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## The How, the What and the Why of *Marusia Churai*: A Historical Novel in Verse by Lina Kostenko

The work, a central piece in Lina Kostenko's literary output, appeared in 1979, two years after Kostenko's sixteen year long silence had been broken with the collection *Nad berehamy vichnoii riky* (On the shores of the Eternal River, 1977). The work was an instant success, received a very favourable review in *Literaturna Ukraina* from no less a master than M. Bazhan<sup>1</sup>, and in 1987 earned the author the Shevchenko Literary Prize. The press run of 8000 was quickly sold out. The book was republished by offset in Australia. Its popularity is further attested by the stage adaptation at a theatre in Lviv and the voice and bandura rendering by Nila Kriukova and Halyna Menkush. Ivan Dziuba has called the novel "one of the most precious pearls of Ukrainian poetry."<sup>2</sup> It has become perhaps the best known work in Ukrainian literature since W.W. II. It is unquestionably a very powerful work, marked by an intensity and sincerity of feeling so characteristic of Kostenko's poetry. But beyond poetry it is also a novel and a history. A closer look at this novel will hopefully explain why the work has been so popular and it is precisely these three elements: history, novel, and verse which provide answers to the "how, the what and the why."

The least problematic is the "how" or the verse. Although a contemporary poet, Kostenko's poetry lacks the prevalence of abstract metaphor that is so typical of modern poetry and relies on more traditional poetic expression, hence its wide public acceptability. Kostenko, as has been apparent in her earlier attempts at longer poems ("Kazka pro Maru," "Mandrivky sertsia"), is a master of the narrative mode. She narrates her stories very well and at the same time her poetry exudes an air of spontaneity and honest directness. Kostenko maintains this element in *Marusia Churai* and, as always, does this through the character of her verse which can be summarized in four features: a) vocabulary, b) tone, c) mood, and d) rhythm.

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1. Mykola Bazhan, "Poema pro kokhannia i bezsmertia," *Literaturna Ukraina*, no. 19 (3752), March 4, 1980, 2.

2. Ivan Dziuba, "Neopalyma knyha," *Ukraina*, no. 7 (1987), 14-15.

Her vocabulary is certainly very rich but not necessarily of the “literary” register. In *Marusia Churai* Kostenko flavors her vocabulary with elements of the historical period (*vtedy* [now *todi*], *prez* [now *cherez*]) and the like, as well as characterizations through socio-occupational language. The court has its *kondytsiiamy prava pospolytoho*, the priest who visits the condemned talks of *soblazny suiety*. *Od boha tak polozheno liudyni dolynoiu smyreniia ity*, and the common cossack Semen Kapkanchyk uses the dialectal *hovore*. But this type of shading by means of vocabulary is kept to a minimum. Most of the work is written in standard contemporary Ukrainian. Furthermore it is presented in a rather uncomplicated syntax bordering on the conversational or the address tone. One can provide innumerable examples but let this final strophe in part 3 of the novel suffice:

... Тюремник вніс у вузлику одержу,  
 щоб я на завтра в чисте одяглась.  
 Яке намисто гарне, — хоч подержу,  
 це ще од баби пам’ять збереглась.  
 Воно, либонь, якесь чи не турецьке.  
 Таке червоне — аж на мене жаль.  
 Чаклунське, кажуть: інеш береться,  
 коли людину укидає в жар.  
 Могла б я одягти і сірячину.  
 Під зашморгом усе вже до лица.  
 А мати вклала в білу сорочину  
 і чоботи, узяті від шевця.  
 Черчату плахту, ще й якісь прикраси.  
 Червону крайку в смужки золоті ...

Аякже, смерть усе-таки це празник,  
 який буває тільки раз в житті.<sup>3</sup>

The narration flows smoothly. There are no undue twists and turns, no forcing of word order to match rhyme or meter. And, as is often the case, there is a prevalent didactic mood captured most often in aphorisms, as seen in the last couplet above or in such lines as:

Воно як маєш серце не з льодини,  
 розп’яття — доля кожної людини.

Та є печальна втіха, далєбі:

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3. Lina Kostenko. *Marusia Churai*. (Kiev, 1979), pp. 93–4. Henceforth only page numbers of this edition will be given.

комусь на світі гірше, як тобі.

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If your heart is not of ice,  
a cross everyone must bear  
But there is a sad consolation  
There's probably someone worse off than you.

