



Canadian Slavonic Papers

The Dislocated Muse: Ukrainian Poetry in Australia, 1948-1985

Author(s): MARKO PAVLYSHYN

Source: *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (June 1986), pp. 187-204

Published by: [Canadian Association of Slavists](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40868584>

Accessed: 10/06/2014 03:35

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Canadian Association of Slavists and Canadian Slavonic Papers are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

MARKO PAVLYSHYN

The Dislocated Muse: Ukrainian Poetry in Australia, 1948-1985

Бо чи весна, чи не весна,
Для нас тут, друзі, чужина
І це нам всім—вилазить боком.¹

A Ukrainian literature, small in absolute terms, but not insignificant relative to the size of its audience, has existed in Australia since the arrival of the postwar Ukrainian immigration.² In themes, forms, and aesthetic presuppositions, this literature, and its poetry in particular, has demonstrated not only continuity, but stability. On the whole, the poets who were writing at the beginning of the period under discussion are still writing today. They have been joined by a number of voices from a generation slightly younger than themselves, but still sharing their poetic outlook. In consequence, the poems published in the first (1954) and most recent (1985) numbers of the almanac *Novyi obrii* (*New Horizon*) are sufficiently similar in spirit to be regarded as contemporaries of each other.

Ukrainian poetry in Australia may be described through the metaphor of dislocation, since it deals, first and foremost, with the experience of emigration and does not seek to integrate itself into any new context, such as, for example, the literary process of the host country or of the Ukrainian emigration as a whole. It is pertinent, therefore, first to consider the social and institutional environment in which this poetry was written.

Ukrainians arrived in Australia in a single wave between 1948 and 1952. The present size of the community is estimated as approximately 34,000 persons, most of whom live in the capital cities of the Australian

1. "Because, spring or not, Friends, this place for us is a foreign land, And that is a pain in the neck." Zoia Kohut, "Vesinni trepety zemli" in *Kucheriavyi dym* (New York, 1974), p. 41.

2. For a bibliographical essay, see Dmytro Nytchenko, "Ukrains'ka knyzhka v Avstralii," paper presented at the conference of the Shevchenko Scientific Society in Australia, Sydney, 1-3 April 1983. For a survey of Australian Ukrainian literature in general, see Marko Pavlyshyn, "Aspects of Ukrainian Literature in Australia," in Jacques Delaruelle, et al. (Eds.), *Writing in Multicultural Australia 1984: An Overview* (Sydney, 1985), pp. 70-77.

States.³ The largest groups are in Melbourne, Sydney, and Adelaide, where literary activity has been concentrated. The poets (like the literati in general) have formed part of a relatively small intelligentsia; many were unable to work in positions appropriate to their qualifications, and few reached any marked degree of contact, much less rapport, with the cultural elites of Australia. Ukrainian poetry in Australia has been the work, almost exclusively, of poets born in Ukraine. The Australian-born generation, while displaying rapid upward social mobility, has not produced any consistent or recognized writers or poets (in English or Ukrainian).

There has, therefore, been no generation change within the community of Australia's Ukrainian poets. Those who were writing poetry even before their arrival in Australia—Lidiia Daleka, Dmytro Chub, Vasyl' Onufriienko, and Ievhen Zoze—have been joined by poets of their own or an only slightly younger generation. Six poets have been published in separate collections, and a further fourteen are represented in the three anthologies of Australian Ukrainian verse: *Z-pid evkaliptiv* (*From Beneath the Eucalypts*, 1976), *Pivdennyi khrest* (*Southern Cross*, 1980), and the collection of R. H. Morrison's excellent translations, *Australia's Ukrainian Poets* (1973). Seventeen others have appeared at least once on the pages of *Novyi obrii*. But the total poetic output has not been large. Only a few poets have had both the urge and the opportunity to write regularly. The collections of Daleka, Kohut, and perhaps Onufriienko have reflected current work; but the other anthologies have been retrospective and in some cases contain poems written in the 1930s.

The poets have used the Ukrainian-language press of Australia and, to a lesser extent, of the other countries of the diaspora as outlets for their work. Some have published in *Slovo*, the almanac of Ukrainian writers in exile. But the most important vehicle for their poetry has been the almanac *Novyi obrii*, seven issues of which appeared, at roughly five-year intervals, between 1954 and 1985. The almanac, edited and inspired by Dmytro Nytchenko (b. Zin'kiv, 1905; he uses the pseudonyms Dmytro Chub and Ostap Zirchastyi), appears under the auspices of the Vasyl' Symonenko Melbourne Literary and Artistic Club (1954-58 and 1966-), a body which has organized periodic poetry readings and discussions, and which published *Z-pid evkaliptiv*. *Pivdennyi khrest* was also published by a writers' organization, namely the Language and Literature Group in Adelaide.

