



Canadian Slavonic Papers

Russian and Ukrainian Studies and the New World Order

Author(s): Oleh S. Ilnytskyj

Source: *Canadian Slavonic Papers / Revue Canadienne des Slavistes*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (December 1992), pp. 445-458

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

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40869432>

Accessed: 15/06/2014 21:23

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

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



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

<http://www.jstor.org>

Oleh S. Ilnytzkyj

Russian and Ukrainian Studies and the New World Order*

Should the intelligentsia[’s] “Ukrainian” idea ... strike the national soil and set it on fire ... [the result will be] a gigantic and unprecedented schism of the Russian nation, which, such is my deepest conviction, will result in a veritable disaster for the state and for the people. All our “borderland” problems will pale into mere bagatelles compared to such a prospect of bifurcation and—should the “Belorussians” follow the “Ukrainians”—the “trifurcation” of Russian culture.¹

Peter Struve (1911)

Alexander Tsipko, a philosopher and democrat-turned-nationalist, spoke for many in the middle ground of Russian politics, when he wrote last year that without Kiev, the cultural centre of Rus until the 12th century, “there can be no Russia in the old, real sense of the word.”²

The Economist (1993)

Anyone following the unceasing political sparring between Ukraine and Russia must recognize that these two nations are not just contesting borders and fleets. Their new and separate existence from each other has roused intellectual and cultural problems which can be called, without undue exaggeration, almost as sensitive as the military and territorial ones. As a new state, Ukraine is not only defining its political geography, but is energetically reconstituting its historical memory, re-thinking national issues that previously had been either taboo or severely circumscribed by both Tsarist and Soviet authorities. In so doing, Ukraine appears to be challenging Russia’s own sense of self which, by and large, is defined with reference to this land, its culture and history. The idea that Ukraine is not Russia (and the implication that it may never have been) places many Russians in a quandary. It is not only the rather elementary fact that Ukraine is seeking the return of certain cultural artifacts housed presently in

* *Canadian Slavonic Papers* invites comments from interested readers in the form of short articles or letters to the Editor. An early draft of this paper was read in March 1993 at a seminar of the Department of Slavic and East European Studies, University of Alberta.

¹ Quoted in Richard Pipes, *Struve: Liberal on the Right, 1905–1944* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980) 211–212.

² “The post-cold-war war,” *The Economist*, 19 June 1993, 49.

Russian museums (something Russia finds easy to dismiss),³ but, more fundamentally, the fact that Ukraine, by its very political existence and through its intensive national soul searching, is raising doubts about Russia's exclusive claims to specific historical periods (e.g., Kievan Rus') as well as individual cultural figures (e.g., Vedel', Berezovs'kyi, Gogol', Kostomarov, Potebnia, Dovzhenko, Malevich). In general, by laying claim to the "Ukrainian national factor" in the history and culture of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union—a factor which hitherto passed primarily as "Russian"—the monolithic image of Russian culture appears to be under siege.⁴

Invigorating as this rediscovery and reassessment is for Ukrainians, the process is sowing resentment among Russians of the most diverse backgrounds. There is a sense that these developments are a diminution of Russia, a hijacking of its history.⁵ From Solzhenitsyn to Ruts'koi, from Zhirinovskii to Lebed',⁶ and including such acclaimed Western minds as H  l  ne Carr  re d'Encausse (who is of Russian descent), Ukraine's independence is interpreted as a tragedy for Russia, an unnatural violation of history, culture, and geography. The voice of Carr  re d'Encausse, inasmuch as it is simultaneously Western and Russian, is particularly revealing. In a *Pravda* interview (December 1992) she said the following:

³ "Non-Russian CIS members seek return of national treasures. Representatives from over half of the CIS states met in Minsk on 12–13 January, to discuss renewing efforts to secure the return of national cultural and historical treasures which were removed during the Soviet and Tsarist periods and which have largely ended up in Russian museums. The states which took part were Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan; Armenia and Azerbaijan sent observers. A year ago, at the CIS summit in Minsk of 14 February, the heads of the CIS states signed an agreement on the return of cultural and historical treasures but this accord was in effect torpedoed when on 20 May the Russian parliament rejected it...." *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No.12, 20 Jan. 1993.

⁴ "Ukrains'ki faktory i 'beloe dvizheniie,'" *Khreshchatyk*, No. 205, 28 Oct. 1992, 5. The Ukrainian press is replete with articles examining various aspects of Ukrainian culture, national identity, history, etc. Special emphasis is being placed on events and figures banned by Tsarist and Soviet authorities.

⁵ Mary Mycio, "Ukraine takes Russians' Identity with it," *The European*, 30 Aug. 1992. Cf. also *Nationalities Papers* 20.2 (1992): 8, 86, 88, 112, et passim.