Finally, rhythm completes the characterization of Kostenko's verse. There is no set strophe and it adheres to the most common folk rhythms: the iamb, amphibrach and dactyl. To add to the verisimilitude and veracity of the novel Kostenko resorts to passages in prose, incorporates parts of songs, mixes direct speech with narration and subordinates the strophe to the narrative flow and content. Hence, as seen from the quotations above, there can be strophes of various lengths. What is also noteworthy is Kostenko's effective switching of rhythm, again to emphasize and support the narrative flow. One such switch occurs during Marusia's long self-reflective monologue in chapter 3. It comes precisely when Marusia recalls her rival Halia Vyshniakivna. Marusia's doubt as to whether she is in fact "fair" to her rival is reflected by a sudden shift from the prevalent five-footed iambic line to rhymed lines with no specific meter:

- -/- !/ - !/ -!/ - !/-

А понавколо свахи ходять роєм,  
-!/ - !/-!/ - -!/!

а зверху Галя котить гарбузи . . .

followed by:

А може, я несправедлива до неї?  
А може, саме таку дружину треба козакові, —  
до печі і до горόδуду, до коней і до свиней, і  
до раді, і до поради, і вночі до любові?

A similar break in rhythm to support a narrative shift in mood occurs at the time Marusia enters a destroyed cathedral when she reaches Kiev during her pilgrimage (pp. 141–2). Also very effective is the switch to the amphibrach to describe the haste and the ride of Ivan to Khmelnytskii's encampment to get the necessary pardon for Marusia in chapter 4:

- !-/! -!/ -! -/  
 Тим часом гiнець доганяє свiтання  
 - ! -/ -! -! -! -!  
 i клаптями ночi доточує днiб  
 - ! -/ -! -/ -! -/ -!  
 I кожна хвилинка, з дається, — остання,  
 - ! -!/ -! -! -! -!  
 i крихта надiї кричить йому: «Нi!»

The rhymes employed by Kostenko are various although the scheme is predominantly that of an alternating masculine-feminine cross rhyme (aBaB). A good example of the variety and inventiveness of the rhymes can be seen in such two stanza sample as the following:

А вже пішли про мене й поговiри.  
 Знов потяглися тоскиі вечо ри.  
 Бо то вже так, вже як пішлось на горе,  
 то так уже i піде, як з гори.

Вже й не співалось. I слова тi самi ж,  
 а мов не тi таке щось в них смутно.  
 Вже й подруиі повіддавались замiж,  
 уже й не клиуть дружкою мене.

Kostenko also uses other instrumentation in the novel, as, for example, such anaphora rhyme:

**Ярема**-князь добити наказав.  
**Ярами** йшов, схищався десь у кручі.

Kostenko is most adept at creating rhymes between various parts of speech: *navishchos' : povishus', vidkhode: Kho de?, dlia nas: ikonostas, Otche: u ochi* and so forth, including one that I found rather personal: *od ruk: Struk. A most interesting point is made by the use of accent: Vy sich, a my Poltava / U vas praveá, my zh—okhorontsi preáva* (p. 24).

The above presentation of the verse in the novel *Marusia Churai* although not exhaustive does give one a fairly good notion of the poetic aspect of the novel. Kostenko is indeed a master of the narrative verse and there are no discernible difficulties. Certainly the work's popularity rests mostly on the "readability" of the work which is primarily due to the poetic manner of narration.

*Churai* is also a historical novel and it is this element that must be examined to learn the “why” of the work. Kostenko could and did choose to write a historical novel although it is not quite the normal pattern for a lyrical poet to go into history. There seem to be several reasons why Kostenko felt compelled to do a historical work. Perhaps the most important was that at the height of the Brezhnev years history had almost ceased to exist as a discipline in Ukraine. A quick look at the bibliographical listings in the *Ukraiins'kyi istorychnyi zhurnal* during the seventies will prove the point. Most books published in the field were concerned with the Party's various endeavors—hence only with history of the twentieth century. No books were written on other periods with the exception of the Khmelnytskii era, and in these, the emphasis was always on the “unification” of Ukraine and Russia.<sup>4</sup> 1979 was also the year of the Tashkent conference on the Russian language at which a resolution was passed to make Russian compulsory in all non-Russian kindergartens and nurseries. It is in this context that one must look at Kostenko's choice: one, to write a historical work and two, to pick the Khmelnytskii era.

“When a big power wants to deprive a small country of its national consciousness it uses a method of *organized forgetting* . . . A nation which loses awareness of its past gradually loses its self,”<sup>5</sup> observed Milan Kundera. Kostenko could not have been unaware of what was happening to Ukraine. Her sixteen year silence proved that she would not be party to the merging of nations. And when she wrote again it was certainly to do everything in her power to reverse the situation. Given Kostenko's uncompromising stand on the role of the poet—“. . . to pass from soul to soul / From tongue to tongue / The freedom of spirit and the truth of the word”<sup>6</sup>—it is not at all surprising that she took it upon herself, a poet, to become the keeper of

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4. For example in 1979 only three books appeared whose subject was not the role of the Party: *Istoriia Ukraiins'koi R.S.R. U 8-my t., 10 kn, t. 2. Vyzvol'na viina i voz'iednannia Ukraiiny z Rosiieiu. Pochatok rozkladu feodalizmu ta zarozhennia kapitalistychnykh vidnosyn (Druha polovyna XVII–XVIII st.)*. (Kiev, 1979). F.P. Shevchenko, *Voz'iednannia Ukraiiny z Rosiieiu i uvichnennia ioho v pamiatkakh istoiii ta kul'tury*. (Kiev, 1979). M.F. Kotliar, *Danylo Halys'kyi* (Kiev, 1979).

