

POST-SOVIET WOMEN WRITERS AND THE NATIONAL IMAGINARY, 1989-2009

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Slavic Languages and Literatures
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013

Urbana, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

This project is a case study of how post-Soviet women writers have attempted to renegotiate women's (and women writers') traditional roles in and vis-à-vis their newly independent postcommunist nations through fiction that engages the questions of gender and national identity in the post-Soviet space. The dissertation examines the writings and paths to literary recognition of several by now established Ukrainian women authors who first appeared on the literary scene in the late 1980s (Oksana Zabuzhko, Yevhenia Kononenko, and Maria Matios) and compares the Ukrainian case of a proliferation in late/post-Soviet women's writing to the Russian one, which is better known in the West.

I argue that one important way in which Ukrainian post-Soviet women writers have been able to gain recognition and even acceptance into the literary canon is by turning to the “national” themes, such as the traumatic Soviet past. Yet their fiction has often treated the questions of the nation through a gender lens, representing and re-imagining the Soviet past and its relevance for the national present from the perspective of a female subject. By placing women in the center of the narrative—as highly individualized characters and not mere symbols of the nation—these works participate in (re)shaping the Ukrainian national imaginary and especially those of its elements that have to do with gender (for instance, the stereotypes about women's roles in the nation). The project utilizes the tools of nationalism studies, postcolonial studies, and gender-nation studies to analyze women writers' interventions into the national imaginary and identifies two broad types of narrative plots about the nation which post-Soviet women writers have used and often simultaneously undermined in their recent fiction.

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Ukrainian literary scholar Solomiya Pavlychko, the end of the 1980s in Ukrainian literature was marked by a “return” of women writers (“Vykyk stereotypam: novi zhinochi holosy v suchasni ukrains'kii literaturi” 181).¹ At the same time, the fall of the Soviet Union and the gaining of independence by Ukraine in 1991 placed before the local intellectual elites the challenge of constructing “a new collective identity, different from the Soviet one” and made the ensuing transitional period a time of heated discussions about the Soviet past, national identity, and the urgent tasks of post-Soviet nation-building (Hnatiuk 17). Not surprisingly for “literature-centric” Ukraine,² much of this construction and discussion happened in prose fiction (as well as literary essays³), with many of the newly emergent women writers actively participating in this process and contributing their visions of Ukraine's past and present.

This study examines the two developments—women's re-emergence in Ukrainian literature and their literary interventions into Ukraine's national imaginary—together. I explore the works and literary careers of several by now established, professional Ukrainian women writers of the so-called “eightiers” (*visimdesiatnyky*) generation.⁴ I argue that these writers' success in asserting themselves on the male-dominated literary scene, gaining popularity and acceptance into the Ukrainian literary canon has often hinged on their willingness to address important national issues in their fiction, such as those of the traumatic Soviet past or Ukraine's post-Soviet challenges. This often implicit cultural expectation of the “national” themes in

¹ Translations from Ukrainian and Russian throughout are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

² A term applied both to Ukraine and Russia by the literary scholar Vitaly Chernetsky (*Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization*). For more on literature-centrism in Eastern Europe and Ukraine in particular, see Chapter 1.

³ For the national identity debates that took place in the 1990s on the pages of Ukrainian literary essays, see Hnatiuk.

⁴ This is a generation of Ukrainian writers that first came onto the literary scene in the mid- to late 1980s. I discuss their significance and characteristics in more detail in Chapter 2.

fiction can be traced back to Ukrainian literature's traditional role as the locus for the articulation and preservation of a sense of national identity in the absence of an independent Ukrainian state, as well as to what I describe, borrowing a term from Serguei Oushakine, as the Soviet regime's "discursive monopoly"—the state's demand for writing that deals primarily with the state's ideology and explicitly political topics ("The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat," 214). Using the example of Nina Bichuya, whom I see as the sole female precursor to the women writers of prose fiction from the eightiers generation, I explain in Chapter 2 how the Soviet discursive monopoly and the literary politics within Soviet Ukraine hindered the career of this talented author and likely prevented more Ukrainian women writers from emerging in the Soviet period.

I further argue that, as in the case of Russian women's literature (better known in the West), to which I compare Ukrainian women's writing in Chapter 5 of this dissertation, women authors in late Soviet and post-Soviet Ukraine have had to deal with the patriarchal stereotype that issues of gender and women's daily life are the hallmark of "narrow-minded" and therefore "inferior" women's literature.⁵ As my analysis of a number of recent critically acclaimed prose texts by Ukrainian women writers shows, one way in which these authors were able to work around this stereotype—and gain critical and readers' recognition in the process—was by creating fiction that treated the questions of the nation through a gender lens, so to speak. Prose works written between 1989 and 2009 by Oksana Zabuzhko, Yevhenia Kononenko, and Maria Matios, examined in this dissertation, discuss, reconstruct and/or re-imagine Ukraine's Soviet past and its relevance for the national present, but frequently do so from the perspective of a female subject. By placing women in the center of the narrative—as highly individualized characters and not mere symbols of the nation—these texts participate in (re)shaping the

⁵ For an explanation of such attitudes to women's writing in Russia, see Helena Goscilo's *Dehexing Sex*, especially pp. 16-8.

contemporary Ukrainian national imaginary—a collectively held conception of the Ukrainian nation, based on a complex of narratives, myths, and symbols (including those that pertain to gender) that are believed to define the “uniqueness” of the Ukrainian national community and hold it together.⁶ In so doing, these works attribute to their authors a tinge of subversiveness—first, because national imaginaries (and the Ukrainian one is no exception) are generally quite resistant to change and, second, because the conservative national discourses usually cast women in the role of biological and cultural *reproducers* rather than producers of new cultural meanings.⁷ Thus, the act of re-imagining and re-writing the national may become a subversive act for a woman writer—as it did, for example, in the case of Zabuzhko's first novel, *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* (1996), examined in Chapter 3.

Through the close readings of representative prose fiction by Zabuzhko, Kononenko, and Matios, as well as an inquiry into its reception and cultural influence—reviews, criticism, literary prizes and awards received, translations into other languages and stage adaptations, I attempt to answer the following questions: What are these visions of the Ukrainian nation that contemporary women writers have authored in the past several decades, and how do they differ from the most representative national visions by male writers? What kind of Ukrainian national identity do they advocate? How have these works been received by the Ukrainian literary establishment and the society at large, and what does this tell us about the gender order under formation in post-Soviet Ukraine?

By undertaking this case study of how post-Soviet women authors renegotiate women's (and women writers') traditional roles and positions in and vis-à-vis their newly independent

⁶ As I explain in Chapter 1, this conception may often be contested, critiqued, and is certainly not shared by everyone in Ukraine, but at least some of its elements enjoy a degree of consensus in the society.

⁷ See, for example, Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (23, 45) and Harriet Murav, “Engendering the Russian Body Politic” (36). I discuss such role ascription in more detail in Chapter 1.

postcommunist nations, I hope to contribute to our understanding of the changes in women's status both in post-Soviet societies and in these societies' privileged domain of cultural production—literature. In comparison with Russia, the case of Ukraine presents interesting differences in the quantity of women's writing during the Soviet era and subsequently, in the themes as well as ways of dealing with the national imaginary. These differences, I argue, stem in part from Ukraine's lack of independent statehood in modern history and its colonial status within the Soviet Union. Thus, to account for these differences as well as to explain the main preoccupations of late and post-Soviet Ukrainian women's writing, I use the tools of postcolonial theory. Concepts, elaborated in postcolonial literary/cultural studies—such as the mute female subaltern, mimicry, and the dynamics between the self and the Other—prove very useful in helping to elucidate the gendered national visions of Ukrainian women writers' prose fiction. In the chapter that compares Ukrainian and Russian women's writing, I apply a modification of postcolonial theory—Aleksandr Etkind's conception of internal colonization—to a “national” novel by a Russian woman writer. This lens allows one to see vital similarities between what seem to be very different portrayals of the nation by a Ukrainian woman writer and a Russian one. In general, the analysis of the role that the Soviet past has played in how post-Soviet women writers construct their nations' identities helps one understand with greater nuance what may be termed as “post-Soviet postcolonialism.”

Additionally, this project illuminates what Elleke Boehmer calls “the writerliness” of a “national consciousness” (145)—that is, the nation's dependence on narrative in general and on literary, especially novelistic, plots in particular. I take as my starting point Benedikt Anderson's theorization of the novel as a vehicle for imagining the nation, and with the help of additional analyses of the gender/nation nexus in literature, I identify and examine two types of emplotment

of the nation in the women's fiction under study—a woman-centered reverse national biography and a national romance. I explain what ideological work these plots perform in each case and how they help stage specific interventions into the national imaginaries of Ukraine and Russia.

In the recent years, there appeared several books and book chapters, devoted to post-Soviet Ukrainian women's writing. Among the most valuable studies is Liudmyla Taran's book, *Zhinocha rol': Zhinka-avtor u suchasnii ukrains'kii prozi* (*The Woman's Role: The Woman Author in Contemporary Ukrainian Prose*, 2007), which examines the so-called “emancipatory discourse” in a number of prose works written by post-Soviet Ukrainian women. In addition, the last chapter of Vira Aheeva's book, *Zhinochyi prostir: feministychnyi dyskurs ukrains'koho modernizmu* (*Women's Space: The Feminist Discourse of Ukrainian Modernism*, 2003) compares the post-Soviet women writers to the Ukrainian women modernists and acknowledges that the former found inspiration in the latter. Both of these studies focus on the themes of individual emancipation and finding one's voice as a woman (including a woman writer); while they discuss the cultural context in which this emancipation does or does not occur, they do not analyze how women writers engage the questions of collective national identity.

That the gender/nation nexus is an important theme for post-Soviet writing in Ukraine is suggested in the chapter “Confronting Traumas: The Gendered/Nationed Body as Narrative and Spectacle” by Vitaly Chernetsky (in his book, *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization*, 2007), but the vast scope of this study prevents the author from going beyond a brief sketch of this nexus in several of Zabuzhko's early works. While even these short comments are helpful and resonant with my project in some ways, my reading of Zabuzhko nevertheless differs from Chernetsky's. Finally, in an article entitled

“Women’s Literary Discourse and National Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine”⁸ Maria Rewakowicz briefly considers a number of recent Ukrainian women’s writings (both criticism and fiction) and how they engage the questions of national identity. However, Rewakowicz focuses much more on the history of two gender studies centers in Ukraine, their scholarly production, and their debates about nationalism and feminism than on an analysis of fiction. The only work from this project which she interprets is *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*. Once again, my reading of this novel by Zabuzhko is quite different.

While there are book-length studies in English of the late Soviet/post-Soviet boom in Russian women’s writing,⁹ there are no in-depth explorations in English of the parallel phenomenon in the Ukrainian context. Neither have there been attempts in English to compare Ukrainian and Russian women writers’ interventions into post-Soviet national imaginaries. This project is an effort to begin to chart the scholarly terrain in both of these directions.

Outline

Chapter 1, “National Imaginaries and Women Writers in the Postcolonial Post-Soviet Space,” develops the conceptual framework for the readings of women writers’ late Soviet and post-Soviet texts by combining the critical tools of nationalism studies, collective memory studies, postcolonial studies, and gender-nation studies. I define my key concept “the national imaginary,” discuss its connections to imaginative literature and the literary canon in Eastern European nations such as Ukraine, and explain its relationship to collective memory as well as its dependence on narrative plots. I also summarize the most important theorizations of the post-

⁸ The article came out in *Contemporary Ukraine on the Cultural Map of Europe* (2009). A revised version appeared in *Mapping Difference: The Many Faces of Women in Contemporary Ukraine* (2011).

⁹ See, for example, Helena Goscilo’s *Dehexing Sex: Russian Womanhood during and after Glasnost* (1996) and Benjamin Sutcliffe’s *The Prose of Life: Russian Women Writers from Khrushchev and Putin* (2009).

Soviet space as a postcolonial one and argue that a postcolonial approach is productive in the case of Ukrainian (and some Russian) women's literature—if coupled with gender analysis. Finally, I review a series of important insights from gender/nation studies and explain their relevance for women's writing in the post-Soviet space.

Chapters 2, 3, and 4 proceed chronologically, tracing the re-emergence, development and reception of women writers of the eightiers generation in Ukraine, as well as their interventions into the national imaginary. Chapter 2, "Writing Oneself into Literature," uses the example of a woman writer from the 1960s generation to illuminate the Soviet historical, ideological, and institutional context which made it difficult for Ukrainian women writers to publish their works before the late 1980s. Through close readings of three shorter works by female authors from the late 1980s and the early 1990s, I show that the break in the female literary tradition in Ukraine was so dramatic that re-emerging women writers questioned the very possibility of writing and being recognized as writers in the patriarchal Ukrainian society with a colonial legacy. I argue that while the heroine of each work—Bichuya's "The Stone Master," Yevhenia Kononenko's "On Sunday Morning," and Oksana Zabuzhko's *The Alien Woman*—confronts her own fears and anxieties about being a female writer, the authors of these texts intervene into the Ukrainian literary canon by aligning themselves through intertextual references with the widely recognized Ukrainian women modernists from the pre-Soviet period. In the process, some of these texts also engage those narratives and myths of the Ukrainian national imaginary that have to do with writing literature. Thus, Bichuya's text suggests that the discursive monopoly of the Soviet era was made even more restricting for writers like herself by the local Ukrainian expectations that literature should function primarily as a means of anti-Soviet resistance, and Kononenko's short

story deconstructs the myth of the Ukrainian folk poet Marusia Churai, which supposedly shows the Ukrainian culture's unconditional validation of women's literary expression.

Chapter 3, "Between Gender, Nation, and Dissemination," focuses on the first Ukrainian bestseller by a woman—Oksana Zabuzhko's notorious novel, *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* (1996). I read this text in light of its reception both in the Slavic world and in the West, arguing that many of the novel's vociferous critics, which faulted the author for being either "too" feminist or "too" nationalist, misread the novel's politics because they did not pay attention to the text's poetics. I analyze Zabuzhko's textual construction of a position from which a Ukrainian female subaltern could speak with the help of Gayatri Spivak's well-known essay and suggest that the voice of Zabuzhko's autobiographical heroine is a split, ambivalent one, shuttling between several powerful and conflicting discourses (Soviet, Ukrainian nationalist, and Western), and finding "home" in none of them. Instead, I show that *Fieldwork* critiques all of these discourses from the point of view of a Ukrainian speaker/writer and a woman. I analyze Zabuzhko's explication and gendered critique of what I call "the insular Ukrainian identity," formed in the forced dialogue with the ubiquitous Other of the Soviet regime, and compare *Fieldwork* to *The Moscoviad* (1993), a novel by Zabuzhko's male contemporary, Yuri Andrukhovych—in order to bring Zabuzhko's gendered Ukrainian vision of the Soviet trauma into sharper focus. I also argue that unlike Andrukhovych's text, Zabuzhko's novel attempts to open up the insular Ukrainian identity to the world.

Chapter 4, "Foundational National Narratives by Ukrainian Women Writers," analyzes four larger works of prose fiction by Maria Matios, Kononenko, and Zabuzhko, published in the 2000s, which have garnered much attention from the critics and the readers and have propelled their authors to the forefront of Ukrainian literary life. I read Matios's *The Nation* and *Sweet*

Darusia, Kononenko's *Imitation*, and Zabuzhko's *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* as *foundational national narratives*—works that engage the most fundamental questions of Ukraine's collective national identity, such as the ways in which it was shaped by the violent Soviet past, the internal divisions within Ukraine, and what I term as some Ukrainian elites' post-Soviet postcolonial desire for Europe as the imagined antithesis of “backward” Soviet identity. At the same time, I show that the visions of the Ukrainian nation, its Soviet past and post-Soviet present, which Matios, Kononenko, and Zabuzhko put forth, are very women-centered. I compare these women writers' narratives of women and/in the nation to Benedikt Anderson's discussion of the poetics of a conventional national biography and show how these narratives often counteract this masculinist national plot by undermining the symbolic gendering of the nation as feminine, by changing the standard nationalist focus from male heroes to activist women, and sometimes by giving women characters the role of critics of their cultural and national communities.

Chapter 5, “Narrating the Post-Soviet Nation and Its Gender,” places my case study of Ukrainian women writers' post-Soviet re-emergence and paths to literary recognition via their engagement with the national questions into a comparative framework with Russian women writers. I sketch out the similarities and differences in how the late Soviet and post-Soviet Russian and Ukrainian literary establishments have received new women's writing and suggest, through a review of the two nations' politics of literary prizes, that in both cultures female authors' literary success has often followed their turn to the national themes. I then juxtapose one Ukrainian national narrative from the 2000s (Zabuzhko's *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*) to a recent Russian “national” novel—Tatiana Tolstaya's dystopia *The Slynx*. I use Aleksandr Etkind's theory of Russia's internal colonization to read *The Slynx* as a parodic, postmodern

“romance of internal colonization” (Etkind’s term), which intervenes simultaneously into Russia’s national imaginary and its literary canon (via its rich intertextuality). I demonstrate that the novel deconstructs several foundational national Russian myths and symbolically “clears out” the space in the Russian canon for Tolstaya herself. I argue that despite the two authors’ disparate attitudes towards feminism, Tolstaya’s and Zabuzhko’s texts end up painting similar gendered pictures of their respective nations’ histories, but that the two novels’ generic differences and opposite ideological agendas ultimately illuminate the two authors’ very different attitudes towards Russia’s and Ukraine’s national imaginaries. These attitudes may be seen as stemming from the two countries’ radically different experience of nation/state-building.

Finally, the Conclusion summarizes the main arguments of this study and takes a brief look at a few more recent literary interventions into the national imaginary by two of the women writers considered in this project.

CHAPTER 1

National Imaginaries and Women Writers

in the Postcolonial Post-Soviet Space

“Even as a young girl, I knew that I belonged to a nation which owed its very existence to literature,” stated the Ukrainian writer Oksana Zabuzhko in one of her essays from the late 1990s (“Vkhodyt' Fortinbras,” 23). Zabuzhko does not explain exactly how she came to know such a thing at an early age. Perhaps it had something to do with growing up in the “electrified atmosphere of the Ukrainian 1960s” in the Soviet state, which she recalls early in the essay—when as a six-year old she observed her parents and other adults “ecstatically recite poetic lines” “as soon as” they got together and often “in a whisper” (22). She writes that repeatedly witnessing such rituals of semi-clandestine poetry recitation instilled in her a “sweet” childish belief that “writing poetry was the most important occupation under the sun” (22). Unlike the latter belief, however, Zabuzhko's early-age conviction of belonging “to a nation that owed its very existence to literature” did not wane upon growing up.

Zabuzhko's statement offers a vivid example of and a useful point of entry to discussing what this study identifies as “the national imaginary.” I define this term as a collectively held conception of a national community (at least some elements of which enjoy a degree of consensus in the society)—based on a complex of *cultural* and *historical images, narratives, and myths* that are deemed characteristic of this or that nation; *cultural imperatives* that have to be honored supposedly in order for the nation to flourish (including those that pertain to

gender—for example, that the primary duty of women is to raise loyal future citizens of the nation); and *national symbols*, including flags, anthems, monuments, and heroes. These elements are often believed to hold together the fabric of the national community and define “the uniqueness” of each nation (even if other nations share some of the same “unique” elements). Zabuzhko's statement exemplifies one such element of the Ukrainian national imaginary—a popular cultural narrative about Ukraine “ow[ing] its very existence to literature.” At the same time, this statement reflects important characteristics of most national imaginaries, but especially those of Eastern European nations and of postcolonial¹⁰ Ukraine in particular: their dependence on narrative and especially on imaginative literature; their “location” in the peoples' collective memory; and their frequent manifestation as self-evident “knowledge,” which appears to stand in contrast to, but really depends on, their “nebulous” modes of transmission (this is the contrast between the certainty of young Zabuzhko's “I knew” and the absence—indeed, the redundancy—of an explanation wherefrom that knowledge came). In the next two sections, I will discuss each of these characteristics of the national imaginary, emphasizing how they work in the post-Soviet and especially the Ukrainian context.

The National Imaginary and Literature

Since Benedict Anderson's famous theorization of nations as imagined communities, the links between literature and the nation have become quite obvious. To recall, Anderson argued that the modern nation is an imagined community because all of its members do not know each other personally, yet they have a more or less clear *image* of this community in their minds—first constructed and disseminated in Europe in the 18th century mainly through two

¹⁰ Ukraine's postcolonial “credentials” and the general applicability of postcolonial theory to the post-Soviet space are discussed further on in this chapter.

forms of print capitalism, newspapers and *novels*. According to Anderson, these two forms “provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation” (25). The generic conventions of the newspaper and the realist novel made it possible to represent the *temporality* of the nation. The very structure of the novel connected the ‘simultaneous’ pasts as well as presents of various members of a nation, providing a textual figuration of imagined national coexistence, if not necessarily unity; similarly, the very structure of the newspaper connected various events because they happened on the same day, during the same week, month, etc. (Anderson 25-6, 33). Anderson's theory is useful to this study in at least three respects: first, in its emphasis on the imagined character of the nation; second, in its focus on literature (the novel in particular) as a vehicle that facilitates such imaginings; and third, in its implicit argument about the national community as a community of readers of the same texts.

I find that the term “the national imaginary” aptly captures the nation's reliance on imaginings and its connection to fiction, or *imaginative* literature. The terms “imagined” and “imaginings” do not necessarily connote “falseness” or opposition to “fact.” As Michael Walsh points out in his critique of the uses of the term “the national imaginary,” such a meaning has been occasionally (mis)attributed to Anderson, even though “he clearly does not see nationalism as (...) a departure from reality, but rather as a development in social epistemology” and “a socially necessary creative act” that gives rise to new “forms of social organization” (7). Yet in many specific historical cases, these imaginings have put forth hegemonic visions of national communities, which, for example, included some members (such as women) only in certain, circumscribed roles and excluded others altogether.¹¹ In a similar fashion, while the term “a

¹¹ Paul Ricoeur writes of this duality of what he calls “a socio-political imaginaire” of a society (and of its dependence on narrative): “the imaginaire operates as an ‘ideology’ which can *positively repeat and represent the founding discourse of a society*, what I call its ‘foundational symbols,’ thus preserving its sense of identity. After all,

national myth” does not imply that we are necessarily dealing with falsehoods, specific national myths have often obscured the historical reality (as did, for instance, the myth of the Ukrainian folk female poet Marusia Churai, analyzed in Chapter 2) and/or promoted cultural values that have had devastating consequences for many members of this or that nation (as did the Russian myth of logocentrism, examined in Chapter 5).¹² And yet, as Lyudmila Parts suggests in her study of myth and cultural memory in Russia, myths are indispensable for “all social, political, and ideological groups,” as these groups simply “cannot exist without some commonly shared, if imagined, conceptions of themselves” (4-5). The present study strives to pay attention to both the productive and the detrimental aspects of the national imaginary and its elements, following suit of the Ukrainian women writers included in this dissertation, whose works both affirm and critique the nation.

While literature has been historically important in the creative imagining of many nations around the world (as argued by Anderson, Timothy Brennan, and numerous other scholars), it has been absolutely fundamental in the construction of Eastern European nations. Andrew Wachtel describes the national significance of literature in Eastern Europe in his study about the role of the writer in this region:

...serious literature and its producers began their rise to prominence in Eastern Europe during the so-called period of national revivals (...). They were credited, usually

cultures create themselves by telling stories of their past. The danger is, of course, that this reaffirmation can be perverted, usually by monopolistic elites, into a mystificatory discourse which serves to uncritically vindicate or justify the established political powers.” (Emphasis mine; Ricoeur, “The Creativity of Language,” 29)

¹² As Paul Gilbert argues in *The Philosophy of Nationalism*, a “myth may incorporate history, true or false,” but its function is usually not to reflect history in all of its complexity, but to illuminate and communicate “national values”: “mythic use of national history (...) sets before us national values that only this history can convey in their specificity and relevance to national life” (163-4). Anthony Smith’s “ethno-symbolist” approach to nationalism, which focuses on “the cultural elements of symbol, myth, memory, value, ritual and tradition,” emphasizes this function of national myths (see Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach*).

posthumously, with being the founding fathers (almost always fathers, I am afraid, as few women writers in Eastern Europe were canonized as nation builders) of their countries, *for these countries were seen as having been created on the basis of a shared national language and a literary corpus.* (Emphasis mine; 5)

Wachtel goes on to explain the prevalence of a “linguistic nation” model in Eastern Europe by the fact that the entire region until 1880 was divided between empires, in which “vernacular languages” had limited use in the official context,¹³ and by the fact that the national movements in the region started as “cultural and linguistic” ones, following Herder’s “linguistic” definition of a nation (13). Wachtel’s description links the four key elements of the present study: imperial and colonial domination, the nation, literature, and gender. I will return to the gendered character of nation and canon formation, noted by Wachtel, later in this chapter, while here it is worth exploring in greater detail the creation of an Eastern European nation by writers and “on the basis (...) of a literary corpus” (Wachtel 5).

Wachtel includes a rather long list of the literary “founding fathers” of Eastern European nations, making the important point that in this region, the privileged genre for initial national creation in the 19th century was not the novel, which Anderson singled out, but poetry. Thus, both in Russia and in Ukraine, the title of the “founding father” went to national poets—Aleksandr Pushkin and Taras Shevchenko respectively. Credited with having “captur[ed] the nation’s collective spirit or essence” in their poetry, these and other Eastern European national poets “were presented as codifiers of the national literary language” and “accorded the status of national heroes” (Wachtel 14-15). In the twentieth century, the Soviet regime appropriated and

¹³ Even Russian, as Wachtel points out, was not the primary language of the imperial administration or Russia’s ruling classes (13).

“recanonized” these poets for its own purposes, in part because it ascribed to all writers an important ideological function, captured in the formula “engineers of human souls” (Wachtel 5)—but also because with Stalin’s ascent to power, the “nation” was reinstated as “a subject of history” (Yekelchik 10), albeit not as a discourse of political rights, but rather of cultural specificity.¹⁴ Thus, as Serhy Yekelchik points out, Shevchenko’s commemorative celebration in 1939 in Kyiv resembled the Pushkin celebration in 1937 in Moscow, with Shevchenko remembered as “the founder of its [Ukraine’s] national literature” (23)—because having at least a nominal “national” literature of one’s own was a vital characteristic of a Soviet nationality.¹⁵ Writers in general and poets in particular also remained important in the Soviet era as opponents of the regime—their societies’ “voice of conscience” (Wachtel 5). This is the function on which young Zabuzhko picked up while observing adults in the 1960s recite forbidden poetry “in a whisper.” Some of Shevchenko’s poetry, excluded from the Soviet canon for its calls for Ukraine’s political independence, for example, functioned in this capacity in the Soviet period as well, along with works by many other poets and writers.

This historical background explains why Vitaly Chernetsky, among others, has called both Russia and Ukraine “literature-centric” nations (*Mapping Postcommunist Cultures* xiv). In Ukraine, however, the added dimension of literature-centrism was that in the absence of their own state for much of modern history, Ukrainians used literature as a means of preserving a sense of Ukrainian cultural identity and keeping alive their aspirations for an independent nation-state. Zabuzhko’s conviction about “belong[ing] to a nation which owed its very existence to

¹⁴ The ambiguous and changing definitions of non-Russian nationalities and their cultural distinctiveness in the Soviet period are discussed by Joshua First in “Scenes of Belonging: Cinema and the Nationality Question in Soviet Ukraine during the Long 1960s.”

