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Symbolic Autobiography in the Prose of Mykola Khvyľovyi (Some Preliminary Observations)

GEORGE G. GRABOWICZ

When I first attempted to define the notion of symbolic autobiography in my early work on Shevchenko, and then in an essay on Shevchenko and Mickiewicz, I was persuaded (and I still hold it to be largely true) that this is a modality that characterizes, or is specifically empowered by, a Romantic poetics. It thus is marked by writing that is attuned to the unconscious and that implicitly opposes the special authenticity of the inner life to the putatively less authentic external and manifest world.¹ My subsequent recourse to this paradigm in connection with Ivan Franko's late long poems, however, suggested to me that the question of a historical poetics is decidedly secondary to the writer's readiness, indeed his need, to address the concealed or repressed levels and forces of his self—specifically of his sense of self and ultimately of his hidden, "shadow" self.² This need continually to reveal and conceal clearly is not confined to any one historical poetics, such as the Romantic. It is a more universal drive, especially evident in the modern period, and as such it is responsive to various interpretative strategies, particularly the psychoanalytic, but also the structuralist and the poststructuralist.

Most generally, the sense of symbolic autobiography involves not so much the writer's readiness to reveal key moments of his internal and hidden life—this confessional principle is quite prevalent, if not altogether universal, and can be said to animate whole genres or modes, such as the lyrical—as to endow them with both narrative extension and a certain narrative autonomy, and in particular to thematize them. As such, this becomes part of a broad modern or modernist tendency of self-referentiality or autothematism.³ One of the recent outer limits of such autothematism—as we see in the witty collection of self-referential and self-dematerializing pieces written in imitation of and homage to Borges's "Borges and I" by contemporary writers from Albee to Updike⁴—is a kind of ultimate dissociation of "the writer" from the "writer-as-real-person": "the writer" becomes radically other and unreachable, even, or especially, to the "writer-as-real-person" in whom he or she resides. Self-reflection and self-consciousness aside, that which defines symbolic autobiography and gives it its peculiar resonance is not the autobiographical moment, or event, or detail as such (for this is contingent even in "straight" or traditional, or avowedly veristic autobiography), but precisely its symbolic component, its encoding. In Shevchenko, who provides a paradigmatic instance of symbolic autobi-

ography, this encoding conforms to the basic structures of his mythopoesis and involves such key moments as the conflation of the fate of the poet-*kobzar* with the fate of the nation, the patterning of his life (the symbolic biography) in terms of the movement between (and thus recapitulation and reinforcement of) *communitas* and structure, and above all the enabling, reciprocal relationship between the poet as sinner and prophet.⁵

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As much as the psychological content—the basic matrix of the encoding—will differ from writer to writer, there also remains the question of narrative articulation, of individual poetics. In this connection, the figure of Mykola Khvylovyi stands out with peculiar intensity. He is arguably the outstanding Ukrainian writer of the early twentieth century, and he is almost certainly the one writer who like a lightning rod attracted, focused, and transmitted the enormous energies of his day—and the energies and powers of interpretation of succeeding generations. For us, Khvylovyi figures primarily as an author of remarkably evocative, yet still only spottily examined prose. The required basic rereading of his work, however, is clearly beyond the scope of this paper. What I propose here is a preliminary sketch of some basic issues—with particular reference to the way in which they flesh out the concept of symbolic autobiography. The specific moment that I will examine is that of the interface of the literary and the psychological in the context of thematized, self-conscious narrative. In a word, the basic issue I will examine is that of intertextuality; in effect, of symbolic autobiography as intertextuality.

For anyone even generally acquainted with the life and work of Khvylovyi, the paradigm of symbolic autobiography would seem particularly apposite. One of the major tasks in the rereading of Khvylovyi that I am calling for is to distinguish between surface (functionally biographical, ideological, and other such) moments and between deeper psychological structures that through the mediation of narrative regulate the interaction between Khvylovyi's life and art, and effectively modulate the one by the other. Surely the most striking and dramatic of these is Khvylovyi's end—his suicide. As various accounts, and the documentary evidence reveal, it was the culmination of a pervasive and deeply held belief in his being fated to play a role, to act out and, even more importantly, to write out a certain calling. The suicide itself, as we see so powerfully from the account of Antonina Kulish, the wife of Mykola Kulish (Khvylovyi's close friend, who was present at the end) was in the best sense of the term "scripted":

May 13 was a nice sunny day. Suddenly Khvylovyi rang and called Mykola to the phone. He said, "Hurovych, it's a nice day today. Come to my place, my friend, and we'll go for a walk in the park."