The poetry that has arisen in these circumstances is in large part dominated by the fact of emigration. Poet and audience share the historical

3. Eugene Seneta, "On the Number of Ukrainians in Australia in 1979," paper presented at the conference of the Shevchenko Scientific Society in Australia, Sydney, 1-3 April 1983.

experience of traumatic departure from the homeland and an often equally traumatic adaptation to the conditions of a new country and the poets have generally aimed at articulating the feelings and beliefs of a community that is united by these shared experiences. Ukrainian Australian poetry has therefore usually aimed at accessibility to a broad audience. It has not responded favourably to the modernist aesthetic, of which more later.

Since the great majority of poems were written with this audience in mind—often, indeed, as *addresses* to this audience, it is convenient to categorize them according to the reaction which they endeavour to elicit. Three classes suggest themselves: the elegiac, the proclamatory, and the satirical. The elegiac reflects the sadness associated with the loss of the homeland, the proclamatory reiterates the founding patriotic ideals of the emigre community, and the satirical protects the founding ideals by castigating those who abandon them. Not all poetic production is covered by these categories. Much of the work of the Adelaide poets Lydiia Daleka and Ievhen Zoze, for example, has as its primary motivation the creation of aesthetic objects and the sharing of the lyrical experience.

We shall begin with the elegiac mode. Like most newcomers to Australia, the great majority of Ukrainian poets have reflected on the novelty of the country's flat, dry, gaunt, and austere landscape. Most have utilized the visual difference between Australia and Europe as a symbol of nostalgia and yearning. Exceptions, like Iryna Narizhna's "Lyst z Avstralii" ("Letter from Australia"), are rare:

У нас зима: квітуть морелі
і евкаліпти всі в квіту.
А там, де буш, де пнуться скелі
мімозу вгледити золоту:

прозора, ніжна, фібролиста,—
вона свої весняні сні
мережить соняшним намистом,
хоч так далеко до весни...

А синє небо океаном...
а з океану мчать вітри...
і квітне, квітне полум'яно
чудове дерево—флейм трі...⁴

(It is winter in our parts. The apricots are in blossom, and the eucalypts.
Over there, in the bush, where the rocks rise steeply, you will glimpse the
golden mimosa:

4. *Novyi obrii*, No. 1 (Melbourne, 1954), p. 52.

transparent, delicate and with fibrous leaves, it embroiders its dreams of spring with sunny beads, though spring is still distant.

And the blue sky is an ocean, and winds race inland from it, and a marvellous tree is in blossom, in fiery blossom—the flame tree).

Narizhna nonchalantly assimilates Australian loanwords (“bush,” “flame tree”) into her poetic language, and looks upon the new country as already—at least in a grammatical sense—her own: “*U nas zyma*.” Only Pylyp Vakulenko, traveller and lover of the exotic, has an equally unencumbered, spontaneous perception of the new landscape.

There are, on the other hand, many reactions that are cautious, or even negative. Daleka expresses wonder qualified by distance and indifference:

Небо—уже на підпитку—
тулиться й дужче хмеліє
і, не рахуючи збитків,
щедро ллє вина з сулії. /.../

Квіти, якісь напівсонні,
липнуть від меду густого.
Я тут глядач безсторонній,
тільки здивований з того.⁵

(The sky, already inebriated, lists even more drunkenly and, oblivious of the damage, generously pours wine from the barrel. [...])

The flowers, somehow drowsy, grow sticky with the thick mead.
I am an impartial observer, merely bemused by it all.)

Vasyl' Onufriienko senses not only foreignness, but even antagonism in the new natural environment:

Вночі прохолоди не знайдеш, мабуть, і в печері,
Краплини роси—найдорожці, як щастя, як рай...
А тиша пекуча—і в вікна, і в стелю, і в двері,
І звідкись шепоче хтось тихо й лукаво: “Звикай!”⁶

(At night you will find no cool spot, probably not even in a cave. Dew-drops are treasures—like happiness, or paradise. The burning silence thrusts through the windows, the ceiling and door, And somewhere someone is whispering with quiet malice, “Acclimatize!”)

5. Lidiia Daleka, *Lehit i bryzy. Poezii* (Melbourne, 1957), p. 30.

6. Vasyl' Onufriienko, *Zemlia nezabutnia. Poezii* (Sydney, 1976), p. 22.

Onufriienko even records and explores what might well be a new motif in the history of the nature lyric: *resistance* to the aesthetic blandishments of an alluring landscape.

З гір манять просторами тихі долини,
З долин манять вгору зелені горби.
Та голос зненацька до серця прилине:
“Ти їх не люби, не люби, не люби!”⁷

(Expanses of quiet valleys beckon you down from the mountains, From the valleys you are tempted upward by green hills. But a sudden voice wafts into your heart: “Love them not, love them not, love them not!”)

