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EDVARD STRIKHA: THE HISTORY OF A LITERARY MYSTIFICATION

GEORGE SHEVELOV

(YURY ŠERECH)

LITERARY MYSTIFICATION IS NOT A NEW PHENOMENON. The very use of a pseudonym is, to a certain degree, equivalent to perpetrating a literary hoax. But if an invented biography is added to an imaginary name, a mythical person is created with a life of his own and with a style associated with it. Often, but not necessarily, this style and consequently the whole character of the newly created mythical author acquires a more or less pronounced touch of parody. The preromantic and romantic periods saw a particularly large number of such mystifications. May it suffice here to mention such well-known and various examples as Ossian, the *Théâtre de Clara Gazul*—which was accompanied by a biography of its “author,” a “Spanish lady”—and *Guzla* by Prosper Mérimée, and, to some extent, Pushkin’s *Povesti Belkina*. The Russian *Koz’ma Prutkov*, a creation of the brothers A. and V. Žemčužnikov and A. K. Tolstoj, may be mentioned as a later example in which the element of parody comes strongly to the fore.¹ In the middle twenties, the stormy period of the so-called “literary discussion” in the Ukraine, which was at the same time a political discussion, did not pass without leaving traces in the genre of parody. In addition to numerous but casual parodies on individual authors,² it created the image of the mythical poet, Edvard Strikha.

The portrait and the activity of Edvard Strikha display traits which distinguish this author from both Clara Gazul and from Prutkov. First of all, these traits are interesting in as much as Edvard Strikha was able to present his parodies in such a manner that the representatives of the literary trends he ridiculed took the travesties for legal tender; they quite seriously published them in their journals thereby creating a great scandal and causing much embarrassment for themselves. In the second place, Strikha’s activity is interesting because it did not confine itself to literary parody alone but concealed beneath this the sting of political satire and of veiled but still

¹ On *Koz’ma Prutkov*, cf. especially P. Berkov, *Koz’ma Prutkov, direktor Probiroj palatki i poet. K istorii ruskoj parodii* (Leningrad, 1933). Toward the end of Edvard Strikha’s literary activity, there appeared a book exclusively devoted to the problems of literary mystification: E. Lann, *Literaturnaja mistifikacija* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1930).

² Cf. a contemporary collection of parodies by V. Atamanjuk, *Literaturni parodiji* (Kiev, 1930).

sharp attacks on the political system then prevailing in the Ukraine. For this, among other "crimes," the actual originator of Edvard Strikha paid with his life somewhat later.

The sensational activity of Edvard Strikha falls into the years 1927-30. Its direct targets were Ukrainian futurism, headed by Mykhajl' Semenko who controlled the monthly *Nova generacija* (Kharkov, 1927-31), and Ukrainian constructivism, the mainstay of which was Valerijan Poliščuk with his almanac *Avangard* (Kharkov, 1928-29).

At the beginning of October 1927, Semenko received two letters closely following upon each other from one Edvard Strikha about whom he had never heard before. With the letters were enclosed four poems entitled "Radiotheses" and an article entitled: "We require a maximum—We shall give an untold number of things." About himself the author gave succinct and peculiar data: "I am swarthy too, aged 25, appetite colossal. Salary: 225. Profession: diplomatic courier. I circulate on the route Paris-Moscow." He signed it: "With radio greetings, Edvard Strikha." The letters were postmarked Moscow and at the bottom the following peculiar address was added: "For correspondence, telegrams, and honoraria: Moscow, Sadovo-Spasskaja 19, Apt. 105, Adja, c/o E. I. Nizner."³ Without suspecting anything ominous, Semenko printed the poems sent to him in his journal and provided them with editorial comment which, as was usually the case in *Nova generacija*, had a somewhat self-advertising character. The editor stated that Strikha's pieces were exemplary: Futuristic, original and perfect!