Mykola was quite puzzled as he walked away from the phone. It'd been such a long time since he had seen Khvylovyi. Almost a year since they last

spoke, even though Khvył'ovyi lived in the same building and only a few steps from our apartment. Mykola went. Somehow he later described it to me:

At Khvył'ovyi's place he met Dosvitnyi, Vyshnia, Epik, Dniprov'skyi, Iohansen, Arkadii Liubchenko, and one other man. He was surprised that Khvył'ovyi had invited such a large company for a walk in the park. Khvył'ovyi began serving tea; his mood was agitated, and elevated, and purposefully gay. Nobody thought this strange. It was obvious to everyone: the arrest of Ialovyi was a complete blow; most powerful, perhaps, for Khvył'ovyi. Everybody seemed depressed. Some were drinking tea and the host took a guitar and began singing the words of Pushkin's poem "Besy":

Хоть убей, следа не видно;
Сбились мы. Что делать нам!
В поле бес нас водит, видно,
Да кружит по сторонам . . .

After this he put down the guitar and went into his study. Suddenly everyone heard a loud shot from the study. When they ran in Khvył'ovyi was sitting in his chair, a trickle of blood was flowing from his right temple and falling drop by drop onto the floor; his hand with the colt in it was drooping, and the colt fell out of it. My husband ran with horror into the room and shouted:

Khvył'ovyi has shot himself!⁶

Apart from his sense of the dramatic, and his underlying and pervasive autothematism, this event points to another essential feature Khvył'ovyi shares with other powerful writers: his profound, uncanny ability to program his own reception. In his case, this higher performance—his playing out both a role and a *fatum*—is expanded into his afterlife.

Immediately after his death, Khvył'ovyi's image and persona begin to assume iconic and cultic and even mythic dimensions. The funeral orations themselves, despite their (obviously officially inspired) castigations of the suicidal act, depict him as unquestionably the central player in the literary process.⁷ In short order, in Soviet Ukraine any positive remembrance was quickly suppressed and for subsequent decades, up to the final collapse of the Soviet Union, Khvył'ovyi became the single most vilified Ukrainian writer and public figure in the scholarly and parascholarly discourse (considerably more so than Vynnychenko and Hrushevs'kyi, and unquestionably more than the avowed nationalist enemy, Dontsov). Outside the totalitarian realm, however, the growth of Khvył'ovyi's reputation was intense. Initially, it was possible for a critic like Mykhailo Rudnyts'kyi to maintain a distanced attitude, to see him as part of a modernist current, but without apologia and even with some irony and scepticism.⁸ But this was the exception. Writing immediately after Khvył'ovyi's death, Dmytro Dontsov saw him as the ideal incarnation of the Ukrainian will to resist or perish in the struggle, indeed implicitly as his own—Dontsov's—alter ego and emanation.⁹ By the tenth anniversary of Khvył'ovyi's death, at the height of World War II, his heroization was in full

bloom: as reflected in the memoirs of Arkadii Liubchenko,¹⁰ Khvyľovyi was again depicted as a preternatural force of will and emotion, as a moral leader, and virtually as a prescient, self-sacrificing national martyr. Two years earlier, as he began his diary in a Kharkiv that had just been—as he then saw it—liberated by the Germans, Liubchenko turns to Khvyľovyi in the very first lines:

Away from Moscow! Do you hear, Mykola? If you were around now, you'd be with us!¹¹

For Olena Teliha, who also wrote around this time (and undoubtedly under the influence of Dontsov, her erstwhile lover and editor), Khvyľovyi had become a moral, and national, and voluntarist standard.¹² Ievhen Malaniuk, writing a few years later (and somewhat less rhapsodically than Teliha, but with no less passion and with characteristic verve) saw Khvyľovyi as the exemplar not only of will (the Dontsovian formula), but of reason and of a sublime sense of the cause. Characteristically, too, Malaniuk was able to see and articulate the reciprocal scripting that occurs in Khvyľovyi's life and art. "Khvyľovyi," he wrote, "was sovereign not so much in art—for this was but one of the manifestations of his creative being—as in life. Thus, too, his death carries the same sign of sovereignty as does his life."¹³

In subsequent decades this line evolved into a curious, but hardly unique hybrid of exegesis and scholarship combined with apologia and hero-worship, as in the writings of Hryhorii Kostiuk, Iurii Lavrinenko, Iurii Boiko-Blokhyn, and Yuri Sherekh-Shevelov. Apart from these literary critics, there were also such political activists as Vasyl Hryshko and Ivan Maistrenko, for whom Khvyľovyi was a basic touchstone for their vision of Ukraine and its recent past. The cult of Khvyľovyi also begat a counteroffensive among the right-wing nationalists who saw in Khvyľovyi's national communism only the communism—and behind it the hand of the Cheka. In a classically naive reading, which mirrors—albeit without the introspection—and thus parodies the perspective of Malaniuk, art and life were again blurred, and Khvyľovyi, with all apparent seriousness, was condemned as the Chekist who in his fanaticism killed his own mother; his story "Ia (Romantyka)," after all, was tangible proof of this.¹⁴ This and other such naive readings, however, should not be simply laughed off. Despite their aggressive and largely inarticulate form, they intimate a deeper level—even while they are unable to see beyond the mimetic, the overtly biographical, and, of course, the ideological.