¹⁵ As Evgeny Dobrenko has been arguing in his recent work on the literatures of the Soviet Union, under the Soviet nationalities policy, dozens of literatures of smaller peoples and ethnic groups were literally invented in the 1920s and the 1930s—to “certify” their distinctiveness. (From Dobrenko’s oral presentation at the roundtable “The Soviet Cultural-Imperial Legacy,” delivered at the ASEES Convention on Nov. 16, 2012, in New Orleans, Louisiana.)

literature” rests on Ukraine’s general Eastern European literature-centrism, but especially on this additional political function of literature, which the latter fulfilled in Ukraine until 1991. It seems that poetry was more suited to this function than the novel.

In an insightful reading of Shevchenko’s 1845 celebrated poem “My Friendly Epistle to My Dead, Living, and Unborn Compatriots in Ukraine and Outside Ukraine,” Rory Finnin suggests that lyric poems “featuring the nation as an object of concern,” in contrast to novels, perform a different kind of ideological work on behalf of the nation (“Nationalism and the Lyric” 36). If the novel, in the words of Anderson, helps imagine the nation as “a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time” (*Imagined Communities* 26),¹⁶ lyric poetry, through its “indeterminate,” yet emotionally powerful lyrical address and its “omnitemporality,” “interpellates” national subjects across different historical periods and functions as “a message in a bottle,” always “timely” because of its “timelessness” (Finnin 51-2). In other words, if a traditional, realist novel gives readers a coherent “mental picture” of the nation, grounded in historical time, a lyric poem on the subject of the nation “hails” them in an Althusserian fashion, creating a feeling of belonging to a “national” community that is “outside of ‘homogeneous, empty time’” (Finnin 45-6). This is certainly how Shevchenko’s “Epistle,” addressed to his “Dead, Living, and Unborn Compatriots,” has worked in Ukraine for many decades. Read, memorized, and recited by successive generations of Ukrainians who lived under foreign domination, it helped them feel part of an imagined timeless “national” community—identified not on the basis of an independent nation-state, but, literally, by a text. Shevchenko’s “Epistle” is thus an example and part of that “literary corpus,” in Wachtel’s parlance, or canon, on the basis of which an Eastern European nation like Ukraine was seen as “created”—and

¹⁶ Anderson, of course, builds his theory of the nation on Walter Benjamin’s conceptualization of modern historical time as “homogeneous, empty time” (*On the Concept of History*).

which helped maintain a sense of a distinct Ukrainian national identity in the absence of political independence.

Because of its important political function and close connection to national identity, this “literary corpus” of Ukraine has had for many an aura of sacredness about it—so much so that the scholar of Ukrainian literature Mark Pavlyshyn has dubbed this model of the literary canon “the iconostasis”¹⁷ (“Literary Canons and National Identities in Ukraine”). Pavlyshyn’s analysis of the interdependence of national identity and the literary canon in Ukraine is very relevant for this project because it illuminates the link between national identity and language in Ukraine through literature and explains why in Ukrainian culture literary interventions into the national imaginary often mean interventions into the canon as well. Pavlyshyn argues that unlike the ordinary notion of the canon, the Ukrainian “iconostasis” is about “hierarchy, immutability and ideological unanimity”; it includes an unchanging, patriotic set of 19th- and 20th-century classics of Ukrainian literature, the meaning of which has been determined once and for all (5). This kind of imagining of the Ukrainian literary canon is linked to a specific, conservative vision of Ukrainian national identity: Pavlyshyn writes that “[f]or friends of the iconostasis (...) 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)” (13). It goes without saying that this vision of Ukraine’s identity is also a rigidly monolingual one, with the language of the canon—standard, literary Ukrainian—being seen as the sole language of the nation.

In the late Soviet and the early post-Soviet period, however, Pavlyshyn sees an alternative vision of the literary canon—and, correspondingly, of Ukrainian identity—

¹⁷ A term ordinarily used for the wall of icons of Christian saints—a traditional architectural element in an Eastern-Rite Christian church.

developing in Ukraine, and this one he calls a “new canon” (5). Promoted mostly by the younger generation of writers and critics, to which three of the four Ukrainian women writers examined in this project belong, the new canon includes “re-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 and postmodernist” (Pavlyshyn 6). Importantly, in the early 1990s the proponents of the new canon rejected the model of “a partisan national identity,” espoused by the devotees of the iconostasis, and several of them, such as the members of the male Bu-Ba-Bu literary group, deliberately provoked the wrath in the iconostasis camp by their displays of irreverence towards treasured national values (Pavlyshyn 6).¹⁸ And yet, despite their vociferous refusals “to participate in the project of developing a national identity,” Pavlyshyn finds that these writers still did exactly that—“by default”—since almost all of them wrote in Ukrainian (19).¹⁹ Because language has been the very core of national identity in a “linguistic nation” like Ukraine, and because literature (which, of course, is “segregated” by language), among other kinds of cultural production, became an important marker of a nationality in the Soviet era, writing fiction in Ukrainian in the early post-Soviet period was a “national” act, whether it was meant as such by the writer or not.

The conflict between the proponents of the iconostasis and the new canon was most pronounced in the 1990s and had lost its edge in the 2000s (although the conceptions of national identity linked to the two models of the canon still have their devotees). It also seems that the conflict played out mostly among the male writers and critics of the older and the younger

¹⁸ Pavlyshyn gives the example of the poem “Love Oklahoma,” written by the Bu-Ba-Bu member Oleksandr Irvanets’ as a spoof on the poem “Love Ukraine” by the Ukrainian poet Volodymyr Sosiura—in order to provoke “the patriotic audience which might find the older poem moving and its political sentiments appealing” (16).

¹⁹ The only significant writer in Ukraine of that generation, who belonged to the new canon and wrote (and continues to write) in Russian is Andrei Kurkov.

generation—in the Ukrainian nationally-inflected version of Harold Bloom’s struggle between the literary precursors and followers (*The Anxiety of Influence*). While the Ukrainian women writers of the *eightiers* generation seemed generally supportive of the “new canon” model, for them the conception of national identity was not the only factor that determined their position vis-à-vis the iconostasis of Ukrainian literary classics. The other crucial factor was gender.

Wachtel’s observation about the lack of founding “mothers” in Eastern European nations, which I quoted above, is only partly true of Ukraine. While it is undeniable that the Ukrainian “iconostasis” includes very few women writers, one of them—the modernist writer Lesia Ukrainka—did become “enshrined” in it as one of the three founders of modern Ukrainian literature, culture, and nation (the other two are Taras Shevchenko and Ivan Franko). As I explain in detail in Chapter 2, re-discovering the writings by this (and one other) precursor—especially their feminist aspects—became a crucial way for the late Soviet and post-Soviet Ukrainian women authors to overcome what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have identified as female writers’ “anxiety of authorship” (49). For the women writers in late Soviet Ukraine, I argue in Chapter 2, this anxiety was very acute because of a dramatic break in the Ukrainian women’s writing tradition during the Soviet era. In the works of Lesia Ukrainka, Ukrainian women writers (especially Nina Bichuya and Oksana Zabuzhko) found a powerful example of aesthetically rich and challenging Ukrainian women’s writing, and their attitude towards this figure in the Ukrainian “iconostasis” (as well as a few other women authors) remains quite reverent.

Besides the appearance of “the new canon” model, it is important to note another nation-related shift in the post-Soviet Ukrainian literature—the growth in the cultural significance of prose, and especially the novel. Arguably, since Ukraine’s independence, what Rory Finnin calls

(after Franco Moretti) the novel's ability to "mak[e] sense of the nation" (52) has become more important than the poetry's abovementioned capacity to function as a national "time capsule" of sorts. As the editors of *Cultural Institutions of the Novel* explain in their introduction, the novel is the widely recognized marker of a nation's distinctiveness and modernity:

...it has sometimes appeared that the new nations emerging out of empires have been required to produce novels *in order to certify their distinct and modern nationhood*. 'The' novel is the universally prescribed form for bearing witness to the locality of the group, and so everyone "has to" have the local equivalent of the Great American Novel. (Emphasis mine; Lynch and Warner 5)

While the novel was a very important genre in official Soviet literature, poetry seemed to be the favorite medium of political and cultural dissent in Soviet Ukraine.²⁰ In the post-Soviet period, as I explain in Chapter 2, the novel gained in its privilege—precisely because of the genre's modern and "rational" (sense-making) nation-building potential. In *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation*, Elleke Boehmer gives insight into the kind of ideological work that the novel has been doing in Third-World postcolonial nations. Some of her insights are also applicable to the functions fulfilled by the novel in the post-Soviet space.

Building on Homi Bhabha's theorization of the link between nation and narrative in *Nation and Narration*, Boehmer points out "the structural analogies between *nations* and *narrations*: the preoccupation with origins, the maintenance of continuity over time, the synthesis of difference into a unified whole" (145). She argues that narrative fiction (especially

²⁰ Almost all Ukrainian dissident writers were poets—Vasyl' Symonenko, Ivan Drach, Mykola Vinhranovs'kyi, Ihor Kalynets, Vasyl' Stus, Lina Kostenko, etc.

novels) “*embod[ies]* nations, inscribing a national destiny into time” and giving nations “enabling” forms (emphasis in the original; 11). Such forms, of course, are especially necessary in the postcolonial context: they “impos[e] a meaningful chronology and continuity (...) upon the native’s past,” which remains an untold (or distorted) story in the colonial period (Boehmer 10). The telling of this story from the perspective of the colonized—both by historians and by novel writers—is one of the most fundamental needs for a postcolonial nation (Chatterjee 77). In Chapter 4 and 5 of this project, I analyze in detail two kinds of “enabling” forms, or two modes of novelistic emplotment, which Ukrainian and Russian women writers have used (and often simultaneously deconstructed) in order to write their respective nations’ pasts—a reverse national biography plot and a national romance. I see these aesthetic forms performing the broad ideological function described by Fredric Jameson: the one of “inventing imaginary or formal ‘solutions’ to unresolvable social contradictions” (79). This is one of the functions which many “national” novels have performed in the post-Soviet space—imagining unity, for example, where it is sorely lacking in the national community. The novels’ related function has been to impart such imaginings to their audiences: as Lynch and Warner explain, “[p]articipating in the social practice of novel reading can give readers the sense of participating in a nation that they imagine to be the product of consensus” (4). I will say more about this kind of ideological work performed by novels further on in this chapter, and I examine this work in detail throughout this project. Here, however, I would like to emphasize another important function of fiction, and novels in particular, in the writing of the “national” past.

Compared to narrative history, imaginative literature has an advantage in the enterprise of writing the past of the formerly colonized. Unlike history, fiction has the creative license to imagine what cannot be learned from the documents or witnesses’ testimonies, and this means

that fiction can often proceed where historical inquiry stops for lack of “reliable” evidence.²¹ In Ukraine, where there have been many recent efforts to write the past from the native’s perspective, the difficulty of recovering local history has been acknowledged, for example, by historian Kate Brown. In attempting to write an account of what happened in the early Soviet period to the inhabitants of the multiethnic borderlands in what is today central Ukraine, Brown was forced to look for a “path around documented evidence”: “I turn to nontraditional sources: oral histories, memories, material culture, folklore, and to the silences in the written record. Critics will find it easy to refute this kind of historical argumentation noting there is no evidence. And these critics will be right. There is often no evidence—nothing stamped and dated—to cite.” (13) If for many historians sources like memories and folklore are suspect, for a writer of fiction on the “national” themes the same sources are precious keys to the natives’ past. And while a traditional historian relies on national archives, a writer of fiction about the nation often works mainly with the elements of the national imaginary, which, I would argue, do not “reside” in archives—at least not primarily there, especially in nations like Ukraine.

The Location and Transmission of the National Imaginary

Mike Featherstone, among many others, has described the conventional understanding of the role of the archive in the “imagining” of nations:

In the 19th century, the archive became seen as the *repository* of the national history and national memory. The development of the discipline of history through figures such as

²¹ Such an argument about literature's different handling of archival “gaps,” as compared with history, is made, for instance, by Aleida Assmann in “Canon and Archive”: “While historians have to adjust their research and questions to the extension and range of the archives, literary writers may take the liberty to fill in the gaps.” (106)

Ranke in Germany and Michelet in France helped to generate the sense that it was possible to ‘tell history as it was’ through careful scrutiny of *the treasure-house of material from the past*, accumulated in the archive awaiting the historian’s gaze to bring it to life (Ernst, 1999). The archives along with museums, libraries, public monuments and memorials became *instruments for the forging of the nation into the people, into an ‘imagined community’*. (Emphasis mine; “The Archive” 592)

However, as Featherstone himself acknowledges, the conventional archive could not be as important a source for the building of national memory “for formerly subjected peoples”—simply because it was often not available (592). As in the case of many Third-World postcolonial nations, whose “archives had (...) been shipped to the European imperial centres” (592), some of the archives from the former Soviet republics, including Ukraine, were sent to Moscow. Numerous other archives, which are available, have been written by the agents of the colonizing state and record next to nothing from the perspective of the colonized. To give a somewhat extreme example, in “Arguing with the KGB Archives: Archival and Narrative Memory in Post-Soviet Latvia,” the British anthropologist of Latvian descent, Vieda Skultans, describes her and her informants’ (the formerly imprisoned and/or exiled Latvians) joint review of the recently made available KGB interrogation protocols that supposedly truthfully recorded the informants’ responses to their interrogators’ questions:

The interrogation protocols give us the answers of the accused as faithful echoes of the questions. The form and vocabulary provided by the question shapes the answers given. For example, Emma Priedite is asked: ‘When did you join the bandits’ group and which

group was it?’ Her answer comes back like an echo: ‘I joined the bandits’ group in March 1948’. But in our joint perusal of the file Emma adds: ‘They write just the way they want. You could confess or not confess, they wrote just what they wanted.’ (324-5)

Obviously, archives like the one described by Skultans are useless for constructing Latvian national memory, unless they are read as a record of national persecution, and even then, in order to find out the perspective of the colonized, it turns out to be necessary to read them together with the actual participants of the recorded dialogues.

The problem of the missing or inadequate archives for a postcolonial nation becomes a major theme of Oksana Zabuzhko’s *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*—one of the Ukrainian novels examined in Chapter 4 of this project. The ways in which the novel solves the dilemma of how to tell a nation’s history without full access to the conventional archives illustrates my point about fiction’s advantage over narrative history and underscores the importance of sources other than the historical archival documents for the national imaginary. Finding that archives are unavailable, the protagonist of Zabuzhko’s novel, who is investigating several mysteries from her and her nation’s past, relies on her own memory and memories of relatives or witnesses, on chance conversations and conjecture, and even on dreams, to (re)construct possible versions of the past.²² At the same time, she foregrounds the topos of the missing archive in her narrative, creating a productive tension between it and the various hypothetical versions of the past. The

²² While recorded dreams have been used as a source of historical evidence before—in the Slavic context most recently by Irina Paperno in *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memoirs, Diaries, Dreams*, which examines individuals’ dreams of the Soviet terror—Zabuzhko’s use of dreams is markedly different. As I discuss in Chapter 4, Zabuzhko’s novel imagines a “dream archive”—containing the filmed experiences of everyone who ever existed, from their point of view—and uses this image to point out the shortcomings of real archives. By contrast, in Bichuya’s autobiographical short story, analyzed in Chapter 2, dreams and nightmares function in more conventional ways.

resulting story is not a conventional “history” of the nation, yet it still works as a “national” postcolonial novel and a novelistic inquiry into the production of history.

The sources used by Zabuzhko’s protagonist—memories, oral histories, etc.—point to the collective memory as an important source for and “location” of the national imaginary. This is true especially of the imaginaries of the formerly colonized communities (because of the unwritten histories and the missing archives), but not only of them. While the images, narratives, myths, values, and symbols that we think of as the ones giving rise to the French national imaginary, for instance, do have pictorial, textual and/or material figurations, and a plethora of them, in and of themselves they do not yet constitute the national imaginary. This is because the latter is “produced” in the interaction between these objects and human agents.

The theory of collective remembering, articulated by James Wertsch, can help understand how this production happens. In *Voices of Collective Remembering*, which discusses the notion of collective memory and examines its role in producing accounts of the past in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia, Wertsch argues that “collective remembering” is “an inherently distributed phenomenon” (174-5):

It is defined by an irreducible tension between active agents and the textual resources they employ, especially narrative texts. From this perspective, it would be misguided to search for collective memory in libraries and other depositories of texts, on the one hand, or in individuals or groups considered in isolation from textual resources, on the other. (175)

Wertsch explains that these “textual” resources can produce “textual communities,” but “interpretive and social processes surrounding the text” are necessary for this to occur (28). Moreover, “[s]ome members of a textual community may not have even read the text, but by participating in the activities of a textual community, they can have the access to the textual material around which the group is organized” (28). The imagined community of the nation may be thought of as a kind of Wertschian “textual community”: “the textual material” around which it is organized comprises the myths, the cultural or historical narratives, the symbols, the values circulating in this community and continually defining its “identity” as well as producing its national imaginary through acts and processes of collective remembering.

Because this is a continual and complex process and because collective remembering is “inherently distributed,” as Wertsch asserts, the transmission of the national imaginary—from one generation to another, for instance—often seems quite nebulous. Members of a community are frequently unable to point out how they came to know this or that cultural narrative, why they believe this or that national myth, or why they share a particular value—they just do (as in the example of young Zabuzhko’s conviction about Ukraine and literature). This lack of clarity only enhances the power of the national imaginary and makes it resistant to change.

In “National Narratives and the Conservative Nature of Collective Memory,” Wertsch gives an interesting example of the nebulous transmission of one such element of the Russian national imaginary—a particular historical myth about Russia’s past. Wertsch argues that collective remembering occurs in part with the help of *narrative schematic templates*, which he contrasts with specific narratives that feature particular places, dates, and people.²³ According to him, one such narrative schematic template, operative in the Russian collective memory of the

²³ Wertsch’s concept of narrative schematic templates owes much to Vladimir Propp’s analysis of folk tales in terms of functions (Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*).

past, is “the expulsion of foreign enemies”—based on “accounts of the Mongol invasion of the thirteenth century, the thirteenth-century invasion by the Teutonic knights depicted in Eisenstein’s film, the Swedish invasion of Charles XII around the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Russo-Turkish wars involving Suvorov at the end of the eighteenth century, the Napoleonic invasion of the early nineteenth century, the German attack in World War II, and even the reign of communism in the twentieth century” (30). Wertsch parses out the main elements of this narrative template:

1. Russia is peaceful and not interfering with others
2. Russia is viciously and wantonly attacked without provocation
3. Russia almost loses everything in total defeat as the enemy attempts to destroy it as a civilization
4. Through heroism and exceptionalism, and against all odds, Russia triumphs and succeeds in expelling the foreign enemy

(“National Narratives and the Conservative Nature of Collective Memory,” 30).

On the basis of contemporary Russian high school students’ essays about World War II, Wertsch then demonstrates that even if the students know little specific historical information about World War II, their essays nevertheless show that they have somehow assimilated “the expulsion of foreign enemies” narrative template. This is evidenced, for example, by a short excerpt from one student’s essay:

The beginning [of the war] was very unexpected for the whole world except for Hitler. Also unexpected was the massive amount of bloodshed, the human losses, and Fascist concentration camps. *The emergence of a second Napoleon*, Adolph Hitler, was also unexpected and strange. The course of the war was hard for the countries of the defenders. Terrible, hard, bloody. (Emphasis mine; quoted in Wertsch, p. 32)

This student's account of World War II is not a specific narrative, but rather an articulation, a textual figuration of culturally held beliefs about the war, the concrete source of which is difficult to pinpoint. One can only say, after Wertsch, that it comes from the collective memory of the Russian nation.

Wertsch's example also underscores the importance of plots (in the most abstract meaning of this term) as "cultural tools" that organize and mediate the national imaginary (*Voices of Collective Remembering*, 55). In her study of the concept of "Rodina" (motherland or native land) in Russian culture, Irina Sandomirskaia goes so far as to suggest that "Rodina" is "first and foremost a 'plot'," and while one cannot "referentially" point to it, one can "tell" it (*Kniga o Rodine*, 24). Because plots are the bread and butter of imaginative literature and because unlike a lot of narrative history,²⁴ literature often highlights its reliance on plots and various means of emplotment, it seems to be a very suitable medium for generating, mediating, and also deconstructing national plots—and thus intervening into the national imaginary. In many of the works examined in this dissertation, women writers do just that: they both generate and deconstruct various national plots, and in some cases, explicitly analyze and critique certain master-narratives of their nations. For example, in *Fieldwork of Ukrainian Sex*, Zabuzhko

²⁴ Despite Hayden White's analysis of emplotment in narrative history (for example, in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*), this aspect is often unacknowledged by historians.

engages in an analytic critique of the ubiquitous Ukrainian national plot of victimhood, or of “being beaten,” as she puts it, and finds the traces of this schematic narrative template in the Ukrainian national anthem as well as, ironically, in her own story.

In addition to the kind of narrative literary analysis outlined above, I examine women writers’ interventions into the national imaginary through the lenses of postcolonial theory and gender-nation studies. In the remainder of this chapter, I will briefly discuss the relevance of both to the post-Soviet context and to women’s writing from this region in particular.

Post-Soviet Postcolonialism

The question of whether it is legitimate to apply postcolonial theory to the post-Soviet region remains a controversial one. Some scholars of the former Soviet Union and its republics, and especially the historians of this region, have objected to extending postcolonial terminology to the so-called Second-World countries.²⁵ At the same time, the case for doing so has been made quite convincingly by a number of other scholars, and as Jennifer Suchland has recently pointed out, “there is already a vibrant field growing from th[e] intersection” of postsocialism and

²⁵ For a most scathing critique of postcolonial methodology and presuppositions, and an argument about its limited value for the analysis of the post-Soviet states, see Stephen Velychenko’s “Post-Colonialism and Ukrainian History.” While historian Velychenko advances a lot of different arguments against using postcolonial theory, including what he sees as its limited novelty and its “obtuse postmodernist/poststructuralist theorizing,” his main problem appears to be with seeing postcolonialism as a social theory and applying it in historical research (394). His position may be illustrated with the following characteristic statement: “In so far as postcolonialism is only a technique of literary criticism, there is no reason why it should be concerned with politics and economics nor why anyone outside the field of literature should be troubled by its dubious methods and preconceptions” (396). His other major objection is against comparing Ukraine to postcolonial Third-World countries because he sees its situation as much more similar to the imperially controlled and now independent European states of Ireland, Finland, etc., even though the latter gained independence much earlier than Ukraine. From the perspective of a literary scholar, Velychenko’s objections can be countered by pointing out how immensely productive the key terms elaborated by the Third-World postcolonial critics (such as marginality, displacement, mimicry) have been for an analysis of literature and culture in contemporary Ukraine (in studies by Chernetsky and Pavlyshyn, for example). It is partly so because some major Ukrainian contemporary writers, such as Andrukhovych and Zabuzhko, have themselves theorized Ukraine as a postcolonial country in their essays, and this view has also informed their writing of fiction.

postcolonial theory (854).²⁶ Perhaps the best-known (at least in the West) and fairly detailed justification for viewing the post-Soviet space as postcolonial has been given by David Chioni Moore in “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique.”

Moore successfully counters the most widespread objections to post-Soviet postcolonialism, including Russia’s precarious identity between East and West, as well as the argument that unlike the British or the French, who were separated from their colonies by oceans, Russia (and the Soviet Union later on) took over adjacent territories.²⁷ He then compares the standard models of “Western colonization,” which include “dynastic reach” to neighbors, settler colonization, and the “colonial control over distant orientalized populations,” to “Russo-Soviet” colonization, arguing that the latter included all of these types, albeit with some modifications, plus a new fourth type, which he proposes to call “reverse-cultural colonization” (118-21). According to Moore, Russo-Soviet colonizing efforts in Ukraine fit into the first and the fourth type: Russia’s expansion into Eastern and Central Ukraine in the 17th and the 18th centuries can be characterized as “dynastic reach” into neighboring territories, and the Soviet post-World War II conquest of Western Ukrainian lands is an example of “reverse-cultural

²⁶ For discussions on the applicability of postcolonial theory to the post-Soviet, postsocialist, or postcommunist space, see “Empire, Union, Center, Satellite: The Place of Post-Colonial Theory in Slavic/Central and Eastern European/(Post)Soviet Studies,” a special 2003 issue of *Ubandus*, edited by Jonathan Platt; the 2009 essay “Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War” by Sharad Chari and Katherine Verdery; and the special 2012 (48.2) issue of *The Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, edited by Dorota Kołodziejczyk and Cristina Șandru. For studies that apply postcolonial theory to post-Soviet and postsocialist nations and their cultures, see, for example, Pavlyshyn and Clarke, eds. *Ukraine in the 1990s* (1992); Todorova *Imagining the Balkans* (1997); Cavanagh “Postcolonial Poland” (2004); Kelertas *Baltic Postcolonialism* (2006); Korek, ed. *From Sovietology to Postcoloniality: Poland and Ukraine from a Postcolonial Perspective* (2007); and Zubovskaia “Primenima li i kak zapadnaia postkolonial’naia teoriia dlia analiza postsovetkovogo feminizma (na primere kategori sovetkovogo i postsovetkovogo ‘vostoka’)?” (2008).

²⁷ Moore points out, for example, that a journey from Moscow to Tashkent, “until the opening of the colonial Central Asian railroads in the nineteenth century,” would be much “rougher” than the sea voyage from London to Cairo. The distance that separated the imperial center from the periphery was thus comparable to the “classic” colonial cases (119).

colonization”—because unlike the Western colonizers, who viewed their subject peoples as culturally inferior, the nations to the west of the Soviet Union (such as Poland, Hungary, etc.) considered themselves culturally superior to Soviet Russia and viewed the Soviet colonizers as “Asiatics” (119, 121).²⁸ While Moore’s examples of places with such a superior attitude are Budapest and Berlin, it is not difficult to find reports of similar views in Western Ukrainian towns. For instance, in his memoir *L’viv ponad vse (L’viv Above All)*, I’lko Lemko remembers the 1960s of his childhood in L’viv as a time when “the wives of the Soviet officers—the so-called “liberators”—who only twenty years ago had gone to the L’viv Opera wearing nightgowns, acquired some manners in the cultural environment of an ex-European city...” (Translation mine; 103).²⁹

Moore marvels at “how extraordinarily postcolonial the societies of the former Soviet regions are,” claiming that this fact has not received sufficient attention (114). He suggests that among the reasons for such lack of attention is “the region’s postcoloniality” itself. This is because the people who have been subjected to lengthy subjugation tend to engage in several kinds of “compensatory behavior,” among which Moore points out mimicry, “when subjugated peoples come to crave the dominating cultural form,” and “an exaggerated desire for authentic sources” of their own past and identity (118). Paradoxically, the two behaviors are combined in the post-Soviet case: as Moore points out, what many post-Soviet subjects “crave” is not necessarily Russian “cultural forms,” but rather the Western ones, describing “this desire as a return to Westernness that once was theirs” (118). Their mimicry of the West then is partly

²⁸ For an analysis of a Czech literary text that exemplifies such a perception of Russia and the Soviet Red Army as “Eastern,” see Valeria Sobol, “‘Yes, We Are Scythians:’ The Image of Russia in Josef Škvorecký’s *The Cowards*.”

