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## The Voices of Ukrainian Emigre Poetry

The question of the poet's voice is a subject that is not unequivocally defined and, unlike form and genre, context and history, reception and hermeneutics, it is not a centrepiece of the currently prominent poetic theories. To be sure, "voice" figures in historical and rhetorical, psychological and even deconstructive criticism; it is often contiguous to such notions as "point of view" and "persona;" but perhaps by the very fact that it partakes of several different critical domains, while at the same time always being ineluctably tied to an individual writer, "voice," like "style," tends to be treated in a gingerly way. In Ukrainian literary criticism and literary history, it is seldom if ever treated as a separate category, as something that may usefully be distinguished from "style," or "creative method," or emotionality, wit, or pathos. Arguably, this lack of distinction between voice and "the poet as such" merely reflects the naturalist bias of much of traditional Ukrainian literary criticism.

A discussion of voice or voices in the specific context of Ukrainian emigre poetry requires a delimitation of that context. As I take it, a Ukrainian emigre literature, in the true meaning of the term, begins only after World War II, in effect in the D.P. period of 1945-1950.<sup>1</sup> It is only then that Ukrainian writers and readers are fully separated from their native environment and cast into the cold reality of foreign cultures. The interwar period, and indeed the war years, present an entirely different picture: so-called emigre literature, i.e., the writings of those who had left the lands that had become the Soviet Ukraine, was largely centred, in terms of publishing and of reading public, in Western Ukraine, then primarily under Poland; contacts between L'viv and Prague, and of course Warsaw, were practicable and the sense of an authentic cultural and social, if not political, context was firmly based. In fact even these non-Ukrainian settings were hardly "foreign" and, taken historically, nothing new. Ukrainian literature in the past—to take but the examples of the St. Petersburg of Shevchenko and Kulish, and the Cracow of Stefanyk and Lepkyi, had often developed and indeed flourished in such nominally foreign centres. Thus the difference

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1. See "A Great Literature," forthcoming in the proceedings of the November 1983 Toronto conference on the Ukrainian D.P. experience; see also the Ukrainian version, "Velyka literatura," forthcoming in *Suchasnist'*.

between cultural life in these cities and that of the later emigration in such metropolises as Munich, or New York, or Winnipeg is crucial.

Ukrainian emigre literature in this latter sense spans only forty years. The first phase, the three to five years of the D.P. setting, is by far the easiest to define in terms of its temporal and psychological and artistic parameters, and is unquestionably the richest in primary and secondary material. After this quantitative, and in various respects qualitative, high point the picture becomes very murky. Further emigration, mainly to the United States and Canada, but also to such distant outposts as Brazil and Australia, produced physical dispersion and the disappearance of the many periodicals, groupings, and institutions that had sprung up in the D.P. camps. But this fragmentation was caused not so much by physical distance as by a sectarian mind-set, a deep centrifugal drive that resulted ultimately in a number of relatively self-sufficient and more or less impermeable "parties" or groupings, each with a house organ, a stable of writers, and one or two factotum critics. It can be said that since the early 1950s, Ukrainian emigre society, and especially its literature, does not show a clear centre let alone a consensus. Any discussion of phases and typologies must thus deal with a mosaic of literary marketplaces.

If, however, one abandons the habit, established by the D.P. experience, of seeing literature through its organizational aspects, and focuses instead on the intrinsic qualities of that literature and its manifest qualities of cultural consciousness, then it is more than apparent that the next phase is determined by the so-called New York Group of poets.<sup>2</sup> This group, which, as its members and chroniclers often point out, never even attempted formal self-definition or structuring, did have, to be sure, the minimal support system to project its collective voice—namely the irregularly periodical and anthological *Novi poezii* and, more importantly perhaps, the monthly *Suchasnist'*, the "house organ" not so much of the only liberal faction of the nationalist camp, but of the emigre intellectuals as such. Significantly, the group's name notwithstanding, it embraced poets living not only in the New York area, but in Chicago, and Munich, and Rio de Janeiro; for its basis of affiliation was not regional or sectarian, but attitudinal or, more precisely, self-consciously avant-gardist. In this it exemplified a new set of literary values and concerns, and, it goes without saying, a new poetics. For all the variety of quality and tenor within it the New York Group signals a valuable departure and achievement in

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2. Cf. Bohdan Boychuk's "Dekil'ka dumok pro N'iu-Jorks'ku hrupu i dekil'ka zadnikh dumok," *Suchasnist'*, No. 1/217 (January 1979), pp. 20-33, for a personal and subjective, but at the same time informative and insightful overview of this group.

