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LITERARY CANONS AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES IN CONTEMPORARY UKRAINE

The years preceding and following the declaration of independence in Ukraine were marked in debates about literature by a *querelle des anciens et des modernes* that reflected differences between generations and individual temperaments, but also disagreements over the proper nature and social role of the literary work and its creators.¹ The tension evolved against the background, at first, of the fall of the Soviet regime, and later of challenges to society and its elites to participate in the tasks of nation and state building. Some literati saw themselves as willing participants in this project, while others did not warm to it. There was contention over which authors and works of the recent and more distant past deserved to be regarded as exemplary in the new political environment, and which values, if any, should prevail in the literary and cultural spheres; in short – over the canon.

Among the proposals for canons, explicit and implied, that emerged in the course of the *querelle*, this article identifies two main types and describes the relationship of each to the models of national identity with which they had a proclaimed or implicit affinity. An inquiry concurring wholly with the now scarcely challenged view that “canons are complicit with power”² might seek to demonstrate the nature and extent of the influence exerted by the canon (or canons) upon national identity and, through national identity, on values, attitudes and actions of particular groups. But given the theoretical problems, sketched below, of such an undertaking, this study undertakes the more limited task of describing the models of national identity that are assumed or projected by groups of texts recognised by particular communities as canonical.

The first such group of texts I have termed elsewhere an “iconostasis” in order to underscore its quasi-sacral status and its dedication to hierarchy, immutability and ideological unanimity, as well as to distinguish it from the idea of a “canon” proper as a list of notable works continually re-

1. The research on which this article is based was made possible by grants from Monash University and two Australian foundations: the Ukrainian Studies Support Fund and the Ukrainian Studies Foundation in Australia.

2. Frank Kermode, *History and Value: The Clarendon Lectures and the Northcliffe Lectures 1987* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 115.

constituted through re-discussion and through successive rediscoveries of these texts' socio-cultural relevance.³ The iconostasis displays continuity with both the nineteenth-century populist canon and, in most matters other than ideology, the canon of Socialist Realism, while openly promoting a national identity orientated toward the reinforcement of the Ukrainian nation-state.

The second group of texts to be dealt with here might be called a "new canon." It comprises the established literary classics interpreted in ways not foreseen by the friends of the iconostasis, as well as new works that might broadly be described as modernist or postmodernist. This new canon, I shall argue, affects indifference and even opposition to a partisan national identity, yet inevitably becomes its advocate through choice of the Ukrainian language and therefore the social and institutional milieu of its primary reception. Just as we are doomed to have canons – not because we particularly want them, but because we cannot, in practice, talk about literature without them⁴ – so the authors and works identified within a particular national cultural community as worthy of attention inevitably lend their authority to the corresponding national cultural identity, even if their attitude toward nation-building projects is explicitly sceptical.

National identity is a concept that has been defined within a range of disciplines including psychology, sociology, philosophy, political science, international relations studies and media studies, as well as being widely and loosely used in everyday parlance. Like other terms that have a life both scholarly and popular, it requires definition at each fresh invocation. In the present discussion "national identity" is an aspect of the individual's consciousness of self that involves a sense of belonging to a group, where the group is a nation – a self-identifying community claiming dignity and either possessing or aspiring to sovereignty, normally through a nation-state. National identity manifests itself in beliefs as well as feelings and informs perceptions and judgements, as well as behaviors.⁵

3. Marko Pavlyshyn, "Aspects of the Literary Process in the USSR: The Politics of Re-Canonisation in Ukraine After 1985," *Southern Review* (Adelaide) 24, no. 1 (1991): 12-25, here 18-21. Translated as "Kanon ta ikonostas," in Marko Pavlyshyn, *Kanon ta ikonostas* (Kyiv: Chas, 1997), pp. 184-98, here 190-93.

4. Kermodé, *History and Value*, p. 115.

5. As will be seen, this inquiry focuses upon implied encounters between texts and readers. Such encounters are most readily imagined as ones in which the participants are individuals, rather than groups. For this reason, our working definition of national identity has a closer affinity to definitions applied in studies of national identity as a dimension of an individual's subjectivity – for example, William Bloom, *Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990); Dora Shu-fang Dien, "The Evolving Nature of Self-Identity Across Four Levels of History," *Human Development* 43, no. 1 (2000): 1-18; Christine J. Yeh and Mary Y. Hwang, "Interdependence

The term “canon,” used since the 1960s in English-language literary criticism primarily to mean a set of authors and works that are, as Harold Bloom put it, “authoritative in our culture”⁶ and therefore prone to be included in school and university curricula, has no analogous history of usage in Ukrainian or other East European literary scholarship. The term began to achieve a certain currency in Ukrainian debates as scholars trained in the West and accustomed to regard the literary canon as indicative of social power relations pleaded for canon change as *pars pro toto* for de-Sovietisation and Westernisation.