The other books advertised in every issue of *Ukraiins'kyi istorychnyi zhurnal* concern the role and history of the Communist Party, Lenin, other revolutionary movements and the like.

5. Milan Kundera. “Afterword—a talk with the author,” in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, (London, 1981), p. 235.

6. Kostenko, “Estafety/Bequests,” *Four Ukrainian Poets*. (n.p., 1969). p. 61. Translation by DHS.

honest records. In a poem published a year later than *Churai* but probably written around the same time she makes this position on the poet's duty very clear. "Tsyhans'ka Muza" in *Nepovtornist'* describes the struggles of a gypsy girl, endowed with the gift of poetry, striving against the wishes of her people to become educated and to become a poet. She knows that only her poetry will save them from oblivion. Scorned by them for becoming a poet, for giving up the old ways, she exclaims:

То хай всі так і думають, що ми лиш ворожбити,  
ні гордості, ні пам'яті, — нічого в нас нема?!

А хто ж розкаже людям про ті криваві сльози  
у тих лісах волинських, де пам'ять аж кричить, —  
коли ми йшли в безвихідь, у голод, у морози,  
тікаючи од звіра, що звався — геноцид?!<sup>7</sup>

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So let them think that we are only fortunetellers  
without pride, memory — without everything!  
And who then will tell of those bloody tears  
in those forests of Volhynia, where memory screams to be heard  
when we marched into a dead end, into hunger, into frost  
fleeing from the beast called genocide?!

The Ukrainian analogy is more than transparent. So Kostenko takes up the challenge and writes a historical novel. Yet, the only permissible subject in Ukrainian history was the Khmelnytskii era, and the area was further limited to the "war for independence and the unification with Russia." And it is here that Kostenko's history is most intriguing. She chooses a legendary heroine from the time of Khmelnytskii and in writing Marusia's story circumvents the restrictions of the time. Her historical canvas is at once too broad and too narrow. It is broader than the period of Khmelnytskii and it is too specific in Khmelnytskii's period (1651) to embrace the Pereiaslav agreement.

Being a historical novel the work combines fiction and fact. How Kostenko combines and mixes history with fiction will be examined in the "novel" segment of this paper. What is of concern here is the amount of historical fact recorded by Kostenko in the course of the novel. The oldest reference in the work is to the monks of the Kievan Cave Monastery in the 11–12 centuries, the most recent to Fedir Zhuchenko, the Colonel

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7. Kostenko, "Tsyhans'ka muza," *Nepovtornist'*, (Kiev, 1980), 241.

of Poltava from 1659 to 91, in-law of V. Kochubei and a foe of Mazepa.<sup>8</sup> Hence Kostenko manages to expand through references, allusions, and recollections, her historical canvas to include almost all of Ukraine's history to the beginning of the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> In between she mentions, in chronological order:

- (12 century) the raid of Konchak [p. 122],
- (1240) Batu khan [p. 145],
- (1430) kniaz Vytovt from the Great Duchy of Lithuania [p. 158],
- (1566–1632) Sigismund (Vasa) [p. 158],
- (1596) Nalyvaiko's defeat at the hands of the Poles at Solonytsia valley [p. 122],
- (1612–51) Iarema Vyshnevetskii's ruthless attacks [p. 158, 122],
- (1637) battle of Kumeikii; defeat of Pavliuk [p. 50, p. 99, p. 158],
- (1638) Ostrianytsia's defeat [p. 122. p. 158],
- (1648–9) Khmelnytskii's first campaign [p. 62, p. 65, p. 158],
- (1649) Radziwill attacks Kiev [p. 23, p. 140]
- (1649 August) Treaty of Zboriv [p. 63, p.],
- (1650 February) Berestechko battle [p. 23,],
- (1651 September) Battle of Bila Tserkva [p. 23, p. 158],
- (1651) Radziwill again sacks Kiev [p. 140]
- (1658 Summer) Poltava burns during Pushkar's uprising against Vyhovskii [p. 7] and Pushkar beheaded [p. 31]

As can be seen from the above—Kostenko's historical canvas is indeed very broad. There is one striking feature, however, in the above list. The whole series of dates seems to be united by one common note: Ukraine's suffering. It is this aspect of the historical background which leads the wandering precentor, whom Marusia meets on her pilgrimage to Kiev through a devastated Ukraine, to exclaim that despite centuries of bloodshed and suffering nothing has been recorded and nothing is known about the travails of the land and its people, destruction and suffering of which could rival those of Troy. The Appian Way to Rome pales in comparison with the long track of devastation

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8. Page 16. Where Horban', the viit of Poltava, is said to have later written a denunciation of Zhuchenko to hetman Demian Mnohohrishny. Mnohohrishny was anti-Russian; Zhuchenko anti-Mazepa.