Ukrainian poetry—and not just emigre poetry. Indeed, it created the first poetry and poetics of Ukrainian modernism through such features as formal and semantic openness and experimentation, thematic breadth (but with a special predilection for the erotic and the urban), a genuine (if not always consistent) catholicity, and, buttressing it all, a firm conviction about the poet's autonomy in the face of society.

At the same time, underlying the deviations from and at times outright challenges to poetic tradition was a palpable sense of belonging to a continuum of Ukrainian poetry, of treating paths and roads that, however tortuous, led back to the homeland. It is primarily in this sense, and certainly not by dint of unadaptability to, or lack of success in, the new environment, that we can and must speak of this poetry as “emigre.” In fact, it is only by virtue of remaining “emigre,” that is, connected to a literary culture that has its roots in Ukraine, that this poetry remains “high poetry.” The alternative is incorporation into an entirely different linguistic and cultural medium—be it American, Brazilian, or Canadian—in which it would be identifiable only by some peculiarities of perspective, or, if still to be written in Ukrainian, becoming popular “ethnic” writing—which, while no longer emigre, is also usually not much better than doggerel or at most folklore.

This much for the collective voice or the historical import of the group. In terms of individual achievement, the true voice in more than one instance will be found to emerge only after separation from the ambience and collective sensibility of the group.

The dissolution of the New York Group sometime in the mid-70s<sup>3</sup> did not leave a vacuum or silence; the voices continued to be heard, the texts continued to be produced if less frequently, but the sense of a centre and with it of a certain vitality in the literary climate disappeared. The last ten years or so of the post-New York Group phase of emigre poetry are marked, to my mind, by decreased vitality and by even greater atomization. Characteristic of this period is the proliferation of literary mavericks, writers who come on the scene and play a more or less notable role without any affiliation to or validation from what passes as the literary establishment. To be sure, the emigration could never boast of a Soviet-like Union of Writers, a guild that would sanction the products and confer the privileges of membership—although the Artistic Ukrainian Movement, or “MUR,” did try to institutionalize such a structure in the D.P. context, partly in order to establish quality control, but also to control and direct the literary process as such.<sup>4</sup> The breakdown of the “establishment,” most

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3. *Ibid.*

4. See “A Great Literature,” *passim*.

notably of quality control and of the need to gain the approval of literary critics, however informally, is reflected in the fact that "Slovo," the Association of Ukrainian Writers in Exile, and perhaps the only such organized body, is prepared to accept virtually anybody who writes and publishes in Ukrainian, regardless of merit; even more telling, is the appearance of works published—here—as "samvydav." To this we shall return.

The question of voice can be examined on three interrelated planes: the social, the narrative or rhetorical, and the psychological. The first is perhaps the most obvious, reflecting as it does the author's relation to his audience *in terms of mutually, if tacitly, agreed roles*. The stance of the poet-as-tribune, the most striking and most tempting of them, depends on a consensus shared by at least a narrow circle of fellow literati, but more often by a broader circle of readers, that such a stance is functional and valid, and not, say, an absurd or crazy posture.<sup>5</sup> What is involved is more than just the presence of an implied readership<sup>6</sup> or certain poetic (primarily Romantic) conventions about the sublime role of the poet; more concretely, the voice I am speaking of is shaped (building to be sure on the conventions just noted) by ideological, extra-literary postulates about the function of the poet in society. In our case these postulates come both from the left, Soviet Socialist Realism, and the right, Dontsovan "visnykizm;" but, regardless of the political attitudes involved, the expectations on both sides—about the poet's exhortatory, propaedeutic, nation- or class-building role, etc.—are remarkably similar, and in formal terms it is quite difficult to distinguish between them. At its most basic the poet's function is reduced to the amplification and elaboration of a small set of extra-literary, ideological verities. In this mode the poet's voice is often simply equated with a trumpet or a bull-horn.

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5. It should be noted that the Ukrainian poet who most openly claims, and is by every consensus granted, the role of prophet and tribune—Taras Shevchenko—also establishes a wide and sophisticated range of devices distancing, or qualifying, or indeed debunking this role: through irony, humour, projection of self on to various archetypal or historical characters, and so on. The simultaneous assertion and questioning are, of course, very much part of Romantic poetics. Many twentieth-century, especially emigre, poets take on this role, but they seldom if ever subject it or themselves to that kind of scrutiny and questioning.

6. See the various articles in Jane P. Tompkins (Ed.), *Reader-Response Criticism* (Baltimore, 1980). Unfortunately, few if any of the theoretical postulates and insights proposed here (particularly by Gerald Prince, Stanley E. Fish, and Norman N. Holland) have ever been applied to the literature and the literary scene of our purview.