It is tempting to assume that the literary canon is one of the many factors that can exert power over the human psyche and therefore can be an agent for social change. In keeping with this assumption the canon can be regarded as directly complicit in the formation of national identity and thereby of the cultural, social and political predispositions or even actions of the national community. There is a certain common-sense plausibility in connecting the establishment of national canons to “the institutionalisation of the vernacular languages, the consolidation of modern nation-states, and the spread of nationalist ideologies,”⁷ or in claiming that “standardised, homogeneous, centrally sustained high cultures” – such as, presumably, can only be expressed in regulative and disciplinary canons – actually engender nationalisms.⁸ Tamara Hundorova asserts forthrightly that a canon “consolidates a certain cultural identity and in this respect is an instrument of identification.”⁹ In the Ukrainian case, the engendering role of Taras Shevchenko in Ukrainian literary history seems a textbook demonstration of the agency of the canonical text: the poetic works of the bard, early recognised and promoted as canonical (“authoritative in our culture”), appear indisputably to have forged a national identity: they addressed their

in *Ethnic Identity and Self: Implications for Theory and Practice*,” *Journal of Counseling and Development* 78, no. 4 (2000): 420-29 – than to those that construct national identity as intersubjective, for example, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983); Philip Schlesinger, “Media, the Political Order and National Identity,” *Media, Culture and Society* 13, no. 3 (1991): 297-308; Paul James, *Nation Formation: Towards a Theory of Abstract Community* (London: Sage, 1996); Rodney Bruce Hall, *National Collective Identity: Social Constructs and International Systems* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1999); and Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991).

6. Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt, 1994), p. 1.

7. Dean E. Kolbas, *Critical Theory and the Literary Canon* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001), p. 11.

8. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 55.

9. Tamara Hundorova, “Literaturnyi kanon i mif,” *Slovo i chas*, no. 5 (2001): 15-24, here 15. This and all other translations are mine.

audience as though it were already endowed with a national identity, while at the same time advocating a particular variant of it. This identity, both projected and invoked, understated social difference in favour of a sense of contemporary community, while emphasising difference from ethnically and territorially adjacent others. George Grabowicz, for example, accepts the reality of a direct and enduring imprint of Shevchenko's works upon what the critic sees as a collective, nationally delimited, cultural predisposition: "questionable, indeed potentially fatal, was the legacy of mythical thinking that Ševčenko had inculcated upon the psyche of succeeding generations of his countrymen."¹⁰ Another Ukrainian context in which the canon appeared to have direct consequences for national identity was the Soviet cultural system. Here one could observe close correspondence between the national identity recommended to readers by approved works of literature, and the national identity that was officially permitted and deemed to exist in society. Literature modelled piety toward the national cultures, but still greater piety toward Russian culture, while in life the reality of assimilation to Russian culture was accompanied by the maintenance of such vestigial signs of Ukrainian culture as official cultural institutions.¹¹

Nonetheless, however close the congruence between the persuasive tendency of the canonical text and dispositions observed in that text's addressee may seem, it is not possible to speak with rigour of the canon as generating or influencing social attitudes. In addition to general difficulties – the philosophical awkwardness of attributing cause in human affairs, the absence of a reliable theory accounting for changes in the human psyche, and the uncertain validity of general statements about entities like "national identity" that exist only as the sum of their many individual instances – we face the special problem of judging the "strength" or social impact of canons in particular social circumstances. In a post-Soviet Ukraine characterised by a broad, continuing and geographically uneven presence of Russian culture we know little of the limits of the cultural environment or, to use Schlesinger's term, "communicative space"¹² in which Ukrainian literary canons have efficacy. Bourdieu suggests that a

10. George G Grabowicz, *The Poet as Mythmaker: A Study of Symbolic Meaning in Taras Ševčenko* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1982), p. 162. The book entered mainland Ukrainian debates through its Kyiv edition, Hryhorii Hrabovych [Grabowicz], *Ševčenko iak mifotvorets': Semantyka symboliv u tvorchošti poeta*, trans. Solomiia Pavlychko (Kyiv: Radians'kyi pys'mennyk, 1991), where the passage quoted appears on p. 171.

11. For a systematic overview of the mechanisms enforcing the hierarchy of national cultures in the Soviet Union, see Lowell Tillett, *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1969).