9. The fact that her historical canvas stretches from Kievan Rus' to Khmelnytskii is supported also by Zabuzhko who provides for teachers a short conspectus of Ukrainian history from Kievan Rus' to the beginning of Cossackdom as an obligatory background for studying the novel. See N.Ia. Zabuzhko, "Vyvchennia romanu Liny Kostenko Marusia Churai" *Ukrains'ka mova i literatura v shkoli*, No. 11, 1989, 14–6.

from Volhynia to Kiev yet no one knows of the latter.<sup>10</sup> It is precisely to rectify this wrong that Kostenko has taken it upon herself to write a historical novel. The other noticeable element is that Kostenko, although she has stayed in the confines of the Khmelnytskii period, has avoided completely the theme of “unification” with Russia, and has in fact written the whole work without mentioning Russians or the tsar even once. There is but one reference to the Pereiaslav Treaty of 1654 and even that is somewhat ambiguous. Khmelnytskii is portrayed by Kostenko in his camp before the battle of Bila Tserkva (Sept 24–5 1651). He has just received news from Ivan Iskra that Marusia has been sentenced to hang and he is reminiscing before signing the decree for a pardon. As he reminisces the narrator presupposes that he might recall 1637 when he, as chancellor, signed a treaty with the Poles which brought about the death of Pavliuk and Churai’s father. The narrator then goes on to say that he will again sign “a cursed” (*preókliata*) treaty in years to come. The reference could be to the upcoming treaty at Bila Tserkva, not too advantageous for Khmelnytskii, to the treaty at Zhvanets in December 1653, which was a repeat of the conditions negotiated at Zboriv in 1649 or it could be the only other treaty to be signed by Khmelnytskii before his death in 1657, the treaty of Pereiaslav in 1654. Considering the tragic importance of the Pereiaslav treaty in Ukraine’s history, it is hard not to suggest that this is indeed the second “cursed” treaty.<sup>11</sup> If this is the case, then this is the only, albeit indirect, reference to the theme of “unification” in the whole historical novel.<sup>12</sup> Although speculation on an author’s intent

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10. Pages 130–1.

Усі віки ми чуєм брзкіт зброї,  
були боги у нас і були герої,  
який нас ворог тільки не терзав!  
Але говорять: «як руїни Трої».

Про Київ так ніхто ще не сказав  
Колись у давниїть недозриму  
була страшна дорога з Риму.  
І звався Апіїв той шлях.

Вже скільки тих віків минає,  
а в світі, певно, кожен знає

коли й кого там розпинали.  
Про це написано аннали,  
про це писали так і в риму,  
зучили вздовж і впепехпечт.

Але ж ота дорога з Риму  
якихось кілька сотень верст.  
А тут до самої Волині  
лежать ці села удовині!

Хто знаї, шо тут відбу лося?  
Хто розказав це людям до пуття?  
Неназване, туманом пойнялося.  
Непізнане, пішло у небуття.

11. It is most interesting that Zabuzhko does not even mention the second “cursed” treaty. See Zabuzhko, 11, 1989 p. 22.

12. Pages 99–100. In the original:



is often more dangerous than illuminating, it seems that in this case one can safely infer, that Kostenko wrote this historical novel to fulfill what she has consistently maintained to be the duty of the poet: to capture the memory of one's people. Yet, one can assume likewise that there was also some desire on Kostenko's part to show "historians" that one can write history, even within the confines outlined by the Party, and that not only one can expand these confines to include more than just the Khmelnytskii period but one can also avoid the only encouraged theme of "unification." Finally, there could be a third reason for writing a *historical* novel. History could well serve as the mirror of the contemporary situation and yet permit, before the days of "glasnost," to criticize and expose the negatives of today. N.Ia. Zabuzhko formulated it well in saying: ". . . Kostenko illustrates through the past many elements of the present and projects them into the future."<sup>13</sup> It is not difficult to see aesopian correlations between the ruin of the seventeenth century and the ruin of today, nor between the various portraits of the courageous and the opportunists (father of Marusia, and the father of Halia Vyshniak), nor between the poets who always write "to please" but cannot rise to write the "great book about the people" (p. 129). Finally it is very easy to see a resemblance between Marusia herself and the author: the silence under judgement, the determined will, the soul of her people. There are even more specific allusions to Kostenko the poet such as the echoes of her poetic sound in such lines as *Ziishly nad murom ocheniata! / Blakytyni, kari, chorni, siri* (p. 104) which hark back directly to another poem of Kostenko's *Plakaly syni ochi, Plakaly siri ochi, Plakaly chorni ochi. I vsi moii*,<sup>14</sup> or the pulsing repetitive use of *odbuty* so reminiscent of the powerful poem "Pasazh boliu" where Kostenko strikes out with the prefix "pere". Compare the sound of Marusia's:

Одбути всі ці клопоти земні  
Оці останні клопоти одбуть  
іти туди куди мене ведуть,—  
аби одбути, все уже одбути,—

А він тоді ще писар військовий,                      Що якось так складається воно,  
підписував ту прокляту угоду.                      роки ідуть, свобода ледве дише  
. . . Недогарок згасивши восковий,                      що наче ж і не писар він давно,  
він, може, знову думав про свободу? а знов угоду прокляту підпише.

13. N.Ia. Zabuzhko. "Vyvchennia romanu Liny Kostenko *Marusia Churai*," *Ukraiins'ka mova i literatura v shkoli*, no. 11 (1989), 14.

14. "Skhodyt' sontse, iasnyi obahrianok" from *Prominnia zemli 1957*, in Lina Kostenko, *Poezii*, (Baltimore, 1969), p. 34.

і щоб не бути, щоб уже не бути!

with:

а я пересилю русява як Русь  
а я переб'юся я перебуду  
а я переплачу пересміюсь,<sup>15</sup>

The comparison between Marusia and the author seems very obvious. Since Churai was not, strictly speaking, a historical character it is therefore of interest to see how Kostenko has modified the legend to suit her purpose. On the other hand, the legend of Marusia was so well known that it led Bazhan to wonder at Kostenko's daring to take up such a well established subject:

What creative courage is needed in order to develop this old ballad into a far-reaching lyric-epic poema, so that its theme, for years sung and resung, thousands of times staged and restaged on various stages, may sound in a new, previously unheard, way.<sup>16</sup>

Kostenko's changes, adaptations, and restructuring of this old ballad form the basis for the "what" of this work, the novel. In praising the work, Ivan Dziuba claims that

*Marusia Churai* resembles a classical architectural construction which embodies a great plan, a great idea. The poetical material unfolds 'of itself' according to a law of inner necessity and an outer purpose. Every part is necessary for the whole, and the whole imparts to each part a higher meaning. Everything lives through a symphony of mutual inter linkage and mutual intensification.<sup>17</sup>

More simply put, Kostenko does not narrate her novel in a strictly linear or consecutive manner. Both the historical points and the legendary life of Marusia are arranged by the author in a specific way. The novel has nine chapters. The architectonics of the work is further enhanced by the symmetric shifts of narrative voice: chapters 1–2, 4–5,<sup>18</sup> 7–8 are narrated by

15. Page 41 and *Poezii*, p. 219.

16. Bazhan, "Poema. . .," p. 2.

17. Dziuba, "Neopalyma Knyha," *Ukraiina*, no. 7, (1987), 14.

18. Chapter 5 actually begins with Marusia as narrator, but this stops after two pages and the omniscient third person takes over.

the omniscient third person, chapter 3, 6, and 9 are narrated by Marusia. The whole novel is permeated with Marusia's songs. Of the 23 songs attributed to her, 11 appear in the novel. Kostenko masterfully weaves them into the narration either as titles or as direct quotations of several lines or even in allusions to the theme of a given song.<sup>19</sup> Flashbacks and foreshadowing as well as chronological displacement of events are also part of the novel's structure. The "inner necessity and the outer purpose," as Dziuba put it, of this construction is to permit Kostenko to use the story of Marusia Churai as the canvas on which she could portray the history of Ukraine.

Although Marusia's existence cannot be proven by any historical records there are several versions of her life. Leonid Kaufman in his afterword to *Divchyna z lehendy: Marusia Churai* (Kiev, 1974) very thoroughly discusses all of the known facts about Marusia as they have come down to our time. V. Smyrniw in his "Istorychna poetyka Liny Kostenko" follows suit with an exhaustive analysis of the historical veracity of Kostenko's characterization of Marusia and Hryts.<sup>20</sup> According to Kaufman, besides the songs attributed to Marusia, besides various folk legends, recollections, and other fictional works, mostly on the theme of "Oi ne khody, Hrytsiu,"<sup>21</sup> three semi-biographical works exist on Marusia. The oldest is a novelle<sup>22</sup> by the Russian playwright O. Shakhovskoi "Marusia—malorossiiskaia Safo," (1839), next a biography by O. Shkliarevskii in *Pchela* (1877) and a biographical notation by V. Modzalevskii in *Russkii biograficheskii slovar'* (1905). Kaufman discusses in detail the variations which exist among the three. Kostenko picks and chooses between the three variants. She follows Shakhovskoi as to Hryts's surname Bobrenko, and Modzalevskii as to Iskra's name Ivan. She takes the idea of a pilgrimage from Shkliarevskii but places