No less revealing of the sense of dislocation is the yearning for an adequate perception of the new land, as expressed by Zoze (“Dai nam zbahnuty tvoiei krasny”—Permit us to comprehend your beauty).⁸

The emotional remoteness of the new landscape has not been alleviated by time, and poets continue to find it a fruitful theme. Bozhenna Kovalenko (b. Kiev, 1924), who began publishing relatively late, has combined it with the theme of the remembered landscape, which is reconstituted repeatedly from a set of familiar elements. The landscape of the homeland cannot be experienced afresh, but its generalized, formulaic constitutive elements can be listed:

Тож на спомин мені принеси:
Полонини в зеленім намисті,
Позбирай всі краплини роси
У лапатім каштановім листі.⁹

(So bring me back as a memento The mountain plains in their green necklaces, Gather all the droplets of dew On a chestnut leaf.)

A small number of natural phenomena not associated with Australia (“hai daleki”—distant groves),¹⁰ and in particular the winter snow, have become emblems of the homeland invoked by almost all poets.¹¹

The lost landscape has become poetic shorthand for all other losses. Severed family ties, the loss of human warmth, and broken relationships

7. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

8. *Z-pid evkaliptiv* (Melbourne, 1976), p. 52.

9. Bozhenna Kovalenko, *Homin Dnipra. Vybrani poezii* (Melbourne, 1983), p. 23.

10. *Zemlia nezabutnia*, p. 71.

11. See, for example: *ibid.*, pp. 62, 68; Onufriienko, “Vzhe i doshch osinnii . . .” in *Novyi obrii*, No. 2 (Melbourne, 1960), p. 36; Daleka, *Lehit i bryzy*, p. 45.

are treated less frequently, possibly because these subjects lend themselves less well to formulaic treatment. Onufriienko, however, has several poems on the theme, including the cycle “Sestri” (“To My Sister”).¹² He is also the author of an effective formulation of the psychological chasm which separates the immigrant and his cultural heritage from the understanding of the native inhabitant:

Здається нам, що птиця все співає.
А в пісні тій пташиній, може, плач.
Ніхто з нас слів незбагнених не знає.
Пробач же, птице втомлена, пробач.

Так біль і наш, збережений у пісні,
Укладений в старий сумний мотив,
В часи важкі, в години лиховісні,
В широкому світі думою ходив.

І що чужим? Найтяжчі наші муки,
Що залягли в душі у нас на дні,—
Лише слова, лише барвисті звуки,
Лише пісні, незбагненні пісні.¹³

(We think of a bird as always singing. But perhaps there is weeping in that birdsong. None of us knows its impenetrable words. Forgive us, weary bird, forgive.

Thus our own pain, preserved in songs, And set in old sad melodies
In hard times and menacing hours, wandered the wide world as a “duma.”

What does it mean to foreigners? Our harshest sufferings, Hardened
at the bottom of our souls, Are merely words, merely colourful sounds,
Merely songs, uncomprehended songs.)

Another typical expression of emigre poetry is what we have classified above as proclamatory verse. The function of such poetry is primarily ritualistic: it reaffirms the founding values of the community, in particular, patriotism, work for the community, maintenance of cultural identity (especially language), and anger at the Soviet state. Such poetry has a life beyond the printed page: it is frequently recited at the commemorative gatherings which continue to be an important part of the community's cultural life. The content and sentiments, as well as much of the symbolism and diction of this verse, are preordained and, not surprisingly, works of this kind seldom become independent poetic statements. Frequently they are little more than metrical and highly exclamatory prose.

12. *Novyi obrii*, No. 3 (Melbourne, 1967), pp. 30-32.

13. *Novyi obrii*, No. 2, p. 35.

The most usual subjects are definitions of the emotional meaning of the term “Ukraine,”¹⁴ homage to events of importance to the patriotic myth (for example, the Winter Campaigns or the activities of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army),¹⁵ and, most commonly, national heroes, e.g.: Shevchenko,¹⁶ Lesia Ukrainka,¹⁷ Ivan Kotliarevs’kyi,¹⁸ Symon Petliura,¹⁹ Valentyn Moroz,²⁰ and numerous others. Dissidents in Soviet Ukraine have sometimes become subjects, but serve more frequently as rhetorical devices. Their names, usually in the plural, are strung together in an order dictated by the metre to achieve an effect of emphatic amplification, as in the following lines from Bozhenna Kovalenko’s “Neskorenym” (“To the Unvanquished”):

Ти краю дав Строкатих і Морозів,
Незламаних тортурами синів,
Ряди Світличних, Горських, Чорноволів,—
Відвагою їх душі запалив.²¹

(You gave the country Strokatas and Morozes, Sons unbroken by torture,
Columns of Svitlychnyis, Hors’kas, Chornovils, And you inflamed their
souls with courage.)

Such poetry extols self-sacrifice, courage, sometimes revenge, and occasionally violence, and is often characterized by hyperbolic, romantic imagery. Vasyl’ Onufriienko’s long poem “Petliura” makes reference to smouldering weapons, flaming hearts, black hands, black cries of despair,

14. E.g., Pavlo Dubiv, “Baliada pro prapor,” in his collection *Struny vichnosity (virshi, pisni, poemy)* (Melbourne, 1984), p. 10; Kovalenko, “Liubliu ii, prekrasnu bat’kivshchynu,” in *Homin Dnipra*, p. 62.