In a word, the cult of Khvyľovyi and then the polarization of his reception, his posthumous existence as both hero and *bête noir*, attest to a remarkably powerful symbolic legacy or indeed biography. The question that must now be addressed is how this phenomenon is in turn scripted, encoded, and programmed by a deeper symbolic autobiography.

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Part of the answer—in effect, its textual basis—inheres in the fact that Khvylovyi's prose, virtually the entire corpus, is highly autothematic and self-referential, from the early stories of *Syni etiudy* such as "Zhyttia" and "Redaktor Kark" (1923), to such late pieces as "Z laboratorii" (1931). There are various subsets to this. For one, to a greater or lesser degree many of the works are metathematic and appear almost as exercises or fugues on the process of creation—most overtly "Vstupna novelia," "Redaktor Kark," and "Arabesky." In others, such as "Povist' pro sanatoriinu zonu" or "Z laboratorii" the meta- or autothematic coexists with a developed, coherent plot and story, which in this coexistence, however, is subtly subverted or decentered. As various critics have noticed—even while the term may not have been used and the systematics not always recognized—the entire corpus of Khvylovyi's prose, his essential style, is highly intertextual. Literature, literary allusions, scenes, characters, topoi, devices, and so on are not only continually introduced, varied, and parodied, but this very mode is thematized and toyed with. Not infrequently this is done with a satiric purpose: the conventions and expectations of the readership or of a genre are conjured up only to be mocked. Thus, for example, in "Redaktor Kark":

Мої любі читачі!—простий і зрозумілий лист.—Я боюсь, що ви мою новелю не дочитаєте до кінця. Ви в лабетах просвітянської літератури. І я поважаю. Та кожному свій час. Творити то є творити. Да. (1:135)

Or the unabashedly mocking opening of "Z laboratorii":

Письменник вирішив написати роман. Письменник був не зовсім бездарний (так принаймні авторитетна критика заявила) і безперечно близький пролетаріятові.

Але про що писати?—подумав письменник.—Про старі часи? Ні в якому разі! Про буденні, непомітні дрібниці? Ні за що! Треба писати про великі події наших днів.

Хто робить події,—письменникові відомо: їх робить робітничо-селянська маса! Відомо йому і за чим проводом: за проводом комуністичної партії. (3:155)

The satiric and parodic effect is augmented by the fact that these obsequious desiderata are not followed at all, and the narrative, like a runaway horse, cannot be controlled by the socialist-realist bridle.

Even on the surface level, however, the intertextuality, Khvylovyi's "literaturshchyna," is not solely determined by a satiric or even ironic thrust.¹⁵ To be sure, the very fact of drawing one's characters, for example, from the existing "classical" repertoire—the male lead, say, from Dostoevsky (Dmytrii Karamazov) and the servant woman from Kotsiubyn'skyi's "Smikh" (in "Val'dshnep")—having the heroine's father (in "Iz Varynoi biohrafii") be a

stock character from the vaudeville stage who can only repeat one and the same line, cannot but be seen as something ironic and comic. It is also very much in the air at that time. Without having to refer to the catalog-mantra of distant “great masters” (“Joyce, Proust, Gide, Kafka, Mann”),¹⁶ one can find more proximate examples, of, say, a Bulgakov or a Witkacy, or better still among the representatives of the Ukrainian avant-garde. Maik Iohansen in his masterful “Podorozh uchenoho Doktora Leonardo . . .” for example, programmatically reverses the centrality of landscape and characters—not throughout, but often and in various key scenes. The characters, in short, are movable and interchangeable cardboard figures. According to the author’s tongue-in-cheek, generic self-definition (“quoted” as he says in his English-language prefatory note, “for the use of critics only”), his is a “landscape novel,” “something that has never been deliberately attempted before.”¹⁷ This process of debunking and dematerializing not only conventions, but such seemingly indispensable literary structures or building blocks as character and plot is part of the poetics of both expressionism and surrealism, and in terms of the latter was strongly represented in the Ukrainian avant-garde theater by Les’ Kurbas.

In Khvyľovyĭ’s prose, intertextuality appears as a profound and ironic sense that the repertoire of literature (implicitly all literature) can be reduced to a kind of cultural shorthand, or, indeed, a detritus of culture. In terms of this implicit “poetics of impermanence and contingency” there seems to be a resonance between Khvyľovyĭ and his near-contemporary, the remarkable Polish prose writer Bruno Schulz.¹⁸ But more than philosophical, or culturological, or even satiric commentary, intertextuality provides for Khvyľovyĭ a narrative drive, a mode of self-assertion. For what must be stressed is that the core of his intertextuality is actualized in terms of his own works. In a word, the individual stories constitute, or at least repeatedly allude to an overarching “master narrative.” Not only do particular stories link up in almost sequential narrative (the most obvious “continuation,” for example, is between “Ia (Romantyka)” and “Povist’ pro sanatoriinu zonu”) or “recapitulate” one another (for example, the scenes of the communist’s retreat in “Ia (Romantyka)” and “Iz Varynoĭ biohrafii”), but they also project a powerful sense that they are continually circling around, reflecting and refracting one, basic, even if dimly perceived ur-story. The analogy to fragment-variants of a large, central mythos is inescapable. A full exposition of this requires a close reading that cannot be provided in the space available here. But one key moment, at once highly cathartic and traumatic, may serve as an example.