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19. Reference to "Zasvit vstaly kozachen'ky" pp. 38, 79, and two lines from the song p. 180. Two lines from "Povii, vitre buinesen'kyi," p. 63. Allusions to theme of "V kintsi hrebli shumliat' verby," pp. 83, Two lines from the song 180. Three lines from "Bolyt' moia holovon'ka vid samoho chola," p. 87. Two lines (one with a slight change) from "Kotylysia vozy z hory," p. 87. Two lines from "Oi ne khody Hrytsiu," p. 87. Eight lines from "Sydyt' holub na berezi," and mention of theme of the song p. 180. Title of "Zelenyi barvinochku," p. 180. Title and one line from "Choho zh voda kalamutna," p. 180. Theme from "Ishov mylyi horon'koiu," p. 180. Theme from "Letyt' halka cherez balku," p. 180.

20. Volodymyr Smyrniw, "Istorychna poetyka Liny Kostenko," *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2 (Winter, 1987), 3–26.

21. Both Kaufman and Smyrniw give authors and titles.

22. Kaufman says it is a "play" (*p'iesa*); Lina Kostenko at a symposium in Ann Arbor, where this paper was delivered, insisted that it was a novelle (*povist'*).

it after the trial whereas he had Marusia take a pilgrimage while Hryts was on a campaign. All sources agree that Ivan Iskra loved Marusia and that it was he who rode to Khmelnytskii for the pardon. In Shakhovskoi the pardon was given because Churai-the-father had given his life for the cause; in Shkliarevskii, Marusia merits to live because of the value of her songs. Kostenko combines both reasons and adds a third. Kostenko takes from Shkliarevskii the episode of the *vechornytsi* where Marusia sees Hryts with Halia. Shakhovskoi places the trial in summer 1652 and has Marusia wither and die in 1653, while Shkliarevskii sets the trial in 1648 and says Marusia went off to a Russian convent and died there a year or so later. Kostenko's novel ends with Marusia still alive and in general her dating of the trial is somewhat different. The chronological frame, the real time of the novel, is about three months.

Kostenko does not give a date but one can assume that she agrees with Shakhovskoi who says Marusia was born in 1625. This would make Marusia twenty-six years old at the time of the trial. Kostenko sets the time of the trial to the fall of 1651 as can be seen from the fact that during the trial a messenger comes to Pushkar with the news that Khmelnytskii is gathering an army at Bila Tserkva (*Bohdan kozatstvo stiahaie pid Bilu*, p. 23). The battle at Bila Tserkva took place on September 24–25, 1651. Furthermore, the narrator informs us that Pushkar will be beheaded in seven years time (p. 31). Pushkar died after the rebellion in 1658. This confirms the trial to be in 1651. In her rambling and not at all chronological recollection of their love in chapter three, Marusia recalls their youth, when they were eighteen (p. 45), and then how Hryts came back after the Khmelnytskii campaigns in 1650 (p. 63): “Pushkar dodomu vidpustyv / svii polk Poltavskyi v p'iatdesiatim rotsi” they were over twenty (twenty-five, to be exact, if the date of birth is 1625) (p. 66): *A nam bulo vzhe i ne po dvadtsiat' lit.* how they became lovers and how Hryts had to leave for the next campaign (the Battle of Berestechko in 1651) and how in the fall before that campaign they consummated their love.<sup>23</sup> This was followed by the defeat at Berestechko in February of 1651 and Marusia remembers how Hryts came home after that campaign,<sup>24</sup> how his mother would not let him be until he got engaged to Halia (p. 81).

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23. Page 67:

Якщо загинеш, буду я вдовою.  
 Чи й ти, не знаю, любиш так мене.  
 А я вже, Грицю, їден дух з тобою,  
 хай ми вже й тілом будемо одне.

24. Page 54. А він прийшов тоді з під Берестечка

This is supported further when Marusia recalls that at the feast of Makovii (August) she had been laughed at by Halia (p. 60). *Ale ia z tserkvy ishla na Makoveia, / i zasmiialas' vslid meni.* Marusia tries to drown herself and is saved by Ivan Iskra. Then the fateful *vechornytsi* (pp. 88–89), Hryts runs back to Marusia (p. 90) but she refuses him and he drinks the poison (p. 93). It is late summer (August) of 1651.