15. E.g., Kost’ Himmel’reikh, “Pid praporom borot’by,” in *Z-pid evkaliptiv*, pp. 25-26; Ivan Smal’-Stots’kyi, “Ukrains’ka povstans’ka armiia,” in *Z-pid evkaliptiv*, pp. 125-26; Pavlo Oliinyk, “Duma pro zymovyi pokhid,” in *Z-pid evkaliptiv*, pp. 75-76; Dubiv, “Marsh UPA,” in *Struny vichnosity*, p. 40.

16. E.g., Kovalenko, “Prorokovi,” in *Homin Dnipra*, p. 78; Onufriienko, “Prorokovi,” in *Zemlia nezabutnia*, pp. 69-70; Pylyp Vakulenko, “Tarasovi,” in *Z-pid evkaliptiv*, p. 17; Zoia Kohut, “Shevchenkovi,” in *Novyi obrii*, No. 7 (Melbourne, 1985), p. 13.

17. Kovalenko, “Lesi,” in *Homin Dnipra*, p. 79.

18. Dmytro Chub, “Ivanovi Kotliarevs’komu,” in *Z-pid evkaliptiv*, pp. 137-38.

19. Onufriienko, “Symon Petliura (poema),” in *Zemlia nezabutnia*, pp. 78-92.

20. Mykhailo Pidriz, “Valentynovi Morozovi,” in *Z-pid evkaliptiv*, pp. 101-102.

21. Kovalenko, *Homin Dnipra*, p. 66; see also her “Zhinkam Ukrainy,” in *Homin Dnipra*, p. 67, and Zoia Kohut, “Ne til’ky slovo,” in *Kucheriavyi dym*, p. 82.

bloody roads, seas of tears, bright swords, and the “black Muscovite oppression” which “sucked out our blood and poisoned our soul, like a serpent.”²²

Verse of this kind, especially when performed in public, compensates for the humdrum realities of day-to-day life; there have been few attempts to relate the founding ideals to more practical concerns, though a small number of poems have been written urging the younger generation to cultivate the Ukrainian language.²³ On the whole, however, the contemplation of the real world has revealed such a discrepancy between the founding ideals and the actual circumstances of emigre life that the poets have responded either in a spirit of melancholy, or through satire.

Such melancholy surfaces in the poem “Tryvoha” (“Fear”), written by Dmytro Chub in 1970 after more than twenty years of cultivating the Ukrainian language among the Australian-born generation through the system of Ukrainian schools:

Ви зайдіть у табір, табір молодечий,
Там наша вже мова майже не бринить...
І лягає смуток тягарем на плечі,
Бо ростуть, мов покруч, дочки і сини...²⁴

(Go into a youth camp, And you will scarcely hear our language spoken...
And sadness descends like a weight upon my shoulder, For our sons and
daughters are growing up twisted and bent.)

By contrast, Zoia Kohut (b. Sumy, 1925) treats this situation satirically. She first established herself with her “Kul’turni arabesky” (“Cultural Arabesques,” published in the *Novyi obrii* for 1960), where the carnivalesque setting of a community ball was used to reveal the multiple hypocrisies and inhumanities of the emigre condition. The numerous dramatis personae were represented as not only failing in their laughable attempts to emulate the new culture, but also as betraying their own culture and themselves. The poem is highly concrete in its portraiture, and succeeds in defining a new type: the emigre philistine. A robust and jocular iambic tetrameter, a facility in the creation of epigrammatic rhymes, an eye for grotesque detail and an ear for bizarre dialogue, all contributed to the success of “Kul’turni arabesky,” as did Kohut’s skill in revealing the gulf between pretence and performance:

22. Onufriienko, *Zemlia nezabutnia*, pp. 78-81.

23. Kovalenko, “Molodi,” in *Homin Dnipra*, p. 53; Nadiia Iarema, “O doniu moia,” in *Pivdennyi khrest. Zbirka poezii i prozy* (Adelaide, 1980), p. 79.

24. Chub, in *Z-pid evkaliptiv*, p. 139.

Є в нас мужі, що розпинають
 Себе на громадських хрестах,
 Вони зі скромністю страждають
 На самовибраних постах.
 За це вони не вимагають
 Ні лаврів, гімнів, ні вінків:
 Їм вистачає подив світу
 І точне функції ім'я,
 Щоб знали всі, хто є цей "я",
 І щоб колись нагробна плита
 Гласила: "Тут лежить Макар—
 Достойний муж і секретар.
 Він посвятив себе ідеї,
 І жив він, і живився нею,
 Писав листи, складав горою,
 Поки ж помер від—геморою.
 Тож спи спокійно в небесах,
 Ми підем по твоїх стопах!"²⁵

(We have pillars of society who crucify Themselves on community crosses. They suffer humbly In self-appointed offices. For this they demand No laurels, hymns or wreaths. They are satisfied with the admiration of the world and an exact name for their position, So that all might know the identity of this "I" And so that, one day, the tombstone might proclaim, "Here lies Makar, A respected man and a secretary. He dedicated his life to the Idea; He lived by it and was nourished by it. He wrote letters, and piled them mountain high, Until he died of haemorrhoids. So rest peacefully in the heavens, and we shall follow in your footsteps.")