As can be seen from both the history of Khvyľovyĭ’s reception sketched out above and from even a cursory reading of his major works, one of the most central, most memorable and unnerving scenes in his corpus is the killing of the mother in “Ia (Romantyka).” It is a scene that in purely literary, i.e., artistic, dramatic terms would presumably be entirely self-sufficient and in a sense closed off from further narration. In a word, it should not be repeated. But repeated it is. And more than once. It recurs or is “varied” in a different key in

“Val’dshnepu” when in the very first chapter Dmytrii Karamazov, who is growing more and more estranged from his wife Hanna, has a fleeting thought about doing away with her:

Есть!—подумав Дмитрій і тут же до болю вкусив свою губу: йому раптом спало на думку покінчити з Ганною.

Але вкусив він губу не тому, що насувається щось трагічне, а тому, що згадав: така трагедія по суті була вже. Хіба це не Ганну він розстріляв колись, у часи громадянської війни, біля якогось провінційного монастиря?

Знаєш що, Ганнусю, раптом кинув Карамазов.—Я зараз думаю про тебе і подумав, що ти воскресла. Як це розуміти? (2:289–90)

Irony? Yes. Intertextuality? Of course. But clearly there is more here than just that. In “Arabesky,” which presumably Khvyľovyĭ wrote just before “Іа (Romantyka),” but which actually was published a few years later, the narrator muses in one of his constant digressions:

І я, романтик, закоханий у свою наречену, знову бачу її сіроокою гарячою юнкою з багряною полоскою на простріленій скроні. Вона загулила рану жмутом духмяного чебрецю й мчить по ланах часу в безсмерття. (1:403)

What emerges here, as I see it, is that the generating force is not literary or stylistic or ironic, but psychological. Khvyľovyĭ, as one can easily demonstrate, is often obsessed with certain elemental events or scenes—and this strongly suggests the working of, or an opening to the preconscious or unconscious levels.

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On the most basic level the question of role is the question of self-definition. In “Vstupna novelia,” for example, a story specifically designed as an introduction to Khvyľovyĭ’s collected works (*Tvory*, 1927) and as such turned into a very paragon of meta- and autothematism, its plot—its digressive and self-referential musings aside—is meant to recount how the writer was obliged by his editors and publishers to write an introductory novella. In effect, it is a drawn-out baring of the device—of the writer entering the role of writer. In “Arabesky” this construction/deconstruction of the persona, the hero of the story, is bared even further. The narrator, Nicolas (the same name that is applied to the author-narrator in “Vstupna novelia”), weaves his hyper-romantic (i.e., basically potboiler) biography, of being Soireil, the illegitimate and abandoned son of some functionary and so on, only to seemingly get bored with it and debunk it all as simple role playing. When the woman he is telling this to asks him to continue with the plot (“Слухай Nicolas! А що ж далі? Як же з твоїм чиновником?”) he responds: “Маріє! Ти наївничаєш. Нічого подібного не було. Я тільки приніс тобі запах слова” (1:397).¹⁹ At times,

the question of role and role playing is specifically bared, as in the late story “Z laboratorii”:

Марченко теж нічого не говорив, він тільки зрідка позирав на товариша Хруща, і в його погляді було стільки добродушної іронії, ніби він дивився не на дорослого Колю а на Колю страшенно маленького, що, скажім, з цілком серйозною міною грає якусь ролю, яка йому зовсім не під силу і яка його робить надзвичайно комічним. (3:175)

In fact, virtually all the lead characters in Khvylovyyi's prose, i.e., those who carry the cathetic line of the narrative, are in some fashion conscious of playing a part. In the story “Pudel,” the main character, Saihor, is the one who provides the perspective—through a clashing mix of irony, trenchant observation, and overflowing sentiment—on a wandering company of students and actors and on their somewhat comical and somewhat erotic outing. Saihor's inability to engage in the erotic play is ultimately revealed as the inability to see the person behind the stereotyped role and with that the inability to be oneself in the presence of the other, in a word, a paralysis of self-consciousness: “Сайгор подумав: що сказати в цей момент? Що кажуть у цей момент?” (1:359). His uncanny feeling that there is an inner double watching our actions is something to which we shall turn in a moment. The most direct articulation of the paralyzing and yet manic, or hysterical sense of role occurs in the story “Іа (Romantyka)”:

Увійшов дегенерат. Він радить мені одложити діла й розібрати позачергову справу:

Тільки но привели з города нову групу версальців, здається, всі черниці, вони на ринку вели одвертагітацію проти комуні.

