referring in my subtitle to "modest propositions" I mean to underscore the predominantly observational, descriptive character of what follows. It is not my intention to propose a single explanatory model for the new phenomenon of eroticism in Ukrainian literature, but to illustrate the relation to coloniality and postcoloniality of the following: (a) the "eroticization" of the older generation of writers; (b) the emergence of sexually titillating writing in the nonnormative mixture of Russian and Ukrainian known as *surzhyk*; (c) the centrality of the erotic, as a dimension of the carnivalesque, in the works and activity of "Bu-ba-bu" and other antitraditionalist groupings and movements; (d) the construction of a myth of L'viv as the focus of the erotic; and (e) the dominance of the male perspective in the new erotics and the corresponding underrepresentation of the perspective of women.

One of the surprising facts about the new literary fashion for the erotic is that it has been enthusiastically embraced by established writers of the literary mainstream: Pavlo Zahrebel'nyi (born 1924), Ievhen Hutsalo (1937–1995) and Valerii Shevchuk (born 1939), to name the best known.[6] The thick literary journals, often accused of stick-in-the-mud traditionalism, have practically competed with each other to publish sexually provocative works. Hryhorii Klochek, seeking to explain this phenomenon in *Literaturna Ukraïna*, has seen as its cause the "heavy, chilling breath of His Majesty the Market": the journals need sensation, furnished by such themes as Stalinist repressions, the Famine of 1932–33, and the lives of the party bosses—themes that journalism handles better than does literature. The habits of socialist realism have made it difficult for writers to address with authority or imagination the fundamentally new political and social realities that have emerged. Thus, more or less for lack of convincing alternatives, many established writers have been tempted to experiment with the erotic.

The stereotypical view, maintained here by Klochek, that Soviet literature had been "demonstratively holier-than-thou,"[7] is not strictly accurate, especially as regards literature of the 1970s. However, the foregrounding of the erotic and the construction of plots around sexual adventure is certainly an innovation.

Pavlo Zahrebel'nyi had used the erotic interestingly even in the bad old days of Brezhnevist-Suslovist stagnation. His historical novel *Ia, Bohdan* (1983) had, among many other unconventional features, a representation of Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi not only as a sophisticated intellectual, but as a man of considerable, and complicated, libido. One of Zahrebel'nyi's recent short novels, *Hola dusha* (*Bare Soul*, 1992), subtitled "Confession to a Dictaphone," is narrated as the autobiography of a woman party functionary who has risen from train conductress

to a high post in the culture administration through the use of the bed. The didactic and moral framework remains conventional: the practice of sex as depicted is to be seen as deviant and as part of a symptomatology of the systemic misuse of power by the party-state elite. While readers are offered the intrigue of sexual adventure for their readerly pleasure, the depiction of sex itself is the depiction of rape:

> Навіть уві сні ввижалися мені короткопалі Кібцеві руки, пожадливо тягнулися до мене, зривали з мене одіж, нахабно, безсоромно обмацували моє голе тіло, добираючись до душі.
>
> Even in my dreams I could see Kibchyk's short-fingered hands greedily stretching towards me, tearing off my clothes, aggressively and shamelessly feeling at my naked body, getting at my soul.[8]

More inclined to tickle the reader with sexual sensation is Ievhen Hutsalo's *Blud* (*Error*, 1993), a book of short and very short anecdotes concerning sexual situations and adventures in all possible social, professional, age, and gender settings. One cannot overcome the impression that Hutsalo, described in the publisher's preface as "continuing Apuleius and Boccaccio on Ukrainian ground,"[9] intends to liquidate this blind spot of Ukrainian literature once and for all. Hutsalo is reasonably explicit both in the situations he describes and the language he uses. The reader is postulated as participating as the listening partner in a confidential conversation. The various situations are presented, not as essays in erotic fantasy, but rather as evidence of the plausibility, even in the sexual domain, of the extraordinary—an effect strengthened by the fact that many of the anecdotes advert to such up-to-the-minute social realities as the Krishna cult, the new class of small-scale over-the-border traders, or the growing number of women who decide to have children outside of a stable relationship. None of this would seem to justify the collection's subtitle, *Ukraïna: rozpusta i vyrodzhennia* (*Ukraine: dissipation and perversion*). Hutsalo's encyclopedia of sexual possibility reads, rather, as a frankly realistic corrective to the idealized (indeed, sentimental) image of social life in Ukraine as hitherto represented by the tradition of socialist realism. Furthermore, this nonmythological account serves as a corrective to Hutsalo's own earlier excursion into the theme of the Ukrainian erotic in his novel *Pozychenyi cholovik* (*The Borrowed Husband*, 1981). There, the libidinal economy had included a thoroughbred calf as the security against which the hero is lent by his wife to another collective-farm woman. This plot situation, of course, formed part of the intrinsically colonial equation of the Ukrainian with the rural, the provincial and the comically grotesque, familiar since Gogol's *Vechera na khutore bliz Dikan'ki* and *Mirgorod*.[10] Hutsalo's new work avoids this particular form of colonial self-deprecation.