No less effective is Kohut's skill at transforming generalized social ills into concrete caricatures. That part of "Kul'turni arabesky" which deals with the ball proper presents fragments of dialogue which simultaneously characterize and damn the speaker: the brand new materialist, childishly obsessed with his new motor-car; the old-world pedant, who insists on the "fashionableness" of archaic hand-kissing; the would-be intellectual who seeks to re-enact prewar European class snobberies; the flighty maiden, who demonstrates the success of her cultural assimilation by mixing English catchwords into her conversation; and a good many other, less emigration-specific types: the drunkard, the lecher, the teller of military anecdotes, the sentimental woman. Another of Kohut's works,

25. Zoia Kohut, "Kul'turni arabesky," quoted here from the text in *Kul'turni arabesky. Poeziia i proza* (Melbourne, 1969), pp. 7-8.

"Z hromads'koho al'bomu" ("From the Community's Album"), is formally conceived of as a gallery of such grotesques: "Krykun" ("Screamer"), "Balakun" ("Chatterbox"), "Obmezhenyi" ("Ignoramus"), and numerous others.²⁶

Zoia Kohut's satire is of the variety that Northrop Frye calls satire of the high norm: it implies a set of positive principles which should, in the satirist's view, determine social behaviour. For Kohut such principles are humaneness, tolerance, rationality, and sincerity—general human values. On the other hand, her satire is also grounded in the founding ideals of the Ukrainian community. It is the perversion and trivialization of those ideals that she deplors. Symbolic of her commitment is the gallery of Ukrainian cultural heroes, "Shevchenko, Lesia i Khmel'nyts'kyi, /Franko, Petliura i Sheptyts'kyi," whose portraits in "Kul'turnyi arabesky" gaze down from the walls of the Ukrainian home upon the circus below.²⁷

In this respect Kohut is in agreement with the prose satirists Opanas Brytva and Iaroslav Masliak.²⁸ The founding ideals have been protected by a taboo: for they maintain a degree of community identity and cohesion, even when they are honoured more by lip-service than in practice.

This is not to deny, however, that the limitations of the founding ideals have been acutely felt—by none more so than by Zoia Kohut, especially in her second, more sombre collection, *Kucheriavyi dym* (*Curly Smoke*, 1974). Signs of a shift to a questioning outlook, sometimes hopeful, but more often pessimistic, had become evident earlier:

Не питайся, чому ти живеш,
Пощо топчеш підшвами милі...
Глянь навколо, бідако! Невже ж
Ти в житті цім не винайшла цілі? [. .]

Заспокійся! Живи просто так,
Щоб від нині до завтра дожити.
А чому? Звідки? Пощо і як?
Просто так... Щоб на той світ поспіти...²⁹

26. *Kul'turni arabesky*, pp. 31-34.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

28. See Marko Pavlyshyn, "Satire and the Comic in Australia's Ukrainian Literature," paper presented at the second conference on the History of Ukrainian Settlement in Australia, sponsored by the Shevchenko Scientific Society in Australia and the Department of Slavic Languages, Monash University, Melbourne, 5-7 April 1985.

29. Kohut, "Ne pytai," in *Kul'turni arabesky*, p. 65.

(Do not ask, why you live, Why your soles pace out the miles. Look around, poor fellow! Have you not Found an aim in life? [. . .])

Calm yourself! Live only so as to survive from today until tomorrow, And as for why, whence, wherefore and how—Just anyhow. As long as you reach the next world.)

Such problems go far beyond the specifically Ukrainian experience and Kohut addresses them in poems dealing with such issues as the direction of the world's development, the role of independent thought in modern society, and the social and emotional structures of the modern family. Unable to clarify these issues, and dissatisfied with religious world-models that postulate suffering as a necessary component of the human condition, her lyric poetry (in contrast to her satirical work) is often imbued with a melancholy that sometimes borders on despair. This pessimism is expressed in her choice of symbolic situations (tracks erased in the sand, apple blossoms fallen from the trees),³⁰ and is explicitly formulated in her "Gedankenlyrik:"

Цигарки кучерявий, легкий дим,
Прозорий дим, немов солодкий спогад.
Не линь за ним! Не підносись за ним!
Твоїм думкам заслонена дорога.

Куди ти хочеш з буднів утекти?
Кого в житті хотіла б наздогнати?
Забудь! Залиш! Чи ж не потрапиш ти
Нарешті вже нічого не бажати?³¹

(Light, curly cigarette smoke, Transparent, like a sweet memory. Do not soar after it! Do not rise to follow it! That path is barred to your thoughts.

