Bohdan Rubchak

Because We Have No Time: Recent Ukrainian Poetry

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In the late eighteenth and during the nineteenth century, the folkloristic moment in Ukrainian poetry became a project, even a kind of political act, to a much greater extent than in Western Europe or even in other Slavic literatures. At the end of the eighteenth century, Ivan Kotliarevsky began to publish his travesty of Virgil's Aeneid (the work took several decades to bring out). This in itself, of course, was not new—a century before, a whole slew of such travesties began to appear in Western Europe and, later, in Russia. What was new was that Kotliarevsky's text is a veritable encyclopedia of folklore, customs, even dress and cuisine, of Ukrainian kozaks, villagers and country gentry. And, even more important, the work is written in the spoken vernacular of the common people, as opposed to the highly ornate, artificial bookish language of earlier literature. Although the "common language" had appeared in written literature before, with Kotliarevsky it began to be used exclusively as a literary vehicle. It is indicative that Ukrainian poetry, by a determinate act of discontinuity, has taken its very medium from the village and, ultimately, from folklore. After Kotliarevsky, practi-

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An earlier version of the article, which covers poetry published in Ukrainian literary periodicals in 1988, appeared in *Echoes of Glasnost in Soviet Ukraine,* Romana Bahry, ed., from Captus University Publications, 1990.

cally every romantic poet and writer, including Nikolai Gogol, was busy collecting Ukrainian folk songs, proverbs, folk tales; needless to say, much of that material wound up in literary works. But it was the Ukrainian romantic Taras Shevchenko who not only applied the "common language" to the highest and most demanding poetical tasks, but raised folkloristic commonplaces to the sphere of metaphysical, on occasion even mystical, symbols. While Wordsworth, Coleridge and other pre-romantics and romantics had to go out of their elegant way to search out the "folk," Shevchenko—born a serf in an impoverished hamlet—spent his childhood in its midst, nourished by living folklore from day to day.

The tremendous role that folklore plays in Ukrainian poetry implies the importance of poetry itself in the daily lives of the people. Ukrainians can recite reams of poetry from memory and they often entertain each other at social gatherings by jousts of recitation. Debates about poetry frequently acquire momentous social significance. There is hardly a political function at which poetry would not be recited, or at least quoted in speeches and discussions. And this brings us to the prominent place that poetry has in the political life of the Ukrainian people. Granting the romantics' general propensity of posthumously turning into cultural heroes, it would be indeed difficult to find in any literature a poet who exercised so decisive an influence on the development of his nation as did Taras Shevchenko. One may say that his poems helped to write the text of the modern Ukrainian consciousness. With an intuitive sagacity that to us seems uncanny, the poet embodies in his texts the intricate relationships between the center and the periphery, the colonizer and the colonized, the individual and the mechanisms of totalitarian power. It is, moreover, the outcast, the derelict, the serf, the unwed mother, the anarchic elemental rebel—the Other—who so often becomes his hero not only in the literary but in the social–historical sense, and thus a symbol of the peripheral state of his nation.

But it was by no means Shevchenko alone, nor even the romantics as a movement, who committed themselves to the tragic estate of their people. Even in the golden age of medieval Kiev, the magnificent imagery of *The Word of Igor's Campaign* darkly broods on heartbreak,

bloodshed and loss. The fascinating *dumy*—a unique Baroque folk genre of epic recitatives, reminiscent of the Serbian folk epics—not only praise the valor of the kozaks, but also bemoan the fate of those who waste away in Turkish prisons.

In the 1860's and 1870's, after Shevchenko's death, the Russian Empire decided to do away with the worrisome Ukrainian culture altogether. In response, political strains in Ukrainian poetry became louder than ever. Dissident populist leaders now demanded that poets dedicate themselves to the struggle, write so that even semi-literates could understand their message, and banish all traces of artistic self-containment. Meanwhile, in step with Western literary developments, a lively modernist movement became vocal at the turn of the century. Although few of these young rebels would go so far as to proclaim their independence from political concerns, nevertheless their very attempts at experimentation and, implicitly, their search for intellectual leadership, irritated the populist critics and mainstream poets. Their vigorous debates at the beginning of our century made significant contributions toward a definition of the specificity of Ukrainian poetry within its cultural and political context.

The Ukrainian national and Bolshevik revolutions obviously created a uniquely heady climate, in which new battles of the books were vigorously fought. In the first post-revolutionary decade, the poets' political commitment was, on the whole, voluntary. Most of the great names, in fact, became intoxicated with "the new era"; some, having begun in the ranks of the national revolution, soon switched to the Communist side. Pavlo Tychyna, one of the most gifted Ukrainian poets of all time, the somewhat younger expressionist Mykola Bazhan, the lively Futurist group, the ironical, muted Ievhen Pluzhnyk and many others lent their voices to the revolutionary chorus. Only one group of notable poets, five in all, ignored the bugle call; headed by the gifted poet and scholar Mykola Zerov, they called themselves, with obvious irony, the Neoclassics (which in English would be more elegantly rendered as "Neoclassicists"). They flauntingly cultivated traditional, even antiquated, Western forms, translated widely from Western poetry, and, in general, at-

tempted to bring Ukrainian literature as close as possible to Western "high culture." What is also important, they resisted not only contemporary politics but the "folkloristic imperative" as well; together with the Futurists, Pluzhnyk and Bazhan (who ignored folklore for their own reasons), they can be said to be the first Ukrainian poets to do so on principle.

Literary debates continued unabated. The so-called Formalists defended their right, regardless of the question of political commitment, to experimentation, artistic integrity, and membership in the community of Western cultures. The "Sociologists," on the other hand, proclaimed poetry to be a means of direct communication with the people and a mirror along the road to a glorious Communist future.[1]

Many of the poets, or subsequent poets, who fought in the national revolution opted for emigration to the West. They were soon joined by other émigrés, and then children of émigrés, in the formation of a powerful literary milieu, in many interesting ways quite distinct from that of the homeland. During World War II, hundreds of writers (mostly poets) escaped to the West—among them Vasyl Barka, who in the emigration managed to develop into one of the most important poets in contemporary Ukrainian literature.

As varied as the émigré poets are, they obviously share the state of exile, which in itself casts their work into a special light. Among their most vital contributions are new, perhaps unforeseen, images of Ukraine and views on its history and politics. It is also instructive, especially for Westerners, to observe the images of the West in their work. In this and much else, Ukrainian émigré poetry is a well-equipped laboratory for the study of the phenomenon of émigré literature as such.