Of the prose writers who had begun their careers in the 1960s, it was Valerii Shevchuk who, in the historical novels that appeared after his ten-year silence

during the 1970s, developed the most sophisticated postcolonial argumentation of the pre-independence period. These novels are not by any means works of erotic literature. It is not without interest, however, that they formulate questions of sex and gender in such a way that they become issues of coloniality. Anna Berehulak has argued that in the novel *Dim na hori* (*The House on the Hill*, 1983) Shevchuk constructs and then resolves a mythical tension between female and male (the generations of women who inhabit the House vs. the male incubi who tempt and sometimes seduce them) in a way that may be read as a postcolonial reconciliation and transcendence of monologic colonial and anticolonial positions.[11] In *Try lystky za viknom* (*Three Leaves outside the Window*, 1986) Shevchuk engages in a grand postcolonial strategy to recuperate, not so much the dignity and authority, as the vibrancy and interest for the present of Ukrainian culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while constructing an elaborate anticolonial satire directed at the Russian Empire of the nineteenth century and, by metonymic extension, at the USSR. As part of the latter project, Shevchuk makes one of the narrators, Satanovs'kyi, a voyeur. The activity of this grotesquely loyal (and demonic) servant of empire, while bringing him pleasure and excitement, doubles as gathering information useful to the authorities. In the prison-house of empire, the novel's argument goes, even the most intimate human sphere is perniciously colonized by the power of the state.[12]

In his more recent works Shevchuk has had no alternative but to abandon the insinuative political ambiguities of Aesopian language: encoded meanings have little utility in an open cultural situation. A direct appeal to popular taste—or what is widely assumed to be popular taste—seems more appropriate in the prevailing cultural situation than a continued pursuit of sophistication and structural complexity. "Shevchuka potiahnulo na seks" (Shevchuk gets a taste for sex), proclaims a reviewer's headline, not without justification.[13] The audience, previously construed as sensitive to the merest nuance of subtextual meaning, is now reimagined as dominated rather single-mindedly by male libido. In the short novel *Misiatseva zozul'ka iz lastiv'iachoho hnizda* (*The Moon-Faced Cuckoo from the Swallow's Nest*, 1992) Shevchuk offers his readers, presumably for their (masculine) delectation, the stereotype of an unintelligent but manipulative woman; the notion of a woman distributing her sexual favors independent of social inhibition, but on the basis of a well-understood fee-for-service arrangement; and, above all, he offers his readers large breasts:

> Юлька була мала [...], із низькопосадженими клубами над карачкуватими ногами, з несподівано великими, аж випирали вони з одежі, грудьми [...].
>
> У вільний час вона відчиняла вікно, присовувала до нього стільця [...], сідала, клала пишні перса, аж вивалювалися вони із блузки, на підвіконня й засинала чи завмирала [...]; при цьому була Юлька така непорушно-відсторонена, що всяк із чоловіків, котрий проходив мимо, неодмінно повертав у її бік фізію [...].

Iul'ka was short [...], she had low-set hips and was bow-legged, but she had unexpectedly large breasts that practically pushed their way out of her clothes [...].

In her spare time she would open the window, bring up a chair [...], sit down and place her generous breasts, bursting out of her blouse, on the window sill; then she would fall asleep or go into a trance [...]; at such times she was so immobile and distant that any man passing could not help turning his face in her direction [...].[14]

A certain pleasure of the text is generated when Shevchuk combines the intention of erotic titillation with his well-proven mastery of humorous irony and fantastic invention. Iul'ka has offered one of her admirers sexual reward if he furnishes her newly-erected porch with a door. But the door must first be stolen from a building containing many households, and therefore a moment must be found for the theft when the attention of all the inhabitants is simultaneously diverted:

Отож треба було й потрапити в той сакраментальний мент, коли діти спали, а чоловіки дружно й майже водночас підгортали під себе жінок. Тоді весь Білий дім починав ходити ходором, ніби колихав його землетрус, бо всі працювали в одному ритмі й одночасно.

So it was essential to hit upon that precise sacramental moment when the children were already asleep and the men collegially and almost simultaneously tucked their wives beneath them. Then the entire White House would begin to vibrate as though shaken by an earthquake, for everyone worked to a single rhythm.[15]

On the whole, the erotic as treated by the established writers of the older generation is not an integral element of an evolving aesthetic paradigm. At worst, the erotic is treated as an object of literary speculation: some authors resort to it in what seems a desperate attempt to retain or attract readers. In the case of Shevchuk, the introduction of the erotic is accompanied by what some might regard as troubling concessions to the lightweight and the middle-brow without a compensatory leap into the genuinely popular. Furthermore, the new erotics of the middle-aged does not engage in any substantive way with power relations linked to coloniality.