Here are some samples from the poems. One of them was entitled "On the Wave Length of 3000 Meters"⁴ and went on literally as follows:

Hello!
Hello!
Hello!
Edvard is shouting:
—Semenko!
At this very moment
I

³ The original of this letter, as well as the originals of many other writings by Edvard Strikha from which the present article was drawn, is preserved in the collection of Oksana Burevij's papers (New York). I take this opportunity to thank Miss Burevij for permission to put her materials to use. *Adja* seems to be a diminutive of Adolph rather than of Edvard. The choice of this form may have been determined by the fact that in Russian slang this name form is sometimes used in the sense of "stupid person" (possibly, by association with *idiot*).

⁴ *Nova generacija*, No. 3 (1927).

Am kissing
 the mistress
 of mine,
 The Golden Zozé:
 in her teeth
 in her breasts
 etc. . . .

Do
 you
 feel
 anything,
 Michael?

The fourth "Radiothesis"⁵ parodies not only the eroticism of certain of Semenko's poems and the lack of poetical rhythm in his poetry but also his propensity toward self-advertisement. What follows is the poem's conclusion:

For
 po
 e
 ts
 from above the sun—my genius
 shines for free.
 But
 keep on the fringe
 so you don't get singed.
 Let soar high up in the air
 my golden
 Well matched
 Errant pair,
 Semenko
 and
 Škurupij.⁶

These lines are clearly and undeniably a parody. The primitivized contents go hand in hand with the primitive technique of "word decomposition" and an equally primitive play on similar sounds, heaped up *ad nauseam*. Semenko welcomed the "destructivism" of these verses and wrote to the poet, or rather "to Adja": "Your poems impressed me as a poet and nonplussed me as an editor," and added: "Send some more *constructive* poems, if you are good

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Geo. Škurupij (born in 1903, arrested in the early thirties) was a Ukrainian poet and prose writer near to the futurists. Among his novels are *Dveri v den'* and *Žanna batal'jonerka*.

at them." The letter ended with a question: "Generally speaking, what kind of a person are you? It is the editor who is asking; you will agree that it is awkward to address letters 'to Adja.'"⁷

In reply to Semenko's requests, an autobiography of Edvard Strikha came into being along with the "constructive" poems. A first autobiographical outline appeared in Strikha's letter dated December 4, 1927:

What kind of person am I? As for the framework, you have it already. The biography itself, however, is rather long and complicated: A boy of Volhynian peasant stock was sent to forced labor in 1916 and from there escaped abroad. Baikal, Kiev, the front, Bucovina, Vienna, Paris. After the revolution, the route Moscow-Paris. For the time being, I am stuck in Moscow; as for the flat, the deuce has it . . . I sleep with acquaintances, mainly girls, or someone else's wife, when the husband is absent . . .

But the author was not satisfied with this brief outline, and he used it as a backdrop for an "autobiographical" poem, *Zozendropija*. This time the target of Strikha's parody was not only Semenko's futurism, but the whole Soviet opportunist "romantic" literature. In it, Europe was "decaying," while the proletariat was struggling for "liberation," and all these clichés were seasoned with a strong dose of eroticism. Strikha's poem depicts the exotic features of the tsarist forced labor gangs of Siberia; it introduces "luxurious" Russian princes and counts, and the "dazzling" Parisian beau-monde; in it, the hero outwits the tsarist secret police; the glory of *Rrrevolution* is sung; demonic *chekists* appear on the background of the red and white terror and finally a happy ending is engineered through the marriage of the fearless *chekist* Strikha-Strisyns'kyj with the charming Countess Zozé Pkhutjur'je. Previously, Zozé, on the instigation of Prince Podlecov, made an attempt against the ferocious *chekist's* life; but now the aristocratic blue blood was pumped out of her and the red proletarian blood pumped in.⁸

At the same time, Edvard Strikha tried his hand at writing "constructive" poetry, dedicated to "Soviet construction," while Semenko continued to publish his other works, in which the scorn of this editor and his journal became less and less obscured. Already in his first article, Edvard Strikha expounded his program in rather obvious fashion: "We are able to give: clearheadedness, *lightheadedness*."⁹ Here is how he formulated his postulates: "We require:

⁷ Letter from November 17, 1927. Original preserved among O. Burevij's papers.