Western Ukraine, which was first under the Austro–Hungarian and later under the Polish occupation, produced a fine body of poetry, practically indistinguishable (except for some linguistic variants) from that of Central Ukraine. Ivan Franko, a giant of Ukrainian literature, who worked at the end of the last and the beginning of this century, and Bohdan Ihor Antonych, an "ethnic surrealist" (close to the Spanish

and Latin American surrealists), who matured in the 1930's, are the two most notable Western Ukrainian poets.

Both the poems and the debates on the pages of literary periodicals in 1988 continue the prevailing concerns of Ukrainian poetry in the new illumination of openness and reconstruction.[2] The role of folklore in poetical texts, the responsibility of the poet toward his people, and the question of political commitment are taken up in the context of our difficult time. No need to stress the fact that in 1991 this last concern has become more viable than ever.

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It is well known that the daily life of the Soviet writer, who is a crucial cog in the ideological superstructure, is fairly rigidly organized. When a young beginner proves to be sufficiently "mature" to advance from the level of local readings and the "regional" press to that of "central" literary periodicals and national recognition, his role in the structure of his profession becomes unequivocally defined. He is then carefully monitored, and by more than a single pair of eyes—not only the obvious and rather visible eyes of the Communist Party, but also the more insidious eyes of his older colleagues, to whom a strong presence in the upcoming ranks represents a much graver danger than the loss of a symbolic laurel wreath. In short, a strong young talent in the Soviet Union, as opposed to the United States, cannot complain of lack of attention.

Between, roughly, 1935 and 1955, the structure of the literary establishment was monolithically uniform. The beginner in Ukrainian poetry immediately after the war was expected to write according to a single central model.

In the late 1950's, as a result of the "thaw," Lina Kostenko, Dmytro Pavlychko, and a small number of other prodigiously gifted poets introduced, cautiously enough, new and discordant notes into the droning monotone of the poetry of that time. As it always happens, soon afterward criticism stirred. Even something vaguely resembling a literary debate became evident, but it often cancelled itself out by ugly

political slander. Things became much livelier when, in the early 1960's, the powerful talents of Ivan Drach, Vitalii Korotych, Mykola Vinhranovsky, Borys Necherda and many lesser lights illuminated the poetic firmament. Most of them availed themselves of Ukrainian myths, folklore and history to create fresh, electrifying poetry, often invoking their acknowledged predecessors—Tychyna, Antonych and, more distantly, Bazhan—and openly absorbing those scripts as elements of a startlingly new poetic utterance. On the periphery of that community stood the great poet Vasyl Stus who had published very little in his lifetime, was subsequently purged and died a martyr's death in the Perm gulag in 1985. It is his name, to be sure, that in time will become the emblem of his generation.

These poets were soon joined by somewhat younger talents. Born in the late 1930's and 1940's, Ihor Kalynets, Pavlo Movchan, Mykola Vorobiov, Vasyl Holoborodko, Vasyl Ruban, Hryhorii Kyrychenko, Hryhorii Chubai, and their peers take the spirit of the poetry of the 1960's much further along the road of poetic experiment, to the borders of surrealism on the one hand and, on the other, the loosely organized and relatively imageless free verse, known in American literature of the 1960's as "the poetry of statement." Because of the impending state terrorism of the following decade, these poets suffered greatly: Kalynets and Ruban spent years in the gulags, Vorobiov and Holoborodko were forcibly silenced and made their living as laborers. It is they, to a far greater extent than their slightly older colleagues, who have become the "gurus" of the youngest generation of poets.

As the wave of the 1960's grew in strength, authentic literary criticism, with its attendant encounter and dialogue, grew along with it. It somehow took on the hue of the poetry that it was discussing, thus forming with it a single unit, a single domain of discourse. The critics of the 1960's write masterfully crafted essays, somewhat elevated, declamatory in tone, favoring a stylized historical diction and generously larded with highly poetic, often folkloristic, metaphors. They prefer broad ideological themes to a scrupulous scrutiny of a text, or to technical discussions of the art of poetry. The work of Ivan Dziuba or Ievhen Sverstiuk, valuable as it is in itself, is a case in point.

The literary criticism of the 1980's, although not as accomplished,

is much more "professional" both in tone and in intent. It has become, moreover, central in the literary process—a sort of emblem of the new *glasnost*. This is duly noted and bewailed by older poets who complain that the critics have become more important than the poets themselves. Such snide remarks lose much of their bite, however, when we consider that most of today's criticism, for all its "professionalism," is written by practicing poets.

Many of the poets of the late 1980's hold advanced degrees in what is known in the Soviet Union as "philology," and one—very active in criticism—is an academic philosopher. The sweetly sentimentalist idea of the poet singing like a bird is completely foreign to them. Neither do they pose as demiurges, sending down gnomically oracular pronouncements in two-or-three-page notes, often not very much to the point—*any* point. Poetry has again become a lot of fun—fun to write and fun to write about, and fun to be as informed and "professional" about as one can, without the bad faith of "guarding its secrets from the profane."

It is impossible to describe here all the numerous and intricate concerns of these young poet–critics; let me merely trace a general outline of their interests. One that stands out most prominently is the unqualified demand for high artistry in Ukrainian poetry. There are impressive attempts to forge a system of evaluative criteria which would orient the poets themselves, their readers and, perhaps most important, the editors of literary journals. As everything else in the discourse of *glasnost*, such imperatives frequently are too impatient and, moreover, themselves badly disoriented. Our young enthusiasts seem to forget that a system of evaluative criteria cannot be forged overnight as a response to sudden changes in the political climate of the land. The tragically truncated development of Ukrainian literature, in which all sorts of demands (often at the point of a gun) pulled the idea of literature in all sorts of directions, cannot be expected to generate the perception and "instinctive" recognition of excellence according to systematic criteria, although this in itself does not prevent Ukrainian poets from producing excellent poems. We see this, for example, in the fact that a single selection of poems by a single author in a journal carries accomplished texts side by side with mediocre production.

Another example is the overabundance of published poetry. The hypothesis of a "movable aesthetics," which some young critics have been advocating, although quite vague in itself, seems to promise a useful resolution to their dilemma. Close (as far as I understand it) to Sartre's "situational ethics," it negates outright the value of "eternal" criteria, thus not only adapting itself to the specific restless situation of reconstruction but moving right into the aesthetic theories of Western post-modernism.