An exception to this generalization, which, however, proves the rule, is Shevchuk's short novel *Kartyna bez ramky na holii stini* (*An Unframed Picture on a Bare Wall*, 1991), where, while dealing with the ever-piquant themes of infant eroticism and the sexual education of an ingenu, Shevchuk strays by accident into a discussion of the fascinating issue of *surzhyk* and colonial relations. The first-person narrator (innocent, naive, a child, Ukrainian-speaking and therefore rural) encounters girls from the city (knowing, sexually advanced and experienced and, of course, speakers of a *surzhyk* practically identical with Russian). Their communication turns to matters of sex:

—Ну от, шо дєлають женщіни і мужчини, знаїш?

Я звільнився з обіймів старшої, бо мені аж млосно ставало, і подивився на них баранчиком. З другого боку, мені було з ними так цікаво, що я аж тремтів. Мій маленький розумець наказував мені покинути цих юних безсоромниць, але я в цій ситуації собі не належав: вони оволоділи моєю волею беззастережно.

"Well then, do you know what grown-up men and women do together?"

I freed myself from the embrace of the elder one, for I was feeling faint, and I looked at them like a little lamb. On the other hand, it was so exciting to be with them that I was actually trembling. My little brain ordered me to run from these shameless young creatures, but in this situation I did not belong to myself: they had captured my will absolutely.[16]

The function which *surzhyk* primarily serves in this story is that of a satirical device to render unsympathetic those who have discarded their native language. But in the passage quoted above, the use of *surzhyk* transforms the situation into an allegory of the colonial power disbalance: the intruders from outside have seniority, knowledge, and aura; the native is irresistibly seduced by the promise of access to a greater and more advanced world than the one currently spanned by his "little brain," which *a priori* seems to him inferior. This triumph of cultural colonialism is underscored by metaphors drawn from colonialism both economic ("I no longer belonged to myself") and political ("they captured my *volia* [the word means both 'will' and 'freedom'] absolutely").

Surzhyk is the outcome of a colonization of language and the most palpable and ubiquitous social proof of the reality and depth of the cultural colonization of Ukraine. It is the communicative medium of individuals who speak neither normative Ukrainian nor correct Russian. It goes without saying that *surzhyk* offends anticolonial purists like Serhii Plachynda, who have invested considerable energies in publicistic campaigns to keep the Ukrainian language free of Russian borrowings or calques. They have done so for excellent anticolonial reasons: to maintain the distinctness and authenticity of the language, which by unquestioned consensus is the most important marker of Ukrainian national identity, and to affirm the value and authority of the native idiom in opposition to the language of empire—something that would be impossible unless the boundaries between the two were fixed and energetically policed.

However, linguistic purism has not been able to control the reduction of the number of social spheres in which the Ukrainian language is standardly employed, nor of the number of stylistic registers actually in use. The scatological domain and the specialized low-life argots of, for example, L'viv's prewar criminal classes have atrophied. Some members of the younger generation of writers have recognized that, de facto, these gaps are filled in real life by *surzhyk*, and have chosen to make its creative employment an important tactic in their aesthetic strategy. The very use of *surzhyk* as the medium for whole literary works is a kick at the anticolonial sacred cow of *solov'ina mova* (nightingale language). As an imitation of actual majority language practice, *surzhyk* possesses vernacular naturalness and vibrancy. Because it parodies two norms simultaneously, it is a

splendid vehicle for humor. Last but not least, it is just as much an anticolonial revenge upon the authority of the Russian language as it is a sign of the colonized status of the Ukrainian.

It is scarcely surprising that the literary use of *surzhyk*, with its carnivalesque dimension of illicit, but life-giving, coupling and contamination, should go hand-in-hand with erotic themes. Effectively the same combination was enacted in Ivan Kotliarevs'kyi's *Eneida* (1798–1842), where a vernacular barbaric in relation to established literary languages, but endowed for that reason with freshness and vitality, was used to formulate a carnivalesque universe of which sex is as much a part as is laughter. Bohdan Zholdak's *Surzhykovi istorii* (*Surzhyk Tales*), which have appeared in the highly scandalous Zhytomyr journal *Avzhezh* and on the no less provocative culture pages of the L'viv newspaper *PostPostup*, are cases in point. Zholdak's story "Bol' sertsia materi" ("The Pain of a Mother's Heart," 1992), for example, is an hilarious account of the ambiguous "agony" enjoyed by a woman as she observes, from her secret vantage-point inside a wardrobe, the sexual acrobatics of her son with persons of both sexes.[17] It is also an amused footnote to the hyperserious image in Ukrainian literature of the mother-son relationship, which has enjoyed mythical status from Shevchenko to Symonenko as the symbol of the fate of Ukraine as family without father, nation without state.