⁸ First printed in the almanac *Avangard*, No. 3 (Kharkov, 1929). Excerpts reprinted in *Arka*, No. 6 (Munich, 1947).

⁹ *Nova generacija*, No. 3 (1927). Here and in other passages, the italics are mine.

a) immortality for all of us (I mean us, not you); b) the erection of a monument on the Rose Luxemburg Square¹⁰ to Semenko during his lifetime,¹¹ and such like. In the poem "Dance, Readers," Strikha wrote in as many words:

I am in ecstatic trance;
 Joyful to the point of homeroetry.
 On my Parnassus, readers, dance,
 And burst of laughter at my poetry.

Semenko, however, far from bursting with laughter, took everything for the real thing. He also printed a passage, in which the author derived futurist poetry from a quarrel between two peasant women:

Ever heard in a village
 Old gals having a tiff?
 Two of them!
 Only two!
 And yet in the whole
 district
 you hear them howl.
 But their hullabaloo
 is about their individual beliefs
 while
 I
 for the whole world,
 for all men
 shall stage a row.
 How can you miss hearing my words?
 When I
 burp once—
 so that my stomach gets upturned—
 I spit out euphony and aesthetics.¹²

Semenko continued to praise Strikha in editorial notes. He wrote some beginner: "You haven't yet outdone Edvard Strikha. . . . Write as Edvard Strikha does, then we shall print your work."¹³ Semenko accepted *Zozendropija* for publication and remarked to its author: "*Zozendropija* contains elements of a masterpiece. This is point one. Furthermore, in it you show unmistakable signs of a

¹⁰ One of Kharkov's principal squares. At that time, Kharkov was the capital of the Soviet Ukraine.

¹¹ *Nova generacija, ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.* This parody aims at Majakovskij rather than at Semenko who was considered, so to speak, as Majakovskij's representative in the Ukraine. Cf. *Oblako v štanax*, chapter 3.

¹³ *Nova generacija, ibid.*

good European school."¹⁴ Unfortunately, when the text of *Zozendropija* had already been set up, the bomb exploded. Someone revealed to Semenko just who was hiding behind the mask of Edvard Strikha and how pronouncedly parodic the latter's writings were. It must be said to Semenko's credit that he kept his presence of mind. In order to save face, he himself started to write under Strikha's pseudonym. He began with his own variant of *Zozendropija*, from which the element of parody was absent, and continued to publish the counterfeit Edvard Strikha, in reality his own poetry, in each of the following issues of his journal. Finally, having decided that the impression of parody had faded from the minds of his readers, Semenko used a new trick in order to put an end to the game. He announced that Edvard Strikha had met a tragic death, having fallen from a rock somewhere in the Murman peninsula. He also printed an obituary and a letter—signed by Olena Veber, the poet's supposed widow—which contained an appeal for material to be used for the late Strikha's biography.¹⁵

Strikha, however, refused to be disposed of too easily. He protested, declaring that he was very much alive. He found a new shelter in the *Avangard* of Valerijan Poliščuk. Poliščuk printed the *Zozendropija*, without noticing, however, that it was aimed at him at least as much as it had been at Semenko. Specifically, while depicting the transfusion of proletarian blood into the veins of Countess Pkhutjur'je, Strikha derided the corresponding scene of Poliščuk's novel in verse, *The Red Stream*.¹⁶

Zozendropija created a storm not only among the adherents of Poliščuk's "spiralism," but in official Communist circles as well. Ovčarov, Kovalenko and other critics sworn to the official "proletarian" style, attached to Strikha the epithets of "character of a penny dreadful," "pathological personality," "super-hoaxter," "vociferous Philistine," "maddened petty bourgeois," and such like.¹⁷ The reason for all this was that *Zozendropija* was a slap not only at futurism, but at the whole of "proletarian" literature. The poem mercilessly unmasked the vulgar and primitive essence of this literature, its helplessness, its sloppiness, and its slavish dependence on the *politgramota*. In the final analysis, Edvard Strikha was wearing

¹⁴ Letter dated January 25, 1928. Original preserved among O. Burevij's papers.