Another important concern of the new poet–critics can be summed up by Ezra Pound's once notorious slogan, "Make it new!" Mykola Riabchuk, an excellent and vocal critic, who made his name in the late 1970's, writes:

> New books of poetry, not always perfect but decidedly experimental, by their very appearance awaken thought, disturb the moribund, stagnant surface of literary "decency," and pose a serious threat to those who for decades have masked their own banality and mediocrity by the empty slogans of traditionalism, of loyalty to classical traditions.[3]

Hand in hand with this concern goes the question of the provincialism of Ukrainian poetry. The younger critics speak surprisingly little of the Russian "center." They seem to realize that such comparisons represent a symptom of a colonized culture—a flunky nation which has not raised its consciousness from the grubbing level of a slave; suffering from a bad case of reaction formation, it wants to please the master by playfully competing with him, as a little boy, currying favor, pretends to compete with his father. The mere presence of the Russian culture looming across the border has been hypnotizing Ukrainians ever since the eighteenth century. That shadow, by itself, has paralyzed artistic freedom, even in those rare times when the police did not actually intervene. So long as the paralyzing cobra stare—the stare of that Other which resides in the soul of a Soviet Ukrainian—is not overcome and banished, the Ukrainian spirit will never be free to encounter Russian culture as a *vis-à-vis,* without a trace of guilt.

Be that as it may, the poet–critics of the 1980's are after bigger and potentially more healthful game than impressing their neighbor. Les Herasymchuk seems to speak for many when he writes in *Prapor* that to view Ukrainian poetry in the context of world culture has now

become imperative.[4] A lively argument has been going on about that. The 29-year-old poet–critic and professional philosopher Oksana Zabuzhko thinks that one must first examine contemporary Ukrainian poetry against the background of the Ukrainian national culture as such, and worry about the West later.[5] The somewhat older experimental poet Valerii Illia warns that free verse, for example, should not be adopted directly from the West but should be adapted to native Ukrainian traditions.[6]

In Ukrainian literature such debates are not new. What is new is the approach that the younger critics take to this "eternal question," against the background of the specific configuration not only of *glasnost* but of some unexpected tendencies in the West. I have in mind theories of the neo-Marxists, like Fredric Jameson or Edward Said, bearing on a redefinition of nationalism and national literatures in view of the third-world nations, which are desperately attempting to excavate their identities from layers upon layers of alien cultural sedimentation, deposited by their imperialist oppressors.

The main thrust of these literary polemics is directed toward the question (obviously linked with the problems discussed above) of the "eternal" bifurcation of the aesthetic and social functions of poetry. This again parallels similar concerns which of late have resurfaced in the West. No doubt basing herself on Lotman, Liudmyla Taran points out that poetry not only differs from, but opposes, daily activity. If we misunderstand this, we misunderstand Marx's dialectical relationship between being and consciousness and, more important, the dialectical relationship between poetic and ordinary language. In short, those who impose on poetry tasks that other spheres of human activity are meant to perform, are "idealists" who oppose the principles of Marxian dialectics.[7] The general consensus seems to hold that the idea of the poem is disseminated not only in the content but also in the material of the form which finally proves to be one and the same; hence the ideology of the poem is defined primarily by its high degree of artistry.[8]

It obviously follows that these critics must redefine the role of the reader. And, indeed, they redefine it in direct opposition to the customary Soviet conception of the reader as a passive receiver of the message;

they call for a reader who is intellectually and psychologically prepared to actively enter the poetic text. Vasyl Ivashkiv, for example, holds that the reader is co-creator of the text, capable of transforming it according to his own view on the world.[9]

Those young critics who choose to defend the social function of poetry directly, also do so in unexpected ways. The most frequent line of defense involves the principle of *glasnost*. Philological poets, the argument goes, miss a myriad of magnificent opportunities that the new era offers. Among the most pressing is the possibility to expand the readership of Ukrainian poetry, and thus to ensure the health of the Ukrainian language itself. Philological poets, as the somewhat older poet–critic Volodymyr Bazylevsky argues, should finally realize that nobody in the cities will read them, and nobody in the villages will understand them.[10]

Although they fully realize the obvious dangers that not only Ukrainian poetry but the Ukrainian language itself faces today, the philological poets are afraid that the baby might be thrown out with the water. Ihor Rymaruk—one of the most gifted, and indeed the most complex poets of the 1980's—expresses the fear that when poets begin to descend to the level of the mass reader, journalism will dominate poetry, and thought will enter it as cliché, lowering itself to the musings of a schoolboy.[11] And Mykola Riabchuk writes that whenever he sees a sentence beginning with the ritualistic formula "At this time of. . . ," he becomes apprehensive. It used to be "at this time of industrialization," "at this time of collectivization," etc. Now it is "at this time of democratization." When such a ritualistic phrase precedes a discussion of poetry, all questions of a poet's artistic worth are automatically neutralized and professional standards become impossible.[12]

There is a kind of poetry that the new poet–critics are fully justified in attacking. They attack it, moreover, in ways similar to those of Jameson (although on a much more rudimentary level), making not only the content but also the form the bearer of pernicious meaning. I have in mind the work of the so-called war poets, together with their numerous contemporary epigones. For example, the critics revel in making long lists of the clichés which those older poets and their progeny consider to be metaphors. The lyrical hero wants to become a

little ear of wheat; the day always rings like a bell; the hammer and sickle lead mankind to truth, goodness, and happiness; the truths of Illich bring mankind to its ultimate aim.[13] These young poet–critics' final verdict against that kind of poetry is that it is insidiously dishonest not only toward society but also toward language and literature. Weaving together clichés in singsong stanzas, the older poets and their followers have attempted to prettify the ugly realities of the late 1940's and beyond. One critic aptly compares such misuses of the poetic word with the notorious Potemkin villages.[14]

What is much more surprising is the unfriendliness that some of the new poet–critics occasionally show toward the "central" poets of the 1960's, who are generally considered to be their forerunners. Our surprise, of course, is mitigated by the fact that here we have to do with the younger generation clearing the ground for the construction of their own settlements, since these attacks are never conducted along political lines. Riabchuk, for example, writes, "The intoxicating thrust into the future which bewinged the poetry of the 1960's with romantic imagery and fiery maximalist slogans, mouthed by a collective and generalized hero, is being tested and found wanting by the new situation."[15]

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The poetry of the later 1980's is indeed quite different from the work of the central poets of the middle 1960's. More precisely, the new poets successfully avoid the traps that their prodigiously talented older colleagues have set up for themselves. Gone is the romantic striving mentioned by Riabchuk, and the declamatory, stagy quality. Gone, one might add, are those poets' showy folk stylizations; their occasional mannered, and to me particularly irritating, infantilism (à la Tychyna, who, somehow, got away with it); the brass notes of an almost embarrassing pathos, frequently coupled with rhetorical, and strictly decorative, hyperbolism; an open flirtation with the reader, frequently expressed in a messy, saccharine voice. Generally speaking, much of the poetry of the late 1980's is the first instance in the history of Ukrainian literature of a concerted rebellion against the spirit of romanticism

which, explicitly or implicitly, has attended Ukrainian poetry since the end of the eighteenth century.