The *surzhyk*-borne stories of Zholdak embody the postcolonial recognition that the grand anticolonial myths, symbols, and values are no longer productive and that continued exaggerated respect for them would constitute a narrowing of the cultural potentiality of the Ukrainian. It is the same insight that has inspired *PostPostup's* campaign to extend the use of Ukrainian expletives. The paper has published its own "Slovnychok-lainychok" ("Little Swearing Dictionary") and has made its own suggestions for new obscene expressions.[18]

Nowhere, perhaps, is the use of the erotic to desacralize a central anticolonial myth more wittily effected than in the poem "Liubit'!" ("Love!" 1992), Oleksandr Irvanets''s parody of Volodymyr Sosiura's patriotic poem "Liubit' Ukraïnu" (1944). The poet's call to love of motherland suffers something of a deconstruction as it echoes in Irvanets' invitation to engage in promiscuous amorous relations with the United States of America:

Любіть Оклахому! Вночі і в обід,
Як неньку і дедді достоту.
Любіть Індіану. Й так само любіть
Північну й Південну Дакоту.

Любіть Алабаму в загравах пожеж,
Любіть її в радощі й біди.
Айову любіть. Каліфорнію теж.
І пальми кристалі Флоріди [...].

Love Oklahoma! At night and at noon,
As you love your mummy and daddy.
Love Indiana. And don't love any less
North and South Dakota.

Love Alabama in the glow of wildfires,
Love her in joy and in anguish.
Love Iowa. California, too,
And the shaggy palm trees of Florida. [...][19]

It is not an exaggeration to assert that the erotic is an inalienable part of the strategy of the most visible (that is, in terms of public relations, most successful) branch of "young" literature in Ukraine today. There are those young writers who still cultivate the ideal of high seriousness (Ievhen Pashkovs'kyi, Viacheslav Medvid', Oleh Lysheha, most of the poets in the *Visimdesiatnyky* [*People of the 1980s*] collection,[20] the writers close to the new Kiev journal *Osnova*). For the moment, however, the limelight has been captured by the postmodern tricksters who, assuming colonialism to have died a natural death, have playfully challenged many of the myths that constitute the anticolonial tradition: the Great Poet and Literature in the service of the Nation, for example, or the mythical image of the Ukrainian Woman (as Kateryna the victim or Roksoliana the victim-heroine).

The best-known representatives of this trend are three poets who comprise the Bu-ba-bu group: Iurii Andrukhovych, Oleksandr Irvanets' and Viktor Neborak. ("Bu-ba-bu" stands for the first syllables of *burlesk* [burlesque], *balagan* [temporary structure for outdoor theatricals, circuses, etc.; mess, chaos], and *bufonada* [buffoonery].) Founded in 1985 and notorious since 1987, Bu-ba-bu has sought consistently to outrage a public postulated as traditionalist and still shockable, in large part by breaking the taboo on the explicit treatment of sex in public discourse. It is not by accident that, in Viktor Neborak's manifesto-like sound poem "Bubon" ("The Drum"), in which the syllables "bu" and "ba" are placed in various suggestive contexts, two lines that make grammatical sense are

Малюю бабу голуБУ [...]
Вам зуби вставить БУБАБУ.

I paint a blue broad [...]
BUBABU will put your teeth in for you.[21]

The lines summarize the ambition and the promise of the bubabists. The ambition is to create nontraditional art ("maliuiu babu holuBU" [I paint a blue broad] appears to allude to Picasso) while provoking through vulgarity and sexual content ("maliuiu babu holu" [I paint a naked broad]). The promise is no less than to empower the audience—to reverse the symptoms of its senility, to give it "bite" ("vam zuby vstavyt' BUBABU").

Bu-ba-bu celebrates the carnivalesque, and its members are candid about their awareness of Bakhtin, whom Andrukhovych all but quotes in his twelve-point definition of Bu-ba-bu for *Literaturna Ukraïna*:

Карнавал поєднує непоєднуване, жонглює ієрархічнимн цінностями, перекидає світ догори ногами, провокує найсвятіші ідеї, щоби порятувати їх від закостенілості й омертвіння. Карнавал—війна зі Смертю. Поки з нами карнавал—ми безсмертні. Бо ми взагалі не помремо.

Carnival unites the ununitable, it juggles hierarchical values, it turns the world on its head, it provokes the most sacred ideas in order to rescue them from ossification and death. Carnival is a war with death. While carnival is with us we are immortal. For we shall never die.[22]

Naturally, the Bu-ba-bists are more than aware of the sexually liberating dimension of carnival and more than subscribe to the Bakhtinian idea that the subversive potential of carnival manifests itself, in large part, in the sexual—that, under cover of the carnival mask, age, social status, sex, and personal identity are obscured and people are at liberty to enter into encounters, including erotic ones, that are usually prevented by social boundaries or gender conventions. In the process, prevailing hierarchies and power relations are, at least temporarily, disrupted.