Where do you want to hide from the everyday? Whom do you want to catch up with in life? Forget these things! Leave them! Can you not contrive, At last, to desire nothing?)

Denial of being is only one, however, of the responses to the malaise of the world to be found in Kohut's poetry. At other times she expresses her hopes, both for the Ukrainian community ("Osanna"—"Hosanna") and for the world at large. Sometimes this hope is religious ("Khrest"—"A Cross"), and sometimes it manifests itself as a yearning for the elimination of folly and the triumph of reason ("Otche nash"—"Our Father"); often

30. Kohut, "Ne shukai," in *Kucheriavyi dym*, p. 25, and "Tsvit iablun' vzhe opav," in *Kucheriavyi dym*, p. 38.

31. Kohut, "Tsyharky kucheriavyi, lehkyi dym . . .," in *Kucheriavyi dym*, p. 22.

it is connected with the motif of untarnished youth, from whose rebellious but unperverted instincts there may arise a better future ("Vudstok"—"Woodstock;" "Molodist'"—"Youth;" "Molodechi protesty"—"Youthful Protests").

Aside from the poetry of Zoia Kohut, Ukrainian literature in Australia has little to show by way of verse satire. Of note, however, is a parody of Shevchenko's ballad style, "Avstraliis'ka baliada" ("Australian Ballad") by Opanas Brytva (pseudonym of Orest Barchyn'skyi). Whereas most of Shevchenko's ballads are constructed on the plot of lovers tragically separated, in Brytva's poem emigre circumstances impart tragic overtones even to a lovers' reunion. The poem tells of the ex-soldier Stepan, who, having over many years grown rich in Australia, decides to bring from Ukraine his former beloved, Hanusia. She arrives by ship, and he meets her on the pier:

Оглянувся, затрусився,
В очах помутніло.
Стоїть Ганя його в хустці,
Бідна, постаріла,
Мов руїна тої Гані,
Яку пам'ятає...
Та ось кинувся до неї,
Що сил обнімає.³²

(He looked around, and began to tremble. Everything became blurred before his eyes. There is Hania, a scarf around her head, Miserable, aged, Like a ruin of the Hania Whom he remembers. But he rushes towards her and embraces her with all his might.)

The scene is, of course, allegorical. Stepan, who has adopted the materialism of the new society, encounters in the time-worn Hanusia a personification of his own, once fresh, ideals. Instinctively, he recoils; yet almost at once he represses his natural reaction and embraces her, refusing to acknowledge the gulf between ideals born in a Ukraine of the distant past and their embodiment in Australian reality decades later.

There are satirical elements in the not very numerous burlesques written by Ukrainians in Australia. Onufriienko's *Stalin u pekli* (*Stalin in Hell*, 1956) emulates *Eneida*, Ivan Kotliarevs'kyi's travesty of Virgil's *Aeneid*. Using Kotliarevs'kyi's stanza form, Onufriienko traces the redescent of Aeneas and the Sibyl into Hades, to witness the arrival there of the recently deceased Stalin. The poem avoids Australian themes al-

32. Opanas Brytva, *I take buvaie* (Melbourne, 1980), p. 121.

together, and deals instead with elements of Soviet society and life in the European refugee camps. Evidently, the poet considered his audience to be the postwar Ukrainian diaspora, united by the D.P. experience and still living in that age.

Among the best and most suggestive burlesques is a mock-ode, “Oda na chest’ varenykiv” (“Ode to Varenyky”) by Ostap Zirchastyi (Dmytro Nytchenko). The poem pokes fun at the inflated role attributed in Ukrainian life to folkloric and domestic culture:

Бо в варениках сидить магічна сила:
Хоч ти з’їв всього їх, може, з п’ять,
А вже чуєш—виростають крила,
Чиєсь серце хочеш пригортать.
Ось вареник соняшний підносиш,
У сметані, з маслом на кінцях,
А з дівчат уже очей не зводиш,
З їхніх уст, із ніжного лица.³³

(For in varenyky there is a magic force: Although you’ve eaten, say, no more than five of them, You feel your wings grow And you yearn to embrace someone’s heart. Now you raise the sunny varenyk aloft, Covered in cream, with butter at its tips, And from the maidens you no longer divert your eyes, From their lips, their delicate faces.)

It is clear from the poems and excerpts from poems quoted in this paper that the aesthetic to which these poets adhere is highly traditional. Syllabotonic versification is all but universal, four-line stanzas with an *a B a B* rhyme scheme are preferred, the image is treated as an ornament, rather than as a constitutive element of the meaning, and departures from the vocabulary and syntax of everyday discourse are, on the whole, shunned. The composition of poetry along these lines has been reinforced by the non-Australian verse which has been printed in *Novyi obrii* and has thereby acquired model status: works of programmatic content by Stepan Rudans’kyi, Lesia Ukrainka, Oleksander Oles’, Iar Slavutych, Vasyl’ Symonenko, Mykola Rudenko, and Oles’ Berdnyk. Contact with non-Ukrainian poets and writers has not been the norm, and there has been no sense of participation in the literary culture of Australia, least of all its avant-garde.