⁶ "Lebed' warns Ukraine. Interviewed by the Kiev newspaper *Nezavisimost'*.... on 9 February, Lt. Gen. Aleksandr Lebed', commander of Russia's 14th Army in Moldova, condemned the 'parade of sovereignties' of the former Soviet republics as a 'darkening of the mind' and predicted that sovereignty will lead to wars; 'therefore it is necessary to eradicate it.' Pointing to the Dniester conflict, Lebed' warned that 'something similar is looming in Ukraine,' owing, he alleged, to the implementation of the Ukrainian language law in Ukraine's 'Russian-speaking' regions. Lebed' has previously urged Ukraine to rejoin Russia in a single state." *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No.29, 12 Feb. 1993.

The West does not understand that a split between Ukraine and Russia would be a colossal tragedy not only for Russia but also for all of Europe. I agree with Solzhenitsyn. Everything is possible for Russia except a split with Ukraine and Belorussia. Russia without Ukraine—this is an historical tragedy. This would mean that the border with Europe would correspond with the Russian-Ukrainian border, that Russia would be thrown out of Europe. The West does not understand what kind of tragedy this will be...

A little further, she reflects on the Crimea:

...Take, for example, the Crimean problem. Russia without the Crimea—this is something not entirely normal... This problem will have to be solved...⁷

Russians who tend to see the separation of Ukraine from Russia as a national calamity (frequently with little regard to what Ukrainians think about it), are in many instances also vocal advocates of restoring in some form a Greater Russia or the Soviet Union.⁸ In contrast, an overwhelming majority of Ukrainians feel neither a sense of political or cultural loss at the disappearance of the Soviet Union, nor any particular desire to unite with Russia. Despite severe economic travails, Ukrainians tend to interpret all attempts at reviving a common state with Russia as a dire peril.⁹ Such differences between the two

⁷ Cf. "Sud'by Rossii," *Pravda*, 4 Dec. 1992, No. 181, 3; Vasyl' Pliushch, "Sevastopol'—iak 'kozyrna' karta," *Literaturna Ukraina*, No. 51, 24 Dec. 1992.

⁸ One of the more troubling aspects of the Ukrainian-Russian debate is the dearth of Russian voices prepared to take a principled and unambiguous stand on Ukraine's right to an independent existence. The voices for the "re-unification" of Russia and Ukraine, on the other hand, are vociferous and many. The following are just a few random examples. "[Arkadii] Volsky told Moscow TV on 5 January that... he ... [is] in favor of resurrecting a new common state on the territory of the former Soviet Union." *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No.4, 8 Jan. 1993. Cf. also: "Russian Deputies' Factions, Movements Call For CIS Integration," *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 14, 22 Jan. 1993; also: "Khasbulatov on CIS Reintegration. Parliamentary speaker Ruslan Khasbulatov told *Den'* (5–11 Sept.) that he expects the resurrection of a new kind of Soviet empire, and called for the development of a new common state ideology based on Russian traditions..." *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 176, 14 Sept. 1993.

⁹ "Ukrainian Attitudes Toward The Former Soviet Union And CIS. The results of two opinion polls published in Kiev on 6 Jan. ... show that many Ukrainians regret the collapse of the Soviet Union because of the economic hardship it has brought but nevertheless strongly oppose the restoration of the USSR.... 52% of respondents view the collapse of the Soviet Union as a 'great tragedy'; most singled out the steep price rises in Ukraine during 1992 as the main reason for thinking so. On the other hand, according to ... *Pravda Ukrainy*, only 5.9% of those questioned want to see the Soviet Union revived. Just over one fifth, 22.3%, want Ukraine to withdraw from the CIS. ... [O]n 7 Jan., Ukrainian TV reported ... strong support for an acceleration of economic and political reform and for Ukraine's withdrawal from the CIS." *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No.4, 8 Jan. 1993. Cf. also: "Ukrainian Diplomat On Relations With Russia. On 25 August ... Oleh Bai, a counselor and envoy of the Ukrainian embassy in Moscow..., said that the old 'mentality of the Soviet Union' still cast a shadow over [Ukrainian-Russian relations], and that in Moscow the 'old attitude' ... remains.

peoples would suggest that they have a radically divergent understanding of themselves and each other. As the two begin sorting out their respective identities, the stage is being set for cultural and historical “turf wars”—assuming, of course, that more violent clashes do not take their place¹⁰—which have the potential of radically changing even the West’s understanding and conceptualization of East Slavic history.