These notions are perhaps most clearly embodied in Andrukhovych's short novel *Rekreatsiï* (*Recreations*, 1992), in which a cultural festival in the spirit of the "Chervona ruta" (Red Rue-Flower) song festival (Chernivtsi, 1989) is modelled as a carnival event. The festival reveals the ephemeral quality of the myth of the Great Poet (the participating Young Poets, lionized by public opinion, are represented as alcoholics, womanizers, vandals, and even poor versifiers), but it does not challenge the poets' vitality or attractiveness: that is evident in their sexual prowess. To make this point, Andrukhovych inserts into *Recreations* no fewer than two descriptions, from female points of view, of sex with Young Ukrainian Poets. The following is an excerpt from one of these:

Я схопила його обидвома руками, я сама ввела його, і тільки тоді він поступився і став виконувати моє благання, бо я вже ладна була думати, що він знущається, але все одно вірила, що ні, і тепер це вже була майже вершина, я боялася не встигнути до вершини, а він перестав собою володіти, от коли я його підкорила, він забув правила своєї гри, він уже не належав собі, а тільки мені, і тепер я намагалася стримати, ще трохи стримати, ще трохи стримати, я вже не чула власного голосу [...].

I seized him with both hands, I drew him in myself, and only then did he give way and start doing what I begged for, for I was ready to think that he was being cruel, but I also believed that he was not, and now this was almost the peak, I was afraid of not making it to the peak, he had lost control over himself, that is when I vanquished him, he had forgotten the rules of his game, he belonged no longer to himself but to me only, and now it was I who

was trying to restrain him, hold on a bit longer, hold on a bit longer, I couldn't hear my own voice any more [...].[23]

In addition to the obvious function of pleasing the biological reader, the passage also intends to outrage the reader accustomed to respecting literature as the repository of supreme national and moral values. It is clear that Andrukhovych regards such an anticolonial reader as part of the nemesis of Ukrainian culture. Andrukhovych's poem "Zahybel' Kotliarevshchyny" ("The Death of *Kotliarevshchyna*," 1991), for example, directly asserts that it is not the proclamation of high ideals, but the cultural gesture represented by the *vertep*—the carnivalized Ukrainian Christmas puppet theatre, with its mixture of piety and comedy, high and low style, seriousness and parody—that has the prospect of survival into the future:

> вертеп не зачиниться з нього показано дулю
> отчизні і жизні і смерті і ясній зорі.
>
> The *vertep* will not close down, and it thumbs its nose
> at fatherland and life and death and the bright star.[24]

The subversive quality of Andrukhovych's carnivalized eroticism becomes especially apparent in the contrast between Andrukhovych and another accomplished prose writer, Iurii Pokal'chuk. Pokal'chuk, an experienced traveler in Latin America as well as a translator and scholarly critic of Latin American literature, is well aware of the potential of carnival to challenge received meanings and values. Yet, in his short story "Vagner" ("Wagner," 1990), set against the background of street life in Rio de Janeiro, the erotic serves to intensify a traditional, essentially romantic, image of love as the supreme human ideal.[25]

Insofar as the ideal location of Bakhtinian carnival is the market square, a feature characteristic of archaic cities, it is scarcely surprising that the Bu-ba-bists and their sympathizers confess to a strong affinity with the city of L'viv. L'viv, with its Ukrainian, Polish, Austro-Hungarian, Jewish and Armenian history, alludes to a cultural syncretism that lovers of carnival appreciate. Its historical underworld, its special argot and its ladies of the night go together to produce an atmosphere of excitement, expectation, and eros that have led Viktor Neborak, for example, in his poem "Mis'kyi boh Eros" ("The Urban God Eros," 1990), to speak of the structure of the city as

> жіноче тіло споночіле і палке, пахке сп'яніле
> тіло міста,
>
> a female body, dusky and passionate, the fragrant intoxicated
> body of the city,[26]

and to imagine an analogy between the convoluted street plan and the internal female anatomy.

L′viv is also the main theater of activity of possibly the most single-minded, outrageous, and dedicated writer of Ukrainian erotic prose, Iurii Vynnychuk. Vynnychuk is the author of *Divy nochi* (*Ladies of the Night*, 1992), a short novel concerning an intellectual who becomes a pimp and reaps from this activity far greater pleasure and profit than from his previous way of life. Under Vynnychuk's editorship, the culture pages of the L′viv newspaper *PostPostup* became the vehicle for a sustained campaign to legitimate the erotic and render it familiar. Vynnychuk's own contributions included "Zhytiie haremnoie prez Nastasiiu Lisovsku z Rohatyna, zhe iu Roksolianoiu prozvano, pravdyvo spysanoie v roku 1548" ("Life in the Harem, Faithfully Recorded in 1548 by Nastasia Lisovs′ka of Rohatyn, Called Roksoliana")[27]—a parodic reworking of the Roksoliana plot as an anatomically frank account, in archaic language, of the defloration and further instruction of an inexperienced newcomer to the sultan's sexual service.