Я входив в ролю. Туман стояв перед очима, і я був у тім стані, який можна кваліфікувати, як надзвичайний екстаз.

Я гадаю, що в такім стані фанатики йшли на священну війну. Я підійшов до вікна й сказав:

—Ведіть! (2:43–44)

In the social context, role is what one is cast into—with the resultant all-encompassing feelings of helplessness and indeed infantilization. In “Revizor,” a story which arguably examines the very paradigm of typecasting, of the ontology of role, so to say, one of the lead characters, Valentyn Brodskyi, a reporter for a provincial newspaper, is put in the role of attending to the Very Important Guest from the big city, who is nothing short of the bared intertextual “revizor” (even though his name is Topchenko, not Khlestakov). In the process everything that Valentyn does or tries to do—especially in the eyes of his wife, Lesia, who provides the cathetic core of the story—only confirms his provincial character:

... Валентинові взагалі сьогодні не щастило, це Леся одразу ж помітила. Він весь час намагався бути розв'язним, дотепним і зовсім не

провінціалом, але і його в'юнка чорненька і остаточно не мужня фігурка і його банальні дотепи і, нарешті, його мало приховане бажання “показати себе” перед ревізором—все це красномовно підкреслювало, що він провінціал, що він все таки ніяк не може зрівнятися з Топченком. (3:80)

As in Gombrowicz's notion of *geba*, which is developed with such accuracy and comical variety in *Ferdydurke*, the “mug” or mask that is pasted on you when you are typecast is so powerful—everything you say or do only confirms it—that only the most radical, and seemingly bizarre, countermeasures may (perhaps) suffice in tearing it off.

In *Khvyłovyi*, the sheer presence and variety of such masks, which are mostly traps upon which role and role playing devolve, is remarkable. Whether in the early “Arabesky,” “Ia (Romantyka)” or “Povist' pro sanatoriinu zonu,” or such late works as “Revizor,” or “Z laboratorii,” the sense of playing roles or having them thrust upon you is highly marked. In “Val'dshnepy,” a work whose political concerns edge it perilously close to a publicistic treatise rather than a novel, but which, nonetheless, maintains a sparkling artistic integrity, the question of role and the pasted-on “mug” is couched in social, and historical, and cultural terms. Specifically, the opposition between things Russian and things Ukrainian which animates the plot and the discourse of the novel and which, characteristically, is also grounded in sexuality, in a battle of the sexes, serves to reveal the mask/trap of the Ukrainian “national character,” its role as a device for ready typization and stereotypization: once Dmytrii Karamazov and Ahlaia enter their respective Ukrainian and Russian roles they seem to become permanently scripted, at least in the narrative of the novel. This also becomes, of course, grist for the mill of an obligatory and invidious urban/rural, center/provinces dichotomy, which now, in turn, is material for an (all too predictable) postcolonial hermeneutics.

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The work in which roles and role playing attain the greatest complexity, and clearly link up with the deeper psychological frame that underlies *Khvyłovyi*'s oeuvre is “Povist' pro sanatoriinu zonu.” Insofar as it forms a diptych with the somewhat earlier “Ia (Romantyka)” one needs to begin with the latter, however. In effect, in “Ia (Romantyka)” role and role playing are revealed as internal psychic processes, and the whole is indeed recast as a psychodrama. While a closer analysis of this diptych is a task for the future, one can note that in “Ia (Romantyka)” (and in contrast to “Povist' pro sanatoriinu zonu”) the prioritization of the symbolic over the mimetic (which is a key to the Romantic mode here) and with it the introduction of “archetypical” moments is a clear indication that the story will unfold in internal, not external space. Thus, the struggle between the Bolsheviks and their opponents is largely cast as a “uni-

versal” opposition, i.e., as if in terms of the Paris Commune of 1870, with such designations as “insurgenty,” “versal’tsi,” “komunary”—although the very specific Cheka, to which the autobiographic narrator belongs, also figures in the story. Most tellingly, the elements of plot and the details, which in realist fiction would occupy center stage—precisely as the means for establishing verisimilitude and the discourse of social relevance—are here programmatically distorted. Thus, on the one hand the stylized (“Romantic”) setting and on the other the bared schematism of the non-dialogue of the narrator’s interrogation of a couple brought before the revolutionary tribunal:

... Портъера роздвинулась, і в мій кабінет увійшло двоє: женщина в траурі й мужчина в пенсне. Вони були остаточно налякані обстановкою: аристократична розкіш, княжі портрети і розгардіяш—порожні пляшки, револьвери й синій цигарковий дим.

Я:

—Ваша фамілія?

—Зет!

—Ваша фамілія?

—Ігрек!

Мужчина зібрав тонкі зблідлі губи і впав у безпардонно-плаксивий тон: він просив милости. Женщина втирала платком очі.