12. Schlesinger, "Media, the Political Order and National Identity," p. 302.

hallmark of a canon is its “familiarisation” within the relevant society,¹³ but we can say little with confidence about the extent to which Ukrainian literary canons are “familiar” in contemporary Ukraine. Unstructured observation of the relative underrepresentation of Ukrainian language and culture in the mass media, popular culture and everyday life, as well as the motif of complaint in Ukrainian-language cultural forums about the dysfunction of such canon-making institutions as literary criticism¹⁴ and norm-setting journals¹⁵ suggest that any Ukrainian cultural canons may enjoy limited authority in Ukrainian society. We should be clear, however, about the fact that such an observation remains within the domain of opinion.

For these reasons, while not disputing the possible reality of “national identities” or the common-sense validity of regarding them as susceptible to “influence” by external factors such as literary canons, this study notes the problems of studying “identity” and “influence” *in themselves*, and restricts itself to examining the relationship between literary canon and national identity *as it is modelled in texts*. The object of inquiry, then, is not the individual or collective psyche of the addressee of the canonical or canon-promoting text, but the ideal addressee implied by such texts. In thus acknowledging the limits of the psychology and sociology of literary reception we follow Hans Robert Jauss, whose theory of reception despairs of empirical approaches to understanding the interaction of text and audience, recommending instead the study of the ideal audience reactions that the text presupposes.¹⁶

There are two ways in which the audience-effect generated by a text might take account of national identity. In the first case the text may suppose a particular national identity to be one aspect of the already existing psychic complexion of the implied audience, a dimension of its “personality” to which rhetorical appeal might be made. Second, the text may project a particular kind of national identity as a goal of persuasion – as a set of dispositions which do not yet exist in the (ideal) audience, but which may be manoeuvred into existence as a result of the (imaginary) encounter between the (ideal) audience and the text.

13. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1996), p. 159.

14. See, for example, the opinions of the writers Oksana Zabuzhko (“Contemporary Ukraine has no professional literary critics, and those that it has are an imitation”) and Ievhen Pashkovs’kyi (“Critics have almost forgotten how to think”), in Ihor Ostrovs’kyi, “Blysk ta ubohist’ estetychnykh interpretatsii: Khto takyi suchasnyi ukrains’kyi krytyk?,” *Den’*, March 21, 2002.

15. Taras Shumeiko, “I mertvi, i zhyvi, i nenarodzeni,” *Krytyka*, no. 7-8 (2001): 20-26.

16. Hans Robert Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation der Literaturwissenschaft*, 2nd ed. (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag, 1969).

It is the latter of these two relationships that is the more characteristic of texts, both canonical and canon-forming, that are associated with our category of "iconostasis." The Soviet iconostasis consisted of lists of ideologically apposite authors and works authoritatively set forth in literary histories and textbooks, and echoed in all writing about literature. The purpose of the iconostasis was to identify works that were exemplary in fulfilling the social function of literature prescribed by Soviet orthodoxy: to exhort readers to think, feel and behave according to ideologically approved norms. The iconostatic Soviet text did not deny the legitimacy of national identity. The languages in which texts were published were the national languages of the Soviet Union, and national cultures were officially regarded as enjoying efflorescence under conditions of state socialism. However, non-Russian national identities could be promoted only as hierarchically subordinate to an "internationalist" identity that, in practice, manifested itself through pious respect for things Russian. In the Ukrainian case, this phenomenon was most evident in works called upon to illustrate the officially favoured historiographical thesis that the Russian and Ukrainian peoples enjoyed a profound and enduring friendship.¹⁷ The iconostasis necessarily excluded authors and works deemed to have opposed or inadequately advocated Soviet ideological norms.

In the late 1980s, as the Soviet cultural monopoly unravelled, many members of the cultural elite, including writers, literary scholars and critics, adopted ideological positions friendly to the goal of a Ukrainian nation-state and identified themselves closely with the movement for independence. They reinterpreted their personal pasts, and the pasts of the cultural institutions to which they belonged, in ways that downplayed their former function as articulators of official Soviet ideology and emphasized their role as refuges for a national identity all but smothered by the Soviet regime. The poet and future parliamentarian Pavlo Movchan, reflecting on the history of the Writers' Union and other creative associations, claimed that "it was in these institutions that rudimentary forms of national self-identification were preserved."¹⁸ Many writers understood the coming of Ukrainian independence as a challenge to change their public political orientation and take on the new task of exhorting their readership to develop an emphatic Ukrainian identity, helping advance the twin projects of nation and state building. "An independent Ukraine – that is the position of

17. Marko Pavlyshyn, "Literary Variants on an Official Myth: The Pereiaslav Pact in the Soviet Ukrainian Novel 1948-1983," in *Proshponema: Istorychni ta filolohichni rozvidky, prysviacheni 60-richchiu akademika Iaroslava Isaievycha*, ed. Bohdan Iakymovych et al. (L'viv: Instytut ukrainoznavstva NAN Ukrainy, 1998), pp. 435-45.