All these personal dates are brought out in the third chapter—the confessional chapter, the one where Marusia is the narrator for the first time. Kostenko, however, prefaces the action in the novel with a concrete historical statement: “In the summer of 1658 Poltava burned to the ground.” This is one year after the death of Khmelnytskii and seven years after the action in the novel. Thus from the very onset she serves notice that she will not be bound by the confines of the Khmelnytskii period. Indirectly, in this first statement, she brings in Vyhovskii, whose pro-polish orientation, caused Martyn Pushkar to revolt. In putting down the revolt Poltava is sacked. This serves as a frame for the novel—a reason for why there are no concrete facts available. The novel then begins as a supposition: “what if, at least one book had survived?” and the narrator immediately switches to the trial in process and into the fall of 1651. Marusia remains silent throughout the trial and the narrator manages to paint in the people and the milieu of mid-seventeenth century Ukraine. But more importantly the narrator also poses some questions as to what is just, what is law, and, indirectly, by inference asks a most current question: when is capital punishment justified, if ever?

Marusia is never really proven guilty of any crime save the fact that it was in her house and from her herbs that Hryts died. At most she was guilty of man-slaughter or accessory to suicide, certainly not of murder. An interesting point, and central for Kostenko, is posited by the Zaporozhian who asks why murder is a crime and not **betrayal**:

А що як інший вибрати закон,—  
не з боку **вбивства**, а із боку **зради**?

Ну, є ж про зраду там які статті?  
Не всяка ж кара має бути незбожна.  
Що ж це виходить? Зрадити в житті  
державу—злочин, а людину—можна?!<sup>25</sup>

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And what if one were to pick a different law  
not from the side of murder but from the point of betrayal

Well aren't there some laws about betrayal?  
Not every punishment must be incompatible

Are we to understand that to betray a country is a crime  
and to betray a human being is acceptable?!

If betrayal were the crime then Hryts would be the guilty party. The question remains rhetorical, for then and now the betrayal of a human being is not a crime. But for Kostenko “betrayal” is the central leitmotif of the novel. The leitmotif is further reinforced by many of Marusia’s songs. The leitmotif of betrayal is the connecting link between the personal and the national. Marusia is betrayed by Hryts, Khmelnytskii is betrayed more than once by his allies, the Tartars, Ukraine is betrayed by such turncoats as Yarema Vyshnevetskii, Ukraine is betrayed also by her lackey poets, Khmelnytskii, it is suggested, will be betrayed by Moscow, and going from the particular to the general, Ukraine is betrayed by historical memory. As the third confessional chapter is central to the development of the personal plot line of the protagonist, so the sixth chapter—the Pilgrimage—is to the portrayal of the historical plot line. In both the leitmotif of betrayal plays a paramount and tragic role.

Chapter four introduces Khmelnytskii. A very interesting chapter in that it does not reveal Khmelnytskii’s decision as to the pardon but places the emphasis instead on his self-doubts and especially on his signing of the “cursed” treaties and on the loss of life “while the years flow on and freedom is barely alive.”<sup>26</sup> In his edict of pardon, read finally in chapter five, Kostenko endows Khmelnytskii with statesman-like maturity and shows how he mitigates in a Solomon-like manner the edict of law with wisdom and justice:

В тяжкі часи кривавої сваволі  
смертей і кари наємо доволі.  
І так чигає смерть вже звідусіль  
і так погребів більше, ніж весіль.  
То чи ж воно нам буде до пуття—  
**пустити прахом, ще одне життя?**

Чурай Маруся винна ув одному:  
вчинила злочин в **розпачі** страшному.  
Вчинивши зло, вона не є злочинна,  
бо тільки **зрада** є тому причина.

Не вільно теж, караючи, при цім не

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25. Page 24.

26. Page 100: роки ідуть, свобода ледве дише.

урахувати також і чеснот.  
 Її пісні---як перло многоцінне,  
 як дивен скарб серед земних марнот.<sup>27</sup>

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In difficult times of bloody lawlessness  
 we have plenty of punishments and deaths.  
 As it is, death lurks everywhere  
 As it is, there are more funerals than weddings  
 So will it make sense for us  
 to turn to dust one more life?

Churai Marusia is guilty of one crime:  
 she committed the crime out of great despair.  
 She did wrong but she is not a criminal,  
 for betrayal lies at the cause of the crime.

While punishing one cannot not take into account  
 also the good qualities  
 Her songs—as a precious pearl  
 like a marvelous treasure among earth's misery.

There is a crime but Marusia is not a wrong doer. The reprieve is granted because she acted in passion, because of the value of her songs, and, of course, because the real crime was betrayal.

It is not surprising that Kostenko changes the time of the pilgrimage from before the trial, as it was in Shkliarevskii, to after the clemency, a symbolic rebirth of Marusia. To heighten the emotional intensity of chapter six Marusia has to undergo an apotheosis. Her wanderings over Ukraine are similar to those of the Virgin Mary in the apocryphal legend, forever popular in Ukraine, about the descent into Hell of the Mother of God. Her companion, again not surprising for Kostenko, is a wandering preceptor, one of the many who for ages were the sole carriers of education in Ukraine, and who is a predecessor of the wandering folk-philosopher H. Skovoroda. The point of this chapter is not only to provide a broad canvas of Ukraine's history and its suffering (“*tut spokonviku skriz' lylasia krov*”) (p. 122), but to emphasize the unjust lacuna in the memory of all these events (“*Ale hovorit': 'Iak ruiiny Troii'. / Pro Kyiiv tak nikhto shche ne skazav,*” p. 130). Memory has been destroyed often in the incessant wars and the records written not on paper but in blood.<sup>28</sup> Similarly to the destruction of the records of Marusia's trial in the burning of Poltava (the beginning of the

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27. Page 111. The emphasis is mine —DHS.