Я:

—Де вас забрали?

—Там-то!

—За що вас забрали?

—За те-то! (2:42)

The bared schematism only reaffirms the fact that the only important moment is the psychodrama itself. The revolutionary tribunal—the sadistic, Lenin-like ideologue Dr. Tahabat, the quintessentially brutal “degenerat,” the “humanistically” weak-willed Andriusha—are basically all fragments of the “ia,” the ego, who is telling the story. There are numerous hints to this effect, for example, this concerning Dr. Tahabat at the beginning of the story: “Цей доктор із широким лобом і білою лисиною, з холодним розумом і з каменем замість серця, це ж він і мій безвихідний хазяїн, мій звірячий інстинкт” (2:37). At another point he thinks of his mother and that she shares the attitudes of the old order, the “versal’tsi,” and then his thought takes this turn:

І тоді, збентежений, запевняю себе, що це неправда, що ніякої матері нема переді мною, що це не більше, як фантом.

—Фантом?—знову здригнув я.

Ні, саме це—неправда! Тут у тихій кімнаті, моя мати не фантом, а частина мого власного злочинного “я”, якому я даю волю. Тут, у глухому закутку, на краю города, я ховаю від гільотини один кінець своєї душі. (2:39–40)

The purpose or teleology of the story—and the very fact that its plot is symbolically coded makes this a story that indeed *has* a core purpose and essence—is to show that here the ego cannot hold its various parts, that its unity is torn between what appears to be revolutionary zeal, fanatical possession by the idea, and an inner world of feeling symbolized by Maria, the mother-lover. As he is goaded by Dr. Tahabat, in effect his “revolutionary” convictions, to pronounce the death sentence on his mother, the narrator sums up his quandary, the ego-split itself:

Так схопили нарешті й другий кінець моєї душі! Вже не піду я на край
города злочинно ховати себе. І тепер я маю одно тільки право:
—нікому, ніколи й нічого не говорити, як розколось моє
власне “я.” (2:45)

In light of this structure, the final killing of the mother, adumbrated as it is by echoes of the killing of Andrii by Taras Bulba, can only be seen as the killing of an innermost presence and value, in effect the anima. For its part, the symbolic meaning of “Ia (Romantyka)” must be seen as a confrontation with the shadow, an encounter with the darkness within—and an implicit concession that that encounter is fatal for the integrity of the ego.

This fatalism is given profound elaboration in “Povist’ pro sanatoriinu zonu.” If “Ia (Romantyka)” presents but the bared rudiments of the psychodrama (albeit programmatically), and also presents the killing of the animamother as still only an implicit suicide, “Povist’ pro sanatoriinu zonu” develops both the psychodrama and the suicide with various nuances of mirroring and fragmentation. Significantly, the narrative is now full of seemingly realist action, dialogue, and detail; at the same time, the underlying symbolic cast of the work is evident, particularly its central feature—the duplication of roles and hypostases, the mirroring, reflection, and refraction of the ego. While seemingly endowed with existential autonomy—in “Ia (Romantyka),” in contrast, the various major characters are shown as but projections of the central “Ia”—the characters here are still fictional creations in the diary of Khora (“the sick one”). And Khora herself is dying of consumption; from the content and style—and the very voice of her entries—she clearly is also a hypostasis of Khvylovyyi himself. The general atmosphere of the sanatorium, and of the story itself, appears to be one of interpenetrated reality and illusion, overlaid with a hysterical energy that is most concentrated in the figures of the *anarkh* and of Khlonia—who are clearly parodic projections of the author, the former as the archetypal anarchist (removing the suffix from his name, as the narrator says, reveals his hairy nature even further), the revolutionary sick with his own messianic and reformist zeal, the modern Savonarola (which his lover, Maia, ironically punctures as “Savonarolichka”) and the latter as the hopelessly sentimental and weak would-be poet. The dramatic counterforce, Karno, the *metranpazh*—literally the page setter—on the surface, the epitome of malicious scepticism and mockery, is also quite evidently a dramatized incarnation

of the author's own critical distance and ubiquitous irony; his role, after all, incarnates the final stage—going even beyond that of editor (viz. the autothematic Redaktor Kark)—of preparing the text before it goes to the reader: the ultimate superego. (Characteristically, in this regard, the concluding authorial *profession de foi* also includes ironic and prescient references to the coming new order where everything will be written with the censor in mind.)

With great psychological acuity, the ambient hysteria of the main authorial projections, the *anarkh* and Khlonia, is shown to be deeply rooted in sexual anxiety, and in the case of the *anarkh* and Maia (whose name, as we are reminded in an anonymous letter to the former, is that of an Indian goddess of illusion) an ongoing, irresolvable, and destructive battle of the sexes. In the spirit of D. H. Lawrence and anticipating such writers as Gombrowicz, Khvylovyyi clearly also distrusts all desexualized ideas.