18. Pavlo Movchan, "Zakon pro movu ta bezzakonnia," *Literaturna Ukraina*, Jan. 31, 1991, p. 2.

the independent Ukrainian writer,” aphorised Stepan Pushyk,¹⁹ while the Writers’ Union insisted that the President of Ukraine use the services of its members to promote a new national ideology. In 1995 Leonid Kuchma obliged, inviting the creative associations to co-operate with him in “shaping the new consciousness of the population.”²⁰

Perhaps more remarkable than the changes that took place in the cultural sphere in the 1990s was the continuity that was maintained. Writers of the older generation continued to regard themselves as specialists in the translation of ideology into plot and character. The content of the ideology to be transmitted had changed, but the tools at writers’ disposal had not. Such works as Iurii Mushketyk’s *Iasa* (1990), Roman Ivanychuk’s *Orda* (The Horde, 1992), or Roman Fedoriv’s *Palytsia dlia prokazhenykh* (A Staff for Lepers, 2000) – all novels by writers whose careers had evolved under the old regime – now sought to set the historical record straight, presenting patriotic accounts of previously taboo episodes in Ukrainian history.

What kind of national identity did such works attribute to their ideal audiences, and what kind of identity did they propose to encourage? They assumed an audience that was already sympathetic to the national cause, but required further narrative and emotional resources to reinforce this position. The identity that these texts envisaged as the outcome of the encounter between themselves and their ideal audience encompassed elements both of emotions and of knowledge. The emotions were those of sympathy with, and solicitude for, a Ukrainian nation (thought of as a community aware of itself, above all, as the joint custodian of a common culture) perceived as being under threat, as well as anxiety lest this nation succumb to the forces ranged against it. The knowledge was of the instances and patterns of historical injustice that grounded the emotional dimension of the proposed national identity. The identity was adversarial, incorporating images of a threatening, crafty, yet often seductive Other, usually identified, in contrast to the practice of the Soviet era, with Russian imperialism in one of its incarnations. The resentment that had proliferated in Socialist Realist literature and had been directed against internal and external enemies of the struggle for Socialism lived on in the post-Soviet iconostasis, but was redirected against other foes. Notions of national community defined otherwise than ethnically were generally absent from works of the iconostasis, perhaps because they had been so thoroughly discredited by the experience of Soviet “internationalism.” At the same time, the pro-

19. Olena Lohvynenko, “‘Nezalezna Ukraina – otse i ie pozytsiia nezaleznoho pys’mennyka” [Interview with Stepan Pushyk], *Literaturna Ukraina* Febr. 3, 1994, p. 3.

20. “Vystup Prezydenta Ukrainy L. D. Kuchmy na III Vseukrains’komu plenumi tvorchykh spilok mytsiv Ukrainy,” *ibid.*, Nov. 16, 1995, p. 2.

jected national identity was harmonised with the international policies of the Ukrainian state: it encouraged no dreams of a Ukraine within broader borders than those of the contemporary Ukrainian state.

It should be remarked that the identity of the audience was not assumed to be responsive only to conventional, aesthetically conservative works in the realistic tradition. Ivanychuk blurred the boundary between historical narrative and fantasy, while Fedoriv complicated his novel with flashbacks. But these narrative devices were not, strictly speaking, innovative: both had already been used in the more exploratory prose of the late Soviet period, and their deployment in the new historical novels was an indicator of continuity rather than change.

Continuity was a value much prized by advocates of the iconostasis. While the executed and exiled writers of the 1920s and 1930s, and the dissidents of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s had been reinscribed into the account of Ukrainian literature, very little was done to question the aesthetic or, indeed, ethical value of works by respected figures whose reputations had been established in Soviet times. One of the symptomatic cultural phenomena of the early 1990s was the campaign to preserve Oles' Honchar (1918-1995), the doyen of Soviet Ukrainian prose from the late 1940s until his death, author of mainstream Socialist Realist works as well as the banned novel *Sobor* (The Cathedral, 1968), as a central figure of the literary iconostasis.²¹

In the community friendly to the iconostasis, the value placed on stability of reputation extended to iconic writers of the past. The need to update official accounts of the political significance of the classics was recognised, and the vocabulary used to describe their role changed. But the principle that a writer's significance was determined, above all, by his or her political engagement remained in place, and attempts to introduce new perspectives into the study of Taras Shevchenko and Lesia Ukrainka,²² in