Judging by what is frequently said in the North American and European media, it could be argued that the West’s reaction to Ukrainian independence is in some ways analogous to the Russian. Both Russia and the West share a certain disbelief at this turn of events and both betray a lack of enthusiasm and understanding for Ukraine’s statehood. While Russia, generally, is embraced by the world as a fledgling democracy deserving of Western aid, Ukraine tends to be viewed with suspicion. “From the very beginning,” writes Anne Applebaum, “American diplomats found the Ukrainian independence movement irritating—it interfered with America’s policy of supporting first Gorbachev, then Yeltsin. When George Bush went to Kiev in August, 1991, three weeks before the Moscow putsch, he warned the Ukrainians against ‘suicidal’ nationalism; Russian nationalism, presumably, was a more constructive force. ‘God Bless the Soviet Union,’ he told them.”¹¹ The media echoed these attitudes. Not so long ago, a front-page headline in the *New York Review of Books* asked the question: “A Nasty New Ukraine?” And *The Boston Herald* (Aug. 10, 1992) suggested that “Ukraine could become a serious threat to the new world order.” Some pundits fear the dreaded specter of “Ukrainization,” raising alarms that it may “become a

Bai said that he is frequently asked ... ‘When will you [Ukraine] return.’ It was imperative, he maintained, that Ukrainian-Russian relations be ... based on mutual respect for each other as independent states....” *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 163, 26 Aug. 1993.

¹⁰ “Russian-Ukrainian Nuclear War? The newspaper of the ‘spiritual opposition’ in Russia, *Den’* ... quotes from what it claims to be a recent meeting of Russia’s ‘shadow government’ in its issue for 7–13 Feb. The ‘shadow’ foreign minister is quoted as saying that the situation with Ukraine is growing ever more dangerous, and that ‘we as professionals should study the possible scenarios of an unexpected nuclear war with Kiev, which, should it break out, will be conducted in the absence of any canons and rules turned out by geopolitical thought in the period of [nuclear] parity.’” *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 34, 19 Feb. 1993; cf. also: “NATO TO GET BRIEFING ... Reuters reported on 14 Nov. that Moscow has offered to send a high-level delegation to NATO headquarters ... to brief alliance leaders ... on Russia’s recently announced military doctrine.... NATO sources were reported as saying that ... it appeared to contain positive elements ... [but] problem areas were identified as whether Russia might be prepared to use nuclear arms against Ukraine....” *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 219, 15 Nov. 1993.

¹¹ Anne Applebaum, “The Comfort of Missiles,” *The Spectator*, 26 June 1993, 13.

tool of Ukrainian hegemony.”¹² Dmitri Simes, of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, told *Moscow News* that Ukraine is “on the whole too cocky and that it shouldn't talk too much about Russian imperialism....”¹³ Henry Kissinger's warnings about Russian nationalism in February 1992¹⁴ mostly took a back seat to the idea of Ukraine as an international “culprit.” *The Christian Science Monitor* actually placed Ukraine in the company of North Korea, Libya, and Iraq.¹⁵

The West's grievances against Ukraine might appear to be based primarily on her slowness in ratifying the START I treaty. While this is a factor, a closer examination reveals that the problem has other, equally important dimensions. Much as in Russia's case, Ukraine seems to trigger cultural and historical anxieties in Western commentators, perhaps because they are “convinced ... that Ukrainians are a subspecies of the Russian nation.”¹⁶ Those who think in this way harbor lingering doubts (even after 90% of the population voted for independence) about the legitimacy of Ukraine's separateness and statehood. Ukrainian cultural assertiveness inspires some individuals to questionable humor (“For sheer tetchiness, [Ukrainians] take the cake,”¹⁷ writes Clarence Brown), while others warn about historical revisionism.¹⁸

An instructive example of the latter is the relatively recent article entitled “Not so Free at Last” by Abraham Brumberg, former editor of the journal *Problems of Communism*. Brumberg rightly points out that “the tensions between Russia and Ukraine ... go deeper than disagreements about territorial or military matters.” “They are rooted,” he says, “in the acutely different perceptions that the two nations have of each other and their history” (p. 56). This promising thesis, however, does not lead to an analysis of these divergent perspectives but turns rather into an exposé of the way Ukrainians are “rewriting

12 A. Brumberg, “Not so Free at Last,” *New York Review Of Books*, Oct. 1992, 60

13 *Moscow News*, No. 36, 6 Sept. 1992, 12. Cf. *Ukrainian Weekly*, No. 48, 29 Nov. 1992, 7.

14 “The New Russian Question” *Newsweek*, 10 Feb. 1992, 34. See also the editorials on Russian nationalism in *The Globe and Mail*, 25 Jan. 1993, and in *The New York Times*, 1 Aug. 1993.