The next level of voice, one which subsumes the foregoing, is the narrative or rhetorical. Every text, it must be stressed, has a voice by virtue of the fact that it is narrated and makes use of rhetorical devices; thus even a text that has no perceptible persona has a voice. The latter case, where the voice is peculiarly disembodied, where no individual psyche but pure poetry itself seems to generate the text, is a special and very interesting variant which we will have opportunity to illustrate. The more usual manifestations of voice in this narrative/rhetorical aspect relate to and indeed determine various literary conventions, or even genres: the dramatic monologue, the lyrical digression, the garrulous, self-debunking *skaz* or *gawęda*, and so on. Focusing on voice in this dimension allows us to examine the author's use of or departure from literary traditions, conventions, genres, and at the same time to discuss and evaluate his formal resources, his formal and artistic sophistication.

The final aspect of voice, the psychological, is or should be as obvious as the first (the social). Every text, even one without a delineated persona, projects or suggests a psyche.<sup>7</sup> When we deal not with a solitary text (although there, too, at times) but with a body of works we are all the more entitled to speak of voice as making audible a whole range of psychological traits, gestures, patterns, or strategies. We can speak of the central issue of authorial self-definition, and such attendant moments as self-assertion or self-doubt, self-valuation or abnegation, indeed the whole range of psychic tropes.

It must be emphasized that all these aspects of voice are interrelated and frequently indistinguishable in an actual text. When we are dealing with the question of the authority of discourse (an issue of some concern for recent deconstructive criticism) then it is clear that such a thing as the "totalitarian" voice (of some of the "visnykite" poets, for example), or conversely the open or bracketed voice, cannot be singled out from the other aspects. The same is true of the extremely interesting and problematic (currently much discussed, though not in Ukrainian criticism) problem of gender, or the voice of gender. Any thorough investigation of Ukrainian emigre poetry would also have to consider this issue.

The discussion that follows is intended to illustrate the historical and the conceptual schema just proposed. While it certainly does not pretend to provide a historical overview, it hopes to focus on some major historical moments and to suggest a dynamics of development. In principle it should follow that if the schema is conceived properly, its case could also be made by focusing on an entirely different set of authors.

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7. Cf. Peter Brooks's "The Idea of a Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism," forthcoming.

The first phase, the D.P. period, may be considered in the light of its central literary-political and “theoretical” desideratum, that of “Great Literature.” This notion can be said to determine the intellectual and emotional tenor of the literary climate as a whole and, as a consequence, various poets of the period strive with utmost seriousness, and invariably to the detriment of their poetry, to live up to this ideal. (To be sure, while this pattern can be discerned in many poets and writers of this period, one should not assume that it was universal; variations and exceptions existed, and they deserve further study.)

The major effect of the imperative to lift up hearts, to address sublime subjects, to achieve “European” standards, to mould readers and to be moulded by them in turn, to live up, in short, to the *duty* imposed by “Great Literature,” was to distort the poet’s voice. Various genres (the “high,” the epic) were given special validity, and others (the “low,” the satiric, the “everyday”) were devalued; in particular various poetic stances—the bardic, the tribunicial, the “national,” and “historiosophic”—were touted over and above other, perhaps much more organic attitudes and modes. A large work that fails mainly because of these demands is Iurii Klen’s *Popil imperii*.<sup>8</sup> The poetry and prose of Ivan Bahrianyi also frequently fail as a result of living up to such “duties,” and more directly as a result of the blurring of the lines between poetry and the soap box.

The immediate predecessor and influence on this complex of attitudes was the phenomenon of “visnykism,” that is the ideology and rhetoric of Dmytro Dontsov, of the journal *Visnyk*, and more generally of militant Ukrainian nationalism. This movement had a palpable bearing on the so-called Prague group, consisting primarily of Ievhen Malaniuk (who later lived in Warsaw), Oksana Liaturyns’ka, Oleh Ol’zhych, and Oleksa Stefanovych. These poets in turn continued to exert an influence well beyond the ’30s, when they first came on the scene.

In this group it is above all Stefanovych who exemplifies to my mind the problematic fate of voice within the confines of this group’s poetics. Stefanovych’s early poetry (primarily of the 1920s) shows a range of thematic concerns—contemplation of and delectation in nature, its smells colours, light erotic motifs, classical motifs, and so on—all expressed in a highly restrained but imagistic diction that echoes in various respects that of his colleagues in the Prague group and perhaps traces its lineage back to Russian acmeism.<sup>9</sup> While quite polished and occasionally striking (though hardly as memorable and deep as some critics tend to think), it

8. See “A Great Literature.”

9. See Ihor Kachurovskiy, “Visnykivstvo i rosiis’ka poeziia,” *Suchasnist’*, No. 3 (March 1961), pp. 67-73.

also shows its moments of sentimental fluff and less than witty posturing. But towards the end of the '20s Stefanovych's poetry begins to fill up with notes of abstract, "idealistic," and of course nationalistic rhetoric; a poetry of experience becomes more and more a poetry of slogans. There are, to be sure, occasional works (e.g., "Shevchenko," 1928) where high pathos and rhetoric do seem to elicit a genuine, emotional response. But more typical are the sentiments expressed in a sonnet of 1936, also entitled "Shevchenko":

Це — буремно випнуте вітрило.  
Що човна нестримано жене.  
Це — велике серце вогняне,  
Що над степом сонцем засвітило.