¹⁵ Semenko's *Zozendropija* appeared in *Nova generacija*, No. 4 (1928). In later numbers of the journal, Semenko (using Strikha's name) published *Nezrozumilo, kryvdno, ale fakt; Rehabilitacija T. H. Ševčenka*, and *My kydajem pyt' ne vodu*.

¹⁶ Poliščuk's novel appeared in *Avangard* (1924-1926).

¹⁷ B. Kovalenko, "Na literaturnij birži," *Literaturna hazeta*, No. 23 (1929). H. Ovčarov, "Proty miščans'kykh vykhvatok u literaturi," *Krytyka*, No. 11 (1930).

a double mask: in order to ridicule futurism, he assumed the garb of a futurist; but his parody of futurism was in turn a tool used to ridicule the whole of out-and-out Soviet literature, and, consequently, the Soviet regime itself. This was the period when Khvyľ'ovyj's *Val'dšnepy* was burnt and the *Vaplite*¹⁸ dealt a crushing blow. The opposition currents in Soviet Ukrainian literature were forced to switch to Aesopian language. Strikha became one of the best masters of this language. His "Party Signboard" alone (which he demanded set up on the Central Executive Committee building in Kharkov) was not only a parody on Majakovskij's lines on the Party membership card, but also a satire on the privileged position of the Communist Party itself:

Make a Party card for me
 Its length—a mile
 Its width—a mile
 And write with red on a fiery background:
 This is Strikha Edvard—
 a rank and file
 genius
 of a geniuses' host!
 - - - - -
 And
 write:
 Gladly will he die
 For the All-world rule of the Soviets.
 Both death
 And laughter.¹⁹

Even if one chose to disregard the parodic character of the whole, the very line "and laughter" would suffice to reveal Edvard Strikha's political attitude. The poem "Rrrevolution"²⁰ was a "sally" of no less magnitude. In it the author, playing on the words *revolution* and *evolution*, hinted that the revolution did not bring about any real change and that the country was ruled by the same type of regime which had prevailed under the tsars. In "Dniprel'stan,"²¹ Edvard Strikha ridiculed the "socialist construction" and its false pathos:

¹⁸ Clarence A. Manning, *Ukraine Under the Soviets* (New York, 1953), p. 83; Naukove Товариство ім. Шевченка, *Encyklopedija ukrajinoznavstva* (Munich-New York, 1949), I, 779 f. (Article by M. Hlobenko.) These questions are discussed in more detail by G. Luckyj in his Columbia University Dissertation *Soviet Ukrainian Literature. A Study in Literary Politics* (1953).

¹⁹ *Nova generacija*, No. 3 (1928).

²⁰ First printed in *Arka*, No. 6 (1947).

²¹ The poem has never been printed in its entirety. The passage quoted appeared in *Arka*, No. 6 (1947).

The month of May drummed: t-r-r-um!
 Bach banged and banged: bong—bong!
 T-r-r-um!
 Bong!
 Blow the trombone!
 On the Dnieper, our impressive Dniprel' state
 presses
 the hours
 into the comunostate.
 Oh Dnieper! don't hesitate,
 you devil, to electroprance!
 By Ford's help your performance'll be enhanced,
 and by
 —all kinds of—
 —zation.

- - - - -
 Communism: to the realm of the real from that of utopia.
 Here's the place for "Zvenyhora"²²
 There—for "Zozendropija"!
 Semenko's poem belongs in the center,
 Semenko's "Kobzar"²³ in the depths below.
 This is,
 of the New World,
 the constructive
 cess
 pro.