²⁹ It may be argued that Russia’s “dynastic reach” into neighboring Eastern Ukrainian lands in the 17th century also had some features of what Moore dubs “reverse-cultural colonization,” as it resulted in much direct cultural influence of the Ukrainian religious and secular elites on the Russian Empire. For more on this topic, see David Saunders, *The Ukrainian Impact on Russian Culture. 1750-1850*.

grounded in a yearning to claim Europe as their own “authentic source” of identity. (And this prevents many post-Soviet scholars, Moore argues, from thinking of their region as postcolonial—that is, in relationship to the former colonizer.) I discuss this post-Soviet postcolonial desire for the West in more detail in Chapter 4, showing how a novel by Yevhenia Kononenko makes this type of desire the central object of its critique.³⁰

Besides Moore, a scholar who has been actively engaged in elaborating the colonial-postcolonial paradigm for the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union in the last decade and a half is Aleksandr Etkind. Building upon the 19th-century Russian philosopher Peter Chaadaev’s description of the Westernizing reforms by Peter the Great as an act of self-colonization (as well as similar formulations by other Russian thinkers), Etkind developed a theory of Russia’s internal colonization. In his essays from the early 2000s and his recent book, *Internal Colonization* (2011), Etkind argues that after Russia’s imperial expansion into Asia and Europe, the empire was so spread-out, multiethnic, and under-populated that its territory required “a second colonization” (“Fuko i tezis vnutrennei kolonizatsii” 60). This led to forced relocations of peasants into Bashkiria, for example, but Etkind’s most significant claim is that the greatest colonizing efforts were directed not into the peripheries, but into the heart of the empire, for instance, into the villages of Tula and Orenburg provinces. These efforts partly manifested themselves in missionary and ethnographic work: ethnographies of Russian peasants described them as barbarians, the travels to the Russian provinces were pictured as exotic, and thus, it was the Russian *narod* that was constructed as the Other of the imperial ruling elites (*Internal Colonization* 251). Etkind argues that if the overseas empires relied on race as a visible marker

³⁰ For a theorization of the difference between the discourses of “Europe” elaborated and deconstructed in the Third-World postcolonial critique and in the post-Soviet region, see Neil Lazarus, “Spectres Haunting: Postcommunism and Postcolonialism.”

of cultural distance between the imperial metropole and its colonies (hence, Kipling's well-known articulation of "the white man's burden"), in the Russian Empire, the "absence of obvious differences, such as race, ... gave rise to the need to develop the cultural markers from which the necessary social hierarchies could be constructed" ("The Shaved Man's Burden" 131). He sees the mandate of Peter the Great to everyone but the clergy and peasants to shave off their beards as one such attempt to impose a visible marker of difference between the imperial rulers and their subjects.

Where in this scheme is the place of Ukraine? Etkind is not sure, and he attributes the difficulty of determining the boundary between the self and the Other to the very nature of Russia's colonization of contiguous territories.

Where, specifically, in the nineteenth century were the borders between the historical and political centres of the Russian Empire and its colonies? ... It is easy to recognize distant islands such as Malta and the Aleutian archipelago as colonies. ... Were the peoples located in the Urals and Siberia, who took part in a classical process of intermixing between immigrants and natives, colonised? *Were Ukraine and Belorussia colonies? There, the populations were ethnically similar to that of the imperial centre but developed cultural differences that would be decisive in the process of self-definition.* If one applies more consistent criteria such as the uniformity of civil rights in the centre and the reduced sum of rights in the colonies, the Jewish Pale clearly becomes a border where the colonies began. *According to this criterion, however, every village of serfs was as different from the gentry and urban dwellers of Russian cities as those who worked in the*

plantations in the Caribbean were from the citizens of London. (Emphasis mine; “The Shaved Man’s Burden,” 129)

Etkind’s criterion of civil rights, which is also a criterion of class, is useful, as it does capture one method of “boundary-making” in the Russian Empire. As another theorist of empires, Ronald Suny, argues, “neither tsarist Russia nor the Soviet Union was an ethnically “Russian empire,” with the metropole completely identified with a ruling Russian nationality. Rather, the ruling institution—nobility in one case, the Communist party elite in the other—was multinational, though they were primarily Russian *and* ruled imperially over Russian and non-Russian subjects alike.” (Emphasis in the original; 26) Nevertheless, cultural differences between the Russian elites and non-Russian elites did matter as well, as Suny himself indirectly suggests. In the 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries, some Ukrainian nobility “dissolved into the Russian *dvoriantstvo*,” due to the fact that, as Suny puts it, “Russia followed a particular logic of empire building. After acquiring territory, usually by conquest, often by expanding settlement, the agents of the tsar coopted local elites into the service of the empire” (41). The examples of such co-optation in the Ukrainian case are many, perhaps those of Nikolai Gogol and the Tchaikovsky family into which Pyotr Tchaikovsky was born being the most famous ones.³¹ If, as Etkind states, the main marker of cultural distance between the center and periphery was class, with ethnicity being marginal in the case of Ukraine and Belarus, why would the Ukrainian nobles need to “dissolve” into Russian *dvoriantstvo* in order to serve the empire?

³¹ For more on the Ukrainian elite in the service of the Russian Empire, see Zenon Kohut's articles “Bilorus’, Rosiia ta Ukraina v XVI-XVIII stolittiakh: zavdannia dlia doslidnykiv politychnoi istorii” and “Ukrains’ka elita u XVIII stolitti ta ii intehratsiia v rosiis’ke dvorianstvo,” as well as his monograph, *Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy: Imperial Absorption of the Hetmanate, 1760s-1830s*.

As historian Zenon Kohut details, this phenomenon of “dissolving” was not just natural assimilation, but rather a complex and lengthy process of negotiation of rights between the imperial center (especially during the rule of Peter I and Catherine II) and the Ukrainian nobility (“Ukrains’ka elita u XVIII stolitti ta ii intehratsiia v rosiis’ke dvorianstvo”). For instance, Catherine’s 1785 *Letter to the Nobility* (*Gramota dvorianstvu*), which granted special privileges to the *dvorianstvo*, became a strong impetus for the Ukrainian nobles (*shliakhta*) to become part of the Russian *dvorianstvo* in order to obtain these privileges as well (Kohut, *ibid.* 61). Additionally, the exotic narratives about the Russian *narod*, which Etkind sees as a phenomenon similar to the West’s Orientalism, had their parallels also in the Ukrainian context (as in the famous example of Gogol’s early tales that portrayed the Ukrainian periphery as an exotic “South”). In sum, Etkind’s model of internal colonization can be used only partly for studying the case of Ukraine, and its focus on class has to be supplemented with an analysis of ethnic, linguistic, and cultural differences.³² Yet it can be productive for an analysis of colonial-like processes within Russia itself—not only in the imperial era, but also in the Soviet and even the post-Soviet periods.

Both Etkind and Suny see the Soviet Union as a kind of empire, and an heir of the Russian Empire, however idiosyncratic. Suny’s view is grounded in his general definition of empire, which he considers “a composite state structure in which the metropole is distinct in some way from the periphery and the relationship between the two is conceived or perceived by metropolitan or peripheral actors as one of justifiable or unjustifiable inequity, subordination, and/or exploitation” (27). Etkind’s view is based on his argument that internal colonization,

³² For a more detailed critique of Etkind’s concept of internal colonization and how it relates to Ukraine, see Chernetsky, *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures*, and especially Hundorova, “‘Vnutrishnia kolonizatsiia’ – povtorna kolonizatsiia.”

because it is oriented inside, towards its own people, turns out to be a recurrent phenomenon, cyclically repeated and difficult to complete: thus, he considers the Civil War as a new conquest of Russia, after which “the familiar manipulations with cultural distance were repeated in grotesque forms, from the belief in the realized unity with *narod* to its mass deportation to the GULAG” (“Fuko i tesis vnutrennei kolonizatsii,” 74). Such a view leads Etkind to consider the process of decolonization in post-Soviet Russia very problematic.

What is a very useful facet of Etkind’s theory for this project is his analysis of how the mechanism of internal colonization was reflected in Russian literature. Etkind identifies a dominant plot in the fiction of the imperial period, which he calls “the romance of internal colonization” (“The Shaved Man’s Burden”). In Chapter 5, I use his analysis to argue that Tatiana Tolstaya’s 2000 novel *The Slynx* may be read as a postmodern version of this Russian literary master plot. Through parodying this plot, however, Tolstaya not only shows the mechanism of internal colonization in action, but also demonstrates the inextricability of Russia’s national identity from its imperial one, portraying the collusion of the Russian language, culture, and politics in the repeated cycles of colonization.³³

A detailed political and historical argument about the Soviet Union as a colonial empire and about post-Soviet Ukraine as a postcolonial nation has been also made by Taras Kuzio (“History, Memory and Nation Building in the Post-Soviet Colonial Space”). Among the many insightful points he makes is his assertion that part of Ukraine’s Soviet legacy is a “confused” and “unconsolidated” identity—a result of Soviet policies of Russification, assimilation, the sending of Russian “settler colonists” into the non-Russian republics, etc. (248, 250). Thus, even though Ukraine, like other non-Russian republics, “inherited ethnocultural definitions of

³³ On the post-Soviet crisis of Russian national identity, see McCausland, “The Post-Soviet Condition: Cultural Reconfigurations of Russian Identity,” esp. pp. 2-6.

nationhood as a legacy of Soviet nationality policy,” its path has been mostly one of civic rather than ethnic nationalism (249). Yet different conceptions of Ukraine’s collective national identity continue to be put forth, debated, and contested. Kuzio, like many others, conceives of this process as a “struggle” between two camps that represent population’s division by language into Ukrainophones and Russophones; he states that this is “a struggle as to who will be culturally dominant in the newly independent stat[e]—‘nativists’ or ‘assimilados’?” (248) Yet the Ukrainian prose fiction which I analyze in this project—even though all of it is written in Ukrainian (and thus, as Pavlyshyn argued, promotes Ukrainian national identity “by default”)—suggests a somewhat more complex picture of the Ukrainian society. The national visions that Matios, Kononenko, and Zabuzhko put forth in their works acknowledge various divisions within Ukraine and trace them to their causes in the Soviet past, but in many cases, these writers do not conceive of these divisions in terms of language (the only exception is Zabuzhko’s *Fieldwork*, in which language is an important theme). Moreover, through a variety of literary means, which I analyze in the subsequent chapters, these women writers critique and/or attempt to bridge existing national divisions.

Beyond these broad arguments for applying postcolonial theory to the post-Soviet space, there are a growing number of studies that use specific concepts, elaborated by postcolonial critics, to investigate various aspects of Ukrainian literature and culture.³⁴ Studies by Marko Pavlyshyn and Vitaly Chernetsky have been especially rich and stimulating in this respect. These scholars have used the notions of hybridity, displacement, postcolonial trauma, etc. to understand

³⁴ See, for example, Pavlyshyn, Marko. *Kanon ta ikonostas* (1997); Riabchuk, *Vid Malorossii do Ukrainy* (2000); Shkandrij, *Russia and Ukraine. Literature and the Discourse of Empire from Napoleon to Postcolonial Times* (2001); Chernetsky, *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization* (2007); and Romanets, *Anamorphotic Texts and Reconfigured Visions: Improvised Traditions in Contemporary Ukrainian and Irish Literature* (2007).

what is at stake in many contemporary Ukrainian texts. Both scholars, however, have focused mostly on literature written by male authors (with the exception of Chernetsky's brief readings of a few texts by Zabuzhko). When the literary works by Ukrainian male writers deal with the Soviet past or the post-Soviet present, they almost always imagine a "universal subject" of Ukrainian history who, upon a closer look, of course turns out to be male. This is true of Yuri Andrukhovych's novels, a lot of which track the adventures of a Ukrainian male intellectual with a postcolonial inferiority complex, for which the hero tries to compensate with often outrageous acts of machismo. The playful and self-aware tone in which these adventures are related does little to justify their sexist (and sometimes racist) character. In a somewhat different way, it is also true of the Ukrainian writer from the sixtiers generation, Valerii Shevchuk (often studied by Pavlyshyn), who has authored a number of texts in a Ukrainian variant of the postcolonial genre of magic realism, known in Ukraine as *khymerna proza* (whimsical prose). Women are either non-existent or marginal figures in Shevchuk's "whimsically" historical prose, or else they fit the archetype of a witch, exercising magical, evil powers over the helpless male characters.³⁵ Nowhere in his prose are they seen as agents (or even victims) of history, or as full participants in and co-creators of Ukrainian culture.

Zabuzhko's, Kononenko's, and Matios's interventions into the Ukrainian national imaginary, I argue, are markedly different: these women authors consciously treat national topics through a gender lens. They pay special attention to how conditions of colonialism and post-colonialism have affected women and the relationships between the sexes, as well as show the multiple and different hierarchies which impact women's lives—including their own lives as contemporary Ukrainian women writers. Thus, it is possible to say that fiction by these authors

³⁵ For an analysis of women characters in Shevchuk's prose, see Buhaichuk.

writes gender into the national and literary histories of Ukraine, thereby reshaping both the national imaginings and the Ukrainian literary canon.

The Gender/Nation Nexus in the Postcolonial Post-Soviet Space

A double focus on gender and the postcolonial nation has been quite popular both in the scholarly and in the fictional writings of the past three decades. As the authors of an introductory volume to postcolonial literary studies, *The Empire Writes Back*, point out, “the strategies of recent feminist and recent post-colonial theory overlap and inform each other. Jean Rhys, Doris Lessing, Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, and Margaret Atwood have all drawn an analogy between the relationships of men and women and those of the imperial power and the colony, while critics like Gayatri Spivak have articulated the relationship between feminism, post-structuralism, and the discourse of post-coloniality” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 30). Elleke Boehmer has argued that because “gender like the nation is composed by way of fictions, the concept of narrating the self represents a central area of *crossover* between the study of *women's writing* and *postcolonial studies*” (emphasis in the original; 12). Since some of the Ukrainian women writers’ texts that I examine feature autobiographical heroines who attempt to negotiate the gender and national (as well as “writerly”) aspects of their identities in the late Soviet/post-Soviet Ukrainian culture, and other texts give gendered and often women-centered visions of the Ukrainian nation, a dual critical focus on gender and the (postcolonial) nation is essential in the reading of these works.

To analyze the gender/nation nexus in women's fiction, I use ideas from by now a sizeable body of theory on gender and nation.³⁶ Scholars like Anne McClintock, Nira Yuval-Davis, Caren Kaplan, Elleke Boehmer, and many others have examined nation and gender together and argued for the necessity of doing so. As Anne McClintock asserts, "[n]ationalism is (...) constituted from the very beginning as a gendered discourse and cannot be understood without a theory of gender power" ("No Longer in a Future Heaven," 261). Why gender is so central to nationalism can be explained in a number of ways—for instance, through the "primordialist" theory of the nation, which holds that nation is just an extension of the model of familial relationships, or, as one British politician put it, "two males plus defending a territory with the women and children" (quoted in Yuval-Davis, 15). Like a patriarchal family then, the nation depends on gender difference and is mired in the unequal distribution of power between the sexes.

In *Gender & Nation*, sociologist Nira Yuval-Davis examines the important intersections between and the mutual constitution of the discourses of gender and those of the nation. Despite the differences between specific nations, she maintains that various national discourses share a common set of important, and therefore strictly policed, roles which women are expected to perform vis-à-vis the nation: they are called upon to be its biological and cultural reproducers

³⁶ As Tamar Mayer summarizes in "Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Setting the Stage," theorizations of the gender/nation nexus, informed by feminism, have begun to appear in the West since the late 1980s (5). For the best-known ones, see Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (1986); McClintock, "Family Feuds: Gender, Nation, and the Family" (1993) and "No Longer in a Future Heaven: Nationalism, Gender and Race" (1996); McClintock, Mufti, Shohat, eds. *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nations, and Postcolonial Perspectives* (1997); Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender & Nation* (1997); and Kaplan et al., eds. *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State* (1999). For the gender/nation nexus in postcolonial fiction, see Shultheis, *Regenerative Fictions: Postcolonialism, Psychoanalysis, and the Nation as Family* (2004) and Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (2005).

(through giving birth and raising its future loyal members), its “symbolic border guards” (through marrying *inside* the nation, for example) and symbolic “embodiments of the collectivity” (as figures for the nation’s identity and “future destiny”) (23, 45). Underlying these roles is the equation of women with nature and/or passivity: even the seemingly active and “civilizational” rather than “natural” role of the cultural reproducer does not really allow women to *make* the cultural meanings they are supposed to transmit to future generations. They are often expected to be cultural *re*-producers rather than cultural *producers*. This expectation makes the position of a woman writer in her nation—should she produce new or iconoclastic cultural visions rather than reproduce the accepted old ones—quite problematic.

This is a problem which several women writers, examined in this dissertation, faced to a greater or lesser extent. While “the nation” seems to be the privileged topic of writing in both post-Soviet Ukraine and Russia—and, as I argue, engaging important national themes has made the women writers under study popular in their respective cultures, the reception of their works on these themes often reveals their cultures’ unease and sometimes even outrage about the national visions these authors have put forth. As I show in the case of Maria Matios in Chapter 4, her acceptance into the Ukrainian literary canon on the basis of her two books on the subject of the nation was made possible by a partial misreading of these texts: while the critics and theater directors, who adapted her texts for the stage, welcomed her turn to the historical themes, forbidden under the Soviet regime, they completely ignored her gender critique of the national community. Another example is the hostile reception of Zabuzhko’s novel *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*, explored in Chapter 3, which shocked most Ukrainian critics not so much with its frank discussion of sex (of which there is very little in the book), but rather with the fact that this bitter analysis of the dysfunctional Ukrainian national space, and of the limits placed on the

female subject by the national imaginary, was authored by a woman. Thus, by writing these works, Ukrainian women writers implicitly raised the question of who is authorized to speak and write about the postcolonial Ukrainian nation and its past, and in what ways.

The third “national” role for women, singled out by Yuval-Davis—that of symbolizing the nation—is what often makes it possible to portray the nation as eternal and natural rather than a modern and constructed phenomenon. As the editors of *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State* put it, “it is through (...) sexualization and genderization that the nation is able to transcend modernities and to become a timeless and homogenized entity” (Kaplan et al., 7). In other words, the modern character of nations gets obscured when a nation is represented, for example, through generations of women’s bodies giving birth to other successive generations of the nation. At the same time, such a representational move equates womanhood with motherhood, reducing complex women’s lives and essentializing gender identity.

How such a construction of woman and nation has worked in Russia is analyzed by Harriet Murav in “Engendering the Russian Body Politic,” which surveys post-Soviet “reconfiguration[s]” of the myth of “Mother Russia” in essays and prose fiction by male and female writers (33). Murav argues that this centuries-old gender myth, in which the nation is represented as feminine and the state as masculine, has been resurrected in the late Soviet and post-Soviet period, including by a number of “politically conservative authors” (33). The latter have responded to the chaos of early post-Soviet years with calls to women “to return home,” to be first and foremost good mothers, and to preserve as well as embody “the values of the nation” (34-9). Prose fiction by Valentin Rasputin and Vasilii Belov constructed female characters who were either held up as positive symbols of “good” Mother Russia, endangered by the “evil”

Soviet regime, or as examples of “bad” mothers and “undomesticated” women—symbolic figures for the “breakdown” of post-Soviet Russian society (40). As Murav points out, this “engendering of the Russian body politic as Mother Russia (...) denies the possibility of representing women in anything other than a mythological light” (43). She then suggests that two broad productive strategies that can be and have been used in fiction in order to “demystify Mother Russia” are to create ironic or parodic figurations of this myth, or to give realistic portrayals of women’s complex lives, without idealizing motherhood or “demoniz[ing]” women’s sexuality (43, 47).

Although the mythic portrayal of Ukraine as a mother does not seem to be as prevalent in the Ukrainian culture as the myth of Mother Russia is in the Russian culture, the equation of the nation with woman is nevertheless quite common, and myths about women’s proper roles and places in the nation abound.³⁷ The two strategies of myth deconstruction analyzed by Murav thus turn out to be useful for dealing with Ukrainian national myths about women as well. Both of these strategies are evident in the prose fiction by women writers, examined in this project. As I show in Chapter 2, Yevhenia Kononenko, for example, uses irony and parody to deconstruct the myth of the Ukrainian folk poet Marusia Churai—an ideal image of Ukrainian femininity. Tatiana Tolstaya employs parody to uncouple Woman and Russia in her postmodern refiguring of the romance of internal colonization (see Chapter 5). By contrast, other women writers in this project resort to the second strategy and create complex, fully developed female protagonists who play a wide variety of roles in their communities, including that of critics of their culture and the nation. Perhaps only Zabuzhko, in *The Alien Woman* and *The Museum of Abandoned*

³⁷ For an analysis of a new Ukrainian gender myth, invented in the post-Soviet era in order to disseminate conservative ideas of femininity, see Marian J. Rubchak, “Collective Memory as a Device for Constructing a New Gender Myth” (2009). I do not describe this new myth in detail here because the Ukrainian women writers examined in this project do not explicitly engage it in their fiction.

Secrets, resorts to some mythologizing, but the myths she creates, as will become clear from my analysis, do not equate woman with the nation.

In general, Ukrainian women writers' interventions into the national imaginary, examined in this project, approach the gender/nation nexus from a somewhat different perspective than do many Russian women writers. This perspective is informed by their sense of Ukraine as a postcolonial nation and by what seems to be a somewhat greater receptivity to feminist ideas.³⁸ (Unlike several prominent Russian women writers from roughly the same generation, Zabuzhko, Kononenko and Matios do not reject the designation "women writers," and two of them—Zabuzhko and Kononenko—also identify as feminists.) This often translates into fiction that resembles in its attitudes towards the nation a lot of women's writing from the postcolonial Third World—described, among others, by Elleke Boehmer. On the one hand, this fiction affirms the nation as a "platform" "from which to resist the multiple ways in which colonialism distorts and disfigures a people's history," and on the other, it critiques the nation partly in order "to reshape national cultur[e] in a way more hospitable to women's presence" (Boehmer 10, 12). As they chart the re-emergence and development of women's prose fiction in Ukraine, the chapters that follow also pay attention to how these two efforts intersect in Ukrainian women's writing.

³⁸ For the intersections between gender, nation, and feminism in the Ukrainian context, see Bohachevsky-Chomiak, *Feminists despite Themselves: Women in Ukrainian Community Life, 1884-1939* (1988); Pavlychko, "Feminism and Nationalism" and "Between Feminism and Nationalism: New Women's Groups in the Ukraine" (in *Feminizm*, 2002); Zhurzhenko, *Gendernye rynki Ukrainy: Politicheskaia ekonomia natsional'nogo stroitel'stva* (2008), "Feminist (De)Constructions of Nationalism in the Post-Soviet Space" (2011) and "Gender, Nation, and Reproduction: Demographic Discourses and Politics in Ukraine after the Orange Revolution" (2012); and Rewakowicz, "Feminism, Nationalism, and Women's Literary Discourse in Post-Soviet Ukraine" (2011).

CHAPTER 2

Writing Oneself into Literature: The Re-Emergence of Ukrainian Women's

Writing in the Late 1980s and the Early 1990s

“This phenomenon is difficult to explain, but in the Ukrainian Socialist Realist writing of the 1930s-1970s, there were very few women authors,” acknowledges Vira Aheieva towards the end of her monograph on the feminist discourse in Ukrainian modernism (*Zhinochyi prostir* 315). This fact is indeed puzzling, especially when one considers the flourishing, critical recognition, and subsequent canonization of women's writing from the turn and the first decades of the 20th century, most vividly seen in the cases of two celebrated Ukrainian women modernists, Ol'ha Kobylians'ka (1863-1942) and Lesia Ukrainka (1871-1913).³⁹

Moreover, this situation appears to be quite different from what was happening in the literature of Ukraine's Slavic neighbor and, at this time, its purportedly “brotherly” Soviet republic—Russia. According to the literary historian Beth Holmgren, the Soviet post-war era “is perhaps the first period in Russian literature when women signify as a major and distinctive group.” (226) As proof, Holmgren cites the examples of Vera Panova (1907-1973), Antonina Koptiaeva (1909-1991), and Galina Nikolaeva (1911-1963), all of whom received the Stalin Prize for their works in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, with Panova being thus “honored”

³⁹ Besides Kobylians'ka and Lesia Ukrainka, there were many other Ukrainian women authors writing in this period. The most well-known among them were Olena Pchilka (1849-1930), Nataliya Kobryns'ka (1855-1920), Lyubov Yanovs'ka (1861-1933), Hryts'ko Hryhorenko (1867-1924), Yevhenia Yaroshyns'ka (1868-1904), and Liudmyla Staryts'ka-Cherniakhivs'ka (1868-1941) (For brief biographies and some of their works translated into English, see *For a Crust of Bread*). In Western Ukraine, the next generation of women writers included Ol'ha Duchymins'ka (1883-1988), Olena Rzhypets'ka (1885-1948), Olena Tsehel's'ka (1887-1971), Natalena Koroleva (1888-1966), Halyna Zhurba (1888-1979), Daria Vikonska (1893-1945), Mariia Strutyns'ka (1897-1984), and others (Bahan 12). Most of these women writers hailed from Ukrainian *intelligentsia* families that participated in the efforts to establish an independent Ukrainian state in 1918-1921, and after this state fell to the Bolsheviks, many of them emigrated to the West.

three times. Holmgren goes on to mention Panova's and Olga Berggol'ts's later "key roles in precipitating the intermittent thaw in Soviet literature" and rounds off her evidence with a sizeable list of both dissident and the more conformist women authors, which includes Evgeniia Ginzburg, Lidiia Chukovskaia, Lidiia Ginzburg, Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, I. Grekova, Inna Varlamova, and Natal'ia Baranskaia (226). Holmgren's explanation of "this boom" focuses on socio-economic reasons, such as Soviet-sponsored "equal-opportunity education and equal-opportunity employment" as well as the opened track for "upward mobility through Party membership" for "lower-class women" (226-7). It also includes the historical and ideological validation of new, if heavily circumscribed, "speaking roles" for women, such as that of a "female mourner" after World War II (228). This analysis leads the scholar to conclude that "surprising as it may seem, the Stalinist system proved to be an institutional and iconic enabler of women's writing" (228).