The essential permutation in “Povist' pro sanatoriinu zonu” is that of doubling, not only of the more evident pairs, the *anarkh* and Khlonia, Maia and the nurse Katria, and so on, but also of the *anarkh* and Karno who is described not only as a provincial Mephistopheles but as the *anarkh*'s double.²⁰ The play of doubles, as of the thematically stressed ego-split in “Ia (Romantyka),” reconfirms both the symbolic and the psychological coding of the work, and with it Khvylovyyi's pervasive self-thematization, the ever-present mirror image, where he is both author and critic, inspired creator and ironic commentator. In terms of the dramatic—and symbolic—movement of the story, the culminating moment in this play of duality devolves upon the double suicide of Khlonia and the *anarkh*.

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Suicide must surely be seen as a key to Khvylovyyi's symbolic self-presentation. Its obsessive presence in his work, and the range of its guises or disguises is striking in and of itself. Its shadow is implied in “Redaktor Kark,” where the title character cannot but dwell on the pistol in his desk—with the growing intimation that he will ultimately use it. In “Zavulok,” the central character, the Chekistka Mariana decides to commit suicide by getting infected with syphilis. A peculiarly bizarre twist occurs in “Lehenda” where the woman-warrior, in order to become a legend and a martyr, chooses her own death—by impalement. In “Val'dshnepy” putting a bullet in one's head is mentioned as if casually, in the course of a spat between Dmytrii Karamazov and his wife Hanna. In “Povist' pro sanatoriinu zonu,” as just noted, there are two suicides by drowning, but since one is the shadow of the other, it basically relates to one core death fantasy. In “Z laboratorii,” the rather hysterical Lida Spyrydonova asks her companion (whom she renames Potop or Potopchyk) to throw her into the river. As already noted, the killing of the mother in “Ia (Romantyka),” to the extent that it is a killing of the anima is also a symbolic suicide. In the late story “Maty” (1930)—a work that echoes *Taras Bulba* and resonates with

Tychyna's, and Ianovskyy's, images of fratricidal civil war—the death of the mother at the hands of her son, Andrii, who thinks he is killing his brother, Ostop, is a function of her own desire to die. And this list is hardly complete.

The point here, however, is not so much to mark an obsessive presence—although even more remarkable, perhaps, is the fact of how consistently this key moment has been ignored in the critical literature—as to underline the existence in Khvylovyy's work of a highly unified psychic space which animates his works and gives them their remarkable power. The specific and interrelated components of this psychological force field are several—the role of the writer and his will, his sheer voluntarism, which is linked in his consciousness with his inescapable sense of playing roles (which prominently also includes the roles of both writer and political pamphleteer and activist), with an almost paralyzing self-consciousness. The resultant sense of virtually autonomous subunits of the self, of an ego-split that moves, as is so masterfully shown in “Povist' pro sanatoriinu zonu,” into virtually clinically accurate dissociation. And the fear of such dissociation becomes a theme in its own right, viz. “Z laboratorii.”

But surely there must be more; surely the suicide fantasy, and the underlying psychic anxieties do not exhaust the picture. The attempt at providing a narrative, a story line that approximates the *autobiography* that we have been alluding to will need to build on a closer analysis of Khvylovyy's work, an analysis that is still a task for the future. One can, however, postulate some functions—and in this fashion perhaps intimate the outlines of the plot into which Khvylovyy feels himself inscribed.

On the articulated, textually given level, suicide for Khvylovyy appears as a moment of acceptance of one's own fatedness, one's need not to hold on to life at any cost, but precisely by letting it go to merge with the higher purpose of things. Near the end of “Povist' pro sanatoriinu zonu,” for example, the *anarkh* has a vision of “the other side of reality” and it draws him with inexorable strength:

За декілька темних годин осінньої темряви перед ним пройшло стільки примар і спогадів, скільки він не бачив за все своє життя. Він остаточно вирішив, що вже не існує, що мешкає “на тому боці” реальності. І він не тільки примирився з цим, йому навіть радісно було, що він уже, нарешті так просто, без усяких перешкод, попав у цей невідомий край. (2:167)

In “Maty,” the death wish is put even more directly and simply:

І раптом прийшла матері думка, що ніякого кошмару нема і що все, що діється зараз, є звичайне й природне явище. І коли вона не може зрозуміти цього, то вона, значить, оджила вже свій час, і, значить, на її земне місце прийшли нові люди, з новими думками й з новими, далекими їй бажаннями. І тоді захотілось матері вмерти. (2:367)

In the larger frame of Khvylovyy's work, suicide, the readiness to take ultimate control and disposition of one's life, functions as an act of radical

authenticity, a moment when one finds the self without the masks of the ego, and without imposed roles. As unexpected, unsanctioned, and even “bizarre” as it may appear to others (and the variants of suicide just noted seem precisely to test believability, let alone social decorum), it becomes an ultimate assertion of freedom. Against the background of the totalitarian night, it became—as his reception confirmed—precisely an act of assertion, not negation.