21. See especially the book dedicated to Honchar's conflicts with Soviet officialdom, Vitalii Koval', *"Sobor" i navkolo soboru* (Kyiv: Molod', 1989), and the commemorative collection, V. D. Honchar and V. Ia. P'ianov, eds., *Vinok pam'iaty Olesia Honchara: Spohady, khronika* (Kyiv: Ukrain's'kyi pys'mennyk, 1997). Honchar continues to be presented in an iconostatic way to the new community of web users (see Liubov Holota, *Pisliaslovo* [Afterword to Oles' Honchar, "Poetychnyi punktir pokhodu"], *Poetyka: Biblioteka ukrains'koi poezii*, accessed April 6, 2002; available from <http://poetry.uazone.net/honchar/pages.phtml?page=pisliaslovo>) and has a sufficiently firm place in the public consciousness to be named by some respondents to a poll conducted by a Kyiv newspaper as their favourite Ukrainian poet, even though his reputation rests almost entirely on his prose. See Daniel MacIsaac, "Who is the Best Ukrainian poet?," *Kyiv Post*, July 5, 2002.

22. See especially Solomiia Pavlychko, *Dyskurs modernizmu v ukrains'kii literaturi* (Kyiv: Lybid', 1997), as well as Vira Aheieva, *Poetesa zlamu stolit': Tvorchist' Lesi*

particular, aroused outrage that spilled onto the pages of the popular press. As women scholars who identified themselves with feminism authored a significant number of the reinterpretations, the rhetoric defending the sacral version of the iconostasis acquired an anti-feminist edge.²³ At stake, more than the images of the respected figures in the iconostasis, were two issues: whether the system of cultural judgments was to remain forever monolithic, and who had the right to participate in crafting such monolithic judgments. Newcomers, whether from abroad or from sections of society previously excluded from the process of canon-making, caused unease because of the instability that they introduced. The very fact that they contributed to a debate on national identity embodied the proposition that national identity, like other aspects of consciousness of the self, might be subject to evolution in response to stimuli from the outside world. For friends of the iconostasis, by contrast, national identity was a fixed, unitary ideal, necessitating devotion to symbolic objects (for example, canonised writers) and justifying the activity of a priestly caste (loyalist critics and pedagogues).

A special place at the intersection of canon and national identity is occupied by the group that early came to be known as the *shistdesiatnyky* ("people of the 1960s"). Viewed from the beginning of their creative activity as a group, both by the literary and political establishments of the years of the Khrushchev thaw (who saw them as a vibrant, if threatening and subversive phenomenon) and by émigré Ukrainians (who detected behind the Sixtiers' words and actions a national identity akin to their own), such poets as Lina Kostenko, Viktor Symonenko and Ivan Drach, such prose writers as Valerii Shevchuk and such critics as Ivan Svitlychnyi, Ivan Dziuba and Ievhen Sverstiuk are especially prone to be enumerated in lists and made the object of homogenising generalizations. Many of the Sixtiers took stands against Soviet officialdom and in defence of Ukrainian culture. In the late 1980s several became leading advocates of democratization and national revival. Some had been bolder and more inflexible than others, and some were more thoroughly punished by the regime than others, but none of their biographies required extensive reshaping when the Soviet regime expired. On the whole, they were less parochial than their predecessors and contemporaries, and their cultural orientation and outlook was as international as the conditions of an insular USSR allowed. They framed their dedication to their homeland within a humanist universalism. Of the

Ukrainky v postmodernii interpretatsii (Kyiv: Lybid', 1999), Nila Zborovs'ka and Mariia Il'nyts'ka, *Feministychni rozdumy: Na karnavali mertvykh potsilunkiv* (L'viv: Litopys, 1999) and Nila Zborovs'ka, *Pryshestia vichnosti* (Kyiv: Fakt, 2000).