While the reasons given by Holmgren are broad enough to assume their validity for Ukraine as well (after all, the Soviet leaders promoted equal rights for women's education and employment across all of the republics, and World War II took a comparable, if not heavier, toll on Ukraine's male population), her conclusion has no bearing for women writers in post-war Soviet Ukrainian literature. There is no "distinctive group" of Ukrainian women writers to speak of until the 1980s,⁴⁰ and none of those few Ukrainian women who did write during this period

⁴⁰ The statistics that I have compiled based on the series *Pys'mennyky Radians'koi Ukrainy* (The Writers of Soviet Ukraine) are instructive in this respect. The series included 13 volumes of essays on more or less established Soviet Ukrainian writers working in all genres (with a stronger focus on older writers) and was published between 1955 and 1987 by the publishing house of the Union of Writers of Soviet Ukraine, "Radians'kyi pys'mennyk," with an average of 3 volumes per decade. Out of 127 writers covered in these volumes, there were only 4 women writers. Out of these four, two were children's writers, one stopped publishing in the 1930s, and only one (Iryna Vil'de) wrote fiction for adults throughout the Soviet period. (See Petrosiuk, esp. pp. 232-6.)

ever received the Stalin Prize or its later version—the State prize of the USSR.⁴¹ The only Ukrainian female author who came close to being allowed into the Soviet literary canon was Iryna Vil'de (1907-1982)—a prolific prose writer from Western Ukraine who, at the time of this region's incorporation into the Soviet Union at the end of World War II, was already an established and popular author and, thus, by no means a product of “the Stalinist system” Holmgren writes about.⁴² In fact, making Vil'de's work fit the ideological and aesthetic strictures of the Soviet canon required both her own renunciation of her pre-war writings and a lot of conscious misreading of her later work on the part of some Ukrainian Soviet critics (Zakharchuk 49, 53).

If not “an institutional and iconic enabler of women's writing,” as Holmgren puts it, then what was the Stalinist and, more broadly, the Soviet regime to Ukrainian women authors? How did the Soviet state-controlled system of literary production influence women's writing in Ukraine? To understand the historical context for the re-emergence of Ukrainian women's writing in the *perestroika* and the early independence period, I think it important to address these questions, although I cannot answer them fully here. I will approach them by examining the case of Nina Bichuya—one of very few Ukrainian women prose writers besides Vil'de in pre-1980s

⁴¹ The Stalin Prize for literature was awarded yearly between 1941 and 1954. In 1966, it was revived and renamed the State Prize of the USSR. While this dubious honor has never been bestowed on any of the Ukrainian women writers, their male colleagues in the Union of Soviet Writers of Ukraine received it many times, most notably Oleksandr Korniiichuk (in 1941, 1942, 1943, 1949, and 1951), Mykola Bazhan (in 1946 and 1949), Volodymyr Sosiura (in 1948), and Oles' Honchar (in 1948 and 1982). It was also awarded three times (in 1943, 1946, and 1952) to a Polish Bolshevik woman writer Wanda Wasilewska, who escaped from Hitler-occupied Poland into Ukraine, joined the Communist party, married the Ukrainian writer Oleksandr Korniiichuk, settled in Kyiv, and wrote propagandist novels in Polish, some of which were commissioned personally by Stalin. Thereafter they were quickly translated into Russian and Ukrainian and awarded prizes already in translation. (See “Komisar Vanda--zhinka u shtaniakh.” For more on Wasilewska, see Leshchenko, *Vanda Vasylevs'ka: narys zhyttia i tvorchosti*.)

⁴² In 1965, at the very tail end of the Thaw period in Ukraine, Vil'de received the Taras Shevchenko Prize for her novel *Sestry Richyns'ki* (*The Richyns'ki Sisters*)—a lesser literary award specific to the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, which was nevertheless a sign of her work's official recognition. Another prominent Ukrainian woman author from this period—the poet Lina Kostenko (b. 1930)—did benefit from a Soviet education and even graduated from the Maksim Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow in 1956, but was severely criticized a few years later for formalist experimentation in her poetry and disappeared from the official literary scene until the late 1970s.

Soviet Ukraine and an important precursor of the next generation of women writers, which are the subject of this dissertation. Being 30 years younger than Vil'de, Bichuya published most of her works during the era of stagnation (the late 1960s-early 1980s). I will briefly discuss her literary career but will deal mostly with her own perspective on her place as a writer in the Soviet Union, which she voiced most poignantly in her semi-autobiographical short story “Kaminnyi hospodar” (“The Stone Master”).

Haunted by a Moustache: Nina Bichuya and the Impossibility of (Women's) Writing in the Soviet Ukrainian Periphery

Born in 1937 in Kyiv, Nina Bichuya grew up and lives to this day in L'viv—the largest city in Western Ukraine. She made her debut in literature with stories for and about children (collections “Kanikuly u Svitlohors'ku” (*Vacation in Svitlohors'k*, 1967) and “Shpaha Slavka Berkuty” (*Slavko Berkuta's Rapier*, 1968), but she reached her best in a series of masterful historical and psychological short stories from the 1970s, such as “Drohobyt's'kyi zvizdar” (“The Drohobych Astronomer”), “Sotvorinnia tainy” (“Creation of a Mystery”), “Velyki korolivs'ki lovy” (“Great Royal Hunt”), “Styhli iabluka pid osin” (“Ripe Apples in the Fall”), “Kviten' u chovni” (“April in the Boat”) etc. (Gabor, “Vyvorozhy mene cherez pyatsot lit” 27-8; Gabor, *Neznaioma* 62). All of these stories were written in Bichuya's unique and difficult style, usually characterized as “modernist” by her contemporary critics. These fragmented and frequently plotless narratives are primarily interested in exploring the characters' inner world and leave much unsaid and unexplained (Gabor, “Vyvorozhy” 28). The publication history of Bichuya's work is instructive as it illustrates the mechanisms and paradoxes of Soviet literary politics

concerning the literature of the so-called national cultures (*literatura narodov SSSR*), Ukraine in particular, or what I designate here as the Soviet periphery.

In a recent essay about her literary career, the Ukrainian writer and essayist Vasyl' Gabor relates the story of Bichuya's first book publication in Russian ("Vyvorozhy"). In the early 1970s, the well-known Moscow-based translator from Ukrainian, Vladimir Rossel's, prepared a collection of Bichuya's stories translated into Russian for publication in the newly established series—The Library of the Journal *Druzhba narodov* (The Friendship of Peoples). The journal, which had for its name Stalin's notorious metaphor from the 1930s that supposedly described the character of the relationship between different nationalities in the Soviet Union, started the series in order to acquaint Soviet readers with the best non-Russian writing coming out of various Soviet republics.⁴³ Before the book could be published in Moscow though, it had to receive a formal approval letter from Kyiv. The authorities in Kyiv, however, responded that Bichuya was too young to be the first writer to represent Ukraine in the new series and that her collection would have to wait. Unfortunately, Gabor does not indicate who wrote this letter or explain exactly how decisions of this sort were usually negotiated between the Soviet metropole and its periphery, but it is probable that the leadership of the Union of Soviet Writers of Ukraine was an important participant in these negotiations. Instead of Bichuya's collection, two books by Ukrainian writers appeared in this series in the early 1970s—a now obscure memoir about Ukrainian literary life by Yurii Smolych (1971) and a second-rate novel, *Tsyklon* (*Cyclone*), by Oles' Honchar (1972). Both authors were heads of the Union of Soviet Writers of Ukraine around this time (Honchar until 1971 and Smolych briefly in 1971); both were men. Perhaps it is

⁴³ For more on Stalin's metaphor "The Friendship of Peoples," see Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-39*, esp. pp. 437-442.

not so surprising after all that the collection by the young and relatively unknown woman writer from the Western Ukrainian periphery had to cede its place to their work.

While Bichuya's collection in Russian finally did come out in Moscow in 1974, the same book in Ukrainian, which Bichuya submitted to the publishing house of the Union of Soviet Writers of Ukraine, “Radians'kyi pys'mennyk,” never saw the light of day. Gabor mentions that this manuscript received three extremely negative reviews that accused the author of painting an excessively dark picture of life as well as of being influenced by the repressed Ukrainian urban prose writer of the 1920s-1930s, Valerian Pidmohyl'ny, whose forbidden works Bichuya, by her own admission, had not had a chance to read at that time (“Vyvorozhy” 30).

It may seem somewhat odd that in the 1970s a Ukrainian writer had less difficulty getting published in Moscow rather than in Soviet Ukraine's capital, but this fact becomes understandable when one considers its historical, ideological, and institutional context. After the brief period of liberalization during the Thaw, Ukraine experienced a renewed, concerted effort on the part of the highest political authorities of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic to stamp out any manifestations of “bourgeois nationalism”—a label that in the post-war era came to be associated predominantly with Ukraine and that was used almost indiscriminately to condemn any type of activity or expression that appeared dangerous or subversive (First 10-11; Bazhan 45). Even Bichuya's quite innocuous vignettes from Ukrainian pre-Soviet history, an interest in psychology and urban themes, and an unconventional style were deemed subversive enough to merit a comparison with the “nationalist” Pidmohyl'ny and to be refused publication in Ukraine. Moreover, as Joshua First notes in his dissertation on Ukrainian cinema and film industry in the post-Stalin period, to the Soviet authorities at that time, the mere use of the Ukrainian language “constituted a type of cultural excess, something that lacked practical necessity and thus

possessed potentially dangerous consequences” (12). He recounts an exchange in 1969 between Leonid Brezhnev and the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine, Petro Shelest, in which Brezhnev wondered “why Soviet publishers needed to print materials in Ukrainian when almost all Ukrainians also knew Russian” (12). Translated into Russian and placed within the “safe” context of Stalinist “Friendship of Peoples” discourse, which superficially celebrated Soviet cultural diversity, Bichuya's texts no longer evoked the ghosts of “bourgeois nationalism” or repressed Ukrainian writers of the 1930s. At the same time, the tokenist nature of this discourse, coupled with the fact that in each of the republics the institutional framework for literary production was characterized by a rigid hierarchy with loyal men at the top, guaranteed that, no matter how talented, a provincial woman writer like Bichuya could not be published in Moscow before the leaders of the Ukrainian branch of the Soviet Writers' Union.

Bichuya's difficulties getting published in Soviet Ukraine continued into the 1980s, which is partly why she wrote relatively little. Most of her stories came out only thanks to the daring editor of the prose section in the L'viv-based literary journal *Zhovten'* (October), Roman Ivanychuk.⁴⁴ Himself a prose writer of the sixtiers generation, Ivanychuk has described the literary politics and tastes dominant in Soviet Ukraine in the 1970s in a memoir, explaining that amidst his circle of populist-minded and mostly male writer friends, Nina Bichuya “remained a solitary figure with her original, modernist style, which, alas, turned out to be unacceptable to our politicized and sentimental reading public...” (*Blahoslovy, dushe moia, Hospoda...* 79) What Ivanychuk means by “sentimental” was partly a symptom of another aspect of state politics

⁴⁴ For more on the role of the journal *October* in the literary politics of Soviet Ukraine, see Risch's *The Ukrainian West*, esp. Chapter 5: “Language and Literary Politics.” In his discussion of literary life in L'viv between 1945 and the late 1980s, Risch mentions dozens of male writers, editors, and other members of the Soviet Ukrainian literary establishment and not a single woman, which gives additional confirmation to my argument about a virtual absence of Ukrainian women authors in this period.

regarding the literature of the Soviet periphery: within “The Friendship of Peoples” discourse, the promotion of the national literatures of the non-Russian Soviet republics has in reality provincialized these literatures by limiting their function to expressions of their peoples’ “essence.” As Joshua First put it, “[u]nder a Stalinist mode of “national” representation, the landscapes and peoples of the Soviet periphery achieved recognition as unique within a folkloric (...) vocabulary, replete with costumes, dancing peasants, and other evidence of ‘national color’.” (51) Growing up on a steady literary diet of the simplified sentimental images of Ukrainian peasants in their colorful national garb, the Soviet Ukrainian readers and writers alike have come to believe that this is what Ukrainian literature really *is* and should be, if it is to be truly Ukrainian and capture “the spirit of the people.” Against such expectations, Bichuya’s complicated and fiercely unsentimental stories about intelligentsia and urban life found little understanding on the part of many Soviet Ukrainian critics and readers.

Bichuya has published no new fiction since the fall of the Soviet Union. Her last new published story to date, “The Stone Master,” came out in the journal *October* in 1990 and has been characterized by Ivanychuk as “the quintessence of her intellectual expression” (*Blahoslovy, dushe moia, Hospoda...* 106-7). The story’s title is an intertextual borrowing: it comes from a renowned Ukrainian modernist woman writer, Lesia Ukrainka, who in 1912 wrote a drama entitled *Kaminnyi hospodar*, which was, in turn, an intertextual nod to Aleksandr Pushkin’s *Kamennyi gost*.⁴⁵ Set in L’viv in the late 1970s, Bichuya’s semi-autobiographical short story is this author’s only overtly ideological text, yet still in keeping with her trademark style. It may be read as Bichuya’s “last word” of sorts on the Soviet environment for writing literature, especially in places as peripheral to the Soviet center as Western Ukraine. Reading this

⁴⁵ The significance of Bichuya’s intertextual engagement with Lesia Ukrainka will be discussed later in this chapter.

text with the help of ideas from postcolonial theory on writing under colonial regimes as well as some recent theorizations of Soviet discourse, we can see Bichuya's perspective on what the Soviet system was to Ukrainian women writers like her.

The central event in "The Stone Master" takes place around a table where the I-narrator, Bichuya's *alter ego*, and a small circle of her male writer friends are sharing memories, almost twenty-five years later, about their reactions to the news of Stalin's death. The narrator remembers how upon hearing about it early in the morning, her father started jumping around the room in just his underwear chanting "Zdokh! Zdokh!" (He croaked!) Later on at school, when the teacher locked up the narrator in the principal's office asking her, because of her literary talents, to write a poem on the occasion of Stalin's death, all that kept coming to the girl's mind was her father's "Zdokh!" Caught between the impossibility of writing *that* and creating anything eulogistic, she finally got out of the sordid task by pretending she was so overcome with grief that she couldn't write at all. Although the narrator's companions laugh, finding the story amusing, the narrator's unease about their laughter generates a fragmented stream of other traumatic memories, personal and national, of nightmares and meditations on the Stalinist past. The narrator pictures Stalin's ghost with a fake black moustache, which he periodically removes, standing right behind her friends' backs, joining in their laughter and drinking, making all of it possible, in fact, because it is their irreverent remembrance of him that unites their little counter-community.

The portrayal of Stalin as an evil force and the Master of the Soviet "house," complete with such stock features as his thick moustache and his pipe, mark this story as a fairly typical product of its time: in *Literary Exorcisms of Stalinism*, Margaret Ziolkowski mentions a host of works by Russian authors from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn to Aleksandr Bek which describe Stalin

in similar terms.⁴⁶ The haunting quality of “The Stone Master,” which brings together Stalin’s ghost and the images of the people who died in his terror, makes this story also comparable to many post-Soviet texts. As Alexander Etkind puts it in “Post-Soviet Hauntology: Cultural Memory of the Soviet Terror,” “[s]pecters of Stalin are haunting a post-Soviet culture that produces dozens of alternative histories of ‘the miraculous Georgian’...” (191) However, Bichuya’s story is also different from many such texts: despite seeming to be yet another, this time Ukrainian version of a story about the evils committed by Stalin, it attempts to shift the focus from the pathologies of Stalin’s person to the still colonial character of the Soviet system post-Stalin. Bichuya imaginatively represents the discursive regime established by the Soviet system and the speaking subject positions spawned by it in the Western Ukrainian periphery. Within this regime, Bichuya’s autobiographical writer-narrator is shown to occupy a precarious, marginal position, speaking/writing from which is sometimes impossible and sometimes simply irrelevant.

Summarizing Tzvetan Todorov’s ideas in *The Conquest of America*, the co-authors of the *The Empire Writes Back* point out that “the key feature of colonial oppression [is] ... the control over the *means of communication* rather than the control over life and property or even language itself.” (Emphasis in the original; 78) It is seizing the means of communication that enables the colonizers to disseminate their imperial order—to establish and maintain what Serguei Oushakine calls “the discursive monopoly of the regime” (214). The functioning of this control over the means of communication during the Soviet period of stagnation is captured in Bichuya’s

⁴⁶ Ziolkowski’s list includes Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, Bulat Okudzhava’s song “The Black Cat,” Andrei Voznesensky’s “Oza,” Anatolii Gladilin’s *A Rehearsal on Friday*, Vladimir Voinovich’s *In the Circle of Friends*, and Bek’s *The New Assignment*.

text in the narrator's recurrent nightmare, variations of which occur in the beginning, the middle, and the end of the story. It is worth looking at the first variation of this dream in its entirety:

Between *myself* and *the podium* made of rough rust-colored planks hastily hammered together, there extends a trampled green field, and *the man behind the podium, holding a microphone in his hands*, exclaims something, shouting at the top of his voice, *but I do not hear a word, and this is all because somebody had spread out such a boundless green expanse between us, and also because the microphone which he holds in his hand is not plugged into anything*, its cord droops, stretches out, and recoils like a long black snake, and maybe he even hisses like a snake, and although I understand that the man cannot hiss, I keep thinking that his voice is that absurd hissing, and there is not another soul in the vast green space – only I and that man who stands behind the podium and holds the microphone, although there is no sense in holding it because nothing can be heard anyway. (Emphasis mine; Bichuya 26)

The man at the podium in this dream is a vivid symbol of the Soviet control over the means of communication. The man is fittingly not any specific, recognizable individual because it is his position at the podium rather than his person that endows him with the power to speak on behalf of the regime. Soviet visual propaganda (photos, monuments, posters, etc.) produced many stock images of the man at the podium (and very rarely—of a woman), their style depending very little on whether the man was Lenin, Stalin, or some nameless Soviet hero exhorting the Soviet people to one thing or another. In a later variation of the dream, the narrator sees the speaker

gesticulating dramatically with his hands and pointing his finger upwards, in a familiar gesture of Soviet leaders in visual representations.

Although the man in the dream holds the microphone in his hand, and thus literally controls the means of communication, the narrator cannot hear a word of what he says because of the distance and the fact that the microphone is not plugged in. I read the “boundless green expanse” between the narrator and the speaker as representing the distance between the Soviet center and its periphery—in this case, one of the Soviet western-most borderlands in which Bichuya’s narrator lives—and which historically proved to be particularly resistant to heeding the ideological messages of the Soviet metropole. The most interesting detail of this dream—the unplugged microphone, and the silence that results from it—seemingly suggests that the man has lost all control over the means of communication, but I think a more accurate interpretation of this image can be done through Alexei Yurchak’s theory of the “performative shift,” which took place in the Soviet authoritative discourse after Stalin, the external “master” of this discourse, died.⁴⁷ As a result of this shift, “the performative dimension” of any act became more important than the constative one in various “genres of authoritative signification,” including “the structure of rituals, visual representations, public events,” etc. (79) Even though no constative meaning of the speaker’s address in the dream can be deciphered, his speech act still works as a performance of control over the means of communication: he still occupies a position of power at the podium and still holds the microphone. This performance of power has a contradictory effect on the narrator: on the one hand, it seems absurd to her and in a later variation of the dream she begins laughing uncontrollably; on the other hand, however, the narrator reports being able only to laugh, but not to move, turn around, or say a word, as if she were petrified. This dream, I think,

⁴⁷ For a detailed explanation of the performative shift, see Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation*, pp. 24-6.

represents fairly accurately the character of the late Soviet regime after the performative shift: as Yurchak pointed out, it was perceived by many as “an eternal state” that “was forever” (1), as if frozen in time and space, and, among many other cultural forms, this perception produced a particular form of helpless laughter, or “humor that has ceased to struggle” (Sloterdijk’s formulation quoted by Yurchak, 277).

In between the evolving descriptions of this recurrent nightmare, the story shifts to the scene at the table where the narrator and her fellow writers reminisce about Stalin’s death in the presence of his ghost. As in the nightmare, the narrator feels unable to utter another word and just listens quietly to her friends’ stories and irreverent laughter. She hears the ghost laughing with them, giving them his permission to mock him. Unlike her companions, the narrator realizes that even these oppositional tales are enabled and determined by the same Soviet discourse that was established under its Master—Stalin. Stalin’s ghost enjoys how the narrator’s friends “extend” his life by talking about him and relives his role of the Master by putting on his fake black moustache. Before he disappears, he takes it off again, which suggests that the moustache in this text does not represent Stalin as a historical person, but rather his performative function as the Master of the Soviet regime and its discursive monopoly—what Bichuya calls “The Stone Master” in the title of her story. It is this discursive monopoly, in which the regime incites to and values speech that revolves only around itself, that haunts the writer-narrator.

Reminiscing about Stalin with her friends prompts the narrator to meditate on the terror, especially the Famine of 1932-33 in Ukraine. It is significant that most of the terror images come to the narrator from accounts of the older generation who personally witnessed it, especially her father. She assimilates her father’s experiences as her own, and these terrifying visions continue to impact her even now: “Coming out of my apartment building in L’viv, I was often afraid to

look to the side because I knew that back then, in Kyiv, Father saw, right under the door, a woman who had died of hunger.” (Bichuya, 36)⁴⁸ Caught between the two opposed, yet linked, ideological worlds—the central Soviet one represented by the speaker at the podium and the Ukrainian peripheral one represented by her writer friends and especially her father—the writer-narrator finds no relevant or even possible position from which to speak otherwise. Her precarious location “in-between” is most clearly visible in that central traumatic memory from the narrator’s early youth when, unable to write either a eulogy for Stalin or her father’s triumphant “Zdokh!” on the occasion of Stalin’s death, she ended up writing nothing.

Although Bichuya herself attempted to speak otherwise in much of her work, avoiding politics and ideology altogether, she constantly faced misunderstanding from her Soviet Ukrainian critics. My survey of a sizeable portion of this criticism convinced me that most of Bichuya’s critics simply did not know how to read her texts on their own terms and made every effort to squeeze her work into the parameters of ideological positions familiar to them.⁴⁹ In “The Stone Master,” the autobiographical narrator links her inability to continue to write to her critics’ incomprehension:

You have not written anything for a long time, and it seems to you that the critics’ arguments about the things you did write resemble some senseless, wild dance on the still fresh grave—your very own grave; despite the fact that it seems that you are no more,

⁴⁸ The relationship of Bichuya’s narrator to the traumatic experiences of her father and his generation fits Marianne Hirsch’s conceptualization of “postmemory”—a form of profound connection which the “descendants of survivors (...) of mass traumatic events” establish “to the previous generation’s remembrances of the past” (105-6).

⁴⁹ This type of criticism, of course, was pervasive and frequently obligatory in the Soviet era, but it strikes one as particularly inept in the case of most of Bichuya’s stories. See, for instance, V. Panchenko, “Lohika kharakteriv? Ni, lohika dumok” (1979).

that you do not exist at all, that stomping hurts and disappoints you like hell... (Bichuya, 33)

This self-addressed passage exemplifies only one of the narrator's several moments of intense scrutiny directed at her "writerly" self. Throughout the story, these are always in the second person, unlike the rest of the narration. This mode of address affords the narrator an honest, critical look at herself while at the same time allowing her to avoid saying "I" and thereby owning up to the painful reality of her perceived failures as a writer.

In an environment of Soviet discursive monopoly, the narrator sees no possibility to be understood or valued even in the future. Perhaps inspired by Marina Tsvetaeva's famous poetic address to her desk, Bichuya communicates this bleak prognosis in a striking coded image of her narrator's "writerly" self and its creations as a writing desk:

Your big, old, solid, reliable table. Its two bulky sections support a heavy brown table-top; the sections' drawers are moved only with effort, as if they do not want to reveal their secrets to anyone... (...) my table may turn out to be (...) useless later, sometime in the future, to someone who will realize its age, old-fashioned character, and bulkiness, and to whom its marks, stains, spots, its scratched-off polish, its charm, uniqueness, and mysteriousness of the pattern in the chestnut finish will say nothing... (Bichuya, 36-37)

The language of this description points to a similarity between the table's aesthetic details and Bichuya's writing style that has so many of its own unique "marks" and mysterious "patterns." As one contemporary commentator recently noted, Bichuya's stories, including "The Stone

Master,” are rarely straightforward but rather consist of cut up and jumbled chunks, which the reader must attend to very closely in order to put them together (Riznyk, 139). Later on the story's text sets up an opposition between the uselessness and probable future destruction of the narrator's writing table and the persistence of the stains from the red wine on the white tablecloth, left behind by Stalin's ghost who drank together with the narrator and her friends. While her writing desk is a “mere used up prop” that was simply a decoration in the “performance” of her life, the red circles from the wine glass on the tablecloth which symbolize Stalin's bloody heritage, including the established discursive monopoly, seem very permanent—they “would not disappear” (Bichuya, 42). However, the most curious detail about the image of the writing table is the narrator's acknowledgment that she is not the full master of it: as it turns out, only one section of it belongs to her, whereas the rest is still her father's, full of his possessions. Just like her vision of the past, the narrator's place as a writer—her place at the writing table—is significantly circumscribed by her father.

What “The Stone Master” ultimately shows is that the Soviet regime's discursive monopoly resulted in only two powerful speaking subject positions in the Western Ukrainian periphery: they may be symbolically designated as that of the Soviet Master and that of the Ukrainian Father. (Needless to say, the association of both positions with men, and paternal figures in particular, is not accidental.) During the era of stagnation, literature that would be deemed relevant by many Ukrainian critics and much of Bichuya's reading public, which consisted mostly of a narrow circle of intelligentsia, could be written only from one of these two positions. Although this may seem like an “outdated” argument amidst the contemporary studies of Soviet cultural production that emphasize a “third position,” such as Yurchak's concept of “living *vnye*” (126-8), I think it nevertheless holds at least for Western Ukrainian literature of the

1970s and the first half of the 1980s. One may give many different reasons for this state of affairs, of which Bichuya's story suggests several. One of them is a more acute memory in Western Ukraine of Soviet-era traumas, perceived as colonial ones; they were well-known by many, the stories about them being consciously passed on in oral form from one generation to the next, which produced and sustained a Ukrainian national imaginary, distinct from the official Soviet conception of "Ukrainian-ness." In the face of these traumas, a position *vnye* could and would be considered unethical and self-indulgent.

Towards the end of "The Stone Master," the narrator describes yet another dream of hers that captures her own difficulty, if not impossibility, of ultimately resisting writing from her father's position after she herself becomes a witness to a Soviet-era trauma. In this dream, the narrator is sent on a mission to some nearby village to write down the songs of the women who wanted their art recorded before they died.⁵⁰ When she gets there, the narrator finds no village, only a toothless, bald child, sitting on the snow, who can tell nothing because she is mute. Horrified by this image of destroyed countryside and its suppressed cultural memory, the narrator wonders whether forgetting such visions will not bring on the recurrence of similar traumas in the future. The ending of the story plays out a sinister scenario of such a return of the terror-filled Stalinist era, with its total discursive monopoly. In a grotesque scene at a Soviet second-hand shop, the narrator once again encounters a vision of Stalin—this time in the form of a stone bust that seems partly alive owing to the efforts of the shop assistant who has decided to

⁵⁰ Incidentally, the portion of the story that describes this dream and the circumstances that led to it illustrates very well the provincialization of cultural production in Soviet Ukraine—an aspect of Soviet cultural politics mentioned earlier. The reason why the narrator comes in touch with the peasant women is because at the theater where she works, they are in need of authentic props from the village for the performance of a humorous 19th-century populist play about Ukrainian village life. This play fit the Soviet bill for acceptable cultural expressions of diverse Soviet nationalities: its focus on folk costumes and other ethnographic details purportedly showed what Ukrainian culture was all about. The bitter irony captured in Bichuya's story is that while the Soviet Ukrainian urban theater audiences enjoyed the politically correct "performances" of village life on stage, the real traditional culture of the Ukrainian countryside was being destroyed by collectivization, deportations, the man-made famine, etc.

resuscitate the creature and make him into her own, private devil. As the head of the bust turns and stares angrily at the narrator, the story's text ends with the last variation of the narrator's recurrent nightmare about the man at the podium. The green field between her and the man becomes quickly filled with a multitude of people who can apparently hear him. The long cord of the microphone recoils at the narrator's feet, the crowd gets larger and larger, and it finally swallows up the narrator into its blackness.