In 1929, Edvard Strikha found a shelter in the *Literaturnyj jarmarok*, the eighth (July) issue of which contained his humorous fill-ins called "*intermediji*." The journal itself owed its existence to the attempts of M. Khvyľ'ovyj's group to adapt itself to the new conditions following the forced "autodisbanding" of *Vaplite* and marked by strict censorship and persecutions. The journal claimed no ties with any group and printed only creative writing, to the exclusion of critical articles and reviews. But for all that, in between these writings, the editors published jocular commentaries on them written in the form of rambling talks on various topics, and there, many a biting literary and political allusion could be found among the other witticisms.²⁴

²² *Zvenyhora* was the title of O. Dovženko's first important film. It depicted the Ukraine across the ages and touched upon the construction of the Dnieper hydroelectric station (*Dniprel'stan*). The film was never shown outside of the Soviet Union. About Dovženko see e.g., Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film* (New York, 1939), p. 322 f., and Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach, *The History of Motion Pictures* (New York, 1938), p. 282.

²³ On Semenko's *Kobzar*, cf. p. 106.

²⁴ Cf. *Encyklopedija ukrajinoznavstva* (1949), I, 992.

Edvard Strikha's "intermediji" abounded with witty and sharp passages. The topical link between them was expressly provided in the ridiculing of Western fears of Communism. But in reality the author was talking about the need for closer contacts between the Ukraine and the West. The plot was as follows: Strikha's wife, the fascinating Zozé, who lived in Paris and had won a beauty contest there, threw hundreds of copies of the *Literaturnyj jarmarok* from a chariot into the Parisian crowd during some carnival festivities. Her aim was to publicize Ukrainian literature in the West. For that she was accused of spreading Communist propaganda. But at a grand trial she captivated everyone by her beauty; thereupon the whole of Paris shouted "Long live Ukrainian literature!" and Poincaré's cabinet had to resign. Such was the background upon which were set imaginary interviews with Picasso, who asserted that the Ukrainian school of painting headed by M. Bojčuk was the most interesting in the world; with Bernard Shaw, who granted the dependence of English literature on the Ukrainian, since *The Portrait of Dorian Gray* was allegedly only a repetition of the *Saldats'kyj portret* by H. Kvitka-Osnov'janenko;²⁵ finally, with H. Barbusse, whose interview the author uses to ridicule Western ignorance of Ukrainian literature.

The lively but biting scenes and repartees of the trial touched upon a number of sore spots of contemporary literary and political life in a strikingly bold manner. I shall illustrate the foregoing remarks by a few quotations from Strikha's "Aphorisms" and his poem "Plagijateza," both included in the "intermediji." Some aphorisms with a clearly political flavor are interspersed among others lacking political connotations. Such are: "Do not believe the proletariat when it tells you you are not a proletarian writer"; "Do not get upset," which amounted to a statement of policy at the time which saw the beginnings of persecutions of writers, and: "When you ride in a car, see to it that the driver keeps to the right; as for yourself, however, you may lean to the left," the latter being an appeal to steering an independent course under the Soviet regime. "Plagijateza" is a poem skillfully pieced together from lines taken from various of the most widely-read verses of Ukrainian nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers. Its zest is contained in a conversation about some of its final lines:

I am
The King of Kings!

²⁵ H. Kvitka-Osnov'janenko's (1778-1843) humorous story *Saldats'kyj portret* (1833) has of course nothing in common with Wilde's novel, except for the motif of the relationship between the portrait and reality.

I am the mighty son of the Sun
And here are my satraps, the noncoms.