15 Cf. Thomas M. Nichols, “Nationalism and Nukes,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 1 Dec. 1992, 18.

16 Anne Applebaum, “How we bombed on nukes in Ukraine,” *Wall Street Journal*, 30 June 1993.

17 Clarence Brown, “Ukrainians Get No Respect,” *Princeton Alumni Weekly*, 9 Dec. 1992, 17. Brown also writes: “My colleague Nina Berberova ..., a quintessential St. Petersburg snob ..., said that ... her smart set had had a standard phrase for ... a display of bumpkin quaintness: ‘They give me a *Ukrainian feeling!*’” [Emphasis in the original]. He then adds: “There is something delicious about such extremes of snobbery....” These and similar statements are passed off as humor and hyperbole.

18 Cf. “Budiansky Not Alone,” *Ukrainian Weekly*, No. 50, 13 Dec. 1992, 7.

history” (p. 58). According to Brumberg, history must grant “that Ukraine, far from being a part of Russia, is a distinct nation ...; that it has been seeking independence for well over a century ...; [But, apparently, not much longer—O.S.I.] and that [Ukrainians] ... have a right to self-determination” (p. 57). Brumberg provides a capsule summary of Ukrainian history and presents his version as the “... reasonable ... view,” which, he contends, “is too dry and legalistic for many Ukrainians.... [a]nd so [they] have turned to a different source—the theories developed by Ukrainian scholars in the nineteenth century and then generally accepted by successive generations of Ukrainian historians” (p. 57). His article sets out to prove how wrong and unreasonable Ukrainian historians are, in part by portraying Ukrainian historiography as a monolithically uniform and completely consonant discipline that does little else but spin unfounded myths. Brumberg concludes: “The ‘Ukrainian national myth’ is evidently a mixture of historical fact and questionable generalizations, at once of reality and fiction, of just grievances and special pleading.”¹⁹ Elsewhere, he adds: “When Ukraine proclaimed its independence ..., it thus began with a mixed legacy of justifiable grievances, myth-making, and a bitter hatred of Russia, which it held responsible for the imposition of communist rule in Ukraine” (p. 59). He paints a picture of “xenophobia” and “intolerance” (p. 60), “strident nationalism and anti-Russianism” (p. 59) in Ukraine. He cites a study that attributes Russian-Ukrainian tensions in L’viv to “Ukrainian ‘chauvinism’” (p. 60).²⁰ In short, the clear insinuation is that the dangers and instability in this region must be ascribed first and foremost to “extravagant” (p. 58) Ukrainian historical claims and “distorted Ukrainian historiography” (p. 59). In straightening out Ukrainians, Brumberg defaults to a repertoire of familiar arguments that end up reaffirming conventional Western wisdom concerning East Slavic and Russian history, including the idea that the Ukrainian language was “[d]erived from Russian” (p. 56), a statement for which he later apologized.²¹ Brumberg shows little if any skepticism toward the history of Russia, to which he defers implicitly and explicitly as the measure of truth for this part of the world. Ukrainians are in effect faulted for not living up to the images prepared for them by Russia and the West.

If we take the above as exemplary of at least some segments of our society and scholarly community, it could be said that, for Westerners, Ukraine’s arrival on the international scene is almost as disorienting as for Russians—perhaps

¹⁹ *New York Review Of Books*, “Not so Free at Last,” 58.

²⁰ In contrast, Anne Applebaum speaks of “Ukraine’s exemplary treatment of its national minorities.” Cf. “The Comfort of Missiles,” 13.

²¹ See the exchange of letters between Brumberg and his critics in the 14 Jan. and 28 Jan. 1993 issues of *New York Review Of Books*.

because the store of knowledge the West has about this region offers no logical explanation for current events. Histories of Russia and the Soviet Union have not prepared Western public opinion for what is taking place. Many individuals have difficulty coping with Ukraine's self-image, her cultural and historical discourse, and, moreover, are quite reluctant to question their own long-held stereotypes. For them, Ukraine is an irritating and strange puzzle that refuses to go away. Moreover, her sudden intrusion into the Western psyche accentuates problems in East Slavic history which, under the old political order, were easy to ignore or sweep aside (after all, everything was "Russia"). It is not surprising that Brumberg, for example, would prefer to resolve these problems by rolling back or denying Ukrainian readings of history, rather than having to revise familiar concepts and theories of Russian and East Slavic historiography. To borrow a Bakhtinian phrase, where yesterday there was primarily a monologic discourse, there is now evidence of an emerging dialogue. The introduction of a second (i.e., Ukrainian) voice—and soon, probably, a third (Belarusian)—has a disconcerting effect on individuals inside and outside the East Slavic disciplines, many of whom seem to feel that the Ukrainian perspective is either extravagant or irrelevant. Under these circumstances, Ukraine, as it were, has indeed become a destabilizing force, for it is undermining an intellectual order with which the West is comfortable.