The story thus dramatizes the futility of Bichuya's own strivings as a writer to escape the discursive monopoly of the Soviet regime. Using her last published piece of fiction to sum up her literary career and engage in a bitter reckoning of her entire life, Bichuya also gives us some insights into the circumscribed and traumatic writing environment created by the Soviet state in the Western Ukrainian periphery. It is only fitting that such painful subject-matter is communicated in a narrative that itself bears the symptoms of trauma. As Laurie Vickroy suggests in *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, trauma narratives “internalize the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of traumatic experience within their underlying sensibilities and structures.” (3) “The Stone Master”'s reliance on nightmares and ghosts of the past, its non-linear structure, numerous ellipses, half-revelations, and the use of the dissociative second-person narration “act out” trauma on the level of form. These devices create a mysterious, disorienting narrative that imparts to the reader a little bit of what it is like to be in the midst of this traumatic environment. Because this unruly narrative is entirely the product of Bichuya's autobiographical narrator, and it ends with the narrator's nightmarish annihilation, it points to unresolved trauma in the author herself. The text, however, is not devoid of the narrator's attempts to “work through” the many Stalinist-era traumas experienced by her and her peers as well as the generation of their parents; in fact, unlike her male writer colleagues, the

narrator clearly understands that this work must be done, but throughout the text, she is too afraid to speak up to her friends about it and/or cannot shake the affective hold of the traumatic memories and visions.⁵¹

Nevertheless, despite its pessimistic ending and the narrator's own failure to deal with the traumatic past effectively, the story hints at a possibility of positive change in the future. While the narrator does not voice her objections to her circle of colleagues who, it seems, simply cannot stop talking about Stalin, in the corner of that room, there sits the teenage daughter of the narrator's friend and host, who periodically interrupts the older generation's reminiscing by citing from the book of aphorisms by the eighteenth-century French writer Marquis de Vauvenargues, which she is reading in the Russian translation. Her seemingly random citations turn out to be an apt commentary on her father's and his friends' obsessed conversation and, more generally, on her parents' generation's uneasy relationship to the Stalinist regime. "The individual who cannot ingratiate himself with the monarch attempts to gain the favor of the minister or, at least, his lackey," quotes the girl at one point, interrupting the narrator's private remembrance of how during the commemoration ceremony on the day of Stalin's death, she wondered how many of her peers pretended to cry for Stalin and how many were watching her, ready to inform the authorities on her lack of mournfulness (translation mine; Bichuya 33). Unlike the narrator and despite her young age, the girl is not fearful to express her opinions out loud, although her father keeps snapping at her, trying to get her to go to bed and leave them alone. The narrator though recognizes in the girl's comments something her generation needs to hear, and she asks the girl to keep reading out loud from Vauvenargues.

⁵¹ The difference between "acting out" and "working through" a trauma has been cogently theorized by Dominick LaCapra (*Writing History, Writing Trauma*), on whose work I draw here.

In an oblique way then, “The Stone Master” seems to suggest that it will be up to the younger generation to make sense of the Soviet era and its many traumas. In the image of the nameless young girl created by Bichuya, I see a representation of the new generation of women writers in Ukraine—the ones who did not live through the Stalinist period themselves and are therefore not haunted by the personal memories and fears of this past, as is Bichuya's autobiographical narrator. At the same time, these women grew up in the Soviet Union, observed the fear- and trauma-ridden lives of their parents and older compatriots, and were moved to make sense of it all, especially with the coming of the more liberal *perestroika* period and the eventual crumbling of the Soviet regime. Such a new generation of women writers really did emerge in Ukraine after the decades of women authors' only marginal presence and virtual silence on the Ukrainian literary scene, especially in prose fiction. Contemporary commentators of Ukrainian literature have referred to the emergence of an entire wave of new women prose writers as “a conspicuous blossoming” and have called the writing they produced since Ukraine's independence “remarkably vibrant” (Naydan “A Conspicuous Blossoming”; Rewakowicz 275).

Bichuya's “Young Girls”: Oksana Zabuzhko, Yevhenia Kononenko, and Maria Matios

While scholars such as Michael Naydan and Maria Rewakowicz have written about the plethora of women's works in contemporary Ukraine in general, including in their analyses the literary output by the youngest generation to date (those born in the 1970s and the 1980s), this project focuses on the very first generation of women writers with whom the whole phenomenon of the re-emergence of women's writing in Ukraine began. These women are approximately the same age as Bichuya's young girl in “The Stone Master”: they were born in the late 1950s and the early 1960s and first appeared on the literary scene in the mid- to late 1980s, which earned

them, together with their male colleagues, the name of *visimdesiatnyky*.⁵² The most prominent among them are Oksana Zabuzhko, Yevhenia Kononenko, and Maria Matios. This cohort is particularly interesting because of the way in which their lives straddle the Soviet/post-Soviet divide: they are the only generation that had received their entire education under the Soviet regime, had made their literary debuts under its disintegrating system but ended up building sometimes extremely successful writing careers already after 1991. As such, this generation of women writers has still experienced firsthand what Naydan terms as “the repressive and congenitally patriarchal nature of the Soviet system”—both as women and as women writers (“Emerging Ukrainian Women Prose Writers”). This experience, as well as their acute feeling of a disrupted tradition in Ukrainian women's writing, are communicated in some of these women's early works, two of which I will examine at length in this chapter. Before analyzing these texts, however, I will sketch out brief “portraits” of the three key abovementioned women authors of this generation.

Born in 1960 in the city of Luts'k in northwestern Ukraine, **Oksana Zabuzhko** received an undergraduate degree in philosophy (1982) and a graduate degree in aesthetics (1985), both from the Taras Shevchenko University in Kyiv. She made a very early literary debut as a poet at the age of ten, but her first collection of poetry, prepared for publication in the mid-1970s, did not come out until 1985 because of a new wave of repressions against the Ukrainian intelligentsia in Kyiv in 1973, which touched Zabuzhko's parents (Gabor, *Neznaioma* 116-8). Her first prose works appeared in 1988-1992 in literary journals, but her major breakthrough was

⁵² The name originated by analogy with *shistdesiatnyky* (“the sixtiers”)—the writers active in the 1960s during Khrushchev's Thaw, frequently unconventional and many of them dissident. Nina Bichuya is part of the sixtiers' generation (albeit she can hardly be considered a dissident) and therefore the immediate precursor of the women *visimdesiatnyky*. For more on the *visimdesiatnyky* (both men and women) and their fiction, see Mark Andryczyk's doctoral dissertation, “A Community of Others: The Identity of the Post-Soviet Ukrainian Intellectual in the Prose of the *Visimdesiatnyky*.”

her 1996 autobiographical novel *Poliovi doslidzhennia z ukrains'koho seksu* (*Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*), which is currently in its 10th edition in Ukraine. Since then, in addition to prose in smaller genres, Zabuzhko has also published a large number of essays and three major works of literary criticism on the classics of Ukrainian literature—Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko, and Lesia Ukrainka. She has also maintained her own columns in several Ukrainian periodicals. Her most recent work of fiction is the controversial 830-page novel, *Muzei pokynutykh sekretiv* (*The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*, 2009) — a family saga that attempts to reconstruct and rethink Ukrainian history from the 1940s to the 2000s. Zabuzhko's public visibility, participation in countless national and international forums, numerous prizes as well as film and theater adaptations of her works have all contributed to her current image as Ukraine's premier woman writer.

Born in Kyiv in 1959, **Yevhenia Kononenko** obtained degrees in mathematics (1981) and French (1994) from prestigious Kyiv universities. Her initial forays into literature were translations of French poetry, while her own poems and stories appeared in print already after 1991. (Gabor, *Neznaioma* 232) Her first published collection, like Zabuzhko's, was a volume of poetry (1997), to be followed by many works of prose. She made a name for herself with short stories about contemporary urban women's lives (collection “Kolosal'nyi siuzhet” [*A Phenomenal Plot*], 1998) and later switched to the genre of the novel, with works such as *Imitatsiia* (*Imitation*, 2001), *Zrada. ZRADA made in Ukraine* (*Betrayal*, 2002), and *Nostal'hiia* (*Nostalgia*, 2005). Kononenko is credited with creating in Ukrainian literature a truly Ukrainian detective novel (*Imitatsiia*). She is also the author of the autobiographical feminist essay *Bez muzhyka* (*Without the Guy*, 2005) and of numerous cultural studies articles and essays, some of which have come out in her recent collection, *Heroini ta heroi* (*Heroines and Heroes*, 2010). A

few of them examine the public images of such Ukrainian women writers as Lesia Ukrainka, Lina Kostenko, and Oksana Zabuzhko.

Born in 1959 in a village in the region of Bukovyna, **Maria Matios** graduated in 1982 from the Chernivtsi State University with a degree in the Ukrainian language and literature. She was also initially a poet, with six collections of poetry published between 1983 and 2002. (Gabor, *Neznaioma* 374-5) Critical acclaim and widespread public recognition, however, came to her with the publication of two prose volumes in the early 2000s—a collection of short stories, *Natsiia* (*The Nation*, 2001), and the novel *Solodka Darusia: Drama na try zhyttia* (*Sweet Darusia: The Drama of Three Lives*, 2004), about the Soviet occupation and eventual incorporation of Bukovyna during World War II and the traumatized lives of the Ukrainian peasants in its wake. In 2004, *Sweet Darusia* was named the book of the year, and in 2005, Matios was awarded the Taras Shevchenko National Prize of Ukraine for this work. Numerous translations and stage adaptations followed. Since then, Matios has been extremely productive, writing in a variety of prose genres, including non-fiction. Her most recent books include the autobiographical volume *Vyrvani storinky z avtobiografii* (*Pages Torn out of My Autobiography*, 2010) and a novel, *Armaheddon uzhe vidbuvsia* (*Armageddon Has Already Taken Place*, 2011).

While these three women writers could not be more different in their personalities, worldviews, and writing styles, the brief sketches of their literary careers offered above do suggest a number of commonalities in their paths to literary recognition. It is interesting that all three started out as poets, only later switching to prose fiction, especially the genre of the novel, in which all of them gained cultural visibility, fame, and, in some cases, speedy canonization. The connection between genre and popularity here seems far from accidental. During the Soviet era, poetry (especially lyrical and on the subject of love) seemed to be the most popular and

culturally the most “acceptable” niche in literature for Ukrainian women writers.⁵³ Another such “niche” was writing for and/or about children, which Nina Bichuya pursued in the beginning of her career. Generally stereotyped as “feminine” occupations in literature, these activities allowed some women to get their foot in the door of Ukraine's Union of Soviet Writers but rarely gained them enough recognition and material benefits to enable them to become full-time professional writers.⁵⁴ At the same time, as Katerina Clark has argued, classical Soviet literature's “privileged genre” was the novel, which could best accommodate Socialist Realism's ideological didacticism (xiii). For reasons which I explained in Chapter 1, the novel did not lose its privileged status in the post-Soviet years, but has even gained in cultural importance. The history of the Taras Shevchenko Prize, established in Soviet Ukraine in 1961 and still awarded yearly in independent Ukraine today as the most important *national* prize, suggests such a continued privileging of the novel, and especially for women writer awardees.⁵⁵ (Of course, as initially a Soviet institution, this prize may be expected to exemplify some continuity with the previous era in cultural forms, if not in ideology. However, because it remains the nation's most prestigious literary award that

⁵³ While there was a dearth of women authors working in prose fiction, there were some women poets, Lina Kostenko being the most well-known among them, especially in the unofficial culture amongst the intelligentsia. It is significant, however, that Kostenko's popularity was due not so much to her love poems as to her historical and patriotic poetic works and to her explicit opposition to the Soviet regime. By contrast, many of her female colleagues who wrote exclusively “private” lyrical poetry had a hard time breaking out of the “women's ghetto,” as Zabuzhko has once characterized the status of women's love poetry in Soviet Ukraine (quoted in Hrycak and Rewakowicz 326).

⁵⁴ Among children's writers, one notable exception was Natalia Zabyla, who did become a full-time writer for children and a functionary in charge of children's literature in the Union of Soviet Writers of Ukraine.

⁵⁵ While the number of female writer awardees has significantly increased with independence, most of them are still awarded the Taras Shevchenko Prize for novels, especially those that deal extensively with national and historical topics. Like Iryna Vil'de, who received this prize in 1965 for her monumental novel, *The Richyns'ki Sisters*, and like Lina Kostenko, Soviet-era Ukraine's most famous female *poet*, who was nevertheless awarded this prize in 1987 for a novel, albeit in verse (*Marusia Churai*), independent Ukraine's women writers receive this recognition predominantly for their works in the same genre (Raisa Ivanchenko in 1996 for a tetralogy of historical novels, Maria Matios in 2005 for *Sweet Dariusia*, Liubov Holota in 2008 for the novel *Epizodychna pamyat'* [*Fragmentary Memory*], Halyna Pahutiak in 2010 for *The Servant from Dobromyl'*). For detailed information on the Taras Shevchenko National Prize of Ukraine and its awardees, see the website of this award's Committee: *Komitet z Natsional'noi premii imeni Tarasa Shevchenka* <<http://www.knpu.gov.ua>> Accessed Dec. 2, 2011.

is capable of furthering an author's popularity and literary career, the Taras Shevchenko Prize cannot be discounted as a significant cultural mechanism that both shapes and reflects the current trends in literature.)

Having started out in one of the two traditional women's "niches," Zabuzhko, Kononenko, and Matios "wrote" themselves into literature and even the literary canon by engaging in writing outside of these niches, and especially by authoring novels that addressed, albeit in quite unconventional ways, the "great" national issues of Ukraine's Soviet past and post-Soviet present. With these works, they intervened into the Ukrainian national imaginary, which became a major subject of debate in Ukraine in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse. When these women authors were only starting out with their early prose works, however, they seemed to be acutely aware of working against the cultural grain specifically as *women* writers—so much so that they made the problem of being a woman writer in late Soviet/early post-Soviet Ukraine a central focus of some of their early works.

Two works that engage this theme most explicitly are Zabuzhko's novella *Inoplanetianka* (*The Alien Woman*, 1989) and Kononenko's short story *U nediliu rano* (*On Sunday Morning*, 1992). These two texts are remarkable not only for their frank discussion of the personal and social obstacles to women's writing in Soviet/post-Soviet Ukraine but also for the complex intertextual strategies they employ to position their authors in a very particular way vis-a-vis Ukraine's literary tradition and even to attempt a re-writing of this tradition. Like Bichuya's "The Stone Master," Zabuzhko's and Kononenko's stories establish an intertextual connection to well-known works by the already canonized Ukrainian women writers from the beginning of the 20th century. If Bichuya's story borrows its title from Lesia Ukrainka's 1902 drama, Kononenko's story invokes by its title the 1908 novella *V nediliu rano zillia kopala* (*On Sunday Morning She*

Gathered Herbs) by Ol'ha Kobylians'ka and Zabuzhko's *The Alien Woman* explicitly engages in its text Lesia Ukrainka's 1908 drama *Kassandra* (*Cassandra*). In so doing, all three late Soviet/post-Soviet texts seek to claim literary authority for the women who wrote them. As the scholar of intertextuality Lyudmila Parts explains, “[a]n intertextually constructed text consciously positions itself on the axis of the cultural tradition; it forces its way into the tradition, intending, among other things, to benefit from proximity to the works already accepted, and often sanctified, by cultural memory.” (16) However, by intertextually engaging the works of the two celebrated Ukrainian women modernists, Kononenko and Zabuzhko in particular do not only seek to “benefit” from Ukrainka's and Kobylians'ka's canonical status and to draw their own lineage to the pre-Soviet tradition of Ukrainian women's writing, bypassing the Soviet era. They also strive to bring out and re-emphasize the gender aspects in Ukrainka's and Kobylians'ka's work that were previously marginalized and de-emphasized in the process of their cultural canonization, thereby making a bold attempt to rewrite Ukrainian literary history.

In a provocative essay from the late 1990s, entitled “The Canon of Classics as a Gender Battlefield” (“Kanon klasykiv iak pole gendernoi borot'by”), the Ukrainian feminist literary scholar, Solomiia Pavlychko, has poignantly summarized the curious history of Lesia Ukrainka's and Ol'ha Kobylians'ka's literary canonization:

Ukrainian criticism, represented almost exclusively by men, preferred to look past the plays by Lesia Ukrainka, past her feminist statements, past her disregard for social conventions, praising and canonizing her early “revolutionary” poetry. The latter, in its aggressive, masculine imagery, the motifs of struggle, strength, and the word as the weapon, appealed to the populists [*narodnyky*] and corresponded to their ideas about the

role and mission of literature. Yet her dramas as well as articles, prose fiction, some poetry, and letters are filled with skepticism, a critique of populism and a search for an alternative to it and to herself in her early “manifestation.” (...) In the literary histories and in the enormous literature on Lesia Ukrainka, there is not a trace of this inner split; her feminism and her disappointment in what she viewed was a completely unjust reception of her work have been completely forgotten. Generations of male critics have built a monolithic monument to the woman who has written: “Word, you are my only weapon...” [*Slovo, moia ty iedynaia zbroie...*] (...) A similar falsification, a misrepresentation of truth characterized the canonization of Ol'ha Kobylians'ka. (215-6)

While the 1990s in independent Ukraine have ushered in a major re-reading of the works by the Ukrainian women modernists, and especially from the point of view of gender, I think it is remarkable that this re-reading was *first* started by the new generation of women writers in their prose fiction rather than by critics who have finally acquired access to Western feminist methodologies after the collapse of the Iron Curtain.⁵⁶ That Kononenko and Zabuzhko were clearly after promoting such a re-reading through their stories is also evident in the specific texts from Ukrainka's and Kobylians'ka's *oeuvres* that they selected as their intertextual referents. Both *Cassandra* and *On Sunday Morning She Gathered Herbs* are works in which the two women modernists responded to important myths in European and Ukrainian culture that have generated classical literary works by (mostly) male writers: Kobylians'ka's novella is her version of the Ukrainian folk ballad, allegedly composed by the legendary 17th-century female folk poet

⁵⁶ On the development of and approaches in feminist literary studies in Ukraine, see Aheieva's *Zhinochyi prostir*, esp. pp. 309-15; Chernetsky's *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures*, esp. pp. 238-48, and Rewakowicz's “Women's Literary Discourse and National Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine.”

Marusia Churai, about her poisoning of her unfaithful fiancé; and Ukrainka's *Cassandra* re-works the Greek myth about the fall of Troy around the tragic figure of the eponymous prophetess. Both of these texts re-wrote the cultural myths in question from a woman's perspective. In choosing to engage them in their stories, Kononenko and Zabuzhko affirmed and joined these women's modernist project of cultural re-writing. And the fact that the two myths have to do with the issue of the recognition of women's expression in traditional societies made these texts especially attractive to these young women writers who were just emerging on the Ukrainian literary scene of the late 1980s and the early 1990s. It is to these early stories, their intertextual preoccupations, and their interventions into established cultural myths that I now turn.

Poems like Potions: Women's Writing as Taboo in Yevhenia Kononenko's "On Sunday Morning"

The legend about Marusia Churai, perhaps the first Ukrainian woman poet in history, has generated an enormous number of literary works from Ukrainian, Polish, and Russian writers in the 19th and the 20th centuries,⁵⁷ and the figure of Marusia herself has long since acquired the status of an important cultural heroine in the Ukrainian national imaginary. Yevhenia Kononenko, who has written about the Ukrainian cult of Marusia Churai in a 1999 cultural studies essay, "Spivocha dusha Ukrainy" ("The Singing Soul of Ukraine"), first took up this national myth in her 1992 short story "On Sunday Morning," which, via an intertextual

⁵⁷ A recent dissertation about the literary reworkings of the folk ballad about Marusia and of her legend examines over a dozen literary works on this theme, from Bohdan Zaleski's ballad written in the 1820s to Lina Kostenko's 1979 historical novel in verse, and mentions many more. See Dakh, "Literaturne zhyttia narodnoi ballady 'Oi ne khody, Hrytsiu...'"

engagement of Kobylans'ka's novella on this legendary theme, re-works Marusia's story for Ukraine's early post-Soviet period and thereby tests the limits of this myth.

Marusia Churai, who allegedly lived in the 17th-century Ukraine around the time of Bohdan Khmel'nytsky's uprising against the Polish Commonwealth, has entered the Ukrainian imaginary as a famed folk song-writer, the author of many ballads among which one, “Oi ne khody, Hrytsiu...” (“Do not go, Hryts', do not go...”), is considered to be autobiographical. According to the text of the song, Marusia poisoned her beloved, Hryts', with a potion made of magical herbs after she found out that he had proposed marriage to another girl. The song, especially its final stanza that contains Marusia's direct speech, suggests that this was a premeditated act of revenge, intended to punish Hryts' for loving two women at once. However, as Kononenko points out in the abovementioned essay, Marusia's current status as a cultural heroine rests not so much on her dramatic love story but rather on her reputation as a gifted writer of folk songs, which hold a unique place in the Ukrainian national imaginary:

In the Ukrainian culture, it is not only literature (and especially poetry) that is considered sacred but also its “mother ancestor”—the folk song. Ukraine is a singing nation. The song is the soul of the Ukrainian people. The Ukrainian language sounds like “the song sung by nightingales.” “Our *duma*, our song, will not die, will not perish.” Ukrainian songs are sung all over the world. The singing voices of Ukraine are the pride of our motherland. The list of similar clichés on the “song” theme can go on and on. “The singing Ukraine” is a stable metaphor which has transformed into a fixed stereotype. It is only natural that one of the first national heroines of Ukraine, in the chronological sense, is the legendary author of folk songs, Marusia Churai. (“Spivocha dusha Ukrainy,” 37-8)

In the 19th-century Ukrainian cultural imagination (and till this day), Marusia Churai has come to be associated with this highly valorized myth of Ukraine's "singing soul," but in order to preserve her positive image, the other part of her story—her poisoning of Hryts'—had to be somehow redeemed or reworked. The two "products" of Marusia's legendary life—her songs that helped sustain Ukrainian culture and her potion that poisoned Hryts'—had to be reconciled in some way. In her essay, Kononenko describes some of the literary attempts to create a thoroughly heroic image of Marusia in various time periods: her 19th-century transformation from "a betrayed lover who has poured out her sorrow in lyrical ballads" to "the author of heroic songs that inspired the Ukrainian people to fight against their oppressors" in the work of the now forgotten Russian writers; the Soviet-era reworkings of the image of Hryts' into a disloyal coward ("apparently, 'the enemy of the people'," as Kononenko quips); and the undoubtedly talented nationalist rewriting of the Marusia myth in Lina Kostenko's celebrated novel in verse, according to which Marusia's poisoning of Hryts' was an accident ("Spivocha dusha Ukrainy," 39, 43, 45). In all of these works, despite their disparate ideological underpinnings and a wildly varying level of literary merit, Marusia's song-writing persona overshadows and/or redeems her personal drama with Hryts', and her crime is reinterpreted as an excusable act of passion, a deserved punishment of fate, and/or a tragic mistake.

Against the background of these myth-making efforts, Kobylans'ka's 1908 novella and Kononenko's 1992 short story look very different. Completely uninterested in contributing to the heroic national Marusia Churai myth, Ol'ha Kobylans'ka even gives her female protagonist a different name (Tetiana) and focuses instead on the story of the poisoning, close to how it is told in the folk ballad. By her own admission, Kobylans'ka wrote her novella partly in response to the 1892 play *Oi ne khody, Hrytsiu, ta i na vechornytsi* (*Don't Go to Parties, Hryts'*) by the well-

known Ukrainian playwright Mykhailo Staryts'kyi, who used the first line of the ballad about the poisoning of Hryts' for the title of his folk drama (Hundorova *Femina melancholica* 198). Kobylans'ka's polemic with Staryts'kyi, who turned the story of Marusia and Hryts' into a buoyant theatrical melodrama with much folk singing and dancing, surfaces already in her choice of the novella's title. While Staryts'kyi's title pointed to the central chronotope of his play—the Ukrainian village *vechornytsi* (a traditional peasant youth party that was the primary village site for courtship), Kobylans'ka's title, *On Sunday Morning She Gathered Herbs*, is a line from the third stanza of the ballad, which details Marusia's preparation of the potion and the actual poisoning:

В неділю рано зілля копала,
У понеділок пополокала,
А у вівторок зілля варила,
В середу рано Гриця отруїла. (Quoted in Kobylans'ka 1)

On Sunday morning she gathered [dug] herbs,
On Monday she washed them out,
On Tuesday she cooked them,
And on Wednesday morning she poisoned Hryts'.

Such a title shifts the emphasis from Hryts' and the social milieu of the village, which are central in Staryts'kyi's drama, to Kobylans'ka's female character Tetiana, the psychological motivations of her actions, and the forest outside the village where Tetiana prepares for her desperate act.

And while the poisoning in Staryts'kyi's play is a melodramatic outcome of a series of misunderstandings in a complicated tangle of love triangles, actively promoted by the villain of the play, Khoma, who is a much more important character than Marusia, Kobylans'ka's novella is an in-depth study of a young woman's psychological response to what she perceives to be the “evil” around her, but what the novella's text suggests is the systemic “evil” of the patriarchal society's double standards for men and women.

Such an interpretation of *On Sunday Morning She Gathered Herbs* becomes evident in part from its structure, for the betrayal of Tetiana by Hryts' is not the only one in the text. It is preceded by the story of a Gypsy woman, Mavra—a completely new and unexpected plotline inserted by Kobylans'ka into the Marusia legend and frequently attributed by critics to the novella's Neo-Romantic flair. Upon giving birth to a blue-eyed, white-skinned boy, Mavra is almost killed by her Gypsy husband, rejected by her community, and abandoned by her father in the forest next to the village where Tetiana's mother lives. Mavra's father leaves her baby son at the door of a rich household in the same village, and its inhabitants later adopt the boy and name him Hryts'. Mavra is rescued by Tetiana's mother and helps her bring up the little Tetiana, becoming her “second mother.” Eventually though, she moves out of the village into a hut in the forest where she makes a living telling fortunes and selling to people various medicinal and magic herbs she gathers. She is the one who passes on to Tetiana the knowledge of herbs and of life in general. When Hryts' first courts Tetiana and later abandons her for another girl, Mavra, who at one point discovers that he is her son, interprets his “dual” nature, his love for two women, as a consequence of her own betrayal of her husband. After Tetiana, who has gone insane, poisons Hryts', Mavra says that her own sin is finished.