Modernist developments in Ukrainian emigre poetry as exemplified in the New York School and as promoted by the editorial policy of the journal

33. Zirchastyi, “Oda na chest’ varenykiv (Zini Chuiko),” in *Z-pid evkaliptiv*, p. 33.

In 1965 a heated debate erupted over the issue of modernism, albeit in connection with a non-literary issue, when Vasyli' Onufriienko published in the Sydney newspaper *Vil'na dumka* a damning review of an exhibition by the Ukrainian modernist painter Michael Kmit (1910-1981). The review stimulated a lively discussion on the pages of *Vil'na dumka* between the protagonists of realism and modernism. Towards the end of it Onufriienko published a poem entitled "Fragment podorozhi" ("Fragment of a Journey"), in which he condemned modernism in poetry as "a lackadaisical attitude to form, a senseless heaping-up of words, and the more meaningless—the better."³⁴ For all this the poem is witty and evocative and it demonstrates an empathy for Australia that Onufriienko had denied himself in his serious lyric poetry:

А хмари—такі нечисті...
Бумба-мумба...
Де шукати Колюмба?
Кубра-мубра,
Чорна лубра.
Дінго в пустині.
Там гори бузкові, чи сині.
Дощу вже сто літ немає.
О краю, краю!
Бумба-мумба,
Десь далеко—Катумба...³⁵

(Boomba-moomba! In the mountains—Katoomba. Boomba-moomba... the sun—a green world. Brr!... how lonely we are! One hundred years? Two hundred? You are celebrating? Greetings to you all, greetings! And the clouds—so unclean... Boomba-moomba... Where to seek Columbus? Kubra-mubra, A black lubra. Dingo in the desert. The mountains are lilac over there, or blue. One hundred years without rain. O country, country! Boomba-moomba, In the distance-Katoomba.)

Here is the Australian landscape with its heat, sun, and changing colours; the sense of an indistinct distance; the identification of the world of nature as that of the Australian Aborigine. (Is “boomba-moomba” the voice of thunder, or an Aboriginal incantation?) One encounters sounds foreign to European ears, that have nevertheless become names of white settlements (Katoomba), and representatives of the primeval population (“lubra” means “Aboriginal woman”). One acquires a short course in white Australian history (one or two hundred years of loneliness) and shares the sense of exasperation with the land (“O country, country”), which is one of the recurrent topoi of all Australian literature. In connection with the image of advancing clouds, this exclamation becomes an expression of anxiety and enriches the poem with a sense of foreboding and menace.

Only one poet registered a positive response to the aesthetic of modernism: Lidiia Daleka (b. Myronivtsi, near Sicheslav, 1899; d. Adelaide, 1983), whose real name was Olena Chornobyts’ka and who also published under the pseudonyms Lu Kiia, Ol’ha Katran, and Chorniava. In one of her poems, “Pered abstraktnymy kartynamy” (“Looking at Abstract Paintings”), inspired by the works of the Adelaide artist Mstyslava Chornii, she recreates the process by which abstract forms and colours resolve themselves into meanings:

Іржа і жовть в жалобі над землею,
де шелестіла колива-трава.
Під фіолетно-чорною ріллею
лягли зомлілі рухи і слова.
Мов черепки трипільські пильно клею,
і не вгадаю: мертва чи жива
канва змагань за кольорів права.
А вже той змаг народжує поволі
і звук, і рух, і хвилі врун у полі.³⁶

34. *Vil’na dumka*, No. 32 (832), 8. 8. 1965, p. 5. Kmit had been acclaimed by the Sydney art critics in the 1950s; he is remembered as a colourist and a neo-Byzantinist, though he also painted important abstracts.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

36. Daleka, “Pered abstraktnymy kartynamy,” in *Slovo. Zbirnyk*, No. 5 (Edmonton, 1970), p. 95.

(Rust and yellowness in mourning over the earth, where swaying grass had rustled. Exhausted hands and words have lain beneath the violet-black tilled soil. I piece them together, like Trypillian shards, yet cannot say whether the canvas where colours battle for their rights is alive or dead. But the struggle itself gradually gives birth to sound, and motion, and the billows of young grain in the fields.)

This, clearly, is poetry whose aims and assumptions differ markedly from those of the other poems quoted in this article. Daleka sets out to create a richly associative and not unambiguous structure of words that resists paraphrase. The reader is challenged to co-create the poem (to discover his or her own emotional correlative, for example, for the “exhausted hands and words” under the “violet-black earth”); he is provoked by rare words (“vruno”). In this poem, the mysteries of the text are also the mysteries of its subject, the abstract painting.