L′viv is a location from which the power disbalances produced by colonial situations are especially evident because of L′viv's own uneasy role as a culturally vibrant and historically significant city, which, however, is not the capital of the country and exists in a state of unresolved tension with Kiev. The situation is replicated in the recently-emerged tension between L′viv and the even less metropolitan west Ukrainian city of Ivano-Frankivs′k, where a veritable explosion of exciting cultural activity has recently taken place.[28] This is focussed on two new journals, *Pereval* and *Chetver*, in both of which the erotic asserts a strong presence. *Chetver* has been described, not inaccurately, as a cocktail of "classical exegesis, nonclassical German philosophy and vulgar Freudianism."[29]

Of particular interest is the third issue of *Chetver*, edited by Iurii Izdryk, which is structured like an encyclopedia: alphabetically ordered entries include biographies of the new gods of the subversive pantheon, comprising the Bu-ba-bists and their friends; theological, demonological, philosophical, and cabbalistic notes; poems and short stories; and other, seemingly random, items. The role of the erotic in the journal is not as prominent as Izdryk suggested when, introducing *Chetver* to the readers of *PostPostup*, he asserted that "*Chetver* is like the arrival of a mobile bordello in a provincial town."[30] Yet the third issue of the journal does illustrate in especially acute form a feature of the contemporary erotic writing which has been more or less evident in most of the material to which we have so far drawn attention: its aggressive machismo and male-centredness. In *Chetver* this feature is, admittedly, presented with a hint of irony—but it is the irony of hyperbole. The entry "Phallus," for example, concludes, without so much as a by-your-leave to Lacan or feminist theory, as follows:

> [Фалос—] це вежа найвищої дзвініці чоловічого тіла, важіль світобудови і вісь обертання, магічне дерево життя і смерті, стовп добра і зла, ключ до найглибших копалень з діамантами, магічний шланг, тюльпанний спис, незгасаючий смолоскип, незламний корінь. Це—вектор, це—промінь. Амінь.

[The Phallus] is the tower of the highest belfry of the male body, lever of the universe and axis of its revolution, wonder-tree of life and death, pillar of good and evil, key to the deepest diamond mines, magic hose, lance of tulips, undying torch, unbreakable root. It is the Vector, it is the Ray. Amen.[31]

The article "zhinka" (woman), on the other hand, reads,

Жінка—це дивна білкова структура довкола отвору. Метафізична сутність жінки—отвір. Або, скажімо так,—поріг.

Woman. A strange protein structure surrounding an orifice. The metaphysical essence of woman is the orifice. Or, let us say, the threshold.[32]

One could quote endless similar examples of formulations of male heterosexual triumphalism. Counterexamples illustrating any form of resistance to this phallic frenzy, on the other hand, are extremely difficult to find, even in writing by women. Many texts by women writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who today form part of the literary canon, Olʹha Kobylians'ka and, as Roman Weretelnyk has shown, Lesia Ukraïnka, today sustain interpretation as challenges to the patriarchal order prevailing in the literary imagination of their day.[33] Writing by women authors in the 1980s and early 1990s, on the other hand, often affirms traditional romantic images of the female role: in the erotic encounter women are passive and receptive; women are endowed with attributes of beauty for the appreciation of their male lovers; women are fully realized only in love and in motherhood. The following poem by Liubov Holota is characteristic of this tendency:

Я жінка. Я травина. Я роса.
Я без кохання—мов калина на морозі. [...]
Це задля тебе в мене руки білі,
І голос плине тихою водою,
І материнством квітне моє тіло.
Я жінка. [...]
Тебе чекаючи,
була віки одна,
І хочу народити тобі сина.
Я жінка.

I am a woman. I am a blade of grass. I am dew.
Without love I am like a guelder rose in the frost. [...]
It is for your sake that my hands are white
And my voice runs like still waters
And my body blossoms with motherhood.
I am a woman. [...]
Waiting for you

For ages I was alone.
I want to bear your son.
I am a woman.[34]

One encounters contemporary women writers of the younger generation who celebrate male dominance in sexual relations. Antonina Tsvyd, for example, in "Obertal'nyi khrest abo filosofiia dvokh" ("The Revolving Cross, or a Philosophy of the Two," 1992), a poem intended, as its subtitile specifies, "for the female voice," writes,

Ти—мій скульптор,
Я—камінь.
Руками
без різця і сокири
висікаєш із мене
жінку...

You are my sculptor,
I am a stone.
With your hands,
Without chisel or axe
you carve a woman
out of me...[35]

and, later,

Ти—голова усесвіту.
Я—лоно.
Ти—дух його,
А я—безсмертна плоть.

You are the head of the universe,
I am its womb.
You are its spirit,
And I am its immortal flesh.[36]

There is no hint that the hierarchy implied in Tsvyd's spirit/body, head/womb dichotomy is about to be questioned here.

A rare exception is Mstyslava Chaika, whose erotic poetry assumes the autonomy of female erotic sensation, celebrates female initiative in the sexual encounter, and is ironic at the expense of male self-stereotypes:

[...] мої несиметричні
як у справжньої амазонки
груди
стали пружнішими

і позадирали носики
як тоді коли ти стоїш поруч
[...]
Ну чому ти така гарна
просто зухвало гарна
немов після ночі кохання

Любий
тобі залишається
тільки позаздрити
собі у моєму сні.