This basic plotline has led many scholars to argue that the novella is built around “the mythologem of sin” (Hundorova *Femina melancholica* 197), which is partly true. However, to argue that it is only Mavra's “sin” that leads to Hryts' and Tetiana's tragedy means to take grief-stricken Mavra's final point of view rather than that of the novella's implied author, whose position is subtly suggested through various characters' remarks, through Tetiana's own motivation for poisoning Hryts', and even through the symbolism of the story's natural setting. Mavra's own earlier comments on her illicit love story, its parallels to Tetiana's, and the similar treatment they received from men show that she is very aware of the society's double standards. “You think he was punished? (...) Punishment has not reached him, only me,” says Mavra to Tetiana about the outcome of her love affair with a rich white nobleman (Kobylians'ka 17). And when Hryts' is chastised by Mavra for how he treated Tetiana, he only laughs in response and says: “It is okay for a man to love two [women – O.S.]” (Kobylians'ka 41). It is precisely this “evil” [*lykho*] in Hryts' rather than him as a person that Tetiana, already delirious at this point, decides to kill: “Is Hryts' to blame? No, Hryts' is not to blame, her heart tells her that Hryts' is not to blame. It is something else. This evil that is hidden in him is to blame, it is stopping him... Evil!!! It is to blame, and it must be killed. She will kill it. She...” (Kobylians'ka 41). Tetiana's madness in the novella is therefore not simply a reaction of a fragile psyche to a lover's betrayal; it is artistically necessary as a reaction that is diametrically opposed to Mavra's “rational” response to her own treatment by men (no doubt influenced in part by her feelings of guilt)—accepting it as the norm of society, which no one single-handedly can change. The permanence and the immutability of this societal order are symbolized in the novella through the monotonous rustling of spruce trees in the wind, which surround the village in the mountains on all sides: “Wherever you look, everything is the same. The same sea of green, an unchanging lullaby... (...)

Whether it's summer, whether it's winter, whether it's sunny, whether it's raining—everything remains the same. It's the same song with the same monotonous rhythm. The same lullaby, the same rustling.” (Kobylians'ka 1) This image is ubiquitous in the text: the novella begins with it, its action takes place to the accompaniment of the rustling, and the same rustling is heard once again after the death of Hryts', suggesting that even Tetiana's desperate rebellion against this order cannot alter the way it functions.

Thus, in *On Sunday Morning She Gathered Herbs*, Kobylians'ka re-writes the Marusia myth by focusing on the second out of its two seemingly incompatible components—the nation-rejuvenating song and the poisonous potion. Her interpretation of Marusia's potion-making as an act of a woman's rebellion against the patriarchal order (albeit ultimately failed) is completely unique among the many other literary versions of this legend. It is, however, precisely her re-writing that Yevhenia Kononenko chooses to engage in her contemporary story, relying on Kobylians'ka's key symbols and motifs to advance a critique of another crucial aspect of the national Marusia myth—its implicit claim of her culture's absolute valorization of women's poetic expression.

Kononenko's *On Sunday Morning* relocates the female poet—a contemporary “Marusia Churai”—from her rural patriarchal setting into a seemingly progressive, urban environment of early post-Soviet Kyiv and imagines what her life would have been like had she actually married her “Hryts'.” The change of setting and circumstance is so drastic that, were it not for the story's intertextual title, the reader could easily miss the connection of this text to Kobylians'ka and the Marusia myth. The story, told in free indirect discourse, gives us the perspective of Kononenko's nameless heroine on her mundane, uneventful existence in a loveless marriage and her difficult co-existence with her husband and her mother-in-law in a cramped city apartment—a barely

tolerable life situation which affords this female poet a tiny bit of freedom to think and write only on Sunday morning. The story takes place entirely on one of such mornings, while the heroine's husband and son are still asleep and her mother-in-law has gone on her ritual round of local food markets. The heroine sneaks out into the kitchen where she stealthily recovers a handwritten notebook of her poems from behind the jars of jam in the cupboard, and as she re-reads them, she begins to reflect quietly on her life. She remembers how one time, during her pregnancy, she came home and sat down immediately to write down a few poetic lines, inspired by the freshness of the rain outside. Her husband's response was to stuff the piece of paper on which she had jotted down the lines into her mouth. "...after that incident, whenever images whirled in her mind like tropical butterflies, and the faint rustle of a cosmic wind echoed in her ears, the taste of ball-point ink would appear on her tongue." (trans. by Svitlana Kobets; Kononenko "On Sunday Morning," 152-3) This traumatic episode of Kononenko's post-Soviet "Marusia Churai" story brings together the already familiar elements of Marusia's song and Marusia's potion, only now, in a grotesque twist, the song becomes the potion: the heroine's poetic lines are fed to her by her own husband—the contemporary Hryts' figure—gagging her and leaving a poisonous aftertaste in her mouth.

After this and other instances in which her husband mocked her poetic expression, the heroine resigned herself to hiding her poetry, limiting her writing to Sunday mornings. Thus marginalized and forced into concealment, the heroine's poetry-writing becomes an illicit activity, akin to Marusia's (or Tetiana's) gathering of the magic herbs on Sunday morning instead of going to church like the rest of the peasants (or, in the post-Soviet Kyiv, instead of sleeping or going shopping). The culminating moment of the story comes in the heroine's remembrance of a past event, which briefly illuminated her gloomy existence: once at a party, she met a man who

enjoyed talking to her and happened to tell her that he had found a three-stanza poem, written on a yellow index card in a library book. As she began to recite her very own poem to him, which she had once left in that library book, the man started kissing her, the poem producing an effect of something like a love potion. In an ironic reversal, it turns out that the fondest memory of Kononenko's "Marusia" character is a sexual liaison with somebody other than her "Hryts'."

At this point in the story, the Marusia Churai myth collapses entirely. By placing her "Marusia" heroine in a drab post-Soviet marriage, Kononenko tests the most optimistic and vital beliefs on which the Marusia myth is built: Marusia's passionate and faithful love for her Hryts' as well as a culturally universal valorization of her poetic expression. As the historian Oksana Kis' explains in *Zhinka v tradytsiinii ukrains'kii kul'turi* (*Women in the Traditional Ukrainian Culture*), creative activities such as song writing were traditionally the province of young, unmarried women, who learned and honed this art form in the circle of their female peers, whereas a married woman was expected to devote herself mostly to practical household tasks (162, 164). The unmarried song writer Marusia Churai fit this cultural norm, which is partly what enabled her cult. Although Kis' writes about the culture of the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century, Kononenko's story shows that little has changed in the cultural expectations for women since that time, despite the Soviet proclamations of "women's equality." Kononenko's heroine is contrasted in the story with her mother-in-law, who had moved to Kyiv from a nearby village, and unlike her, is interested in the "right" things for a woman with a family: procuring food, getting good bargains, etc. It is in this contrast that Kononenko's intertextual play with Kobylans'ka's text is most subtle and ingenious. Early on in the story, the heroine recalls how her mother-in-law criticized her potato-peeling skills: "How can you peel off so much of the potatoes? Did you plant them? Did you *dig them up* [*ty ii kopala*]?" (Emphasis

mine; 151) The Ukrainian phrase “dig them up” uses the same word in the same grammatical form as the last part of Kobylans'ka's Ukrainian title for her novella, *V nediliu rano zillia kopala* (translated into English as “gathered”), the word that is omitted in the title of Kononenko's story but is supplied here. The point of contrast is clear: instead of digging potatoes, as it “befits” a married woman, the heroine spends her Sunday mornings in the taboo activity of “digging magic herbs,” which is Kononenko's intertextual metaphor for writing poetry. Furthermore, playing on Kobylans'ka's important image of wind, the sound of which foreshadowed different dramatic events in the novella, Kononenko calls her heroine's poetic inspiration “the cosmic wind” while the heroine's mother-in-law only uses the word in a crude, folksy expression “khodyty do vitru” (to go to the wind), a euphemism for “to go to the bathroom” (“U nediliu rano,” 5). Finally, like the monotonous rustling of the spruce trees, which in Kobylans'ka symbolized the immutability of the social order against which Tetiana rebelled, Kononenko's heroine reminisces in the kitchen to the non-stop rumbling of the streetcars outside her window, an image that denotes the unchanging tedium of the heroine's life, which was not transformed even by what set off the entire dramatic chain of events in Kobylans'ka's novella—a woman's extramarital affair.

In the dysfunctional post-Soviet family, which Kononenko portrays in *On Sunday Morning* as well as in her other stories from the early 1990s, there is neither genuine love nor adequate space or time for a woman's creative self-expression. The great irony of this story, however, is that the writing of poetry for a married woman turns out to be a greater taboo than her adultery. The heroine's writing is perceived by her family to be so out-of-place and is so marginalized that it is implicitly equated with witchcraft and ultimately leads the heroine into an illicit love affair, however brief and inconsequential. Kononenko's critique of a woman writer's position in her own, post-Soviet Ukrainian society emerges most strongly in the intertextual

juxtaposition with Kobylians'ka's novella and through her play with the basic elements of the heroic Marusia Churai myth. As Kononenko enters into dialogue with these very popular “texts” of the Ukrainian literary and cultural tradition, she attempts to re-write this tradition through her critique but also to write herself into the company of its best female commentators, such as Ol'ha Kobylians'ka. As I will demonstrate below, Kononenko's critique and project of cultural re-writing, as well as her strategies for claiming literary authority for herself, were not a singular phenomenon in late Soviet/early post-Soviet Ukrainian literature. In her 1989 novella *The Alien Woman*, Oksana Zabuzhko tackled the same theme and relied on a similar repertoire of strategies in a project of re-writing and self-authorship not unlike that of Kononenko's.

Mythologizing Women's Writing: Freedom, Truth, and Liminality in Oksana Zabuzhko's *The Alien Woman*

In the second half of the 1990s, as part of the new intellectual project in the Ukrainian humanities to reinterpret the Ukrainian modernist works from a gendered perspective, Oksana Zabuzhko put forth a major feminist claim about the dramas of Lesia Ukrainka—that collectively they amount to “a grandiose 're-reading' of European cultural history from an alternative position—the point of view of 'the other sex'” (“Zhinka-avtor,” 175). However, a decade before the essay in which she advanced this claim and eighteen years before the publication of her 600-page monograph on Ukrainka's dramas with a richly suggestive title *Notre Dame d'Ukraine*, she attempted to draw the readers' attention to Ukrainka's radical re-writing of cultural myths in her own early prose work—the novella *Inoplanetianka* (*The Alien Woman*). In this text, Zabuzhko directly engages, explicates, and applies to her own time the philosophical questions raised by Ukrainka in her 1908 poetic drama *Cassandra*, which, in Zabuzhko's formulation, turns the

mythic history of the fall of Troy into “a tragedy of a female voice [Cassandra's—O.S.] that went unheard” (“Zhinka-avtor,” 175).

In a dissertation on the use of female mythic figures in women's literature, Anja Grothe argues that in a larger sense, “Cassandra can be read as a paradigm of the silenced woman author” (18). This is exactly how Zabuzhko uses Ukrainka's Cassandra, constructing the prophetess as an ancestor and a spiritual sister of sorts to the future generations of women writers, including to the heroine of her story—Rada D. If we consider Cassandra and Rada as their respective authors' *alter egos* (a reading invited by Zabuzhko's critical comments on Ukrainka's work and my analysis of the structure and narrative strategy in *The Alien Woman*, which follows), these two texts acquire a meta-fictional dimension—as commentaries on the nature of creative writing in general and the advantages of women's writing in particular.

In *The Alien Woman*, a very self-aware and articulate young writer, Rada D., has a mysterious encounter with a “Messenger”—a creature from “beyond” who comes to offer Rada absolute freedom and a chance to transcend the limitations of human existence. The work makes it clear that Rada receives this visit because she herself is “an alien woman” in her society, in possession of a powerful writing talent which is metaphysical in nature: the only reason Rada is even able to see and hear the Messenger is because she is connected with “the other” worlds, and her works are true art because they “come” to her from “beyond.” Rada's guesses of who the Messenger is reveal not only her literary erudition (“...who are you? (...) Ivan Karamazov's devil? Or the one who bought the soul of Adrian Leverkühn?”; 172), but also the fact that she does not hesitate to place herself among the celebrated literary *men*: “So this is what was happening with all of them shortly before their death—with Gogol and with Franko, who was rumored to have gone mad. And Swift's silence. And somebody else's, can't remember whose right now... And

also the poets with their mysterious deaths—from Shelley to Svidzins'kyi.” (225) However, while the well-known *male* writers and the *male* literary characters are only mentioned in the text, Rada’s alignment of herself with Ukrainka’s Cassandra runs throughout it and is important for all of the story’s major themes, including what the critic Liudmyla Taran identifies as its portrayal of the process whereby a creative woman asserts her identity in “the male world” (21). For Zabuzhko, this is a crucial autobiographical theme: *The Alien Woman* was only her second published prose work. As such, it is astounding in its boldness: not only does it make big statements about the nature of true art and portrays a woman writer who, in a very nonchalant manner, likens herself to the most established male authors; it also re-establishes a tradition of women's writing in Ukraine by evoking Ukrainka’s legacy and making Zabuzhko's *alter ego*, Rada, Cassandra’s literary heiress.

In discussing the process of how a woman writer deals with the literary tradition before her, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have famously revised Harold Bloom’s concept of “the anxiety of influence” and argued that a female poet experiences instead “an even more primary ‘anxiety of authorship’—a radical fear that she cannot create ...” (49).⁵⁸ Confronting this anxiety, a woman writer does not perceive her literary precursors as a threat, like male authors tend to do, but rather actively seeks out a female precursor in her literary tradition who “proves by example that a revolt against patriarchal literary authority is possible” (49). This female writer then finds reassurance and support in such a literary ancestor and “feels that she is helping to create a viable tradition” in literature (50). Gilbert and Gubar’s explanation of this process, given

⁵⁸ Although it might seem that Oksana Zabuzhko’s personal confidence and assertiveness would prevent her from experiencing “anxiety of authorship,” her own testimony proves otherwise. In an autobiographical sketch that accompanies her collection of prose *Sister, Sister* published in 2003, she confesses that she has been writing prose alongside with poetry since a very early age, but “did not have the courage to publish it: I was tortured by a realization that there was “something wrong” with how I wrote it [prose], that I had no previously thought-out structure for it, but wrote it as I would write poetry—from a feeling that by itself, from “inside,” creates its own composition.” (235)

over thirty years ago, still seems useful for our understanding of Zabuzhko's purposes in making Cassandra and her creator so central in *The Alien Woman*. By aligning Rada with Cassandra, and herself with Lesia Ukrainka, Zabuzhko is claiming a place for herself in the tradition of Ukrainian women's writing. Moreover, Zabuzhko "enlists" Ukrainka and her Cassandra to help her advance a curious *gendered* theory of art, which is implicitly suggested in *The Alien Woman*. She does this by stressing that Rada's literary talent and Cassandra's gift of prophesying have the same nature, thereby presenting Rada's writing as prophetic in some sense and thus superior to all other "modes" of writing.

There are several important similarities between Cassandra's prophesying and Rada's writing that Zabuzhko highlights: Cassandra's visions and Rada's artistic works have an "otherworldly" source—they are therefore presented as dictated "truth" rather than invention. Additionally, both women have no real control of these gifts—the prophecies and the literary works are "channeled" through them in a sort of mystic frenzy that overcomes the heroines from time to time. Moreover, both Ukrainka and Zabuzhko emphasize the role of vision in their heroines' ability to grasp "the truth." Cassandra firmly states the primacy of vision in her prophetic gift: "I don't know anything except what I see" (93).⁵⁹ She starts her every prophecy with the words "I see." In *The Alien Woman*, Rada is accused by her former husband Arsen of *observing* people from a distance rather than letting them get close to her, and she herself reports that her gift of writing has to do with her ability to see people and herself differently: "...and then, as if having awakened from a sleep, I *saw with a sharp, cinematographic clarity* the nook in which we as a group were acting out some private, improvised performance"; or "in horrified disgust, you *watch* the to and fro movements of her wet, slippery mouth with lipstick smeared all

⁵⁹ Translations from Lesia Ukrainka are mine.

over” (187, 208). Zabuzhko’s insistence on the all-important role of vision for Rada’s writing is what allows her to claim an affinity between prophesying (that is, reporting visions) and writing, and thus between Cassandra and Rada.⁶⁰ The final important similarity between the two heroines is that both women have to use language as a primary “tool” of transmitting their visions. This turns out to be quite problematic for both: Cassandra’s main struggle throughout the drama is to make her compatriots understand and believe her prophecies; and Rada’s first complaint to the Messenger is about her inability to write because she has lost faith in language as well as in her ability to communicate with people. It is this inadequacy of language for expressing Cassandra’s and Rada’s visions which, I argue, is an important key to an understanding of Zabuzhko’s theory of art as a *gendered* theory.

Relying on Lacan’s theory of symbolic language and quoting Ann Rosalind Jones’s *Inscribing Femininity*, Martha Cutter describes the difficulties that exist for women in adopting language:

According to Lacanian theory, an individual enters the symbolic by repressing primary libidinal impulses (...) and adopting *a language structured by the Law of the Father*. For women, there are several problems with adopting this language. First, symbolic language *suppresses multiple meanings*—which recall the libidinal multiplicity of the pre-symbolic realm—*installing unambiguous and discrete meanings in their place*. (...) Second, this process actually *reserves the “I” position for men*: “Women, by gender lacking the

⁶⁰ In *Notre Dame d’Ukraine*, Zabuzhko emphasizes this link even more by calling Cassandra Ukrainka’s *alter ego* and using the writer’s letters to demonstrate the metaphysical nature of Lesia Ukrainka’s gift: “...no sooner do I start some more mundane project than some inescapable, despotic dream literally ‘seizes’ me, torments me in the night, simply takes the life out of me. Sometimes I am even scared of it—what kind of a mania is this?” (Quoted in Zabuzhko, *Notre Dame d’Ukraine* 71)

phallus, the positive symbol of gender, self-possession, and worldly authority around which language is organized, *occupy a negative position in language*” (Jones 83). (My emphasis; Cutter, 91)⁶¹

This passage highlights the anti-woman bias of symbolic language, as defined by Lacan—a language which women must use nonetheless, especially if they want to write or prophesy. The suppression of multiple meanings by the symbolic language is precisely what enables understanding: only by knowing exactly what somebody means by this or that word, phrase, or sentence can you make sense of her utterance. Cassandra’s problem lies in the fact that she cannot make her prophecies understood by people because they are pre-symbolic, a-temporal, and therefore untranslatable into symbolic language. She sees the images of the tragic events to happen in the future, but they are difficult to understand because they could be interpreted in multiple ways. To make them understood, she would have to force meaning onto them and structure them according to the laws of the symbolic language, of which she is not a master (“*women occupy a negative position in language*”). Thus, Cassandra cannot interpret her visions and does not want to either, because of her commitment to the truth, however incomprehensible this truth sounds to other people. Cassandra’s dilemma becomes painfully obvious in the following exchange:

Andromache: How can we believe you if your prophecies/ are always *so untimely and unclear*?

Polyxena: You prophesy disaster without telling/ wherefrom and why disaster will appear.

⁶¹ Although Lacanian theory of language has been often critiqued as ahistorical, it suits my purposes here well because both Lesia Ukrainka and Zabuzhko, in *Cassandra* and *The Alien Woman* respectively, deal with a myth, the timeless and universal insights of which they test and rewrite.

Cassandra: Because *I do not know it*, Polyxena.

Andromache: Then how can we believe the *mere words*?

Cassandra: *It's not mere words, I see it all*, my sisters. I see Troy perishing,

Andromache: But why? Who will destroy it?/ The Atridae? Achilles?

Cassandra: Sisters, I don't know. (Emphasis mine; *Kassandra*, 99-100)

Zabuzhko appropriates the vacillation of the prophetic between vision and language, and between truth and understanding, for her theory of art. By making Rada's literary gift highly dependent on personal visions and by claiming that these visions have an "otherworldly" source, Zabuzhko creates a dilemma similar to Cassandra's for her character. Rada occupies a space in-between the reality of this world and the "other" world (the Messenger tells her that she is standing on the threshold; 224) —between language that has been, in her opinion, used up by others and her unique visions. Consequently, Rada must choose between remaining true to her visions—and risking not ever being understood and appreciated—and describing what people want to hear and can understand using the unambiguous (but trite) symbolic language.

What Zabuzhko implicitly suggests in *The Alien Woman* is that this position of "in-between-ness" is the position of a *woman* writer. It is a very lonely and frequently unhappy position, but it also allows one to create true and visionary art, of which those living completely within the bounds of the symbolic order are incapable. Although Zabuzhko does not say this directly, it becomes clear from the radical opposition she sets up between Rada and her male mentor, the writer Valentyn Stepanovych, as well as several other male characters (her husband and eventually even the Messenger), that this liminal position can be understood as *feminine*,

which men, by virtue of their gender, are less likely to occupy (or want to occupy) and, by extension, create what Zabuzhko believes is true art.⁶²

Like Helenus and Cassandra in Ukrainka's drama, Valentyn Stepanovych and Rada are perfect antagonists. The descriptions of Valentyn Stepanovych, his way of writing and even his study leave little doubt about his complete entrapment in the symbolic order: "For him, the world was *fixed clearly and firmly, like the orderly structure of a crystal*"; "...this phrase was already *redundant*, but this is precisely how Valentyn Stepanovych wrote—*taking every glimmer of an idea to its unambiguous and conclusive end*, slamming the door on the inner space of a work..."; "Everything in this study was *heavy*—the antique writing table on its curved gilded legs; the velvet chair, so deep it seemed a bear had slept in it... amongst this *weightiness of established things*, one would probably feel quite unable to work..." (Emphasis mine; 211, 190). While Rada is generally very critical of Valentyn Stepanovych, there are two things about him which she truly envies: his outstanding command of language ("...he spoke majestically, almost in a baroque manner...") and his all-Ukrainian literary fame ("...nonetheless this was the look... of the artist—the greatest among all of those alive in Ukraine today, a god, a living legend..." 191). Not incidentally, these are the two important privileges of occupying the position of a *man* within the symbolic order: the ability to master the symbolic language and the authority that this mastery bestows upon a man. Unlike Rada, who is after some elusive sense and transcendental

⁶² It is important to add, however, that not all female authors in fact occupy the liminal position of a *woman* writer: many of them adopt a masculine position for a variety of reasons. In this sense, it is not by accident that Zabuzhko chose Lesia Ukrainka for her literary ancestor. As several Ukrainian feminist scholars noted, the poetry of the most distinguished Ukrainian female poet of the Soviet period—Lina Kostenko—has been written from a masculine position. This idea has been expressed well by Vira Aheieva: "In this poetry, there is very little room for a genuinely *feminine* voice. (...) These poems are convenient for quoting (incidentally, they are frequently used as didactic material in schools...) Maxims and sayings, apt, sharp, but *hopelessly univocal* [*odnoznachni*]—these are texts that you would search in vain for *insights into psychic experiences, for semantic multiplicity, which are important, perhaps, not so much in and of themselves as for what one gains along this path of exploration*." (Trans. and emphasis mine; *Zhinochyi prostir*, 264) Aheieva concludes that in comparison with the feminist motifs in the work of Ukrainka, the poetry of Lina Kostenko is marked by a regression from a feminine stance (*Zhinochyi prostir*, 269).

truths, Valentyn Stepanovych is content to simply *describe* in his work, the element of creativity in his writing being limited to his skillful use of language. Further, his fame is a direct result of his authoritative and, above all, unambiguous, pragmatic use of language: his works are easy to understand since they describe what is known and appealing to other people. In this sense, Valentyn Stepanovych is very much like Helenus in *Cassandra*: he gives people what they want and he privileges language over truth (“**Helenus:** ...You think that truth gives birth to language?/ I think that language births the truth.” [139]).

At a certain point in the novella, Zabuzhko makes the alignment of Rada and Cassandra on the one hand, and Valentyn Stepanovych and Helenus on the other, very explicit by actually citing Cassandra’s dialogue with Helenus about the relationship of truth and language in prophesying. What follows is a radical re-interpretation and re-evaluation of Cassandra’s status in the world vis-à-vis that of Helenus. Rada claims that Cassandra’s gift of prophesying over which she has no control is, in fact, a sign of a peculiar kind of freedom, and this freedom characterizes her, Rada, as well: “...*that force* which tore people out of the established, inhabited flow of circumstances-that-cannot-be-ignored and threw them into the dark abyss of the unknown *had*, I just know it, *the same nature as Cassandra's 'voice' and as my 'writing dictated from above'* ... to recognize it and to walk towards it...— *that is freedom, the second degree of freedom.*” (Emphasis mine; 201) This is certainly an unusual way to read Cassandra and her situation. Cassandra’s prophetic gift has made her very unhappy: it has alienated her from her family and everyone else in Troy and it has prevented her from being with a man she loved (as she explains, Dolon was afraid of Cassandra’s cold eyes that saw visions). More than once in the drama, Cassandra herself laments being unable to free herself from her visions: “Perhaps, it’s true that words of mine are poison,/ that eyes, my eyes, kill human strength!/ How I would like

to be both mute and blind.../ For me, that would be happiness divine!” (106) In general, most critics have interpreted Cassandra’s gift as a curse. Zabuzhko, however, re-reads Cassandra from an entirely different perspective.

However paradoxical Cassandra’s “second degree of freedom” might seem, by using this concept, Zabuzhko is actually referencing a long-standing tradition in philosophy of dividing freedom into two types: negative and positive (Zabuzhko’s academic training in philosophy has certainly made this tradition familiar to her). As Ian Carter explains, “[n]egative liberty is the absence of obstacles, barriers or constraints. One has negative liberty to the extent that actions are available to one in this negative sense. Positive liberty is the possibility of acting — or the fact of acting—in such a way as to take control of one’s life and *realize one’s fundamental purposes*.” (Emphasis mine; “Positive and Negative Liberty”) Using this definition, one might say that Cassandra does not have negative freedom because her prophetic gift is a constant obstacle on her path to human happiness; at the same time, one can see her as having positive freedom because she acts on her gift—she *chooses* to lend voice to her visions—and thereby realizes a higher purpose of serving the truth. For Zabuzhko’s Rada, the second degree of freedom is a higher kind: it is the freedom to realize a higher ideal by transcending the firmly established symbolic order which allows one only a very primitive kind of liberty—“the liberty of a graphomaniac to replace any of the words he wrote with a different one, or to stop writing at all...” (194).

The Alien Woman shows the insufficiency of negative liberty by stressing how enchanted Valentyn Stepanovych is by Rada’s freedom: “...you seem to emanate freedom,” (190) — he repeats to her, and himself confesses that freedom is the most important thing for a writer. That he has no positive freedom becomes clear towards the end of the novella when Rada finds out

that Valentyn Stepanovych had plagiarized her ideas and observations in his new book. Rada explains the motives of his action to herself as follows: “For his myth, *for a registration [propyska] in people's consciousness*, Valentyn Stepanovych *has paid with his freedom*, without even noticing it. Poor Valentyn Stepanovych, what else is he supposed to do now if not to steal it from others?” (Emphasis mine; 222)

Thus, Zabuzhko's theory of what constitutes true art makes the second degree of freedom, or positive freedom, an indispensable condition for a writer. To attain this freedom—more often than not—the artist has to go beyond the laws of the symbolic order, beyond everyday human existence, and pursue her visions, however unique and incomprehensible they may be to the rest of the world. This is why the Messenger tells Rada that an artist is not completely a human being (180). What can be surmised from the conflict between Rada and Valentyn Stepanovych in *The Alien Woman* is that such a feat—going against the symbolic order towards positive freedom—is attainable for Rada in part because she is a woman and because, from the very beginning, she is not as trapped in the symbolic order as Valentyn Stepanovych is.