In effect, the suicide that is so marked in Khvyľovyi’s fiction establishes the basic teleology of Khvyľovyi’s symbolic self-representation, or what we can still, most generally, call symbolic autobiography. It does so not solely because of the undercurrent of morbidity (although this aspect of his shadow also needs to be examined), and perhaps not only because of his sense of an overarching *fatum* looming over him and his generation, but because for all his love of life, and openness to play, his sense of self was finally so uncompromising.

NOTES

1. See George G. Grabowicz, "The Nexus of the Wake," in *Eucharisterion. Essays Presented to Omeljan Pritsak on His Sixtieth Birthday by His Colleagues and Students* (Cambridge, MA, 1980), pp. 320–47 [=*Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 3–4]; and, *The Poet as Mythmaker* (Cambridge, MA, 1982). See also idem, "Z problematyky symbolichnoi avtobiohrafii u Mitskevycha i Shevchenka," in *V litopys shany i lubovi*, ed. V. S. Borodin et al. (Kyiv, 1989), pp. 51–63.
2. See George G. Grabowicz, "Vozhdivstvo i rozdvoiennia: tema "vallenrodyzmu" v tvorakh Franka," *Suchasnist'* 1997(11): 113–38.
3. See Boguław Bakula, *Oblicza autotematyzmu* (Poznań, 1991).
4. See *Who's Writing This? Notations on the Authorial I, with Self-Portraits*, ed. Daniel Halpern (Hopewell, NJ, 1995).
5. See George G. Grabowicz, "Shevchenko iakoho ne znaïemo," *Suchasnist'* 1992(11): 100–112.
6. See "Spohady pro Mykolu Kulisha," in Mykola Kulish, *Tvory* (New York, 1955), pp. 365–433, esp. pp. 415–20. All of the people mentioned here were prominent writers of the time; virtually all were members of VAPLITE, the literary group Khvyľ'ovyi had helped to found in 1925. It was disbanded by the regime in 1928.
7. See, for example, *Literaturna hazeta* 27 May 1933: 2; cf. Mykola Khvyľ'ovyi, *Tvory v p'iat'okh tomakh* (New York, 1986) (henceforth: *Tvory*), vol. 5, pp. 137–48.
8. See M. Rudnyts'kyi, *Vid Myrnoho do Khvyľ'ovoho* (Lviv, 1936).
9. Cf. "Mykola Khvyľ'ovyi," *Literaturno-naukovyi visnyk*, 1933 (cf. *Tvory*, vol. 5, pp. 439ff.). The resonance between Dontsov and Khvyľ'ovyi clearly requires a separate inquiry.
10. See Arkadii Liubchenko, "Ioho taiemnytsia" (1943); cf. Khvyľ'ovyi, *Tvory*, vol. 5, pp. 87–112.
11. *Shchodennyk Arkadiia Liubchenka*, ed. Iurii Luts'kyi [George S. N. Luckyj] (Lviv and New York, 1999), p. 7.
12. See Olena Teliha, "Partachi zhyttia"; cf. *Tvory*, vol. 5, pp. 472–74.
13. Malaniuk, "13 travnia 1933 r.," cf. *Tvory* vol. 5, pp. 468–69.
14. See, for example, V. Koval, ed., *Na sud ukraïns'koï emihratsiï "natsional-komunizm"-khvyľ'ovyizm ta ioho propahatoriv! (Materialy z perevedenoï aktsiï u SShA i v Kanadi)* (New York-Toronto, 1959). Cf. also the bibliography in *Tvory*, vol. 5, pp. 691–786.
15. For irony in Khvyľ'ovyi, see M. Shkandrii, "Irony in the Works of

- Mykola Khvylovyi,” *In Working Order: Essays in Honor of George S. N. Luckyj* (Edmonton, 1990), pp. 90–102.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 100.
 17. See Maik Iohansen, *Podorozh uchenoho Doktora Leonarda i ioho maibutn'oi kokhanky prekrasnoi Al'chesty u slobozhans'ku Shvaitsariiu* (Kharkiv, 1930).
 18. See Bruno Schulz, *Sklepy cynamonowe / Sanitorium pod klepsydra*, 4th ed. (Cracow, 1992), particularly the “Traktat o manekinach,” pp. 35–39.
 19. In a ground-breaking essay on “Khvylovyi without politics” Yuri Sherekh takes this passage as emblematic of Khvylovyi’s style and mode in general: “Це один з ключів до творчости Хвильового. Скільки критиків Хвильового осмішили себе, бо не відчували запаху слова, не розрізняли гри від життя чи може краще сказати, гри в житті від життя без гри.” (“Khvylovyi bez polityky,” in his *Ne dlia ditei* [New York, 1964], p. 54.) What Sherekh is calling “play” here is, as I see it, entirely compatible, if not entirely coterminous, with the notion of role and role playing.
 20. See the above-noted anonymous letter, *Tvory*, vol. 2, p. 145.