One must be careful not to overgeneralize this point for the simple reason that the variety of styles in contemporary Ukrainian poetry is staggering. I will now outline only two tendencies in this wide array which seem to me to be the most representative. Their radical opposition to each other, moreover, should give us an idea of the extraordinarily broad spectrum of poetic discourse in the Ukrainian literature of our day. I should warn, however, that a single poet can work in both of these directions.

The first style is that of the aforementioned philological poets, as their opponents call them, or what I would prefer to call the neosymbolists. Ihor Rymaruk, Vasyl Herasymiuk, Iurii Buriak, Hennadii Moroz, Mykhailo Kameniuk, Dmytro Kremin, in spite of the various and great differences among them, seem to represent the mainstay of that direction. They write in seemingly conventional stanzas, but they often explode them from within, in the manner, say, of the early Ted Hughes. They favor rhyme, but their rhymes are, on the whole, daringly experimental and complex. Their lines are dense sonic and verbal textures, frequently with foregrounded consonantal alliteration. Openly, even flagrantly literary (indeed, "philological"), they are obviously in love with the Ukrainian language, searching out old words or rare dialectal expressions and constructing unusual syntactical patterns. They indulge in various forms of wordplay and in intertextual allusions, often wittily masked. Their poems are thick tapestries of metaphors, which sometimes echo distant, unspecified myths. These metaphors are organized elliptically to create a quasi-hermetic effect, although they almost always reflect extrinsic significations.

To illustrate this type of poetry, I will quote a poem by Rymaruk with an obviously political theme: a purged and exiled poet dreams of returning home, while his successful and carefree younger colleagues back home are destroying the traditions for which he has suffered:

> Starym obrusom stolu ne zastelym—
> pomyslymo. . . i spalym, pered tym
> protsytuvavshy holosom veselym,
> shcho navit' dym solodkyi, navit' dym.

I dohoryt'. I zakortyt' idylii.
I toi, u koho shche khoda tverda,
maine do zhinky u sorochtsi bilii,
do zhinky, movchaznoi, iak voda.

A tam, potoibich dymu bezimennia,
khtos' katulaie cherez kalamut'.
Tak dobuvaiut' dushu—ne proshchennia,
tak nohy obmorozheni idut'! . .

Nemov ioho chekaiut' na vesilli,
nemov luna hude na trysta sil,
i svichnyky, na pisniu zdalenili,
shche zalyvaiut' voskom holyi stil.[16]

[We shall not cover the table with the old tablecloth. We shall deliberate. . . and burn it, quoting beforehand in a merry voice that even the smoke is sweet, even the smoke. / And it will burn up. And we shall want some idylls. And the one who still can walk steadily will steal away to a woman in a white shirt—a woman as silent as water. / But there, beyond the smoke's namelessness, someone is dragging his feet through the mud. Thus they extract the soul, and not forgiveness. Thus his frostbitten feet walk! / It is as if they were waiting for him at a wedding, as if the happy echo thundered through three hundred villages. And the candle holders, now too distant for song, still drip wax upon the bare table.][17]

The effectiveness of this stunning poem is obviously enhanced by its understated mythical atmosphere and equally subtle intertextuality, playfully introduced by the phrase "quoting in a merry voice." The allusion is, of course, to the *Odyssey*—the famous image of the sweet smoke of Odysseus's Ithaca. It follows that the "we" in the poem may be read as Penelope's wanton grooms, usurping the city of poetry, and the woman, "as silent as water," as Penelope herself—a mysterious, elusive Ukrainian Muse. The theme of the poem, moreover, is supported by a secondary allusion; I have in mind passages in several poems from the 1920's, whose authors were eventually purged, in which the image of the smoke of Ithaca is inscribed.[18]

The following poem by Mykola Miroshnychenko is an example of rather bold verbal and sonic experimentation, vaguely reminiscent of similar experiments by Marina Tsvetaeva and the Ukrainian émigré

poet Emma Andiievska. Notice, however, that even in this case the poet refuses to abandon extrinsically coded meaning: the poem is about a woman who is also a tree.

Daryvo soniachne,
derevo sunychne,
sokom zvysochene,
trykol'orosynychne!
Shchedroiu rodistiu
rid proholoshui,
stan' meni radistiu,
shcho pryholomshuie. . .
Skoro skory mene
vittiam i korenem,
shche i uiaskry mene
karymy koramy.
Budem dva dereva
sokom zvysocheni,
budem dva daryva
rozloho-soniachni.[19]

A prose translation of this poem would be completely worthless; the complex punning on the word "trykol'orosynychne" alone would take a paragraph of variants ("tricolored dew," "tricolored bluebird," etc.), while the two meanings of the word "zvysocheni" ("heightened" and "glorified")—equally valid as epithets for trees—would also require commentary.

Directly opposed to this kind of intensified poetry is a sort of "antipoetry," which I would prefer to call by the term popular among American poets in the late 1960's—"the poetry of statement." This kind of poetry is written mostly by quite young authors, in their twenties or early thirties, although we already find it in the work of some poets of the late 1960's, especially Vasyl Ruban, the later works of Ihor Kalynets and Mykola Kholodnyi. The most visible among them are Oleksandr Hrytsenko, Viktor Neborak, Oleksandr Irvanets, Ivan Malkovych, Ivan Malenky, and Natalka Bilotserkivets, who is also their most vocal "theorist." This is an extremely active and productive group, and most of the youngest poets, who have made their debuts in the national periodicals in 1988, seem to be eager to join it. These poets are also the

most vociferous, developing their credos in erudite articles which, for all their erudition, read like good old-fashioned manifestoes.

Much like the poets of statement, these young Ukrainians cultivate themes of daily life, seemingly insignificant incidents, fleeting emotions. Theirs is a deliberately limited, personal world, scrupulously deprived of any "poeticalness" on the one hand, and, on the other, of any grand political or historical themes. It is only by the slightest, barely perceptible movements that a deeper significance is implied. They avoid ostentatious imagery; occasionally, a single delicate metaphor, frequently in the closure of the text, suddenly breaks the illusion of mundane reality and vaguely intimates other, often mythical realms.

The signature of poetry in these texts is carried by their tone, syntax and diction. The tone is calmly narrative, sketching the image of speech. "Low," everyday words constitute the body of the diction. And yet the poet, predominantly by a subtle manipulation of syntax, strives to create an atmosphere of wonder—the mystery of everyday words, events, objects. The control here must be absolute, otherwise the effect might be lost, and we might be left with a paragraph or two of worthless prose. The poem, nevertheless, should never create an impression of monumentality and indispensability; very loosely framed, it should imply an effect of inconsequentiality—a moment of language, to be fleetingly experienced and then left behind, but, one hopes, not forgotten.