The first three lines are derived from Lesja Ukrajinka's poem "Napys v rujini" (1904) and on the face of it refer to the times of ancient Egypt; the last line comes from T. Ševčenko's poem *Jurodyvyj* (1857), and refers to Tsar Nicholas I's reign and the police regime prevailing at that time in Russia. The very juxtaposition of these lines in a piece published in 1929 is expressive and alludes to the contemporary situation. This projection into the present is further stressed by the ensuing commentary in dialogue form. The author says to his plenipotentiary: "A work of genius, isn't it?" The latter answers: "A beautiful poem, this. Only from the ideological point of view . . . this 'King of Kings' rings dissonant." Whereupon the author concludes the discussion with the following sentence: "Well, this may be corrected into 'Slave of Slaves.'" This characterization of a contemporary Ukrainian's position needs no further comment. He is called a slave of Ukrainian Communists who in turn are slaves of the Communists of Moscow.

This appearance in the *Literaturnyj jarmarok* was Strikha's last unhampered literary expression. His attempt, undertaken in 1930, to have the book *Parodezy* published ended in failure. His preface, in which he declared that his parodies were aimed exclusively at futurism, was of no avail. Nor was his changing the title of the poem "Dniprel'stan" into "How the Nova *Generacija* Pictures the Dniprel'stan" any more helpful. The censor (*Holovlit*) wrote when he returned the manuscript of *Parodezy* to the publishing house: "Returning Edvard Strikha's book *Parodezy*, the Section of Literary Control does not recommend its publication. Chief of the section . . . N. Kaljužnyj."²⁶

In 1930, Edvard Strikha was forced to lay the parodic vein aside and to indulge in autocriticism in the pages of the official party journal *Krytyka* (Kharkov, 1928-31). Pressed by necessity, the author abandoned his irresponsible chattering manner and declared that for the first time he was writing seriously and "without his ugly mask"; he went on to say that the present article completely differs in tone from Strikha's other scribblings and concluded as follows: "Whenever our Marxist criticism deals blows at the *strikhias* and exterminates Strikhianism in our literature, my warm sympathies will be on the side of such criticism." It must be added

²⁶ Letter of *Litkontrol'* to the publishing house *Literatura i mystectvo*. Date: November 27, 1930. Original among O. Burevij's papers.

that the opening parts of the article were devoted to the history of the parodic genre in world literature, dwelling especially upon Gozzi, Merimée and Prutkov. And yet, the old Strikha could be discerned even between these lines; the nearer the reader approached the end of the article, the stronger must have been his impression that he was reading one more parody—this time on the style of contemporary Communist criticism. In the first place, it could be felt in the article's ambivalent and almost allusive title, "Autoexecution." Furthermore, it comes out in the author's solidarity with the most ridiculous of the pronouncements of the "proletarian critics" such as Ovčarov, V. Sukhyno-Khomenko and B. Kovalenko. The travesty became most transparent in the author's declaration following the "autodestroying autocriticism": "I am not dead yet. Even when I am dead, many elements of Strikhianism will be left in our literature."²⁷

On this point, however, our writer was wrong. The article was Strikha's last. Further biography of Edvard Strikha is the life story of the person who was hiding behind his mask. This person was a Ukrainian writer, publicist and political figure of considerable importance by the name of Kost' Burevij. His biography deserves special treatment. Only a general sketch can be attempted here. Burevij was born of peasant parents on June 2, 1888 on the northeastern confines of the Ukrainian ethnographical territory, in the village of Velyka Meženka of the Voronezh government. Between 1903 and 1922 his life was absorbed by his activity in the (Russian) Social Revolutionary Party. This activity comprised work among peasants and workers, terrorist coups, such as the attempt at the life of the Voronezh governor, repeated arrests and banishments, living under assumed names; in short, an untold number of situations loaded with danger and tension. At the fourth Social Revolutionary Party Congress (1917), Burevij became a member of the Party's Executive Committee. He was among the organizers of the Volga uprising, but refused to continue to collaborate with Admiral Kolchak. This in turn caused a split in the party. Burevij headed a minority which preferred to strike a compromise with the Soviets and after the destruction of this group (1922) he retired from political activity. His participation in Ukrainian cultural life started at this juncture. He wrote a novel *Khamy*²⁸ and a series of revues,

²⁷ *Krytyka*, No. 5 (1930). It is conceivable that in the opening passages of "Avtoekzekucija" Strikha may have used the data of Lann's book which had recently appeared. Cf. note 1.