How gender pertains to prophesying and writing in the two works by Ukrainka and Cassandra can be further traced through the symbols of masculinity and femininity which these texts use throughout. Vira Aheieva analyzes the opposition of two such symbols—the sword (*mech*) and the distaff (*priadka*) in *Cassandra*. While the sword is clearly a symbol of aggressive masculinity, distaff is the tool used in traditionally feminine work. Aheieva concludes that in the drama, Cassandra rejects both the stereotypical masculine and feminine roles, both the sword and the distaff (*Poetesa zlamu stolit'*, 162). Because she is a prophetess, she cannot be easily placed in the feminine world symbolized by the distaff, despite such attempts by her brothers (“**Deiphobus**: You picked up your distaff and that is good,/ in truth, it so much more befits a

woman/ than that prophetic speech, so start your spinning/ and do not prophesy.” [119]) At the same time, Cassandra refuses to kill Sinon with a sword, even though this is a unique chance for her to prove to her compatriots that her prophecies are not invented. Even though Cassandra prefers the peaceful distaff to the sword (she does engage in the feminine work of spinning yarn at several points in the drama), neither of the stereotypical gender roles represented by the sword and the distaff contain her, at least not until the very end of the drama. There is, however, a third gender symbol in *Cassandra* for which Aheieva does not account in her analysis. This is the prophet’s staff (*paterysia*), which is the symbol of the prophet’s spiritual authority. It is interesting that in Ukrainian the word for “staff” is derived from the Latin *pater*, suggesting that the role of the prophet has been traditionally reserved for men. A symbol of masculine authority, the staff in the hands of Cassandra puts her in an uncertain position. One can say that the staff is a visual equivalent of the symbolic language instituted by the Law of the Father. The staff represents the power of this law and as such, it marks a profound irony of Cassandra’s situation: it is precisely the power and the authority in her society that she lacks. At the end of the drama, Cassandra breaks the staff and renounces her status of a prophetess. Aheieva argues that Cassandra does this because she has already seen a vision of her approaching death, and there is no use for prophesying anymore (*Poetesa zlamu stolit’*, 147). While I agree with this claim in general terms, there is an interesting detail in the text which makes the reading of the drama’s ending more nuanced. Right after breaking her staff, Cassandra asks Clitemnestra to give her some work (presumably feminine work such as spinning yarn). That Cassandra did not simply give up her staff and her prophesying, but *replaced* it with feminine work signifies her acceptance, for however brief a moment before her death, of a woman’s negative and *silent*

position in the symbolic language. Such an ending is thus quite pessimistic as it shows the prophetess' defeat by the symbolic order.

If we now examine the role of feminine and masculine symbols in *The Alien Woman*, we will see that in addition to the concept of positive freedom, they constitute a re-writing of *Cassandra* by Zabuzhko. There is no sword and no staff in the story; however, a gendered symbol close to Cassandra's distaff—knitting—is employed throughout the text. It first appears during Rada's recollections of her attempts to fit into the human world and find meaning in its mundane activities. As a child and following the example of the older girls, she desperately wishes to learn how to knit, thinking that this activity holds a meaningful secret to the “essence” of existence. Once she masters knitting, Rada is very disappointed:

Moving needles, an endless yarn thread unwinding out of the little plastic bag, knit one, yarn over, knit two together—*there was no mystery behind all of this, no secret society existed*, nothing but the soft growing body of the knitted garment, its knotty texture, and the all-consuming calculations, which *I took for an exquisite fantastic language* that had transported our girly circle into adulthood... (Emphasis mine; 187)

Rada's association of knitting and language in this passage is not incidental. Later on, she makes this link explicit by using the metaphor of knitting to describe Valentyn Stepanovych's language: “Lord, how infuriatingly masterful and indefatigable was his speech, as if he were knitting: knit one, yarn over, knit two together.” (219) Knitting here represents the writer's mechanical mastery of the symbolic language. Thus, if in *Cassandra* the symbolic language was represented by the staff, which underscored its awesome masculine power, *The Alien Woman* deliberately

emphasizes this language's inferiority by equating it with the mechanical act of knitting and thus undermining the supreme value that is usually ascribed to it. In other words, if Lesia Ukrainka emphasized the symbolic order's overwhelming power, Zabuzhko stresses its mechanical, uncreative nature.

This reversal of usual value hierarchies in *The Alien Woman*—the de-valuation of the masculine symbolic order as lacking in freedom and true creativity, and the ascription of higher value to the feminine position of liminality, which allows a woman writer to create real art—constitutes the radical re-writing of *Cassandra* by Zabuzhko. The latter uses Ukrainka's pessimistic reinterpretation of the Cassandra myth to create a new, positive myth of women's writing. Thus, if the drama ends with Cassandra's silence, the ending of the novella is literally the first sentence of Rada's new work—*The Alien Woman* itself:

After some time, Rada D. was sitting at her writing desk, having put a new sheet of paper into the typewriter. Hesitating for a moment—the paper seemed threatening in its whiteness, like an unfilled space on an old map—she finally typed her first lonely sentence:

“There was something about the Messenger she didn't like right away.” (226)

Filling her blank sheets of paper with the story of her encounter with (or vision of?) the Messenger, which in itself is a re-writing of male authors' popular literary myth, Rada begins to trace out the heretofore uncharted territory of a Ukrainian woman writer's creative laboratory—the process whereby a vision is transformed into a work of verbal art.

Zabuzhko does everything to encourage the readers to accept her version of *Cassandra* and to assure them that Rada's writing from the liminal feminine position is both possible and admirable. Her choice of a prose genre rather than a dramatic one allows her to tell Rada's story entirely from Rada's perspective and from the point of view of a narrator who is very sympathetic to Rada. Zabuzhko's use of the free indirect discourse in the story is such as to support and strengthen Rada's authority. As Susan Sniader Lanser explains, free indirect discourse can be and has been used by many women writers "to authorize intelligent and morally superior women as critics and interpreters of their society" (74). Frequently, when this discourse is "nonironized," to use Lanser's term, it allows the writer to create "a completely authoritative heroine" (77). This is Zabuzhko's goal in *The Alien Woman*. Another interesting feature of her narrative technique in this story is that she switches rapidly and frequently between the first, the second, and the third person narration:

Oh, *I* know this already, only too well: should you give in just a little, the lifeless matter, the dumb, heavy materiality (...) will overcome you, imprison you within itself... "whoever sees this and hears this will turn to stone up to her waist," *you* shake it off like a dog, *you* try to push it away, unsettle the dead, frozen reality, Arsen's mother is saying something to you, and, in horrified disgust, *you* watch the to and fro movements of her wet, slippery mouth with lipstick smeared all over (...) "whoever sees this and hears this will completely turn to stone," once on the way home—this was already after *her* separation from Arsen—*she* heard an excited child's scream coming from the front garden... (Emphasis mine; 208)

The second person address encourages the reader's identification with Rada, and the fact that all three types of addresses refer to Rada creates a solipsistic textual universe in which she is simultaneously the narrator, the character, and the audience. No chances are left for the reader to identify with Valentyn Stepanovych, Rada's husband, or even the Messenger, as they are presented through Rada's point of view and this presentation forcefully dismisses them all.

Tetiana Tebeshevs'ka-Kachak, among other critics, has claimed that the autobiographical principle operates in most of Zabuzhko's prose works and that this becomes obvious from the ways in which she constructs her main characters and her narration. This conclusion is certainly valid for *The Alien Woman*. However, there is another structural trick in the novella which makes Zabuzhko and Rada appear to be the same person—this is its ending quoted above. The circular structure of *The Alien Woman*—the ending which is also its beginning—raises the question of who the real author of the work is. The text makes it clear that the author is Rada because it is she who writes its first sentence at the end of the novella. However, the novella itself was obviously published with Zabuzhko's name on the title page, which formally equates the author with the character. This feature highlights the meta-fictional dimension of *The Alien Woman*—Zabuzhko's early prose work about the difficulty, but *not* the impossibility, of women's writing, including her own. By making Ukrainka's *Cassandra* central to her work, Zabuzhko reminds us of the tradition of women's writing in Ukraine that existed prior to the Soviet era and inserts herself into it. And by re-writing this drama by Lesia Ukrainka, especially its pessimistic ending, Zabuzhko creates a positive myth about the supreme value of women's writing.

If Kononenko's story dramatized post-Soviet Ukrainian women's obstacles to creative self-expression, Zabuzhko worked hard in her text to find a way for herself (and the woman author more generally) out of these difficulties and to affirm women's writing. At the same time, by engaging in intertextual dialogue such famous literary predecessors as Kobylians'ka and Ukrainka, Kononenko and Zabuzhko attempted to revive the tradition of feminist women's writing in Ukraine and to write themselves into it. After several decades of Ukrainian women's relative silence in literature, these two women authors entered onto the literary scene with works that addressed the possible reasons behind this silence—continuing, in their different ways, Bichuya's attempts to account for it in “The Stone Master.”

Taken together, the three texts by Bichuya, Kononenko, and Zabuzhko create a multifaceted portrayal of a Ukrainian woman writer's position in late Soviet and post-Soviet Ukraine. Bichuya reveals how circumscribed this position was by the institutional and ideological strictures and practices of the official Soviet culture, as well as by the local Ukrainian accommodations and forms of resistance to this system. For a Ukrainian woman writer who wanted to escape the discursive monopoly of the Soviet regime and create outside of the two powerful speaking positions which it produced, publishing and finding an audience for her works was a very difficult task. Kononenko's story describes the challenges that often awaited a Ukrainian woman writer in the private sphere: while the Soviet regime had claimed to have liberated women, “On Sunday Morning,” like many other works by Ukrainian and Russian female authors from the late 1980s and the early 1990s, shows that not much had really changed in the patriarchal attitudes of most Soviet citizens, including Ukrainians. Kononenko emphasizes this lack of change by playfully reworking and deconstructing a popular Ukrainian myth that supposedly illustrates traditional Ukrainian culture's valorization of women and their poetic

voices. Finally, Zabuzhko's novella responded to what seemed like an immutable societal gender order, including in the world of literary production, by reversing its value hierarchies and mythologizing women's writing as inherently different—and better—than men's.

CHAPTER 3

Between Gender, Nation, and Dissemination:

The First Ukrainian Bestseller by a Woman Writer

While raising the question about the place and the worth of a woman writer in the late Soviet and/or the new post-Soviet Ukrainian society, the early stories by Bichuia, Kononenko and Zabuzhko have also brought up a number of themes that would come to the forefront in later writings by them and other women authors: the issue of the repressive Soviet past and the lingering national traumas resulting from it (Bichuia's "The Stone Master"); maltreatment of women and the profound disconnect between the sexes (Kononenko's "On Sunday Morning"); and the loneliness and marginality of a creative, intellectual woman in her society, which does not hear or value her voice (Zabuzhko's *The Alien Woman* as well as Bichuia's and Kononenko's texts). In the first post-Soviet decade, no other Ukrainian work managed to bring together and articulate these themes with greater force and intensity than Oksana Zabuzhko's 1996 best-selling novel with the provocative title *Poliovi doslidzhennia z ukrains'koho seksu* (*Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*; hereafter *Fieldwork*). This work has been since recognized by many as one of the key texts in post-Soviet Ukrainian literature, and its successive editions and translations continue to be printed, read, and debated in Ukraine and beyond.⁶³

Yet the novel's reception has been in many cases quite ambivalent. In Ukraine, its initial publication caused a scandal (albeit not without Zabuzhko's conscious efforts to elicit precisely

⁶³ As Alexandra Hrycak and Maria G. Rewakowicz point out, in 2006 Zabuzhko's *Fieldwork* was named "The Most Influential Book for the 15 Years of Ukraine's Independence" (325). The novel is currently in its 10th edition in Ukraine and has been translated into many languages, including Polish, Russian, Czech, Bulgarian, Romanian, Hungarian, German, Swedish, Dutch, Italian, and English (for details, see Zabuzhko's official website: www.zabuzhko.com).

such a reaction). A significant number of hostile reviews lambasted the author for both the novel's subject-matter (especially its argument about the Ukrainian male character's colonial inferiority complex manifesting in the sexual abuse of the woman narrator) and its style (a barely veiled autobiographical narration in an angry and sarcastic tone).⁶⁴ And while more serious commentators acknowledged that the novelty of this text, which at first glance seemed to be just another failed love story, lay in its examination of the nexus of gender and Ukrainian national (postcolonial) identity, different critics, depending on their own ideological affiliations, found the work to be—paradoxically—either too feminist and subversively anti-nationalist, or taking a nationalist stance and therefore being “deficient” in its feminism. For example, an early review in the newspaper *Ukrains'ke slovo* (*Ukrainian Word*) criticized Zabuzhko's novel for deconstructing the traditional image of a woman in Ukrainian culture and acting “against population needs (of the nation)” because Zabuzhko's protagonist displayed ambivalent attitudes about motherhood.⁶⁵ On the opposite side of the ideological spectrum, Serguei Alex. Oushakine, in his introduction to the special volume of *Studies in East European Thought* (dedicated to the changing roles of intelligentsia in Eastern Europe), described Zabuzhko's stance as “somatic nationalism” “in the Ukrainian version of postcolonialism” and suggested that the feminist identities emerging in post-Soviet Ukraine (including presumably that of Zabuzhko) were “a product of elaborate (and at times twisted) cultural translation” (247-8). As a result, *Fieldwork*

⁶⁴ For more on the scandal the novel caused and the criticisms leveled at it, see Liudmyla Taran's "Lantsiuhova reaktsiia. Retseptsiiia retseptsii 'Poliovykh doslidzhen' z ukrains'koho seksu' Oksany Zabuzhko" and Zabuzhko's own essay, "Zhinka-avtor u kolonial'nyi kul'turi," esp. pp. 190-2.

⁶⁵ The criticisms voiced by *Ukrains'ke slovo* are cited in more detail in Natalia Monakhova's essay "Pidporiadkovane' v ukrains'komu konteksti" (The Subaltern in the Ukrainian Context), p. 124 (here translation is mine).

had earned Zabuzhko a perplexing reputation of a nationalist who is not good enough for many nationalists and a feminist who is not good enough for many (especially Western) feminists.⁶⁶

At the same time, as Zabuzhko pointed out in her interviews, numerous women readers of different ages found that the novel gave eloquent expression to their own gendered experiences of life in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Ukraine, and they communicated their admiration to the author with phrases such as “This is my story!”, “It reads as though you were sitting in my kitchen, and I was pouring my heart out to you!”, “I feel as though I wrote it!” (Hryn, “A Conversation with Oksana Zabuzhko”). “Never before did I realize to what extent half of the nation had been deprived of a direct voice of their own when it came to the most intimate, everyday life experiences,” commented Zabuzhko on this feedback to her interviewer, translator and literary critic, Halyna Hryn (Hryn). By having her autobiographical female narrator explain and analyze her own position—the experience of being caught, as it were, in the web of personal, historical, and ideological pressures and discourses characteristic of the early post-Soviet Ukrainian context—it seemed that Zabuzhko did not simply write a story that resonated with her female readers, but rather opened up a heretofore unavailable discursive space for Ukrainian women's critical voices.

A few perceptive commentators of *Fieldwork*, such as Vitaly Chernetsky and Natalia Monakhova, have noted the relevance of the postcolonial feminist lens and especially of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's theorization of the female subaltern's speaking for Zabuzhko's text (Chernetsky *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures* 228; Monakhova, “National Identity” 182, 186 and “Pidporiadkovane” 127-9, 131). As both scholars pointed out, Spivak's analysis of the female subaltern subject's double silencing and abuse by the imperial colonizing and the local

⁶⁶ Because of her double focus on the issues of gender and the Ukrainian nation, Zabuzhko has been also dubbed “a national feminist” (see, for example, Hrycak and Rewakowicz).

colonized masculinities is very much applicable to *Fieldwork*, in which a Ukrainian female intellectual takes on the difficult task of breaking this silence and shedding light on this abuse. While I agree with this general line of reasoning, I find the argument made thus far incomplete. In this chapter, I suggest that it is worth taking another, closer look at Spivak's insights about the subaltern woman subject, which, I argue, will help us better understand the politics and poetics of Zabuzhko's novel, as well as its contradictory critical reception. In the course of this re-reading of *Fieldwork* through Spivak's arguments (and other concepts from postcolonial and cultural theory), Zabuzhko's engagement with and critique of the Ukrainian national imaginary and its gendered aspects will become clear.

In Search of a Space from Which to Speak

The central claim of Spivak's renowned essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" answers the title question in the negative, demonstrating through a meticulous historical discursive analysis of *sati* (the Indian ritual of widow self-immolation on the deceased husband's pyre) and its abolition by the British colonizers that, in fact, "[t]here is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak" (307). This is so because "both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant," for the most part leaving women outside of official narratives altogether (Spivak 287). This is also true because when women do appear in these narratives, they figure in them as objects of discursive manipulation, spoken for rather than speaking themselves. Spivak illustrates this idea with two statements that summarize the legal and cultural battle over *sati* between the British colonial rulers and the Indian nativists: while the actions of the former can be "understood as a case of 'White men saving brown women from brown men'," the latter's defense

of *sati* boils down to a statement that speaks for the subaltern women: “The women actually wanted to die.” (297) Not only do both statements leave no room for the female subaltern herself to speak about *sati*, but they also, as Spivak shows, make the figure of the self-immolated Indian widow into a battleground of powerful discourses:

Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into *a violent shuttling* which is the displaced figuration of the “third-world woman” caught between tradition and modernization. (Emphasis mine; Spivak 306)

To unearth the subaltern women's voices from the long history of this “violent (discursive) shuttling,” Spivak argues, is a challenging task, itself fraught with the risk of, in the end, speaking for them, which would leave the female subaltern “as mute as ever” (295). Yet this task must be faced, according to Spivak, by postcolonial female intellectuals, who can chart this history and, in so doing, at least begin a search for a subaltern woman's consciousness. The essay's final example of such a search—the story, unearthed by Spivak, of a young Indian woman's desperate attempt to re-write the hegemonic “social text of *sati*” by committing a ritually unsanctioned suicide—emphasizes the urgency of this task, as the young woman's subversive re-writing was ignored and misinterpreted even by her own family and acquaintances (308).⁶⁷ The female subaltern's efforts to carve out a space from which to speak a different

⁶⁷ In Spivak's retelling, the young woman named Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri was a member of a local group of fighters for Indian independence that assigned to her the task of a political assassination. Agonizing over her inability to carry out this task, Bhaduri decided to kill herself, but since she knew everyone would most likely interpret her suicide as the result of an illicit pregnancy, she waited to commit her desperate act until she was menstruating. She thus sent a message, “in the physiological inscription of her body,” to her family and the conservative culture at

message about herself from within the available hegemonic discourses, including those on *sati*, failed, and her message went unheard.

The double dilemma outlined by Spivak—the female subaltern's inability to speak herself and be heard, and the danger that, in telling the subaltern's story, even a well-meaning postcolonial intellectual will end up speaking *for* her—is given a unique solution in Zabuzhko's novel, for *Fieldwork*, to use Zabuzhko's own characterization, is a “confessional” work (Hryn). It takes its autobiographical female narrator named, like Zabuzhko herself, Oksana as its object of investigation—announced in the title as “fieldwork in Ukrainian sex”—and thus positions her as both a Ukrainian subaltern woman and a postcolonial female intellectual who analyzes the subaltern's history (or, rather, *herstory*). Such a positioning is accomplished in part by the text's split narration, which alternates between an authoritative first-person voice that reports and explains the heroine's (and her nation's) story in the form of an imaginary lecture to an international academic audience (marked as “ladies and gentlemen” in the text, with the English address transliterated in Ukrainian) and an intimate narrative—combining first-person and third-person narration, free indirect discourse, and a second-person address to oneself, with fragments of poetry interspersed—that relives the painful feelings and personal details from the narrator's past.

The authoritative voice of the female intellectual addressing a Western audience:

...so, ladies and gentlemen, please do not be in a hurry to qualify the presented case of love here as pathological, because the speaker has not yet stated what is most important—the main point, ladies and gentlemen, lies in the fact that in the research

large (Spivak 308). Nevertheless, when Spivak made inquiries about Bhaduri's death with those who knew the young woman, she was told the reason for the suicide was “illicit love” (308).

subject's life this was her first *Ukrainian* man. Honestly—the first. (Emphasis in the original; *Fieldwork* 30)⁶⁸

The intimate voice that mixes narration in all three persons and includes poetic fragments:

...I can't take this anymore!—and so her prophetic dream came true—an old dream from a year ago, visited upon her long before they met: a sapling at the crossroads, trembling and rustling, someone invisible is setting a bonfire below, the strike of a match, and oh—in a flash!—the sapling is consumed by fire (...) and so in a place where a moment earlier the sapling glittered with shades of light green against the blue sky there now protrudes a bitter, blackened skeleton. On the occasion of which, girlfriend, allow me to congratulate you.

A budding tree in a naked row—

Why in such hurry, you foolish thing? (...) (*Fieldwork* 82)

The changes in the narrative voice in the novel are frequently quite seamless. As in Zabuzhko's *The Alien Woman*, examined in Chapter 2, this text's narration also switches rapidly from the first to the second and to the third person, but the added function of this device in *Fieldwork* is to preserve the unity of the split narrating heroine. Simultaneously, the construction of all the voices and personas of the narrator is further complicated by anger, sarcasm, ironic performance, and the narrator's bitter self-awareness, which underscore the narrator's ambivalence about herself and her embattled position. By means of this complex narrative structure, Zabuzhko attempted to create a space from which a Ukrainian subaltern woman could speak: her narrator

⁶⁸ Hereafter all quotations are cited from Zabuzhko, Oksana. *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex*. Trans. Halyna Hryn. Las Vegas, NV: AmazonCrossing, 2011.

avoids the danger of speaking for another, as that “another” in *Fieldwork* is herself; and at the same time, through putting on an authoritative first-person voice of a woman intellectual, she strives to increase the chances of her subaltern “self” to be heard and understood, especially by Western audiences that are largely ignorant about Ukraine and the problems faced by Ukrainian women.

Furthermore, *Fieldwork* confirms Spivak's insight about the insidious power of hegemonic discourses, be they imperialist or nativist, to manipulate, co-opt, and obliterate a female subaltern and her history. Since these are the discourses that have heretofore constructed “the woman,” they furnish and circumscribe the space from which a female subaltern subject must speak. *Fieldwork* dramatizes what Spivak dubbed as the “violent shuttling” of the figure of a subaltern woman between the powerful discourses of “tradition and modernization” (306), which in the early post-Soviet Ukrainian context are the ones of Soviet colonialism and Western cultural dominance (both presented as “modernization”) as well as Ukrainian populism and anti-colonial nationalism (which cling to Ukrainian traditions).⁶⁹ The novel's autobiographical heroine is at once a victim and a product of these discourses—at least of the Soviet and the Ukrainian ones. While her female postcolonial intellectual persona, in her first-person authoritative voice, attempts to explain the hold of these discourses on the female subaltern and to diminish their power through sarcasm and scathing critique, her female subaltern persona performs her own imprisonment in and loyalty to them (especially the discourse of Ukrainian nationalism), even as she also occasionally laments their continued force. Such ambivalence emerges, for example, in the most obvious point of intersection between gender and national

⁶⁹ For a similar argument in the context of Central Asia, see Ol'ga Zubovskaia, “Primenima li i kak zapadnaia postkolonial'naia teoriia dlia analiza postsovetkovogo feminizma?” Zubovskaia writes of the construction of what she calls “‘the voice’ of Central Asian feminism” as a position “between various discourses on gender”—the discourse of Western aid donors, the Soviet discourse on “the women's question,” and that of Central Asian nationalism (178).

identity, illuminated by *Fieldwork*—the narrating heroine's choice of a Ukrainian lover and her willingness to put up with his abusive sexual behavior, at least for a time, just because he is Ukrainian. Even as the narrator's subaltern persona expresses her attachment to this man through remembering numerous intimate details of their relationship and, for instance, the seeming fulfillment in it of her dream for a *Ukrainian* family that would bring forth the next generation of Ukrainians, her postcolonial intellectual persona recognizes this kind of behavior as “national masochism” and ironically refers to herself as “poor sexual victim of the national idea” (*Fieldwork* 53, 103).

I would like to suggest that it is precisely many critics' lack of attention to the complex narrative structure (as well as other *literary* aspects) of *Fieldwork* that has brought about such a broad range of ideological (mis)readings of this novel. Those commentators who accused Zabuzhko of a subversive anti-nationalist stance have focused mostly on the criticisms of the Ukrainian imaginary made by the intellectual voice of the novel's narrator while ignoring her other persona's allegiance to her Ukrainian identity. And critics like Serguei Oushakine or Uilleam Blacker, who found Zabuzhko's feminism lacking precisely because of her nationalism, have taken the performance by the narrator's female subaltern persona of her dependence on nationalist and essentialist gender discourses to be Zabuzhko's only and final word on the matter (Blacker “Nation, Body, Home” 490). I would argue, however, that Zabuzhko's project can be fully understood only if we take seriously the productive tension created by the voices of the novel's split narration and pay close attention to other formal properties of *Fieldwork*—especially its use of language(s).⁷⁰

⁷⁰ The use of language in the novel has been briefly analyzed by Monakhova and in more detail by Amy Elisabeth Moore in her recent comparative doctoral dissertation on Nicole Brossard and Zabuzhko, although the latter work includes many misinterpretations, in my view. In this chapter, I go beyond the analysis found in these two studies.

Finally, Spivak's analysis is applicable not only to *Fieldwork*'s form, but also to its thematic level, as throughout the novel Zabuzhko's severely depressed heroine contemplates committing suicide. From its first sentence, in which the narrator tells herself that she wouldn't do it "today," to *Fieldwork*'s last word, which signals that the heroine has decided to go on living, the entire text may be read as the narrator's tortured, extended debate with herself (perhaps, in front of the mirror in which she examines herself repeatedly) on why she should or should not take her life. The immediate reason that the text seems to suggest for the narrator's desire to end it all is her failed romantic relationship, and it is this relationship and especially its sexual aspects that have been the overwhelming focus of a lot of literary scholarship on *Fieldwork* up to the present time.⁷¹ While certainly important—so much so that it gives the novel its title, such a focus has the inherent danger of trivializing Zabuzhko's very intricately woven, convoluted text and the purposes she has attempted to accomplish through writing it. To take the narrating heroine's failed affair with her Ukrainian lover, Mykola, as the center of the narrative and the principal (or only) reason for her depression and thoughts of suicide is to perform a rhetorical gesture similar to that of the Indian hegemonic discourse on *sati*, which sanctions the man as the only understandable reason for a woman to kill herself. Instead, I argue that like Spivak's young female rebel, Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, who went to great lengths to send a different message to others in her suicide, Zabuzhko's narrator, throughout *Fieldwork*, charts a complex personal and cultural history of oppression, silencing, and invisibility that throws a

⁷¹ Nila Zborovs'ka sees *Fieldwork* as a "love" novel that deals with "the death of love" (*Feministychni rozdumy* 113, 119). Maryna Romanets focuses on the dynamics of masochism in the narrator's love affair and in the Soviet society at large (*Erotic Assemblages*). Maria Rewakowicz dismisses the novel's thematic preoccupations as "anything but new," "a typical story of 'boy meets girl,'" attributing novelty only to *Fieldwork*'s subversive blending of autobiography and fiction ("Women's Literary Discourse," 286-7). And even Chernetsky's reading of *Fieldwork* discusses the novel mostly in terms of its depiction of bodies and its "critique of colonial masculinities" through its image of Oksana's lover (*Mapping Postcommunist Cultures*, 258).

different light on her contemplated act of self-annihilation. In this light, the heroine's unfortunate love affair emerges as only the most obvious, surface theme of the story she tells.