Although such poetry, both in Ukraine and in the West, is mainly written in free verse, Ukrainian poets of that ilk sometimes employ meter, and even rhyme. The game, however, is to use such formal devices as informally and loosely as possible, almost to the point of parody (a technique perfected in modern Polish poetry). All traces of "philological" virtuosity are to be avoided; the effect must be that of haphazardness, often bordering on singsong and doggerel.

The following is an interesting poem by Klavdiia Koretska, slightly reminiscent of the early Holoborodko, but more contemporary than he in its refusal of any kind of "poeticalness":

Baba moia Oleksandra
sydyt' bilia zapichka—
do nei tuliat'sia puzati horniata,
i makitra hlynianym slukhom

lovyt' babyni mysli.
A babyni mysli ta vse pro robotu:
"Treba kartopliu spoloty,
podoity korovu
i trokhy soniashnyku povernuty holovu,
bo vin ne vstyhaie za sontsem."
Ia stoiu bilia pechi
i tak meni svitlo,
niby sydyt' na lavi
ne baba, a pryzakhidne sontse.[20]

[My grandmother Oleksandra sits close by the stove. Round-bellied little pots snuggle up to her, and the large clay bowl, with its earthen hearing, receives Grandma's thoughts. And Grandma's thoughts are always about work: "The potatoes have to be weeded, the cow has to be milked, and the sunflower's head has to be turned a bit, because it just isn't catching up with the sun." I stand by the stove, and everything is so bright, like it's not Grandmother sitting on the bench, but the setting sun.]

Grandmother's first name grounds her, imbuing her with immediate actuality. The name itself, however, is not typical for a peasant woman. Hence, as early as the first line, we have the effect of simultaneous immediacy and subtle alienation. This effect of grounding–with–alienation is strengthened by the implication that a common clay mixing bowl is a strange radar dish which, moreover, is equipped to receive thoughts. But it is in the list of the prosaic agricultural tasks which grandmother has to perform that we feel the full impact of mythical alienation (the effect of its near-imperceptibility is achieved by the evenness of the narrative voice): Grandmother must turn the head of the sunflower a little, because it cannot catch up with the sun. Suddenly, and almost imperceptibly, the peasant woman becomes a mythical figure—perhaps the earth mother or the sun wife—and the blending of her vast figure with the setting sun in the closure is now merely a consequence of what has gone before. It is, of course, the prosaic context, embodied in the even, "spoken" narrative tone, that makes the woman's epiphany that much more *authentically* poetic.

And here are two stanzas from a poem by Viktor Neborak, in a startlingly different key, but still within the field of the poetry of statement:

I dzhynsy nosytymu do dirok,
i karkatymu na mody novitni.
Ia budu, pevno, ostannim na sviti,
khto znatyme, shcho take spravzhnii "rok."
. . . . . .
Spysavshy virshiv os' takennyi stos,
za memuary viz'mus' potrokhu.
V nykh voskreshu ia nashu epokhu!
(Iakshcho mene ne vkhopyt' skleroz.)[21]

[I'll wear my jeans threadbare, and I'll grumble against new fashions. I'm sure that I'll be the last man on earth who knows what real rock is. /I'll write a pile of poems this high, and later I'll start thinking about my memoirs. In them I'll resurrect our epoch! (That is, if sclerosis doesn't get me first.)]

As the two examples show, within the general domain of the poetry of statement, there are numerous and interesting "subdivisions"—from the playfully satirical Viktor Neborak and the somewhat more darkly sarcastic Oleksandr Hrytsenko to the intensely lyrical Ivan Malkovych. The borderlines of these subdivisions run in various directions. A very important boundary, illustrated by my two examples, lies between the "city poets" and the "country poets." The country poets do not necessarily write for the village reader, as Bazylevsky advises poets to do in a passage alluded to earlier. Many of them, like Klavdiia Koretska, use the village idiom and folkloristic themes for quite complex and subtle artistic purposes. Natalka Bilotserkivets, who is the advocate of the "city poets," has not missed this; she lumps such "country poets" together with the philological neosymbolists like Rymaruk, labeling all of them elitist poets who—for all their obvious talent and the important place that they occupy in the literary process—are rapidly losing readers not only of their own poetry but, more indirectly, of new Ukrainian poetry as a whole.[22]

There are, indeed, a number of Ukrainian post-modernist poets who attempt to write directly for the young city dweller, using his own language, including slang. Oleksandr Hrytsenko, for instance, does this, and advises others to do it too. Here is an excerpt from his poem "Movoznavstvo" ("Linguistics"):

A khloptsi hotsaiut' do rannia
pid bezdukhovnyi "modern toking"
nachkhaty im na isnuvannia
Antonychevykh strof vysokykh

a mozhe druzhe razyk zvazhysh
svoiu literaturnu hordist'
a mozhe ty ishche rozmazhesh
sl'ozu rozchulennia po mordi

poeziiu shchonaivysoku
zvidkil' cherpaty iak ne z toho
nemal'ovnychoho potoku
zamutnenoho ta zhyvoho

vid "SIova" azh do Vorobiova
vid tekhinstruktsii do matu
i pozychaiesh tuiu movu
v svoiu chudovu prebahatu[23]

[And the guys hoof and stomp 'til the cows come home to the soulless "modern talking" not giving a damn about the existence of Antonych's high verses / and maybe buddy you'll want to consider for a bit your literary pride and maybe you'll yet smear a tear of sentiment all over your mug / from where can we ladle up the very highest poetry if not from this unpicturesque brook muddied and yet alive / from the "Word" (of Igor's Campaign) all the way to Vorobiov from tech-specs to screw-you *and you borrow this language and put it into your own so beautiful and rich.]*

Natalka Bilotserkivets calls such poetry "rock poetry," and interestingly points out that it fulfills for the city dweller the same needs as folkloristic–sentimental poetry does, or used to do, for the village reader.[24] Be that as it may, the fact remains that popular culture—an obviously powerful ideological tool—comes to Ukraine via Moscow, in the Russian language. For a long time, the center prevented the Ukrainian periphery from developing its urban culture; it seems that now this lack is about to be remedied.

An exciting result of such attempts is the rapidly growing phenomenon of the Ukrainian "bard"—a poet who sings or chants his verses, accompanying himself on the guitar. Andrii Panchyshyn, Viktor Morozov, and Oleh Pokalchuk are the most prominent among them.