The issue can be phrased in another way. If we accept, for the sake of argument, that Ukraine is constructing a myth, then it may also be true that we are on the threshold of the dissolution of another myth, one that has guided Western thinking for a long time. The myth I have in mind treats East Slavic history, essentially, as Russian national history. Westerners know the East Slavic world mainly through this one story, which has rather successfully crowded out other potential explanations. Most facts concerning this part of the world were and continue to be shaped by the overarching premise that, of all the Eastern Slavs, only the Russians have an unambiguous and uninterrupted thousand-year old historical tradition in this part of the world, and that they are the fountainhead from which Ukrainians and Belarusians spring. As any good myth, this one tends to expunge anything that does not fit its pattern; it even has a name for anomalous tales—they are called "nationalistic." During the Soviet era, narrators of unorthodox tales—creators of unauthorized "imagined communities"—were punished, even put to death. However, now that the threat of violence has been lifted, competing plots and new tellers of tales are emerging. Naturally, not all the stories are entirely new (many of us in the field have heard them before and may even subscribe to them in some measure), but since they are being told in an entirely different political context, they are acquiring a novel and, some would argue, totally unwelcomed resonance. They

certainly have arrived at the doorstep of our profession with a new sense of urgency and we too face the question whether to listen or not.²²

The social sciences are constantly challenged to be open-minded. Among other things, they are being asked today to examine the possibility that there may be a male bias to culture, that there may be a white bias to history, and that there may be too much Eurocentrism in our textbooks. Most scholars would agree that remaining receptive to new and untraditional ideas is a healthy attitude. Guided by this spirit, I ask: is not this an opportune moment to entertain the notion that Slavic Studies in the West is Russocentric? Or is posing this question to be construed as a sign of Ukrainian nationalism?

This brings me to my main point.

How Russia sorts out her political and psychological problems with Ukraine is an issue that we in the West can affect only indirectly. However, as North American Slavists and as Western Scholars, we do have a responsibility to our field and to our students, as well as to our political leaders who (occasionally) rely on our judgment. After all, is not our discipline today being accused of failing miserably to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union, largely because it was so narrowly focused on Russia? As Leslie H. Gelb put it in the *New York Times Magazine* (Dec. 8, 1992)—“Even those who are experts on the Soviet Union are really experts on Moscow, not on the Soviet republics and their enormous variety of languages and cultures.” If this contains even an ounce of truth, then it would be appropriate at this time for our profession to examine—through a concerted interdisciplinary approach—some of the deeply rooted but poorly articulated premises that guide our thinking and teaching of Slavic Studies in general, and the Ukrainian-Russian relationship in particular. In this respect, I think special responsibility falls to Russianists and Ukrainianists, for it is through these two fields that some of the major fault lines of our profession run. Polonists too have a role to play, but clearly the problems and political consequences of the Ukrainian-Polish relationship are not as grave. Polish-Ukrainian scholarly contacts, generally, have a better record and certainly better prospects. Consider, for example, the January 1993 agreement between Ukraine and Poland “to cooperate in seeking to reconcile long-standing differences in historical perceptions and in the preparation of history textbooks.”²³ It seems unlikely that any time soon Ukraine and Russia will reach a similar accord. Fortunately, as Western scholars, we do not need formal agreements to initiate a debate on Slavic history and culture in our own countries.

²² To avoid any possible misunderstanding, let me stress that I am not suggesting here some mechanical substitution of one national “myth” for another.

²³ “Suchocka In Kiev,” *RFE/RL Daily Report*, No. 7, 13 Jan. 1993.

Not everyone will accept the premise that Slavic studies has a Russian bias or that it needs to be re-examined, especially from a Ukrainian perspective. Some would consider the issue raised here wholly artificial, an invention of Ukrainian scholarship, its failure to see things for what they really are. However, whatever our personal attitudes, it is safe to say that we will not be able to ignore this question, if only because Ukrainian studies will continue to raise it. It bears emphasizing that Ukrainian scholarship is now extricated from the artificial external constraints under which it labored for such a long time. Even though at the moment it faces serious practical and theoretical problems it has nonetheless at its disposal unprecedented resources. Thus there is every reason to believe that Ukrainian scholarship is poised to affect the dialogue with Russia and the West. Already Ukraine's independence has certain repercussions. On the simplest level, publications in North America are even now adopting "Kharkiv" instead of "Kharkov," "L'viv" instead of "L'vov" and "Rivne" instead of "Rovno"—if for no other reason that this is how the new editions of world maps are beginning to read. Moreover, chances are that scholars from Ukraine will in the future contribute to American and Canadian conferences, journals, and encyclopedias just as Soviet (mostly Russocentric) scholars had done before. It is thus a foregone conclusion that the history of Ukraine and the East Slavic lands will be presented in ways that are not entirely congruent with mainstream North American thinking. This means that, like it or not, Ukraine will have to be engaged intellectually by our discipline. That engagement can be reluctant and arrogant or it can be proactive and open-minded. The choice, no doubt, is ours to make.