Стогогутньо випростані крила,  
Що між ними рокіт не засне.  
Чудо ясне, — дивне і страшне:  
Ожила земля й заговорила.

Клекотіння крові і вогню.  
Громовé — розвиднитися дню!  
Встати дню із чорної безодні!

Спалах Крутів, Похід і Базар,  
Гарячé розжевлене сьогодні  
І майбутній праведний пожар.<sup>10</sup>

Rather than expressing an individual voice, which had once been capable of conveying joy and excitement, the later poems begin to indulge in the sound and fury of collective frustration. The shift from the personal to the collective is reflected not just in tone and images, but in thematics, or rather metathematics: the focus on bards and martyrs and heroes (Shevchenko, Ol'zhych, Khmel'nyts'kyi), on national trauma and national destiny, and finally, in jeremiads and visions of apocalypse. It is also

10. Oleksa Stefanovych, *Zibrani tvory* (Toronto, 1975), p. 97.

"He is the storm-filled sail/that inexorably drives the boat. /He is the great fiery heart/that shines as the sun over the steppe./

And hundred-fold powerful, outstretched wings/the clamour of which will not cease. /O bright miracle, strange and terrible:/the earth revived and began to speak.

The gurgle of blood and of fire/The thunderous command—the day will dawn! /The day will rise from the black pit!

The flame of Kruty, the Winter Campaign and Bazar,/the red-hot present day/and the future righteous conflagration."

reflected in a shift (somewhat camouflaged, to be sure) of formal mode. To take but one example, the poem "Dva" ("Two," 1938), devoted to Shevchenko and Gogol', while formally a sonnet, is turned by its exhortatory rhetoric into nothing less than an ode.

The late poetry is saturated with a tone of doom, but even if it is sonorous and at times powerful, with various Biblical and apocalyptic echoes, it is at its core abstract; it becomes a rhetorical gesture, out of touch with experience. The poet's self, and his voice, are submerged under the rhetoric of these "higher" values. The non-personal voice of "high," sanctioned, and conventional "poetic" sensibility may have been achieved—but at what cost? The poetry that results is ever more narrow and claustrophobic, and frequently riddled with clichés and bombast.

Why focus on Stefanovych? Above all, because he best exemplifies the problem and suffers the worst defeat. Malaniuk, a self-anointed and unabashed tribune, a poet who could with all apparent seriousness give his first collection of poetry the awful title of "Stylet i stylos" ("The Stiletto and the Stylos," 1925), and who preferred to have Beethoven's Fifth Symphony as a background to his poetry reading, managed by craft or innate talent to evade the jaws of his self-made trap: his late poetry, with its troubled and pained, but still vibrant and powerful voice, redeems much of the posturing of his early work. Ol'zhych, perhaps because he was a true believer who gave up poetry for underground activity and received the death he probably anticipated, did not succumb: for him poetry was not a surrogate for action and politics—it was a different realm. This poetry, spare and minimalist *avant la lettre*, a poetry "grey and stony" as Stefanovych called it in his eulogy ("Ol'zhych," 1946), remained free of the cliché and heat and ideological baggage of the day.<sup>11</sup> If for nothing else—and there are other valuable qualities—it remains significant.

The suspension of voice that we observe in Ol'zhych is a quality that recurs more than once in the middle generation of poets, those whose work basically begins in the post-World War II era. Their misfortune, I believe, was to stand between two epochs, between the perfervid and parochial, but still self-confident poetic world of, say, the *Visnyk* poets and the wholly new, but cosmopolitan and self-consciously anguished poetry of the emerging New York Group. The voices of this middle generation are not easy to describe. They certainly have no cohesion as a group, nothing at all resembling the common threads, the interpenetration, the mutual admiration of the Prague group. An unconscious awareness of their transitional, in-between status may be suggested by the tendency of such poets as Oleh Zujewskij, Ostap Tarnavs'kyi, and Vadym Lesych to turn to translation—

11. Oleksa Stefanovych, "Ol'zhych," *Zibrani tvory*, p. 126.

as if hedging on the autonomy of their own voice. It is within this group that we find instances of suspension and attenuation of voice that go far beyond what we have just noted in Ol'zhych.