Because of her concern for aesthetic values and her love of space, equilibrium, and symmetry, Daleka has been compared to the Ukrainian Neoclassicists.³⁷ The justice of this remark can be seen in a poem like “Fikusy” (“Ficus Trees”), whose purpose is to evoke the architectural quality of the space defined by the ground and the boughs of giant figs and to communicate the pattern of light and the soundlessness that prevails within that space:

Подвір'я це—тут не почувеш кроків,
усе поглинуть фікусів масиви.
Їх тіней гніт на мур насів, на сивий,
наліг на брук вагою сотні років.

А корінь чорний рве хідник широкий,
він напирєє знизу, що є сили,
і там, де листу й хмизу натрусило,
встає тупим закам'янілим боком.³⁸

(This yard—here you shall hear no footsteps. They will be swallowed by the massive ficuses. And the weight of the shadows presses on the grey wall, presses on the ground with the weight of centuries.

And the black root tears up the broad pavement; it pushes upward with all its might, and over there, where leaves and dry branches lie scattered, it rises, a blunt, stony flank.)

37. Lidiia Rostek, “Ukrainian Literature and Theatre in South Australia 1949-1984,” paper presented at the second conference on the History of Ukrainian Settlement in Australia, Melbourne, 5-7 April 1985.

38. Daleka, *Lehit i bryzy*, p. 43.

Refinement and control of rhythm and a preference for closed forms, especially the sonnet, further confirm the neoclassical bent of Daleka's poetry. Other features of her work, however, might well be regarded as impressionist, notably the fascination with conditions of light, shade, colour, and sound, and their effects upon the observer, as in "Nastrii" ("Mood").

Ievhen Zoze (b. Poltava, 1917), also a resident of Adelaide, subscribes to a similar view of poetry, although his verse is not as compact or formal. Zoze, alone among Australian Ukrainian-language poets, has discarded classical metrics in most of his verse and has sought freer forms of his own. His "Avstraliada" ("The Australiad"), dedicated to Lidiia Daleka, is illustrative of his fragmentary syntax and his montages of disparate images, often linked by sound rather than meaning. There is in Zoze an echo, non-urban, to be sure, of Mykhail' Semenko:

Орбіти,
 квадрати,
 евкаліпти.

Простір ліній у ніщо...
 Гігантом фікус,
 Рожевих ліній
Голубокий континент.

Пелюстки тут—
 момент напруги.
Регіт кукабари,
 бари,
 реклами—
 плями

Подруги усміх—
 успіх,
І крок вперед.
 Ідем.³⁹

(Orbits, squares, eucalypts. A space of lines into nothingness. The fig a giant, a blue-eyed continent of pink lines. Petals of sadness—a moment's tension. Kookaburra's laughter, bars, advertisements—blots. A girl's friendly smile—success, and a step forward. We move.)

Both Daleka and Zoze associated with the Australian poet R. H. Morrison and translated his poems. Morrison, in turn, translated theirs—

39. Zoze, "Avstraliada. Lidii Dalekii," in *Pivdennyi khrest*, p. 43.

and those of twelve other Ukrainian poets who were living or had lived in Australia. These translations were published in 1973 under the title *Australia's Ukrainain Poets*, but the volume attracted little attention, and certainly did not initiate any dialogue between Ukrainian poets and those of Australia's other cultures. Ukrainian poetry remained as dislocated as ever: its poets were still, in large part, reflecting on their dislodgement from the homeland, and they continued to write without any significant evolution, in isolation from developments in poetry in Australia, largely uninfluenced by innovations in Ukrainian emigre poetry elsewhere, and on the basis of an aesthetic canon belonging to the nineteenth century, or, in some cases, the 1920s and 30s.

That is still virtually the case today. The most recent *Novyi obrii*, however, contains an innovation: a selection of poems by a young Australian-born Ukrainian, Iryna Romanovs'ka. Written in English, they are emotionally intense, replete with well seen and originally worded images—and as remote as could be from the tradition (not to mention the language) of Australian Ukrainian writing. Whether the promising newcomer is the harbinger of a new development, or merely a swallow whose appearance does not herald a spring, remains to be seen.

It is not easy to draw up a summary evaluation of Ukrainian poetry in Australia. It is unreasonable to demand that a highly local literature should produce works capable of being judged by the same standards as "world" literature. It would be fairer to ask whether Australian Ukrainian poetry has met and developed the aesthetic expectations of its audience. A stern critic might argue that the range of this poetry has been limited; that it has seldom risen above the reiteration of stereotyped content in equally stereotyped forms; and that it has rejected outside stimuli which might have ushered in productive development or at least change.

Such a critic would be difficult to refute, were his judgement directed at the poetry as a whole. But it is more generous to admire the peaks of a literary landscape, than to grumble over its depressions. One might, perhaps, benefit by desisting from generalized judgements and contemplating instead the beauty of an image by Daleka, or the acuteness of an epigram by Kohut, or the emotional sincerity of verses by any one of a number of other poets. For Ukrainian poetry in Australia contains works that stand out from their context; they deserve to be savoured for their own sake and on their own terms.