These general observations would clearly be incomplete without at least an example or two of the type of problems that Ukrainianists and Russianists in the West need to address. I will not dwell on the continuing Western practice of identifying Kievan Rus' almost exclusively with "Russia" (despite good arguments to the contrary), for it seems to me such an obvious area of concern and controversy. I have chosen instead to highlight a problem in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Slavic literary history, which, in my view, serves as a classic example of an intellectually untenable Russocentrism. In pointing to this problem, I, a Ukrainianist, am explicitly asking: "Is this position tenable from the point of view of a Russianist or Slavist today?"

My first reference is to Prince D.S. Mirsky's *A History of Russian Literature*.²⁴ In a section entitled "The Passing of Old Russia. The South-Western Revival," Mirsky writes: "After the Union of Lublin (1569) all the west of Russia (White Russia, Galicia, and Ukraine) came under the direct rule of Poland. The Poles started a vigorous campaign against ... the Russian nationality. They easily succeeded in winning over the West Russian nobility...." (p. 44). Further he speaks of "The Latin culture adapted by West Russia..." (p. 44) and states that the "Academy of Kiev" "became the centre of all intellectual activity in West Russia" (p. 44). Ivan Vyshens'kyi is described by Mirsky as "a sort of attenuated Ukrainian Avvakum" (p. 44). And on the development of verse, he says the following: "The writing of verse was first introduced into Russia from Poland in the late sixteenth century. The oldest extant specimens are to be found in the rhymed preface to the Ostrog Bible of 1581."²⁵ In the seventeenth century much rhymed verse was written by West Russian scholars" (p. 48).

As is obvious, Mirsky would have his readers believe that "White Russia, Galicia, and Ukraine" are "Russia" and that the peoples and cultures in this area are best characterized by the term "Russian." For Mirsky this seems so self-evident that he offers no explanation, even though it is clear that he is speaking of a period of almost one hundred years (1569 to 1654) *before* Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi's oath of allegiance to the tsar. Thus what Ukrainians know as their own literature and history is treated here as an integral aspect of *Russian* literature and history. There is no hint that the developments about which he speaks occurred in a cultural system other than the Russian or that they reflect some other (e.g., Ukrainian) literary process. For Mirsky, apparently, Vyshens'kyi and Avvakum is as logical a national and cultural pairing as, say, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky. Anyone extrapolating from what he says, would have to assume that the writing of this period and this region was done in the same "Russian" language used in Muscovy. In short, Mirsky's approach suggests that the period and place he examines is nothing but an organic part of Russia, and that "Ukraine" is but a geographic designation for one of its many regions.

Is this is a model of Russian (and Ukrainian) literature that we wish to impart to students in North America today?

It might be argued that Mirsky is a moot point, inasmuch as he wrote in the twenties. Perhaps. Nevertheless, a few observations are in order. First, it is

²⁴ *A History of Russian Literature. From the Earliest Times to the Death of Dostoyevsky (1881)* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1937). All quotes are taken from this edition.

²⁵ Elsewhere Mirsky says: "... The first bible to be printed in Russia was that of Ostrog (1581) ...," p. 7.

ironic that Mirsky's history appeared initially in 1927, i.e., at the height of Ukrainization in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, when many a scholar would have considered such views seriously outdated. Second, as is well-known, Mirsky's history (one of the most influential works of Western scholarship) has gone through several editions, some revised and corrected by Francis J. Whitfield. The passages I cited, however, have never been either the object of revision or critical commentary. From this, one might draw the unflattering conclusion that, as far as Russianists in the West were concerned, Mirsky's interpretation of this period was perfectly correct. Thirdly, Mirsky's views on Ukraine and Ukrainians have far from disappeared. They were echoed two years ago in Solzhenitsyn's notion (this time in reference to the nineteenth century) that "in a severed Galicia" Ukrainian was "a distorted ... language ... produced ... with active Austrian encouragement" in order to draw Ukrainians "away from their habit of using the Russian language" (p. 16).²⁶

For another example, I turn to Evelyn Bristol's *A History of Russian Poetry*, published in 1991. Again, the period in question is the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Bristol writes:

The acquisition of Western ideas [by Russia] was considerably furthered by the *return* of the Ukraine, with Kiev, from the Polish-Lithuanian state during the seventeenth century ... The *return* of the Ukraine, which was now a source of both scholasticism and popular literary currents, was gradual. During the sixteenth century, many peasant refugees from Great Russia [sic] had fled to the south. This new population gave rise to a *Cossack ethnic group*. In 1569 the Ukraine entered, together with Lithuania, into a union with Poland. An aggressive policy of Polonization was applied to the new lands; a Uniate church was founded, as were Latin schools. The *Ukrainians* began to feel oppressed as an ethnic minority. The *Cossacks* were able, through political and military action, to facilitate the *return of the territory* to Russia. In 1654, they declared their own suzerainty to Moscow.... The restitution was completed in 1709, when Peter the Great won the west bank during one of his many conflicts with Sweden. Despite their ethnic and patriotic loyalties [sic], the educated members of the *Ukrainian population* did not relinquish [sic] the cultural advantages of their Western schooling.... (pp. 23, 24, emphases added).

Bristol does not actually refer to Ukrainians as Russians but, as is evident, everything in her text points to a perfect congruence between the two. Ukraine is

²⁶ Solzhenitsyn's full text reads: "As late as 1848, Galicians in Austria-Hungary referred to their national council as the 'Chief Russian Rada.' But then in a severed Galicia, and with active Austrian encouragement, a distorted Ukrainian language was produced, unrelated to popular usage and full of German and Polish words. This was followed by the attempt to force Carpatho-Russians away from their habit of using the Russian language." Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: *Rebuilding Russia. Reflections and Tentative Proposals*. Translated and Annotated by Alexis Klimoff (Farrar, Straus and Giroux: New York, 1991) 16. What Solzhenitsyn calls "Russian" was in fact "Rus'ka" (as in *Holovna Rus'ka Rada*), i.e., Ruthenian, a name used by Ukrainians.

little more than a territorial designation and the literary period in question is discussed as part of Russian letters, again, without any regard for the separateness of the two cultural systems during this period.²⁷ In a sense, Bristol's Russocentric scheme is even more dubious than Mirsky's. She suggests that the Great Russians colonized Ukraine, becoming a new ethnic group (Ukrainian Cossacks), apparently a result of Polonization.²⁸ The "restitution" of Ukraine to Russia implies a return to wholeness and normalcy. Thus, while Poland's division between Prussia, Austria, and Russia is described in terms of "swallowing" (p. 81), Ukraine is spoken of in terms of "a return" (p. 24).

Bristol's history reinforces the impression that Mirsky's views are not the exception in Russian studies but something akin to generally accepted common sense. What is particularly surprising in her case is that she makes no allusion to the fact that there are alternate (e.g., Ukrainian) interpretations of the Pereiaslav treaty (1654) and this period which rest on a sizable scholarly literature. This reluctance to introduce another perspective is often characteristic of Russian studies: it interfaces with Ukrainian sources reluctantly, perhaps on the assumption that there is nothing to be gained from such contacts.

A sharply different picture of this period emerges in Victor Terras' *A History of Russian Literature* (1991). In his preface, the author explains:

The literature of the early period arose mostly in regions that are today a part of the Ukraine and Belorussia. Much of the seventeenth-century Muscovite literature was generated by Ukrainian and Belorussian immigrants to Muscovy. It stands to reason that Ukrainian and Belorussian literatures have *as good a claim, or better*, to some of the authors and works dealt with in the first four chapters of this history of Russian literature.²⁹ The controversy over the beginning of Ukrainian and Belorussian as separate languages and literatures has not been broached in this history. Inclusion of such authors as Feofan Prokopovich, Saint Dimitry of Rostov, and Stefan Yavorsky does not necessarily imply that they were 'Russian' authors. It suggests only that they were important for the development of Russian literature (p. ix, emphasis added).

When Terras speaks of the Kiev Academy, he calls it "the cradle of Ukrainian literature and indirectly of modern Russian literature as well" (p. 101).

27 In contrast to Mirsky and Bristol, compare this statement by Paul Bushkovitch of Yale University: "Unlike the conservative (and many liberal) Russians of the last century, the men of the sixteenth century did not confuse Russians with East Slavs.... Russians were the subjects of the tsar ruling in Moscow: no "West Russians" or "Little Russians" for them." Cf. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 10.3/4 (1986): 356.

28 In another place, she suggests Ukrainians develop a new ethnic identity by "drifting away into the political sphere of Lithuania and Poland" (p. 19).

29 These four chapters are: "Russian Folklore," "Old Russian Literature: Eleventh to Thirteenth Centuries," "Old Russian Literature: Fourteenth to Sixteenth Centuries," "The Seventeenth Century." [O.S.I.]