28. Page 131:

novel), the records of the wandering precentor have disappeared as well (“. . . *torbu v mene vkraly, / i vsi moii papirusy tiu-tiu*”) (p. 138). If it is not war it is theft. Ukraine’s history is either obliterated or stolen. In the light of what has been done to Ukraine’s history in contemporary Ukraine, Kostenko’s statement of theft of Ukraine’s history is by no means gratuitous.

Poets either serve like lackeys (“*Use komus’ shchos’ pyshut’ na do-hodu,*” p. 129), die in the eternal carnage, or have their works destroyed or stolen. In such circumstances Khmelnytskii’s pardon is indeed wise, for why should still one more poet be silenced? Yet the central question of the wandering precentor: “And who will write, or has written, the great book about our people?”—remains unanswered. Kostenko’s view of history is synchronous: the then and now merge, the then is a reflection of the present Ukraine and especially in the all pervasive destruction of spiritual values. In a little poem written approximately at the same time as the novel, Kostenko writes:

Сиві мальви при дорогах на Волині.  
Ото як пройшло козацьке військо, —  
мальви щороку інші,  
а **курява** ж і досі та сама.<sup>29</sup>

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There are gray hollyhocks near the roads of Volhynia.  
As the Cossack army passed  
Hollyhocks change from year to year  
But the dust cloud is the same till this day.

The “dust” cloud has remained constant in Ukraine’s history yet no one will write about it and let the whole world know. This is the injustice which the work protests. Dziuba refers to this as the “tragic motif—the injustice of history and of the historical memory of humanity.”<sup>30</sup> The novel, however, emphasizes that legends do live on. It ends on a positive note with Marusia once again the narrator, and in the final line she asserts that she is still alive. Her songs live on. Kostenko’s novel *Marusia Churai* is likewise an attempt to reverse this injustice and to instill into the contemporary memory

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Ми ж пишем кров’ ю на своїй землі.  
Ми пишем плугом, шаблею, мечем,  
піснями і невільницьким плачем.  
Могилами у полі безімен,

29. *Nepovtornist’*, p. 184.

30. Dziuba, “*Neopalyma . . .*” p. 14.



a remembrance of Ukraine's history. At the time of the work's publication this was an extremely important task.

This paper, hopefully, has shown how Kostenko managed to take an old legend, imbue it with a new perspective by isolating the motif of betrayal, and, by fusing history, verse, and fiction, create a truly remarkable chef-d'œuvre in Ukrainian literature. Yet, as a concluding reflection, and, perhaps, not completely a fair one but from a Western perspective, that concept of this historical novel which looks toward the poet for historical record keeping — is somewhat disquieting. It is true that culture is the ultimate resistance to tyranny, but poets as spokesmen, as the conscience, as the historians of the nation — all elements of the romantic notion still hearkening to Shevchenko — replace poets who as individuals simply create and verbalize their personal vision of the world. One keeps hoping that this weight of responsibility placed on the shoulders of a poet is not a generic feature of Ukrainian poets but directly related to political circumstance. Perhaps someday Ukrainian poets too will not have any special "behests." They will just be.

With great difficulty I suffered myself out with you,  
It was all like a vision, a dream.  
Love crawled up quietly like Delilah,  
and reason slept, a trusting Samson.  
Now it is time for us to part. Daybreak.  
Mirages froze on the white windows.  
And how will we be, how will we be?!  
so kindred yet so strange.  
This fairy tale of days was so brief.  
This bright dream — left without return.  
This quiet glow above my fate! —  
has remained for all of my life.

- Translated from the Ukrainian of Lina Kostenko by Michael M. Naydan  
from the collection *Originality* (1980)

This isn't a miracle, but a burning scent, such love terrifies me.  
The black magic of night, tell me with the voice of rivers —  
this anxiety, this tenderness,  
an undarkened paradise without expulsion,  
enchanted happiness, — does it happen like this forever?  
Every day what do we unnoticeably lose from our illuminations?  
How reason avoids us! My soul has grown weary of hawks.  
I exhort you, be extraordinary for me forever.  
The black magic of night, tell me with the voice of rivers.

- Translated from the Ukrainian of Lina Kostenko by Michael M. Naydan  
from the collection *Garden of Unthawed Sculptures* (1987)