²⁸ Only an excerpt of the novel appeared in *Červonyj Šljakh*, No. 5 (1925).

the best known of which were *Oportunija* and *Čotyry Čemberleny*. The latter was staged in Ukraine's leading theater *Berezil'* (Khar'kov, 1931).

While acting the part of Edvard Strikha, Burevij wrote his historical drama *Pavlo Polubotok*. The plot depicts the fate of a Ukrainian hetman of the eighteenth century who, when still a Cossack colonel, opposed Mazeppa's policy of autonomy and hoped that Ukraine's rights would be best defended in an alliance with Russia. For all that, he was imprisoned by Peter I in the Petropavlovsk fortress and ended his days there. It is possible that Burevij may have drawn a parallel between the past and his own activity in the midst of the Russian political parties. The drama's leading idea was that Ukraine's liberty would not be reached through compromise with Russia, but was to be found "at the point of a sabre."²⁹ We may be the more justified in considering this idea as a conclusion drawn by the author from his own experience, as the tragedy was clearly written for his own use. He could not reasonably entertain the hope that it might be published or staged under Soviet conditions.

Burevij's evolution in the above direction may be also deduced from the history of his relationship with M. Khvyľ'ovyj, who originated the slogan, "Away from Moscow—Let us turn towards Europe," as a postulate for Ukrainian cultural life. In 1926, Burevij opposed this slogan in a pamphlet *Evropa čy Rosija?*. To some extent, his objections were motivated by practical considerations. As a rule, Ukrainian youth was unfamiliar with European languages; therefore a slogan which would make it renounce Russian literature would amount to isolation from any culture. However, certain principles were also involved in Burevij's stand. He thought at that time that European literature was largely decaying, while the Russian was on the upsurge. Consequently, Burevij appealed to his generation to turn toward Russia rather than toward Europe, but he was careful to add that "other, special horizons may open up before the next generation. It will sing its own songs and decide for itself the question of the path to be taken by the development of the Ukraine's literature."³⁰ Soon afterward, however, Burevij's views underwent a change. He collaborated with Khvyľ'ovyj in the *Literaturnyj jarmarok* and later in the *Prolitfront*³¹ and it is not chance that his, or rather Strikha's "intermedijj" were devoted to a

²⁹ Kost' Burevij, *Pavlo Polubotok. Istoryčna trahediija* (Munich, 1948), p. 97.

³⁰ Kost' Burevij, *Evropa čy Rosija?* (Moscow, 1926), p. 37.

³¹ In *Prolitfront*, No. 3 (1930), pp. 205–28, Burevij (using the pseudonym of Varvara Žukova) published the article "Fašyzm i futuryzm." On *Prolitfront*, cf. *Encyklopediija ukrajinoznavstva*, I, 780.

topic which was dear to Khvyl'ovyj, namely the problem of the relations of Ukrainian literature to that of the West.

The end of Burevij-Strikha's biography was the logical outcome of the views he had developed. As early as 1932 no publishing house dared to print his work except under an obscure pseudonym. The writer suffered material hardships and had constantly to change his address. He was arrested in the autumn of 1934 and executed on December 15, 1934 together with a group of other Ukrainian writers and scholars. The action was officially interpreted as retaliation for S. Kirov's murder. Parody turned out to be too dangerous a genre under the Soviet Ukrainian conditions of the thirties.