A student, nurtured on views like Mirsky's and Bristol's, could conceivably take Terras' statements either as wholly incorrect or simply provocative. Certainly, his wording and conceptualization is quite a striking departure from the "norm."

But even in Terras' case some curious problems remain. Despite the care he takes in identifying the three literary legacies, he does not ultimately stray far from the model that animates the other histories. The "controversy" of origins to which he alludes, applies only to the "beginning of Ukrainian and Belorussian as separate languages and literatures" and, apparently, has no bearing upon "Russian" language and literature, which Terras treats as having commenced sometimes during or before the founding of Kievan Rus'. Terras refers to Kievan literature as *Russian* literature (not "Rus'ian," for example). Even stranger, considering his statement about Ukrainian and Belorussian claims, is the fact that Terras—exactly like Mirsky—sees no contradiction in calling Western Ukrainian writing "The Literature of Western Russia" (p. 100), a title he gives to one of his sections. He does this even as he correctly identifies most everything in this part as either "Ukrainian" or "Belorussian." Ukrainians and Belorussians are no longer "the Russian nationality" as in Mirsky, but their literatures, paradoxically, still end up as part of Russian letters. How does one justify this? Clearly, to call these writings "The Literature of Western Russia" is to imply much more than simply that "they were important for the development of Russian literature."

In the final analysis, Terras's desirable correctives do not solve the glaring problems of the other histories—they simply accentuate them. Certainly, students reading all three histories (a reasonable assumption, I'm sure) would be left confused and disoriented. Who exactly are these Ukrainians? Why are they so "nationalistic" if they are Russians? And more importantly: if Ukrainians have a "better" claim to the literatures of the eleventh through the seventeenth centuries, then on what basis does the Russian claim rest? On the idea that the Russian nationality sprung forth complete and mature in the tenth century in what is now Ukraine? Or another question: By what logic does an object that influences (West Ukrainian literature) turn into the object it influenced (Russian literature)? Tamed and qualified as it is in Terras's version, the Russocentric view of East Slavic history and culture still leaves much confusion in its wake.

In summary, I think it is accurate to state that the problems noted in these works are not personal idiosyncrasies but deeply ingrained traditions in Slavic and Russian studies. The Russocentric myth is not a marginal phenomenon but lies at the heart of much of the most regarded scholarship about the Eastern Slavs, existing there well-nigh as an unquestioned truth. This myth is rarely ever examined with the same diligence or indignation as, say, the "rewriting" of

history by Ukrainians. So “natural” is its presence that most of the time it is not even noticed. For example, a recent, very positive review of Terras’s *History* draws attention to “a large number of printer’s typos” but leaves without comment the notion of “The Literature of Western Russia.”³⁰ It is this type of selective blindness that leads otherwise serious scholars to various curiosities, e.g., saying that the Ukrainian language derives from Russian, dubbing entire periods of Ukrainian literature as “Russian,” and treating H. Skovoroda as a Russian writer.³¹ Perhaps, it also explains why in 1992 a reviewer (Halina Stephan) can speak of “the current [sic] Ukrainian efforts to establish the separateness [sic] of their literary tradition...,”³² making it sound as if the Ukrainian literary tradition had no distinct existence before the 1990s.

The problem as outlined here is especially pernicious in that this model of East Slavic culture is propagated not by bad books but by good ones. The instances I cited come from the pen of respected scholars who are backed by prestigious publishers (i.e., the university presses of Oxford and Yale). What is more, all these books are in many respects useful and insightful works on Russian literature. Mirsky, even today, is difficult to surpass.

It is safe to say that our scholarly community would be outraged if history after history would promote false, outdated facts and fantastic theories; it is therefore troubling indeed that such a central issue of Slavic studies as the one broached here can be presented over and over again on the basis of assumptions that are, if not actually antiquated, then certainly controversial and dubious. It is as if the work of Ukrainian research institutes at Harvard and the University of Alberta were inaccessible or the writings on these questions by scholars such as Bushkovitch, Frick, Goldblatt, Grabowicz, Keenan, Kohut, Lunt, Ostrowski, Picchio, Pritsak, Shevchenko, Shevelov, Sysyn, Szporluk and many others did not exist. For the sake of our discipline in North America, for the sake of all our students, especially those majoring in Russian and Ukrainian, I think it is imperative that we squarely face this problem by becoming more sensitive to its existence and by trying to accept into the mainstream more sophisticated methodologies for discussing the Ukrainian-Russian relationship.

³⁰ Cf. William E. Harkins’ review in *Slavic Review* 51.4 (1992): 846–847.

³¹ Robert Lord, *Russian Literature. An Introduction* (Kahn & Averill: London; Taplinger Publishing Co.: New York) 19.

³² *Slavic and East European Journal* 36. 4 (1992): 496.