23. See, e.g., Inna Bulkina, "Zhinocha dohma," *Krytyka*, no. 9 (2001): 30-31.

phenomena of culture observable in the Ukrainian SSR in the 1960s, they had the most plausible claim to the quality of modernity.²⁴

And yet, they did not receive among the cultural intelligentsia of generations younger than themselves the acknowledgement and understanding that they might have expected. The factors that rendered them heroic in their youth later appeared to alienate them from younger writers and intellectuals, preventing their incorporation into the new canon that arose to challenge the iconostasis. The problem is set out in an account by a commentator not of their generation, whose attitude, however, is sympathetic to them: "*Shistdesiatnytstvo* [the phenomenon of the Sixtiers] as a living and dynamic reality that manifested itself after the Khrushchev thaw in the works of Lina Kostenko, Ivan Drach, Vasyly' Symonenko, Dmytro Pavlychko, Ivan Dziuba, Mykola Vinhranovs'kyi and others, had the national imperative at its foundation and gave shape to a cohesive myth [*monomif*] which in a short time effectively dissolved the sharp demarcation lines between culture (literature) and politics."²⁵ It was the political *engagement* of the Sixtiers that deprived them of exemplary status as writers in the eyes of many who began their literary careers in the 1980s or later. Indifference, irony and hostility often marked the comments that spokespeople of these successor cohorts not infrequently made concerning the Sixtiers. The following entry by Volodymyr Ieshkiliev in *Mala Ukrain's'ka Entsyklopediia Al'ternatyvnoi Literatury* (Small Ukrainian Encyclopaedia of Alternative Literature) or *MUEAL* may serve as an example:

Sixtiers: [. . .] a group of writers in Ukraine whose output falls within the grid of both T[estamentary]-R[ustic] and N[eo]-M[odern] discourse in whose discursive list of values the most important concepts were "openness," "sincerity," "democracy," "human rights" and "revival of the national spirit," extrapolated in the 1960s from the political discourse of antitotalitarianism into artistic and especially literary domains. Within the canonical list of the "Sixtiers" are numbered V. Symonenko, V. Stus, I. Drach, L. Kostenko, M. Rudenko, D. Pavlychko and others. Today the discursive sphere of "*shistdesiatnytstvo*" has lost the attributes of infraliterary relevance. Its achievements have been canonised in the historical discourse that describes the situation of opposition between the individual and totalitarian ideologies of the

24. For an analysis of the deliberate invocation of Western modernity by a member of this generation, see my article, "Modernizm iak znak: Bil'mo Mykhaila Osadchoho," in *Blahovisnyk pratsi: Naukovi zbirnyk na poshanu akademika Mykoly Mushynky*, ed. Mykola Zymomria (Uzhhorod: Polychka "Karpats'koho kraiu," 1998), pp. 231-40.

25. Anatolii Dnistrovyi, "'Shistdesiatnyky' – 'dev'iatdesiatnyky': Tiahlist', rozryvy, konfrontatsiia?," *Krytyka*, no. 10 (2001): 18-20, here 18.

20th Century. Some ideologemes of the sixtiers' antitotalitarianism are utilised by representatives of later generations (e.g., O. Zabuzhko).²⁶

Some of the striking features of this text – the irony signified by the inverted commas around words from the vocabulary of humanism and patriotism that the Sixtiers took at face value, the denial of contemporary aesthetic relevance to the Sixtiers and the relegation of them to history – may be read as signalling what Harold Bloom called the “anxiety of influence.” This anxiety Bloom saw as a precondition of any desire to assert the “priority in divination” that, in his view, accompanied any ambitious and potentially canonisable creative work.²⁷ *MUEAL*'s conflict with the Sixtiers from this perspective is an acknowledgement of their strength. Another feature of the quoted passage is its relentless invocation of “discourse,” a word not placed in inverted commas, presumably to signify an absence of ironic intention *vis-à-vis* Foucault (and, by association, the other authorities that *MUEAL* invokes: Barthes, Bakhtin, Borges, Warhol, Heidegger, Derrida, Eco and Nietzsche).

MUEAL, edited by Ieshkiliev and Iurii Andrukhovych, was part of the publicity apparatus of an alternative literary canon – one that by the end of the 1990s was so familiar to the cultural elite as to justify the label of a “new canon.” The new canon was the fruit of more than a decade's gifted work by writers and cultural personalities associated with the Ivano-Frankivs'k circle, beginning with the Bu-Ba-Bu group that comprised Iurii Andrukhovych, Oleksandr Irvanets' and Viktor Neborak. Bu-Ba-Bu feigned contempt for canons and other stable hierarchies. It professed the intention of “turning the world upon its head, provoking the most sacred ideas in order to rescue them from ossification and death.”²⁸ Much of its literary output and activity – glossaries of Bu-Ba-Bu, retrospectives of Bu-Ba-Bu, collected works of Bu-Ba-Bu and the Bu-Ba-Bu poetry prize – parodied canon-formation as practised by the Writers' Union and other institutions of official culture. But, through its parodies, Bu-Ba-Bu achieved notoriety as the first step toward cultural visibility, itself a step toward the status of what Tamara Hundorova facetiously labelled a “canonette” [*kanonchyk*].²⁹ But if in the word *kanonchyk* the diminutive form indicates a

26. Volodymyr Ieshkiliev, “Shistdesiatnyky,” in *Mala Ukrains'ka Entsyklopediia Aktual'noi Literatury: Proekt Povernennia demiurhiv*, ed. Volodymyr Ieshkiliev and Iurii Andrukhovych (Ivano-Frankivs'k: Lileia-NV, 1998), p. 123.

27. Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), p. 8.

28. Iurii Andrukhovych, “‘Bu-Ba-Bu’ i vse inshe,” *Literaturna Ukraina*, March 28, 1991.

29. Hundorova, “Literaturnyi kanon i mif,” p. 19.

limitation of the canonette's reach to a section of the fragmented postcolonial and postmodern public, then *MUEAL* signifies an intention to transform the *kanonchyk* into a fully fledged new canon. The encyclopaedia places between single covers most of the more prominent or gifted writers who do not belong to the iconostasis (the list goes well beyond the Ivano-Frankivs'k circle) together with a selection of their works that acts as proof of the authenticity of their aesthetic competence. Entries on writers stand alongside entries on practitioners of the other arts, Ukrainian critics sympathetic to innovation, and the abovementioned figures from the canon of Western theory. The transformation of Kotliarevs'kyi's *Eneida* (1798-1842), his travesty of Virgil's *Aeneid*, into the foundation work of vernacular Ukrainian literature, reminds us that the phenomenon of a parody on a canonical object itself becoming the source of a canon is not a novelty in Ukrainian cultural history. Nor is the seeming paradox of simultaneous rebellion against, and dependence upon a canon unfamiliar to students of canons: as Kolbas remarks, "canon formation involves the reproduction of, adaptation of, and familiarity with canonical antecedents."³⁰

It is time to ask what kind of national identity the new canon assumes and projects. The iconostasis wants to engender an audience united by loyalty to Ukrainian culture and a desire for a Ukrainian nation-state that would help that culture flourish. The new canon unambiguously announces that it is not interested in such a project. On the contrary, it makes a considerable fuss about provoking such an audience and enacting contempt for it and its values. In enjoining his readers to "Love Oklahoma," Oleksandr Irvanets' mocks, not so much Volodymyr Sosiura's wartime poem "Love Ukraine," as the patriotic audience which might find the older poem moving and its political sentiments appealing. A poem by Serhii Zhadan speaks bluntly of the antagonism between his position and the sentiments of cultural loyalists:

My poetry
 does not contribute to the further progress of literature
 My poetry
 is regressive and bereft of talent
 My poetry
 is faceless and epigonal
 My poetry
 is not poetry at all
 because
 I do not love my fatherland with all the fibres of my soul
 I dislike the song of nightingales over the millponds

30. Kolbas, *Critical Theory and the Literary Canon*, p. 4.

I cannot stand Shevchenko's verses
 I am an atheist and go out of my way to avoid any church
 and anyway (see above)³¹

Andrukhovych, recollecting the scandalous success of the Bu-Ba-Bu "poeso-opera" *Chrysler Imperial*, derived pleasure from the memory of the discomfort of the "types with drooping moustaches [who], outraged by this universal blasphemy, left the auditorium – to write crushing reviews somewhat akin to denunciations."³² "Drooping whiskers" reminiscent of those of the Cossacks and of Taras Shevchenko in his later years were adopted by many national-democratic activists of the years immediately before and after the declaration of independence. To create an association between such symbolic expressions of patriotism and the activities of informers was to make the provocative suggestion that an authoritarian strain was common to both.

Members of the new canon were generally disinclined to countenance the division of the world into a national "self" and national "others." The postmodern journal *Chetver* (Thursday) published a special issue in Russian, furnishing an afterword in Ukrainian, German and English in which the editors proclaimed the journal's intention of "combating all prejudices and stereotypes."³³ The authorities to whom members of the new canon turned were more likely to be Western European than Ukrainian. In the works of the new canon, Ukraine is generally a backdrop; the issues, if such can be distilled from what are sometimes complex and inscrutable texts, are seldom particular to Ukraine. Thus Iurii Izdryk's novel *Votstsek* (1997) is set in recognizably Ukrainian milieu, but is concerned with general ontological, epistemological and ethical questions. Insofar as a socio-political Ukraine does become a theme in works of the new canon, it is usually reflected in a critical way. In general, the works of the new canon do not "recommend" emotional identification with contemporary Ukraine. The exceptions here are such prose writers as Ievhen Pashkovs'kyi, V'iacheslav Medvid' and Oles' Ul'ianenko whose radical neo-naturalism contains an element of neo-populism. They, however, call for compassion with suffering human beings, not identification with a national project. Andrukhovych, the unchallenged first among equals in the new canon, began in his non-fictional prose of the late 1990s to focus increasingly on forms of identification that overlook or exclude the Ukrainian nation-state as constituted within its present borders. Always an enthu-