Although I follow the growth of the new poets of statement with great interest, I see a serious danger threatening them. In the West, particularly in the United States, the pretended naiveté of such poetry is really an *image,* or a *game,* of naiveté and simplicity. Such poetry is indeed a "supersophisticated" affair, based on a long tradition, beginning with Whitman, through William Carlos Williams, and ending with such deceptively simple, and yet extremely complex, poets as John Ashbery. And, perhaps most important, the tradition opposite theirs—that of intensely "poetical" (or philological) poetry like Wallace Stevens's or, in our day, James Merrill's—acts as its dialectical Negative, reinforcing it through the tension of opposition. The younger Ukrainian poets do not always observe such complex mediations, which they could easily find in their own literature. They go directly from what they learned in their literature classes into attempting to transcribe the voices of their grandfathers, or, for that matter, their own. As a result, some of them fall into the trap that the nature of the poetry of statement sets up for the unwary: what we get is indeed a piece of socialist–realist prose, with a moralizing closure, haphazardly slapped on. I should repeat, however, that the best of that work is indeed excellent.

One of the reasons for the frequent slips of artistic judgment within the field of the poetry of statement is the result of a phenomenon that is in itself laudable—the aforementioned all-out war against the "Potemkin villages" of the inauthentic language in the production of the war poets and their numerous imitators. Liudmyla Taran makes this quite plain:

> Young poets deliberately insult the poetical pose, the drum roll, the loud rhetoric. . . . They attack all prettifying devices, all declamatory gestures, all artifice. Young poets deliberately wish to incorporate ever new levels of life, of the everyday, of everything that is small and unnoticeable. They want to turn this into the fact of poetry.[25]

And Riabchuk wrote somewhat earlier: "In this we see the opposition of the earthy 'substantiality,' the full-blooded concreteness of life, to language at a second remove, conditional language which we have learned to read as falseness, as *Ersatz* [*erzatsnist* in the original]."26

Although the critics' objections are in themselves healthful, their

tone of urgency might be misunderstood by young enthusiasts as a call for the *immediate* (unmediated) infusion of ideology into poetic texts. The wounds that *glasnost* has exposed hurt so much (and the pain must be told immediately), the mistrust that has been unleashed is so deep (and must be expressed at this very moment, before it is too late) that some young poets consider the mediation of art *as such* to be in bad faith. And this, of course, threatens to bring their poetry, full circle, back to the raw ideological "statement."

4

The pain and the mistrust is indeed felt everywhere in the poetry of the young—not only in the work of the poets of statement but also in that of the most disciplined of the philological poets. As these poets themselves admit, their view on the world has little of the youthful enthusiasm and the resolute faith in the future that we saw in the poets of the 1960's; it cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be regarded as hymning the new age of openness and reconstruction.

Even the most intimate poems are frequently darkened by the shadow of anxiety. Here is a stanza from a poem by the talented Iurii Andrukhovych about taking a walk with his little daughter:

> I tse smerkannia—lahidne i hlyboke. . .
> Vona bizhyt', i ii chotyry roky.
> I ia uslid ii tiahnusia rukoiu,
> i chym ia zasloniu, i iak zahoiu? . .[27]

[And this twilight is gentle and deep. She is running, and she is four. And I reach after her with my hand, and with what will I shield her, and how will I heal her?]

Small wonder that in such an emotional climate poets choose themes of introspection, questioning and doubt. In intimate lyrical poems, motifs implying absence, lack, emptiness, the wasteland occur with astonishing frequency. Let me quote some lines from Viktor

Ostapchuk's moving poem "Akvarel' z chervonymy chovnarny" ("Watercolor with Red Boats"):

> Na bezbarvnomu vitri nimiiut' pokynuti hnizda.
> Na zaliznomu vitri tripochut' doshchi zapiznili.
> Vidplyvaiut' chervoni chovny do bezbozhnoho mista.
> U znevirenu zemliu liahaiut' plody pcrezrili.
> . . . . . .
> Vidplyvaiut' chervoni chovny, zalyshaiuchy pustku.[28]

[In the colorless wind the abandoned nests become silent. In the iron wind the belated rains flutter. The red boats are leaving for a godless city. Overripe fruit falls into the desperate soil. . . . The red boats are leaving, abandoning the desolate homestead.]

In an almost relentless sequence of parallel phrases, the elegiac sadness beats like a tidal wave, intensifying our sense of loss and emptiness.

Frequent apocalyptic themes in the work of these poets are almost invariably linked with the tragedy of Chornobyl. The poet Bohdan Stelmakh, who had made his debut in the late 1960's, wrote a satirical poem about an old potter, significantly named Pygmalion, who suddenly decides to fashion a row of nuclear reactors out of clay, instead of his usual supply of pots and clay toys, and to exhibit them in the marketplace. Little wonder that his wife, named Galatea, is somewhat disturbed by this decision (her name implying that she knows what her husband can do when he puts his mind to it):

> "Shchos' ty, Pihmalione, nache s'ohodni ne teie. . ."
> "Teie s'ohodni ia, teie, liuba moia Halateie."
> . . . . . .
> Vynesla zhinka diad'kovi termos borshchu na bazar.
> Bachyt'—stoit', ne kupuiet'sia atomnyi diad'kiv tovar.
> "Shchos' ty s'ohodni ne teie, liubyi Pihmalione,
> Lipshe lipyv by dali horshchyky pid vazony.
> "Liuba moia Halateie, horshchyky—shtuka nekhytra.
> Ni soloveiko, ni pivnyk, ni baranets', ni makitra.
> Shtuka—take, shcho i ne svysne i maku v niomu ne vtresh,
> A ie!—movchyt' i nahaduie, shcho ty z ioho lasky zhyvesh."[29]

["Not feeling too good today, are you, Pygmalion. . ." "I'm all right

today, quite all right, my dear Galatea." . . . The wife brought to the market a thermos of borshch for her old man. She sees that his nuclear ware is standing, not selling at all. "Not feeling too good today, are you, Pygmalion? You'll be better off making flower pots, as before." "My dear Galatea, flower pots are a piece of cake. So is a bird whistle, a clay rooster, a clay ram, or a mixing bowl. The trick is to make something which does not whistle, and in which you can't pound seed, but which is!—silently reminding you that you live by its grace."]