The prime illustration of this is the poetry of Zujewskyj, in which not only has the voice been all but muffled, but the narrative, communication itself, has been suspended or rarefied to the point of disappearing altogether. In Ol'zhych it may have been hard to fill in the features of the narrating persona, but the sense of his presence and his general contours (control, self-abnegation, a neo-Romantic cult of power and death, indeed a longing for transfiguration through martyrdom) are all discernible. Nothing of the sort can be said about the persona of Zujewskyj's poetry; there is little to indicate his presence, and even less to bring out his features. Virtually any poem can illustrate this, for example, "Protei" ("Proteus," 1948):

Від сьогодні немає привіту:  
Одшуміли в минуле сонця,  
І, як згадка ворожого світу —  
Білий усміх німого лица.

Золотий, коралевий — нерівний  
Він приходив у блисківі дня  
І для тебе, Найвища Царівно,  
Навіть зорі вечірні спиняв.

А тепер його порух, мов камінь,  
Наче кара від ночі, застиг,  
Щоб майнути у тьмі сторінками  
Дорогих непрочитаних книг.<sup>12</sup>

12. Oleh Zujewskyj, *Pid znakom feniksa* (Munich, 1958), p. 41. A translation by Patricia Kilina (*ibid.*, p. 104) reads as follows:

From today on there will be no greeting:  
The suns rustled away to the past,  
And like a hostile world's constant reminding —  
The white smile of a reticent face.

He would come in the day's glaring brightness:  
Full of gold, like a coral, all warped,  
And for you, oh you Loftiest Princess,  
Bringing stars of the evening to half.

But his motion is now like a stone's death,  
As if punished by night, all congealed,  
To appear in the darkness with pages  
Of the books yet unopened and dear.

The metrical regularity (anapestic trimeter, with alternating feminine and masculine rhymes) and the apparent temporal localization of the three strophes-sentences cannot disguise the fact that the poem is quite “irregular,” that it requires many rereadings for even a preliminary grasp of its narrative statement. And no number of rereadings will allow us to grasp the poem in such a way as to allow us to paraphrase it: in this respect it is quite irreducible.<sup>13</sup> But this elusiveness is not to be seen as a formal illustration of the Proteus theme. It is something much more general.

Another poem, “Des’ daleko na vodi tam” (“Somewhere, in the distance, on those waters,” 1948), whose images of the phoenix resonate with the title of the collection, shows a skilful play with rhythm:

Десь далеко на воді там,  
Де не видно навіть хвиль злих,  
Гордий фенікс, що від бур стих,  
Мабуть, прапор розпростер сам.

І тепер його ясна путь.  
Навіть день підвів чоло враз.  
Зачекай. Скажи мені: в нас  
Дома теж когось давно ждуть?

Чи тебе, що від самих слів  
Зрю тепер на голубих днях?  
Гордий фенікс, як підняв стяг,  
Мабуть світлий твій прихід сплів.<sup>14</sup>

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13. It goes without saying, of course, that poetry, and literary art in general, does not in principle lend itself to paraphrase; paraphrase, we still all believe, is a “heresy.” The issue here, simply, is that the exposition, the narrative flow, the “unfolding” of the poem resists the kind of order and encapsulation that we intend by “paraphrase.” Apparently, this quality can be captured (or at least intimated) in a translation; see, for example, Patricia Kilina’s “Proteus,” above. But here the translation (its awkward moments aside) also tends to give the poem more cohesion than it has in the original.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

“Somewhere, in the distance, on those waters/Where even the evil waves are not visible,/The proud phoenix, silenced by storms,/Perhaps unfurled his banner himself.

And now his path is bright. /Even the day suddenly raised his brow. /Wait. Tell me: At home/Are they, too, awaiting someone since long ago?

Perhaps you, whom from the very words/I now perceive in the blue days? /The proud phoenix, having raised his banner/Perhaps wove your bright coming.”

Each of the lines is octosyllabic, with masculine endings. With but one clear (line 7) and one probable (line 9) exception, they are all strongly end stopped; indeed, given the tension or “incongruity” between shifting and fixed accents (while the first two float the third accent always falls on the last word of the line) the poem seems to invite a parodic rendition—which would become quite evident if one were to introduce a brief pause before that last stressed monosyllable.<sup>15</sup> But as in “Protei,” this regularity, subtle though it may be in effect and design, can hardly compensate for the disjointed narrative message and disembodied, barely marked voice.