[...] my asymmetrical breasts
like those of a real Amazon
have become firmer
and have turned up their noses
as when you stand alongside.
[...]
Well, why are you so beautiful—
so contemptuously beautiful
As after a night of love

My beloved,
all that remains to you
is to envy yourself
as you appear in my dream.[37]

But Chaika is the exception that highlights the rule. How to explain the paradoxical situation where the proclaimed intention of destabilizing received cultural and social hierarchies, in large part through mobilizing the subversive potential of eros, is accompanied by the vigorous assertion of traditional male dominance—precisely in the domain of erotic relations? A number of possibly relevant factors come to mind. Perhaps the sexual privilege of powerful men in Soviet and post-Soviet society—including the men in the cultural elite, bohemian or otherwise—is so attractive that it is celebrated by those who have it as much as by those who do not. Perhaps increasing awareness, but profound suspicion, of Western feminism encourages male writers to indulge in hyperbolic phallocentrism, occasionally tempered by a hint of irony. Perhaps the phenomenon in question is merely the anticolonial negation of the "absent father" myth inherited from Shevchenko's "Kateryna" and the *pokrytka* (shamed and abandoned unmarried mother) tradition.

If one were to attempt, at the end of this discussion, a generalization about the erotics of postcolonialism in Ukrainian literature today, it would be this: while there is a great deal of the erotic in Ukrainian postcolonialism, contemporary Ukrainian erotics is not itself very postcolonial.

If the condition of postcoloniality involves a transcendence, not only of the structures of colonial domination, but also of the anticolonial responses that mimic and replicate them, then, indeed, Ukrainian literature and culture today includes important and vibrant phenomena that can be called postcolonial. Much of the most interesting younger Ukrainian literature, and the aura of performance art and popular culture that surrounds it, is involved in the playful, parodic, in a word—postmodern demystification of both imperial and national values. This literature reveals and challenges the structures of political, social, and cultural power that prevailed in the Soviet period and enjoy an afterlife in post-Soviet times. The erotic, its novelty and therefore its ability both to shock and to fascinate still relatively intact, is certainly a central mechanism in this general strategy.

The field of the erotic itself, however, is no less polarized by power relations than are other spheres of post-Soviet experience, and there is very little evidence as yet of a general uprising against the hegemony of the heterosexual male point of view in the literary sphere. It may be that a softer, more conciliatory, indeed, more postcolonial resolution is just around the corner. But if that is the case, then this spring is not being heralded by a great many swallows just yet.

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NOTES

1. Viktoriia Stakh and Mstyslava Chaika, eds., *Bila knyha kohkannia. Antolohiia ukraïns'koï erotychnoï poeziï XX stolittia. Anons* ([Kiev]: Biblioteka zhurnalu "Chas," n.d. [c. 1991]).

2. This view is maintained, for example, by Hryhorii Klochek in his essay, "Chortytsia. Erotyzm u suchasnii prozi i shcho za nym vbachaiet'sia," *Literaturna Ukraïna*, 1 July 1993, 4.

3. Mikhail Shtern and August Stern, *Sex in the USSR* (New York: Times Books, 1980). See also "Zur sexuellen Frage in der UdSSR. Interview mit Professor Dr. Igor S. Kon (Moskau)," in Joachim S. Hohmann, ed., *Sexualforschung und Politik in der Sowjetunion seit 1917* (Frankfurt/Main: Lang, 1990), 297–306.

4. Brian Edwards, "Textual Erotics: The Meta-Perspective and Reading Instruction in Robert Kroetsch's Later Fiction," *Australian-Canadian Studies* 5 (1987), no. 2: 69–80.

5. "Post-Colonial Features in Contemporary Ukrainian Culture," *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies* 6 (1992), no. 2: 41–55, here 45.

6. This fact has been noted even on the pages of one of Kiev's most widely read general-interest dailies. See Kostiantyn Rodyk, "'Zhinky—tse okrema natsiia.' Chy vzhe maiemo novu ukraïns'ku erotychnu literaturu?" *Vechirnii Kyïv*, 30 October 1993. The question in the subtitle ("Do we have a new Ukrainian erotic literature?") the correspondent answers in the affirmative.

7. Klochek, 4.

8. Pavlo Zahrebel'nyi, *Hola dusha. Povist' (Spovid' pered dyktofonom)* (Kiev: Presa Ukraïny, 1992), 39. This and all subsequent translations are mine.

9. Ievhen Hutsalo, *Blud. Ukraïna: rozpusta i vyrodzhennia* (Kiev: Ukraïns'kyi pys'mennyk, 1993), 2.

10. See my article, "Yevhen Hutsalo's *Pozychenyi cholovik*: The Whimsical in the Contemporary Soviet Ukrainian Novel," in *In Working Order: Essays Presented to G. S. N. Luckyj,* ed. E. N. Burstynsky and R. Lindheim (Edmonton, Alberta: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1990), 113–28.

11. Anna Berehulak, "Positions of Coloniality in the Ukrainian Historical Novel," Ph.D. thesis in progress at Monash University.