The theme of the tragedy of Chornobyl is often expanded to embrace more general problems of ecology. This, in turn, provides poets with the opportunity to attack technology, or, more precisely, the cold indifference of the technological age. Oksana Pakhlovska writes:

> Vzhe Dzhotto—ne khudozhnyk, a suputnyk.
> Vzhe navit' des' kompiuter—dyryhent.
> I z kozhnym dnem vse lehshe nam zabuty
> ostanniu z naiprekrasnishykh lehend.
> . . . . . .
> Vse myhotyt'. Vs'omu nemaie liku.
> A nebo znovu tykhe na zori.
> I my—poety atomnoho viku—
> ostanni trubadury na zemli.[30]

[Now Giotto is not an artist but a sputnik. Now somewhere even a computer is an orchestra conductor. And with each day we forget more and more easily the last of the most beautiful legends. . . . / Everything shimmers. There is too much of everything. Only the sky is once again silent at dawn. And we—poets of the atomic age—are the last troubadours on earth.]

Although technology itself is frequently thus criticized—in a romantic, if not a sentimentalist, spirit—technological terms are utilized again and again in metaphors, to make poetic texts sound more contemporary, more in touch with the surrounding actuality. I for one find the provincial naiveté of such use of "hardware" extremely annoying, particularly when the author attempts to combine it metaphorically with lyrical, emotional motifs. As the young Ukrainian poets, in other instances, themselves show, we have lost the innocent Baroque fascination with matters of "physics."

As is to be expected, the poets devote much attention to *glasnost* and *perestroika*. But, contrary to the enthusiasm that we find daily in political and literary articles, the poets are more critical than enthusiastic; to put it more precisely, they reveal extreme caution, and a profound scepticism. But *glasnost* gives the young Ukrainian poets the opportunity to express their patriotism with a fervor probably unprecedented in the history of Soviet Ukrainian literature. Their definitions of the motherland, however, are not at all uplifting. The notes of pessimism in some of these poems are reminiscent of the early Romantic poetry before Shevchenko, as we see in the following lines by Bohdan Stelmakh:

I zarosly nedobudovy,
Sama trava.
Sumni slova pisen', bratove,
Irzha vkryva.[31]

[And the unfinished buildings are overgrown. Nothing but grass. The sad words of our songs, my brothers, are covered with rust.]

The antiquated form of the word *bratove* (brothers) implies the author's wish to cast his bleak image in an historical perspective. Indeed, a large number of poets examine the question of the motherland historically, rediscovering the national past, there to find mostly grief. Valerii Herasymchuk, for instance, goes as far back as the medieval times:

Ishly vorohy. I khtos' im khliba kraiav.
Khtos' nalyvav u kelykhy vyna.
Dilyly Rus' na kuseni okrain,
Minialy viru, nazvy, imena. . .
Usim distalos'! Rus' taky velyka:
Iak ne lany z zhytamy, to bory!
(Iz lyp naderty mozhna dosyt' lyka,
A vzhe z liudei shcho khochesh, te i dery.)[32]

[The enemies were coming. And somebody cut them some bread. Somebody poured them wine into chalices. They cut Rus' into pieces of borderlands (in the original, a possible pun on the word "Ukraina"), they changed the (local) faith, the names of places and of people. Everybody got a piece! Rus', after all, is large: if not fields of wheat,

then deep forests! You can tear enough bast off lime tree trunks (a pun on the proverb "dery lyko poky deret'sia"—"grab while the grabbing is good," with a possible secondary reference to material for bast shoes) and as for the people, you can rip off them whatever your heart desires.]

It is not surprising that within this thematic framework, and along with continuous coverage in the press, the fate of the Ukrainian language occupies a central place in the poetry of the young. Taking Shevchenko's famous lines as her intertext, Oksana Pakhlovska writes:

> Strashnyi myslyvets' vyide znov na lovy.
> *V iedynu sitku vsikh ptakhiv zhrebe.*
> Raby—tse natsiia, kotra ne maiie Slova.
> Tomu i ne mozhe zakhystyt' sebe.[33]

[The terrible huntsman will again come out for the hunt. He will rake up all birds into his single net. Slaves are a nation which does not possess the Word, and therefore cannot defend itself.]

It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that dozens of poems published in periodicals in 1988 were devoted to the danger in which the Ukrainian language finds itself today. We have also seen strong passages, or entire poems, devoted to the hymning of language as such. The language of poetry, in particular, is glorified as the only salvation in our world—the only love that will never betray.

Finally, the new spirit of openness has opened up a new, and highly surprising, thematic vein in Soviet Ukrainian poetry—poetry about the soul, about spiritual existence (occasionally close to mysticism), and unabashedly religious poetry. Some young poets accuse Christianity of having destroyed the pagan beliefs which alone had been truly Ukrainian. Many more, however, have gone the less eccentric route by writing about the new barbarism having destroyed the ancient Christian churches in Ukrainian towns and villages. Valentyn Bendiuh, for instance, wrote an excellent short poem about a mute old bell-ringer who dies of grief when his little village church is closed down by the authorities.[34] I will now quote in full a text by Hennadii Moroz which I consider—together with Rymaruk's poem, quoted earlier—the best work that I read in 1988:

Iak vy zovetes', doroho v kufaiechtsi hrudnia,
Khutir zabutyi, zamshila kaplytsia pusta?
Kholodno hospodu. Kholodno bohu. . . A liudiam?
Ot i pishly. I zabuly. Ne znialy z khresta.

Smittia—oshuiu, suvii pavutynnia—odesnu.
Z kosmosu hlianuty—i prosl'ozytys': krasa!
Mozhe voskresnut'? A spravdi, uziat' i voskresnut'.
Til'ky navishcho? Dlia koho otut voskresat'?

Babo v mohyli i viri, na samomu spodi,
V khustochtsi bilii i chornykh, iak pole, rokakh,
Pravdu kazaly vy: vse u rukakh u hospodnikh,
Vse, pochynaiuchy z tsviakhiv, u boha v rukakh.[35]

[What is your name, road, in your white cotton jacket of December, with your abandoned farm house and a moldy empty chapel? The Lord is cold. God is cold. . . And the people? They simply left. And forgot. Did not take Him down from the cross. / The trash—to the left, the bale of cobwebs—to the right. One could look down from the cosmos and shed a tear: Oh, how beautiful! Perhaps one should rise from the dead. Really, just go ahead and rise from the dead. But then, for what? For whom here should one take the trouble of resurrection? / Grandmother, in your grave and in your faith, at the very bottom, in your white kerchief and your years, as black as the field—you were finally right: everything is in God's hands. Everything—beginning with the iron nails—is in the hands of God.]

In the time of reconstruction, the best of the younger Ukrainian poets are powerfully reconstructing Soviet Ukrainian poetry. It is my own deeply vital concern that this beautiful and varied garden not only survive but flourish—that it not be brutally trampled yet once again.