One could of course argue that this poetry is to be seen not as the product of a psyche, but as pure poetry, as self-generating poetry. But this, too, begs the question. For this poetry’s resistance to narrative coherence, to “meaning,” when taken in conjunction with its manifest regularity, restraint, and “sensibleness,” often attains a disturbing paradoxicality: an elaborate and highly articulate inarticulateness. And this can only partially be explained by the disjointed and diffuse grammatical, referential, and semantic connections.<sup>16</sup> To my mind, this is only the technical surface, the mechanical locus of the real cause. That cause, as I would put it, lies in an almost total bracketing out of emotion, that affective force field which normally—if subliminally—allows us to hold together even an inchoate scene—as in the visions of Emma Andiiiev’ska. Here there is nothing surreal or formally odd, but the poetic statement, this voice-less, message-less quasi- or crypto- or non-communication, is strange indeed. Its meaning, to return to the larger picture, becomes more pronounced when we go beyond the hermetic perimeter of this poetry and

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15. In his introduction to this collection, Ihor Kostets’kyi does speak at length about parody in Zujewskij (pp. 11-12 and *passim*) and in fact focuses on this particular poem (p. 26). As I see it, however, here the issue of parody hinges not on a recasting of literary influence or models (i.e., Stefan George’s “An dem Wasser das uns fern klagt . . .”)—for in a given reading an awareness of this datum may be quite absent—but in the invariably perceived or felt regularity, bordering on the jingly, which rather than introducing order only highlights the chaotic swirl of images and messages.

Kostets’kyi’s comment on the femininity of the ostensibly (formally) masculine rhyme in this poem is well taken. And in general the introduction offers many subtle and valuable insights. But at the same time, especially when addressing larger questions of literary movements and processes (classicism, symbolism), it is often egregiously wrongheaded. This may well be intentional. The whole piece reads like nothing so much as a parody on the archetypical learned introduction to a newly discovered poet.

16. See Iurii Sherekh, “Velyka stattia pro malyi virsh,” *Ne dlia ditei* (New York, 1964), pp. 395-403.

see it as the ideal antipode to the shouting, gesturing, and strutting of the preceding generation. Rhetoric is overcome, but at a high cost, it seems.

To turn now to what was then the youngest, and, alas, is still such, the New York Group of poets. In the history of Ukrainian poetry they occupy a significant niche not only (though of course primarily) because of their achievement, but also because they are fated—as far as we can now tell—to be the last group in Ukrainian emigre poetry.

Diverse as the major members of this group are, one can speak, with but one exception, of a collective cast or patterning to their early voice. The exception of course is Andrievs'ka, whose voice is quite unlike that of any other, who produces more than any of them put together, and who apparently does not change or evolve. The others, particularly Bohdan Boychuk, Bohdan Rubchak, Iurii Tarnavs'kyi, show a clear development and maturation. And while in his above-mentioned article—in effect an epitaph for the group—Boychuk held that “regardless of the work done our present is worse than our past,”<sup>17</sup> I find that their latest work, even if thinner in bulk, is undoubtedly superior to their earlier efforts, largely because each has found his or her own voice. Their beginnings, in contrast, were marked by an almost incestuous cross-fertilization. Taking the three poets just mentioned, for all the formal and thematic differences between them, their tone and basic concerns are rather similar: alienation, angst, the erotic, the urban; above all a common sense of autonomy and the need to be part of the real world, not a symbolic and ever more irrelevant emigre world, or an ever more low-brow ethnic or “Uke” world. And yet, with the possible exception of Tarnavs'kyi, whose bilingual collection “This is how I get Well” may serve as a symbolic manifesto of disengagement, their bonds to the emigre world were not severed.

Experimentation and more generally the rejection of any preordained forms or norms can also be said to characterize this group. In terms of voice such experimentation is most pronounced in Rubchak. His early poetry is rife with poses and gestures and a self-conscious exoticism. Rather than a real-life poet there is always the Poet. There is throughout a literariness which serves as a convenient and traditional vehicle for the deeper, psychological need to try on roles and masks, or at least defer the poetic act from truly baring the soul. The images of a chameleon, of mirrors, of assumed identities, and of magic transformations are an insistent refrain. The play with roles—and voices—finds its expression not only in personae, in assuming the guise of Icarus or Man Friday, of speaking through the mouth of Paris or Vyshens'kyi or Kotliarevs'kyi,

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17. See his “Dekil'ka dumok pro N'iu-Jorks'ku hrupu i dekil'ka zadnikh dumok,” p. 33 and *passim*.

but of “trying on” the voices of such poets as Ryl’s’kyi and Zerov, and quite explicitly Ol’zhych (see, for example, “Poky vesonn’o na skroniakh,” [“While the temples are still in spring”], *Kaminnyi sad* [*The Stone Orchard*, 1956]) and Antonych (see, for example, “Praosin’ ” [“Primal autumn”] in the same collection). These imitations, perhaps significantly, were omitted from Rubchak’s latest, collected edition, *Marenu topyty* (*To Drown Marena*, 1980), but they point to a central trait of his poetics, not so much derivativeness, as an anxiety of influence fuelled by intellectualism and the need to find a screen for the poet’s excessive sensitivity.