12. I have developed this argument fully in the article, "Mythological, Religious and Philosophical Topoi in the Prose of Valerii Shevchuk," *Slavic Review* 50 (1991): 905–13.

13. Roman Kukharuk, "Shevchuka potiahnulo na seks," *PostPostup*, 1992, no. 33 (47), 10.

14. Valerii Shevchuk, "Misiatseva zozul'ka iz lastiv'iachoho hnizda," *Suchasnist'* no. 3 (March 1992): 15–53, here 15.

15. Ibid., 21.

16. Valerii Shevchuk, "Kartyna bez ramky na holii stini," *Berezil',* 1991 (6): 13–94, here 65.

17. *PostPostup*, 1992, no. 39 (53), 29.

18. *PostPostup*, 1992, no. 38 (52), 19 and 1993, no. 4 (67), 23.

19. *Pereval,* 1993 (1): 153–54.

20. Ihor Rymaruk, ed. *Visimdesiatnyky: Antolohiia novoï ukraïns'koï poeziï* (Edmonton, Alberta: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1990).

21. Viktor Neborak, "Bubon," in his collection *Litaiucha holova* (Kiev: Molod', 1990), 36.

22. "'Bu-ba-bu' i vse inshe," *Literaturna Ukraïna*, 28 March 1991, 7.

23. Iurii Andrukhovych, "Rekreatsiï," *Suchasnist'* no. 1 (January 1992): 27–85, here 79.

24. Iurii Andrukhovych, "Zahybel' Kotliarevshchyny, abo zh bezkonechna podorozh u bezsmertia," in his collection *Ekzotychni ptakhy i roslyny* (Kiev: Molod', 1991), 63–64, here 64. "Otchyzni i zhyzni i smerti" alludes to an uncharacteristically solemn passage in Part 5 of Kotliarevs'kyi's *Eneïda*: "Liubov k otchyzni de heroit', / Tam syla vrazha ne ustoit', / Tam hrud' syl'nisha od harmat, / Tam zhyzn'—altyn, a smert'—kopiika" ("Where love for fatherland heroically is felt, / There the enemy's force will not prevail, / There the [warrior's] breast is stronger than cannon, / There life is worth a penny, and death—a farthing"). See I. P. Kotliarevs'kyi, *Tvory* (Kiev: Derzhavne vydavnytstvo khudozhn'oï literatury, 1957), 186. "Iasna zoria" is part of the standard locution "na iasni zori, na tykhi vody," familiar from Ukrainian *dumy* and thus associated with the heroic representation of the Cossack past.

25. Iurii Pokal'chuk, "Vagner," *Svito-vyd* 1 (1990), no. 1: 24–35.

26. Neborak, *Litaiucha holova*, 39.

27. *PostPostup*, 1992, no. 1 (15), 15 and no. 12 (26), 10.

28. A typically strident account of this tension is contained in Ksenia Nesterenko's article, "Pro pana Bazia, pruten' i kuliu zamist' holovy," *PostPostup*, 1993, no. 28, 13. The essay begins with a provocative claim: "Slowly but inevitably L'viv is becoming provincial." No cultural phenomenon in L'viv, asserts the author, can match the importance of the emergence of *Chetver* and *Pereval* in Ivano-Frankivs'k.

29. Liubko Petrenko, "L'vivs'ka prezentatsiia 'Chetverha'," *PostPostup*, 1993, no. 1 (64), 13.

30. Iurko Izdryk, "Cherhova buria u shkliantsi 'Stanislav' (Sproba hlybynnoho analizu provintsiinoï dumky)," *PostPostup*, 1992, no. 46 (60), 26.

31. *Chetver*, 1992, no. 1 (3): 119.

32. Ibid., 60.

33. Roman Vereteľnyk [Weretelnyk], "Feminizm u dramaturhiï Lesi Ukraïnky," *Suchasnist'* no. 2 (June 1991): 29–31 and "Kozachka v teremi," *Slovo i chas*, 1992 (6): 46–50.

34. Liubov Holota, untitled poem, in her collection *Dzerkala. Liryka* (Kiev: Dnipro, 1989), 5–6, here 5. Originally published in Holota's anthology *Narodzhennia v stepakh* (1976), the poem introduces the 1989 collection.

35. Antonina Tsvyd, "Obertal'nyi khrest, abo filosofiia dvokh. Poema-trylohiia dlia zhinochoho holosu," in her collection *Blahovist kriz' vid'mats'kyi rehit. Poema-trylohiia i virshi* (Kiev: Molod', 1992), 4–31, here 6. The poem was first published in *Avzhezh*, 1991, no. 5. An abridged version emphasizing the erotic sections of the work was published in the youth journal *Ranok*, 1992 (6): 18–21.

36. Tsvyd, *Blahovist kriz' vid'mats'kyi rehit*, 16.

37. Mstyslava Chaika, "Feminum ego," *Ranok,* 1991 (3): 6.