Footnotes

1. See the excellent history of the early years of Soviet Ukrainian literature: George S. N. Luckyj, *Literary Politics in the Soviet Ukraine, 1917–1934,* rev. ed., "Studies of the Harriman Institute," Durham: Duke University Press, 1990.

2. The bulk of quotations are taken from the following literary periodicals published in 1988: *Literaturna Ukraina, Vitchyzna, Zhovten* (now renamed as *Dzvin)* and *Prapor.* Collections of poetry or books of criticism, as well as work published in other periodicals, have by and large not been taken into consideration.

3. Mykola Riabchuk, "Imitatsiia—ta shche i iaka!" *Zhovten,* no. 7 (July 1988), 122.

4. L. Herasymchuk, "Krytyka na rubezhakh siohodennia," *Prapor,* no. 1 (January 1986), 86.

5. Oksana Zabuzhko, "Kultura i tradytsiia," *Prapor,* no. 3 (March 1988), 157–168.

6. Valerii Illia, "Vil'nyi virsh—vid choho vin vil'nyi? Polemichni notatky," *Vitchyzna,* no. 7 (July 1987), 156.

7. Liudmyla Taran, "Tendentsii i paradoksy," *Zhovten,* no. 3 (March 1988), 126.

8. See, for example, the various opinions of the younger critics in "Khudozhnii obraz perebudovy. . ."

9. Vasyl Ivashkiv, "Z pozytsii zhyttieutverdzhennia," *Zhovten,* no. 7 (July 1988), 119–120.

10. "Khudozhnii obraz perebudovy. . ."

11. Ibid.

12. Riabchuk, "Imitatsiia. . . ," 124.

13. Bilotserkivets, "Konfidentsiina. . . ," 120.

14. Natalia Okolitenko, "Pospivaimo, pohraimosia. . . abo Potiomkinski sela v poezii," *Vitchyzna,* no. 11 (November 1988), 184–185.

15. Mykola Iu. Riabchuk, *Potreba slova* (Kiev: Radianskyi pysmennyk, 1985), 170. Quoted in Taran, 126.

16. Ihor Rymaruk, "Perestupnyi vik," *Vitchyzna,* no. 3 (March 1988), 6.

17. All improvised prose translations are mine.

18. See, for example, Mykola Zerov's sonnet "Kapnos tes patridos," with its following strong closure:

> I ty promovysh z pochuttiam lehkym:
> —Tam tsilynoiu idut' lemish i ralo.
> —Tam znosyt'sia Itaky synii dym.

[And you will pronounce with a light feeling: There the ploughshare and the plough traverse the virgin land. There the blue smoke of Ithaca rises in the air.] Mykola Zerov, *Sonnetarium* (Berchtesgaden: Orlyk, 1948), 61.

19. Mykola Miroshnychenko, *Literaturna Ukraina,* 14 April 1988.

20. Klavdiia Koretska, "Iz knyzhky Chas pik," *Zhovten,* no. 4 (April 1988), 11.

21. Quoted in Bilotserkivets, "Konfidentsiina. . . ," 121.

22. Ibid., 123.

23. Oleksandr Hrytsenko, "Sered tupotu nih: Movoznavstvo," *Vitchyzna,* no. 5 (May 1988), 10. The italicized lines at the end of the excerpt constitute a quotation from Pavlo Tychyna's notorious poem "Chuttia iedynoi rodyny"

("The Feeling of a Single Family"). To appreciate the intent of the quotation, we should glance at its context:

> Iak do chuzhoi pryidesh movy.
> . . . . . .
> Odna v nykh spil'na chuty nytka
> vid davnyny i po s'ohodni.
> I pozychaiesh tuiu movu
> v svoiu,—chudovu, prebahatu.
> A vse znakhodyt' tse osnovu
> u syli proletariatu.

[And you will arrive at the foreign language. . . We hear in them (the foreign and the native language) a single thread, from antiquity to the present. And you borrow that language into your own—so beautiful and so rich. And all of this finds its base in the strength of the proletariat.] *Tvory v shesty tomakh,* vol. 1 (Kiev: DVKhL, 1961), 261–262.

24. Bilotserkivets, "Konfidentsiina. . . ," 123.

25. Taran, "Tendentsii. . . ," 125.

26. Riabchuk, *Potreba slova,* 54–55, quoted by Taran, 125.

27. Iurii Andrukhovych, "Napruha rusla," *Vitchyzna,* no. 11 (November), 15.

28. Viktor Ostapchuk, "Ozhyvy: Akvarel z chervonymy chovnamy," *Zhovten,* no. 12 (December 1988), 10.

29. Bohdan Stelmakh, "Zhyttia bezkonechne: Vylipyv diadko," *Zhovten,* no. 6 (June 1988), 3.

30. Oksana Pakhlovska, "Tanets nad provalliam," *Zhovten,* no. 11 (November 1988), 2.

31. Bohdan Stelmakh, "Zhyttia bezkonechne: Zhal," 4.

32. Valerii Herasymchuk, "Ia shche pryidu: Rus'," *Zhovten,* no. 12 (December 1988), 8.

33. Pakhlovska, "Tanets. . . ," 4.

34. Valentyn Bendiuh, "Chornyi bil: Staryi dzvonar," *Zhovten,* no. 9 (September 1988), 12.

35. Hennadii Moroz, "Pershyi prymorozok," *Vitchyzna,* no. 12 (December 1988), 5.

Askold Melnyczuk

Shadowboxing: *A Column*

1.

The Opera House in Lviv (aka Lemberg, aka Lvov) is modeled after the theater in Vienna. I was told it's the third largest baroque performance hall in Europe, but I don't believe it. Ukrainians are as prone to hyperbole as Anglo–Saxons are to understatement.

It was on the stage of the theater that last September I recited a poem written years before which contains a reference to this thousand-year-old town where both my grandfather and mother attended the university. Nearing the end of it, I felt my anxiety mount. In the published version the last lines read: "I come from a country/which no longer exists. . ." Suddenly the stanza seemed ridiculous, fabulously mortal. I was inside that very country. It certainly did exist. The wooden planks of the stage were solid, the audience silent but palpable. From what I'd seen over two weeks of travel, from Peremyshl to Odessa to Kiev, Ukraine was more awake than it had been in decades, maybe centuries.

Life, I reasoned, takes precedence over art, and certainly over words ephemeral as these. So I improvised. "I come from a country/which no longer exists" became "I come from a country/which refuses to die." Unfortunately, I can't say how the change was received. I don't believe more than a handful of the five hundred or so people in the audience understood English.

I'd hoped to dedicate this entire afterward to the Ukrainian Poetry Conference which took place last September in Kiev and Lviv. I wanted