In *Marenu topyty* this search for masks or voices is largely successful. In Rubchak’s earlier poetry the imagery or even the concepts would often overwhelm the fabric of the poem. Now, however, the voice holds it all together. Thus, for example, in “Heroii” (“Heroes”), from the triptych “Na poliakh Iliady” (“On the fields of the Iliad”), the harsh debunking of the ancient, blood-crazed heroes seems to issue simultaneously from the mouth of a modern poet speaking across the distance of several millennia and that of a contemporary, remembering his childhood and angry at the hero worship of the barroom raconteurs:

Потвори на ходулях. Блискучі чучела  
із бронзи. В бровах кров запечена  
порічками. Пусті очиць печери,  
і вбивства похить наглі зуби шкірить.

У вухах їм галактики бринять,  
а венами колують кораблі;  
кує ненависть гордий герб у серці,  
і навіть горб нажив зелену шерсть.

Жорстокість. Розчепірена щока.  
Розчавив камінь череп. А в кущах  
зламане ратище. Епос. Ось про що  
нудно заводять старці по шинках і досі.

А все таки нещасні. Кукли сил,  
хворіють на простоволосий шал,  
що смерть дітей на нього — єдиний лік.

Вони ж надлюди. Нелюди, каліки.<sup>18</sup>

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18. Bohdan Rubchak, *Krylo ikarove* (New York, 1983), p. 14.

“Monsters on stilts. Shining dummies/made of bronze. The blood in their eyebrows like baked/red currants. Empty caves of eyes,/and the lust of killing bares urgent teeth.

A similar well-fused duality animates the rest of the triptych, the poems on Vyshens'kyi and Kotliarevs'kyi, and various others. In all of them, the very essence of the poem is the voice. It is an eminently literary voice; not only by virtue of overtly searching for and articulating a literary theme or topos, but by its persistent self-reference and the poet's continual need to reveal and conceal himself. This is most striking, perhaps, in "P'iatnycia sam" ("Friday, himself"):

Оцей наговорив багато хитрих слів,  
оставив тьму дарів, що я їх не просив:  
на погляд мій відвертий маску він надів,  
як хутра на ебен тілесної краси.

Заразу жаху защебив у кров мені,  
гріха гарячку та хандри липкий намул, —  
не миготять уже боги в моїм вогні,  
я мушлю роздушив, бездушну вже й німу.

Громаджу купи дум і сумнівів-жалів,  
як ягоди сухі, що нагромадив він:  
лякають день і ніч руїни кораблів,  
корони королів, птахи чужих провин.

Відплив, як бог. А я на звідному піску  
злим хвилям прокричу його пісню мораль,  
та й полечу зі скелі в хвилі хлань жаску —  
хай зацілюють біль макреля і кораль.

І хай йому тоді, в ту божевільну мить,  
в таверні, де торги, гетери, ром і шум,  
папугою знаття свободи зверещить  
і випалить ущент проклятий, гордий ум.<sup>19</sup>

Here the voice is not that of Defoe's Friday, or of a mock Friday, but of the poet's persona actualizing itself through this literary character so that, paradoxically, the mask becomes more real than the persona.

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Galaxies throb in their ears/and ships circle in their veins;/hatred forges a proud emblem in their heart/and even their hump bristles with its green pelt.

Cruelty. The jaw spread open. /The skull crushed by a rock. And in the bushes/ a broken spear. Epic. This is what/the old men drone on and on about in taverns.

And for all that they are unhappy. Puppets of power/they are sick with the straight-haired frenzy/the only cure for which is the death of children. They are, after all, Supermen. Non-men. Cripples."

The final object of my purview, the mavericks as I call them, can also be seen—descriptively not evaluatively—as naifs. Such poets as Zoia Kohut and Babai, Maria Holod and Oleksandr Smotrych are characterized above all by the fact that their voice is largely direct and unmediated; in contrast to the chameleon-like strategies of a Rubchak the persona and the poet himself are very close indeed. In the case of Smotrych this naivete, accompanied by a deliberately anti-poetic stance, makes his poetry a very fresh and exciting phenomenon.

Smotrych's poetry divides fairly clearly into two parts: basically lyrical and autobiographical-reflective poetry published over the last five years in *Suchasnist'* (and now about to be published by that journal as a separate collection) and eleven thin typed, and then duplicated, collections of verse, usually of about thirteen to fifteen poems in each, for the most part entitled simply *virshi* (and one—"1933"), all published in the period 1974-76 and all described on the title page as *sam vydav*—or "sam vydav." It is on this I want to focus, for it epitomizes the centrifugal tendency I detect in the latest stage of Ukrainian emigre poetry. But Smotrych's later poetry, while more restrained and "normal," also reflects a unique and powerful voice.