31. Serhii Zhadan, "Moia poeziiia," *Chetver*, no. 4 (1993): 21.

32. Iurii Andrukhovych, "Ave, Kraisl'er! Poiasnennia ochevydnoho," *Chetver*, no. 6 (1995): 61.

33. "Reziiume," *Chetver*, no. 5 (1993): 119-20, here 119.

siast of his home city, Ivano-Frankivs'k (often referred to in Andrukhovych's works by its former Polish name, Stanisław), of L'viv, and of the part of Western Ukraine that prior to its incorporation into the USSR had been called Galicia, Andrukhovych began to write travelogues exploring the affinity of Galicia to Central Europe. These texts nostalgically invoked the lost cultural harmony-in-diversity that they present as having been characteristic of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. They also formulated an aversion to the Orient, of which non-Galician Ukraine, including Kyiv, was presented as a manifestation.³⁴ Andrukhovych adopted the pose of having abandoned the nation-building pathos of which there had been traces in his earlier novels *Rekreatsii* (Recreations, 1992) and *Moskoviada* (The Moscoviad, 1993), choosing instead to savour a different cultural ideal: that of a multifaceted and cosmopolitan Central Europe.

And yet, in all of the new canon's demonstrative withdrawal from the "national agenda" there was a modicum of deception. Members of the new canon wrote in Ukrainian and therefore addressed an audience conceived of as competent in that language. They pilloried and lampooned this audience for being retrograde and simple-minded, but they had no other audience to address. Indeed, their animus toward the audience was susceptible to interpretation as a sly and not immediately transparent *captatio benevolentiae*. Any critique of an audience for its philistinism proposes a notional division of that audience into philistines and cognoscenti, and any concrete reader is invited to feel solidarity with the author against the plebeian crowd. Viewed in this way, the attacks by spokespersons of the new canon against the old-style audience ostensibly responsive only to the iconostasis were also appeals to that very audience to learn to value the offerings of the new canon and thereby enter the domain of a culture that projected itself as contemporary and exciting. It could be argued that such a rhetorical structure underlies every avant-gardism that is seemingly hell-bent upon offending its audience: the offender is engaged not so much in offence as in seduction:

Thus, in a roundabout way, the superficial refusal by several Ukrainian writers of the 1990s to participate in the project of developing a national identity could be read as an invitation to contemplate a national identity that continued to value Ukrainian national culture, but a Ukrainian culture viewed as dynamic, multifarious, multicultural, and aesthetically challenging. Each seemingly iconoclastic work written in Ukrainian – or in another

34. See especially the essays gathered in Iurii Andrukhovych, *Dezorientatsiia na mist-sevosti* (Ivano-Frankivs'k: Lileia-NV, 1999), and Iurii Andrukhovych, "Mala intymna urbanistyka," *Krytyka*, no. 7-8 (2000). For an analysis of the spatial co-ordinates invoked by Andrukhovych's prose, see my article, "Choosing a Europe: Andrukhovych, Izdryk and the New Ukrainian Literature," *New Zealand Slavonic Papers* 35 (2001): 41-44.

language, but acknowledging its Ukrainian milieu – whether it claimed to promote the evolution of a Ukrainian national identity or not, promoted Ukrainian national identity by default, through the very fact of adding to the amplitude of Ukrainian culture.

Lest this conclusion seem too emphatic, it is well to recollect that our inquiry has taken as its object, not real audiences harbouring “real” national identities susceptible to evolution and modification, but abstract audiences presupposed by texts. In the absence of empirical research, the actual social impact of the literary canon remains the subject of speculation or impressionistic observation. It could be thus speculatively or impressionistically proposed, on the one hand, that the social significance in Ukraine of Ukrainian-language high culture is itself not great, and that consequently the impact of shifts and eddies in the literary canon upon society at large is marginal. On the other hand, it could no less plausibly be argued that a statistical approach to the significance of phenomena is misplaced when it comes to high culture, and that what happens within elites is significant precisely because in the development of society elites can play initiative or exemplary roles that are disproportionate to the number of their members. From this perspective it is not unimportant whether one of the cultural elites of Ukraine discovers for itself, in harmony with its cultural canon, a national identity that is congruent with its perceptions of the contemporary world.

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