The question remains to be answered, why, at least from the formal point of view, Strikha chose Ukrainian futurists as the main target of his parodies. To do this, we must cast a brief glance at Ukrainian futurism. This current was by no means an organic growth in Ukrainian literature. As a rule, futurism was linked to urbanism. But this precondition was absent in prerevolutionary Ukraine. Large cities were few and the Ukrainian element far from prominent in them. That is why Ukrainian futurism looked like an imitation of foreign, mainly Russian, models and was not able to become a school. Its consistent adherent and leader was Mykhajl' Semenko (born in 1892), "the Ukrainian Majakovskij." Others, like H. Škurupij, V. Poliščuk, M. Bažan, L. Nedolja joined him at different times, but for the most part they soon drifted away from Semenko and from the movement as a whole. Semenko himself did not develop his art organically. He began with imitations of café and cabaret type ego-futurism, represented by Igor' Severjanin, which he seasoned with reminiscences of the Western Ukrainian modernists and even symbolists. To this period belong his prerevolutionary cycles *Derzannja*, *Kverofuturyzm*, *Erotezy*, *Osinnja rana*, *Pjero kokhaje*, *Pjero zadajet'sja*, and *Paysages intimes*. From 1919 on, when Severjanin's ego-futurism became anachronistic under Soviet conditions, Semenko switched to other attitudes which brought him nearer to Majakovskij. Some of his works, such as *Tovaryš sonce*, *Poema povstannja*, and *Kablepoema za okean*, are the result of this change. His verses ridiculing traditional views on poetry, and using the technique of the decomposition of the verbal material (*Poezomaljarstvo*) fall into the same period. Here also belongs the "poem" which reads:

Monday
Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday

Friday
Saturday
Sunday.³²

Having collected his writings in a book, Semenکو ostentatiously called it *Kobzar*, a title which was to allude to the author's polemics with Ševčenko across the gulf of time. The collection's motto was: "Our creation does not belong to us any more." In the period of *Nova generacija* Semenکو moved further toward transforming his poetical language into prose, toward extolling technology and servicing official political campaigns.

Semenکو and his journal proved a welcome target for Burevij, who opposed the "mere talk" of Europeanizing Ukrainian literature. Although Semenکو talked much about Europe, he had no real first hand knowledge of it. At the same time, nowhere else in contemporary Ukrainian literature did the spirit of conformism with the Soviet system appear so strongly, nor the desire to serve this system in every detail become so obvious as in Semenکو's writings.³³ Thus it was precisely here that Burevij found the combination of provincialism and opportunism which enabled him to express, by allusions and under the guise of literary parody, his general political likes and dislikes. We have seen, however, that soon Strikha's satires outgrew the futurist frame of reference.

Today, viewed from the perspective of more than two decades, Semenکو's activity does not appear in quite as hopeless a light as it once did. It is true that worthless imitations make up the bulk of his poetry, but he also produced some fresh and original writing. Of course in that movement which advocated a Ukrainian literature oriented toward the West, futurism cannot claim a place equal to that held by M. Khvyl'jovyj, the movement's leader. Nor does it measure up in importance when compared to the more serious among the literary groups, such as the neo-classicist school headed by Mykola Zerov, or to Valerijan Pidmohyl'nyj and Arkadij Ljubčenko who turned for their inspiration to French literature, which they knew intimately, or to V. Domontovyč, interested in German literature, or, finally, to the members of the "Techno-artistic Group A" (M. Johansen, Jurij Smolyč and others) with their admiration for the English short story. Nevertheless, both Semenکو and Poliščuk deserve a modest place in the history of the pro-Western current. To some extent, they initiated the Ukrainian

³² Mykhajl' Semenکو, *Kobzar* (Kiev, 1924), p. 627.

³³ Except for VUSPP (*Vseukrajins'ka spilka proletars'kykh pys'mennykiv*). But this organization was not considered as a literary body, but rather as a political mouthpiece of the Communist Party in literature.

reader into the formalist, destructivist and constructivist trends of the West. The fact that these trends were viewed through the prism of Russian constructivism and futurism is of secondary importance here. Soviet security organs assessed the situation correctly when they arrested Semenko and Poliščuk in the thirties; the two writers have never been heard of since.