The "samvydav" poems are driven by a manic, obsessive hatred and are consistently antiaesthetic and anti-poetic. The anger and hate are directed primarily on Russia and all things Russian, the "syphilitic" Peter I and Catherine, the USSR (mere "katsapiia"), Marxism-Leninism and Bolshevism (more "katsapiia") and even the very genes and the mother's milk of the Russians. Thus, for example, the four-line "Internatsionalist":

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19. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

"That one spoke many clever words,/left heaps of gifts for which I did not ask;/and to my open glance he put on a mask,/like furs to cover the ebony of bodily beauty.

He infected my blood with the disease of horror/the fever of sin and the sticky sediments of melancholy—/the gods no longer glimmer in my fire/I have crushed the soul-less and now mute seashell.

I pile up mounds of thoughts and doubts and remorse. /Like the dry berries that he piled up;/the ruins of ships frighten the days and nights,/and so too the crowns of kings, birds of others' sins.

He sailed away like a god. And I on the deceptive sands/will shout his meagre morality to the evil waves/and will fly from the rocks into the terrible depth of the waves—/let the mackerel and the coral kiss me to death.

And let then, in that mad moment/in a tavern where there is barter and whores, rum and noise/the knowledge of freedom scream like a parrot in his ear/and burn out to the last his accursed proud reason."

Кацап сказав:

“Хател би я за все народи міра умереть!”  
Мені ж подумалось — не вмреш, заразо,  
бо ти — смерть.<sup>20</sup>

But Smotrych’s anger and bile are also directed at his fellow Ukrainians, the cowardly ones there and the torpid and fat-rumped ones here, and above all on their national icons and shibboleths. Thus, for example:

“В своїй хаті своя й правда  
і сила і воля!”  
Отак колись — “во время оно”  
Шевченко, кажуть, десь  
у “Кобзарі”  
сказав.  
Розміркувавши, що й до чого,  
він в своїй хаті, під Торонтом,  
для себе Україну незалежну  
збудував.<sup>21</sup>

He also despises women (a young widow with an angelic face already has the makings of an “old bitch” [*baba-sterva*]),<sup>22</sup> and not least of all himself, a “not very lyrical mug” (*daleko ne lirychna morda*),<sup>23</sup> as he puts it.

To describe this poetry is to show its limitations and flaws. Its bile often chokes; at times Smotrych is uncomfortably close to the crazies, like the paranoid-schizophrenic Vasyl’ Okhrimenko, and some of his verse is not translatable not because it cannot be done, but because one would be embarrassed to have it appear in English. But the voice is sure, clear, and often memorable. It is strong because it is charged by intense emotion and by a principled debunking of “poetry” for its prettiness and its sanctified aura of exclusivity. Smotrych calls his poetry slops—*pomyii*—or this

20. Oleksander Smotrych, *Virshi*, Sam vydav, 1974 [No. 28]. “The katsap [derogatory for “Russian”] said: /‘I would die for all the nations of the world!’/ And I thought—you won’t die, you bastard,/You’re death itself.”

21. Oleksander Smotrych, *Virshi. Zbirka vos’ma*, Sam vydav, 1975 [No. 11]. “In one’s own house—one’s own truth/and power and freedom!” /Thus, at one time—‘in the olden days’/Shevchenko (so they say)/spoke somewhere/in the *Kobzar*. /Having figured it all out/in his house, near Toronto/he built himself/an independent Ukraine.

22. Oleksander Smotrych, *Virshi: Zbirka shosta*, Sam vydav, 1975 [No. 12].

23. Oleksander Smotrych, *Virshi. Zbirka vos’ma*, Sam vydav, 1975 [No. 1].

У мене вірші  
 лізуть з-під пера,  
 немов каліки перехожі —  
 ладу й порядку в них  
 нема — сама нудьга  
 і чорної ненависти  
 гора, й смердять вони,  
 мов яма виргібна  
 у спеку влітку . . .<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps because of this antipoetic stance he can renew the poetic moment. At times, as in his meditations on Shevchenko's millenarian vision, the motif of "I bude syn, i bude maty, /I budut' liudy na zemli," it rises to real heights. His later, much subtler poetry, with its shadings of irony and distance, builds in fact on this clearing of the decks. For all its merits and dynamism, however, it is a poetry, an often crabbed poetry, that can offer little in the way of models for renewal other than to remind us how central voice is to poetic function and quality.

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24. Oleksander Smotrych, *Virshi: Zbirka s'oma*, Sam vydav, 1975 [No. 5]. "My verses/crawl from my pen/like passing cripples—/there's no rhyme or reason/to them—only tedium/and a mountain of black hatred,/and they stink/like a cess-pool/in the summer heat . . ."