In Search of a Home... in Language

Like the protagonists of the works by Bichuia, Kononenko, and Zabuzhko, examined in Chapter 2, the narrating heroine in *Fieldwork* is a writer (a poet, to be more exact), but unlike theirs, her examination of the self takes place not in Ukraine but outside it—during her stay in the United States as a Fulbright scholar in the mid 1990s. Thus, the third major preoccupation of the novel, in addition to gender and nation, is “dissemination”—defined by Homi Bhabha, in one sense, as “that moment of scattering of the people,” the experience of “mass migration” that has so profoundly changed the modern world and its nations (291). For the heroine of *Fieldwork*—a formerly Soviet subject from behind the Iron Curtain—traveling to and teaching in the West is at once a dream come true (a literal fulfillment of her reiterated wish “to break out”—*vyrvatys'*) and a painful experience of displacement.⁷² Although Oksana knows English well enough to lecture in it, the text continually underscores the foreignness of her surroundings and of various objects and concepts of American culture—frequently by leaving their names in English (with Ukrainian explanations in footnotes). She also feels profoundly alone in this culture—especially because, as she discovers, few in America know much about Ukrainians or Ukraine:

...you had simply grown tired, after all these years of homeless wandering, of loving the world *all alone*—of passing, anonymous and unrecognized, through all the dusky airport terminals, the restaurants and bars with their warm lights, the seashores with their shuffle

⁷² For more on the general function of displacement in *Fieldwork* and in other contemporary Ukrainian novels, see Vitaly Chernetsky, "The Trope of Displacement and Identity Construction in Post-Colonial Ukrainian Fiction."

of incoming waves against the rough sand, the early-morning hotels with coffee in the lobby—"Where are you from?"—"Ukraine."—"Where's that?"⁷³—you had grown tired of *not being* in this world... (Emphasis in the original; *Fieldwork* 33)

The physical condition of dislocation to the West, with its accompanying feelings of loneliness and even non-existence, further destabilizes Oksana's sense of self, already undermined by her recent romantic failure and the still lingering traumas from her Soviet past. As a result, *Fieldwork* becomes a record of the narrator's painful identity crisis, which is expressed in the novel as a search for "home," or, more precisely, for a feeling of "being at home" (*vdoma*). Yet the novel never expressly defines what this feeling is in positive terms; rather, the narrator intimates what it could be by cataloguing all those circumstances that make it impossible for her to feel at home anywhere in the world as well as by recalling a few remarkable instances in which she did experience "being at home."

In part, Oksana's crisis can be understood as a specifically postcolonial one: Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, the authors of *The Empire Writes Back*, define this crisis as "the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place" (8). This identification, and with it a "valid and active sense of self," is often lost, they argue, as part of the colonial experience of "dislocation" or "displacement," which "is always a feature of post-colonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention, or a mixture of the two" (9). Elsewhere Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin explain exactly how this dislocation occurs in societies that are colonized through conquest, and this explanation is very fitting for Ukraine:

⁷³ This mini-dialogue appears in English in the original text.

...dislocation in a different sense is also a feature of all invaded colonies where indigenous or original cultures are, if not annihilated, often literally dislocated, i.e. moved off what was their territory. At best, they are *metaphorically dislocated*, placed into a hierarchy that sets their culture aside and ignores its institutions and values in favour of the values and practices of the colonizing culture. Many post-colonial texts acknowledge *the psychological and personal dislocations that result from this cultural denigration...*

(Emphasis mine; *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 75)

While many citizens actually experienced a physical displacement under the Soviet regime (imprisonment in the *gulag* or exile, for example), what Zabuzhko focuses on most of all in *Fieldwork* is the *metaphorical* dislocation of Ukrainians, the erosion of their “valid and active sense of self” because of “the cultural denigration” of the Ukrainian language, the local traditions and institutions. The Ukrainian critic and cultural historian Maksym Strikha, in his contribution to a recent multi-author project on Ukrainian popular culture, identifies the Ukrainian language as the most important, fundamental element of the Ukrainian national imaginary and charts the history of this language's “denigration”—from the bans on the use of Ukrainian in the Russian Empire to its reflection in the popular attitudes towards Ukrainian in the late Soviet era. He writes that as recently as in the 1980s, the “typical reaction” of many in the streets of Kyiv to conversations in Ukrainian between a father and his child, for example, would be comments such as “с виду культурный, а русского языка не знает” (*looks like a cultured man, yet doesn't know Russian*) or “зачем калечите жизнь ребенку?” (*Why are you ruining your child's life?*) (“Mova” in *Narysy ukrains'koi populiarnoi kul'tury*). Similarly, Zabuzhko herself, in an essay on language and state power, acknowledges the crucial function of Ukrainian for her culture and

writes about belonging to the generation of Ukrainian *intelligentsia* that did not grow up in the native language environment because outside their home in Kyiv, there were few opportunities to hear Ukrainian (“Mova i vlada,” 101). *Fieldwork*'s autobiographical narrator likewise experiences this metaphorical dislocation, as well as the real threat of a physical displacement, and these are a primary reason for her inability to feel “at home.”

Growing up with a dissident father, with terrifying memories of repeated home searches and a constant fear of his possible arrest, as well as the burden of her father's over-protectiveness and control bordering on abuse, the narrating heroine remembers her childhood home as a dangerous and oppressive space from which she yearned to escape (*vyrvatys'*). Alas, as she bitterly remarks, there was nowhere to escape in Soviet Ukraine (129):

There *was* no breaking out—all around nothing but Communist Youth League meetings, political education classes, and the Russian language [*chuzha mova*]. One only ventured out there (like a four-year-old to a stool in the middle of the room to recite a poem for aunts and uncles) in order to reproduce, in ringing tones and tape-recorder accuracy, all that had been learned from them and them alone, and only this guaranteed *safety*—a Gold Medal on leaving high school, a Diploma of Red Distinction at university, and then ever so carefully along the tightrope [*prosuvannia “po veriovochke”*]... (Emphasis in the original; *Fieldwork* 145-6)

Outside of her childhood home, Zabuzhko's heroine could obtain the longed-for feelings of safety, usually associated with a home, only in exchange for ideological compliance with the Soviet regime, its institutions and practices, including the displacement of Ukrainian through

Russification (*all around... the Russian language*—identified in the original as *chuzha mova*—a foreign language). Significantly, the passage above expresses the Soviet discourse's pervasiveness and power to silence the subaltern through an image of rote poetry memorization and its recitation (*to recite a poem for aunties and uncles*)—an act in which a discourse is shown to literally *speak through and for* its subject and one that has special meaning for Zabuzhko's heroine, who is a poet herself. This passage suggests that for the narrator in *Fieldwork*, “being home” is closely associated with being able to speak her own text, rather than somebody else's, and in her own language. Early on, the novel describes how the narrator experiences feelings of “at-home-ness” precisely on an occasion when she is given a chance to publicly read her own poetry:

...at a writers' forum in one Far Eastern country where out of politeness they asked you to read in your native language (“you mean, it's not Russian?”⁷⁴)—and you began reading then, in insult and desperation listening only to your own text (you were sick to death of their “Russian” even then), concealing yourself within it the way one slips into a lit house at night and locks the door behind, and midway you suddenly realized that in the frozen silence you were being heard [*shcho zvuchysh v dzvinkii... tyshi*]: *mova*—your language, even though nobody understood it, in full view of the public it had concentrated around you into a clear, sparkling sphere of the most refined, crafted glass inside which magic was happening, this could be seen by all: something was coming to life, pulsating, firming up, arching into broad billows of flame—and then misting up again, as happens with glass that is exposed to heavy breathing; *you finished your piece—enveloped,*

⁷⁴ This question is asked in English in the original.

crystal-clear, protected, now that would have been the time to realize that your home is your language, a language only about a few hundred other people in the whole world can still speak properly—it would always be with you, like a snail's shell, and there would not be another, non-portable home for you, girl, ever, no matter what you do.

(First emphasis in the original, second emphasis mine; *Fieldwork* 10-11)

This is a telling passage that sheds light on what the narrator means by “feeling at home”: it is not tied to possessing an actual house of her own (*non-portable home*), nor to the physical territory of Ukraine (the poetry reading is happening in a foreign country), nor even to the condition of her language—Ukrainian—being recognized or understood, since in this case, as before, Oksana is mistaken for a Russian speaker and no one in the audience can comprehend what she is saying (in this case, the translation inaccurately states that Oksana was being “heard,” whereas in the original, she only “sounded”). The feeling of home for the narrator is created by the act of speaking for herself, reciting her own text in Ukrainian. To the sounding of her language, she ascribes some magical protective quality and essentially finds her identity in it.

Oksana's location of her “home” in her language confirms the principle which Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin see as ubiquitous in postcolonial writing—in this literature, they find “a repetition of the general idea of the interdependence of language and identity—you are the way you speak” (*The Empire Writes Back*, 53). I see *Fieldwork*, however, extending the application of this statement from the language or a mixture of languages an individual speaks (Ukrainian, Russian, or *surzhyk*—a mix of Russian and Ukrainian, for instance) to *the manner* of speaking as well. The passage cited above, for example, describes the narrating heroine feeling completely at home in an odd, hermetic, non-communicative situation where her speech, instead of

establishing some sort of communicative interaction between her and the audience, actually serves as a protective barrier between them. This type of speaking, I would argue, is paradigmatic for the embattled identity of the Ukrainian intellectual (of either gender) which Zabuzhko dramatizes and analyzes in her novel.

The Insular Ukrainian Identity

Many conceptions of identity have underscored the importance of the interplay between the self and the Other for identity formation. Mikhail Bakhtin has famously described this process in terms of dialogic exchange, and Stuart Hall saw “the relationship between you and the Other” as one of identity's crucial constitutive elements (Bakhtin, “Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics” 287; Hall 345). Zabuzhko's novel scrutinizes a historical situation in which the self is significantly shaped by the ubiquitous presence of a powerful and hostile Other—the Soviet regime, represented by its secret police, informers, and other agents whose goal it is to make sure that the ideology of this Other is a vital part of each self. *Fieldwork*'s narrator describes what it is like to grow up engaged in the constant *forced* “dialogue” with this “evil” Other:

...however, you are unfamiliar to subjugation to limitless, metaphysical evil, where there's absolutely nothing in hell you can do—*when you grow up in a flat that is constantly bugged and surveilled and you know about it, so you learn to speak directly to an invisible audience: at times out loud, at times with gestures, and at times by saying nothing*, or when the object of your first girlish infatuation turns out to be a fellow assigned to spy on you... (Emphasis mine; *Fieldwork* 111)

The constant presence of this Other is shown to have a profound effect on the *speech* of the self. To protect herself, the heroine learned early on to hide her real thoughts and even, at times, her Ukrainian from anybody who could be linked to the Other, which was almost everyone but the immediate circle of her family and friends (*Fieldwork* 127). Thus, when a boy whom the narrator met in a high school academic competition asked her if she was familiar with the works of the banned Ukrainian writer Volodymyr Vynnychenko, she gave him a politically correct answer, “tapping out each syllable in precise Pioneer Girl fashion” and speaking in Russian (*Fieldwork* 144). In light of such a history of identity formation, the novel seems to suggest, a (non)communicative situation in which an individual can speak her own “text” publicly and in her own language, yet be protected from another’s potentially threatening entrance into a dialogue, can truly seem like a safe haven, a utopian “home.”

Nevertheless, *Fieldwork*’s narrator recognizes the pathological character of such a closed, insular identity—when she gets a chance to observe it up close and in the extreme form in the Ukrainian artist and her lover, Mykola. Upon their initial encounter, Oksana experiences that rare feeling of “at-home-ness” she had at the poetry reading abroad—because Mykola is her first Ukrainian partner, with the same language (“language (...) drastically shortened your path toward one another, you recognized him: he’s one of yours, yours—in everything, a beast of the same species!” [*Fieldwork* 32]) and the same traumatic baggage of displacement and denigration, which both of them experienced especially acutely as Ukrainian cultural producers. Initially, Oksana sees in this relationship a chance for a real partnership—in exploring the world together and making names for themselves in the West through their creative expression as *Ukrainian* artists. Yet the heroine quickly becomes disillusioned as she discovers a dark side to the insular structure of identity that characterizes her lover and (to a lesser extent) herself.

In describing the reasons behind the failure of Oksana and Mykola's relationship, many commentators have focused on the sexual abusiveness of Mykola, stemming from his traumatic colonial past. While the novel does foreground this reason, it also highlights other aspects of Mykola's character—all symptoms of his insular identity formation—that made this relationship unviable. For instance, the narrator deplores Mykola's lack of interest for the outside world: upon joining her in the United States, he remains completely closed to experiencing the foreign Other and makes no effort to learn English.⁷⁵ By contrast, the narrator herself, who has already traveled abroad repeatedly, seems more open and welcoming to the fascinating foreign world around her:

...you liked that bar, the dull bottle-green of the décor (...), the night outside the distant windows, its thick, brown murkiness melting the candy-yellow street lamps—everything at once, because only thus can you enter an *alien* world: accepting everything at once, with all your senses, and you know how to do that... (Emphasis in the original; *Fieldwork* 32-3)

Importantly, Oksana also sees Mykola's “hermetic” identity, which is what he himself calls it (58), manifest itself in his use of language as a protective mask from the Other—something she knows how to do herself as well:

...he opened up to share something inside him only very gradually, creakily (...) *for outsiders he smeared himself with a thick coat of an impenetrable, though, one must admit, very masterful sort of chitchat, all kinds of gags and games generously flavored*

⁷⁵ While Mykola's behavior fits the more general image of post-Soviet masculinity in crisis, widely examined in the fiction and films of the 1990s, as I show below, Zabuzhko identifies the particularly “Ukrainian” features of this postcommunist phenomenon.

with spicy irony, but she was not one to be fooled by that, she also had her (hah!) elaborate and ever-so-tightly fitted (...) *linguistic mask*, and when he tried to hide behind his—hey, there, if you're gonna play, no cheating!—she preferred to slice that papier-mâché apart with a knife... (Emphasis mine; *Fieldwork* 59-60)

Oksana unmistakably recognizes Mykola's *manner* of speaking—the “impenetrable” chatter that hides the real self from the Other, in part by disguising one's real meaning through irony. As we have seen above and as she acknowledges in this passage, Oksana has learned, through her identity formation under the Soviet regime, to use similar defensive strategies herself, but unlike Mykola, she realizes that what these strategies do is preclude real communication, making a dialogue and therefore a genuine partnership impossible. This communicative disconnect turns out to be just as damaging to Oksana and Mykola's relationship as the sexual abuse, and the narrator sees the roots of both in Mykola's insular identity.

While *Fieldwork* recognizes this type of identity as characteristic of both genders, the novel also suggests that it is an especially acute problem for Ukrainian men in the Soviet/post-Soviet culture. In her theoretical essay, written in an effort to better understand the hostile reception of *Fieldwork* in Ukraine and tellingly entitled “A Woman Writer in Colonial Culture,” Zabuzhko argues that cultural denigration under the Soviet regime affected Ukrainian men more than women by virtue of the fact that the Soviet society, in its structure and culture, remained a patriarchal one and the public sphere continued to be dominated by men. Therefore, if women, unable to realize their creative potential in the public sphere, could psychologically “retreat” into the private sphere of home and family, men would find such a retreat much more challenging and psychologically traumatic. They thus turned out to be “more dependent on the social

environment 'outside [the home]'" and much more susceptible to such denigration (163). *Fieldwork* illustrates this idea not only through Mykola, but also through other male characters. One such illustration—through the image of the father of Oksana's female friend Darka—vividly shows how the cultural denigration of Ukrainian and the ubiquitous presence of the Other of the Soviet state, especially in the public sphere, affected the manner of speaking and the identity of Ukrainian men:

...a year earlier Darka's father had died—he was *an award-winning musician, a deputy, and in his day practically a member of the Communist Party Central Committee*, although, it's true, even *he got into a little trouble for "nationalism,"* so he started playing at state concerts, while his wife, who had gotten used to a comfortable life, would nag him to death *if ever he tried to give a toast at official banquets in Ukrainian—even if uttered thickly and stupidly, playing the jester with his "howdy-doody" wordplays*, the Central Committee official representative—a concrete slab in a gray suit—sat disapprovingly silent: not a single muscle moved on his impenetrable, seemingly waterlogged, face, ai-ai-yai, we're in trouble now, "and you were gonna go on that trip to Canada," the wife yelped, taking off her coat in the hall while a pregnant Darka (...) was grinding up some coffee in the kitchen for her father—"you use that head of yours for thinking, ever?"—and her old man, after walking into the kitchen and lighting up a cigarette (first breaking a few matches), *told his daughter roughly (also, like his wife, in Russian): "I know, I'm merely a sociopolitical buffoon,"* and this phrase stayed with her always, a hammered-in nail... (Emphasis mine; *Fieldwork* 101-2)

In this passage, once again, we see the self being forced to hide behind a language mask, this time of a fool and a buffoon, in the presence of the threatening Other. This strategy, however, is used here to avoid potential accusations of nationalism because of the man's use of Ukrainian in the official Soviet public sphere. Darka's father consciously adopts a comical and self-demeaning tone—in the already low speech genre of a toast—as if to reassure everyone present that his Ukrainian is not dangerous and does not carry with it any hidden challenge to the official *status quo*. Nevertheless, even this self-inflicted denigration of one's language is perceived with displeasure by the authorities (the Communist Party's Central Committee representative) and instills fear into Darka's mother for her husband's future career advancement. Significantly, the final assessment of himself as a “buffoon” (*shut*) is given by Darka's father in Russian—suggesting perhaps that his Ukrainian has become so inextricably tied to the mask of buffoonery that it is not suitable for expressing such a serious and bitter truth about one's identity.⁷⁶

The "Gender War" in Early Post-Soviet Ukrainian Literature

While *Fieldwork* does much to portray the psychological roots of Ukrainian men's insular identity and their colonial inferiority complex, it also powerfully critiques this identity and exposes the tendency of some Ukrainian men, like Mykola, to seek compensation for their denigration in how they relate to women. When the narrator informs Mykola that their relationship is over, the latter tellingly asks Oksana if she feels like a female “victor,” using the

⁷⁶ This analysis demonstrates, I think, the Ukrainian specificity of what has been generally described in academic literature as the “unmaking” of the Soviet man (see, for example, Lilya Kaganovsky, *How the Soviet Man Was Unmade: Cultural Fantasy and Male Subjectivity under Stalin*). It thus offers a response to an argument made by scholars like Madina Tlostanova, who maintains that Zabuzhko's Ukrainian man does not differ in any way from the generalized Soviet man, with his characteristic “complexes of inferiority and symbolic castration as well as unimaginable egocentrism and moral immaturity” (Tlostanova 174).

Russian word “победительница” (Zabuzhko, *Poliovi doslidzhennia* 21) and thereby revealing that on some level, he viewed their relationship as a sparring match rather than an equal partnership. By employing the Russian word for “victor” of feminine gender, pronounced with great irony (which the text reflects through the Ukrainian transcription of the word), Mykola simultaneously distances himself from Oksana, aligning her with the Russian-speaking colonizing Other, and mocks the very idea of a woman being victorious in anything. His compensation for his past experiences of colonial humiliation becomes especially evident in this scene.

Although inspired by the real prototype from Zabuzhko's love life, the image of Mykola (and her critique of it) emerged also as her response to a cultural and literary type of a Ukrainian man that became popular in Ukraine in the early post-Soviet years. Zabuzhko has acknowledged this fact in her interviews,⁷⁷ and in her aforementioned essay, “A Woman Writer in Colonial Culture,” she explained in more detail what she perceived to be a glaring absence of fully drawn, complex women characters in contemporary Ukrainian fiction by men—a situation she undoubtedly sought to rectify in *Fieldwork*. On the one hand, Zabuzhko argued, there was the so-called “‘sexually liberated’ men's prose,” populated by immature male characters (created by equally immature male authors) and only specific women's body parts in which they were interested (189). On the other hand, she stated, there were works by seemingly less “juvenile” male writers, who nevertheless displayed complete “lack of interest” in the fate of those identical stick-figure women characters whom they created for the benefit and diversion of their male

⁷⁷ For instance, in Hryn, “A Conversation with Oksana Zabuzhko”: “...prior to the appearance of *Field Work* [sic] the voices heard in our literature were predominantly male, and misogyny, either overt or latent, became part of a fashionable writer's make-up—all those guys playing the role of “eternally young” macho boys, to the cheers of the same “eternally young” macho critics.” . . . The male protagonist of the novel, “the genius painter” (...), belongs, undoubtedly and recognizably, to the same type.”

protagonists (189). From the sum of these statements, it is not difficult to recognize which male author in particular Zabuzhko had in mind as the chief target of her criticisms. Yuri Andrukhovych—perhaps the most successful Ukrainian male writer of Zabuzhko's generation and the leader of a male literary group, Bu-Ba-Bu—is the well-known creator of a whole series of juvenile and misogynist “macho” characters, all modeled to a large extent on his own persona and contributing to what the literary scholar Tamara Hundorova calls “the image of the Ukrainian [male] bohemian of the 1990s” (“‘Bu-Ba-Bu,’ Carnival, and Kitsch” 9). In a way, the main debates on the Soviet past, the nation and gender of the first half-decade of post-Soviet Ukrainian literature crystallized on the pages written by Andrukhovych and Zabuzhko—and in (overt and covert) dialogue between them. The feminist literary critic Solomiia Pavlychko once referred to these debates as a “gender confrontation or war” (186).

Three years prior to *Fieldwork*, Andrukhovych published his second novel, *The Moscoviad* [*Moskoviada*] (1993), which came to be widely considered a key Ukrainian text in the project of “postcolonial de-centering of Russian/Soviet imperial discourses” (Polishchuk 296)—a symbolic “farewell to the empire” (Hnatiuk 481). A Ukrainian travesty of *The Odyssey*, which is moreover inspired by Venedikt Erofeev's drunken travel narrative *Moscow to the End of the Line* [*Moskva-Petushki*] (1970),⁷⁸ *The Moscoviad* features an autobiographical narrating hero—a perpetually inebriated Ukrainian poet who, like Andrukhovych in the past, studies at the Maxim Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow in 1989-1990, and witnesses what he describes as the death throes of the Soviet Empire. Physically displaced to the imperial center, the protagonist engages in what Chernetsky, borrowing a postcolonial concept from Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, interprets as a “paradigmatic instance of 'writing back to the centre of the empire',”

⁷⁸ Written in 1970, Erofeev's “poema” was first published in 1973 in Israel. In the Soviet Union, it was officially published only in 1988-89.

deconstructing through mockery and linguistic play Soviet ideological myths, institutions, and discourses (Chernetsky, "The Trope of Displacement" 222). As in Andrukhovych's other novels, *The Moscoviad's* protagonist is a carnivalesque adventure hero, a buffoon, which is evidenced by his escapades, "linguistic behavior" (Hundorova's term) as well as his clownish (and distinctly un-Ukrainian) name, Otto von F.⁷⁹ Towards the end of the novel, the author actually dresses Otto von F. in a buffoon's mask (thereby laying bare his device of carnivalesque masking), in which Otto attends the macabre apocalyptic ball/conference of all political leaders of the Russian and Soviet Empires and shoots them all as well as himself. These killings turn out to be symbolic rather than real (Catherine II, Lenin and other leaders shed rags, not blood, and Otto reappears alive on a train back to Ukraine), suggesting that underlying the novel is a desire to exorcise the "evil" Other of the Soviet empire from one's identity and thereby articulate a new self.

In this journey to a new identity, Otto's primary "weapon" is not a gun, but rather language, as scholars have pointed out (Bodin 65), and his manner of speaking may be understood as a Ukrainian colonial subject's appropriation of *language as a mask, a protective barrier*, as well as of *Ukrainian speech as low and self-denigrating buffoonery*—both captured by Zabuzhko in *Fieldwork's* characters of Mykola and Darka's father and analyzed above. Just like mimicry in a colonial culture has the potential to be a 'menace' to colonial authority because it may become mockery (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*), the buffoon's self-denigrating and masked linguistic performance, through the manipulation of its penchant for irony and ambiguity, may be turned against the colonizing Other. This idea can be illustrated by a toast the

⁷⁹ Since Andrukhovych and "Bu-Ba-Bu" in general gave primacy to sound and reading out loud (Hundorova "Bu-Ba-Bu"), it makes sense to decipher this name on the basis of its phonetics. In Ukrainian, "Otto von F." sounds like the beginning of the phrase "Ото фанфарон!" (*What a braggart!*). Coming into Slavic languages from the Spanish *fanfarron*, the word denotes "someone who puts on display his own imagined virtues or vices, a braggart," which would make it a fitting ironic name for any and all of Andrukhovych's buffoon characters (*Tolkovyi slovar' Ushakova*).

inebriated Otto gives at a shady Moscow pub, in front of a few friends who accuse him of nationalism and a general half-drunk Russian-speaking audience. Otto begins by assuring everyone with utmost sincerity in his tone that he has friendly feelings for all people, that he supports the idea of unity and brotherhood of nations and proceeds to give as proof—in the same sincere tone—his numerous sexual liaisons, including with members of other nations and races, suggesting that he has thus enhanced unity in the world with his body. His "proof," of course, ironically undercuts his earnest proclamation of loyalty to the familiar Soviet slogan about the brotherhood of nations, but the mask of sincerity hides the mockery, making Otto's position and person seem ambiguous: is he simply a fool to make such a statement, a drunk whose thinking is temporarily clouded, or is he consciously engaging in parody and subversion? The toast is also filled with folksy Ukrainian sayings, appropriate for a simpleton's speech delivered in his "provincial" language (*I cannot just sit (...) silently, as if I just swallowed a horseradish...*) and with ambiguous puns that poke fun at the Soviet state but masquerade as the slips of a drunk's tongue: "...now, when I drink acrid beer in the midst of a wasteland (...) when around me is one great *Asian*, sorry, *Eurasian plain* [rivnyna], sorry, *country* [krayina]..."⁸⁰ (emphasis mine; Andrukhovych, *The Moscoviad* 50). Formally, Otto's toast does not differ from the toast given by Darka's father in Zabuzhko's *Fieldwork*: like the latter, Otto fools around, engages in punning buffoonery and uses folksy expressions ("uttered thickly and stupidly, playing the jester with his 'howdy-dooody' wordplays," *Fieldwork* 101). Yet in an appropriation and re-direction of these devices, initially used by Darka's father to make himself and his Ukrainian seem unthreatening to the Soviet Other, Andrukhovych's Otto transforms the figure of the buffoon and his language into the very opposite—a 'menace' and a challenge directed at the colonizing Other.

⁸⁰ The English translation only reproduces the first pun—*Asian-Eurasian*—while the rhyming parallelism of the second one—*rivnyna-krayina*—is lost.

Andrukhovych's re-appropriation and re-evaluation of the Ukrainian buffoon—from Darka's father's bitter "I'm merely a sociopolitical buffoon" to a figure with freedom and the attractive, playfully realized power to undermine his society's oppressive conventions—appeared to be quite revolutionary in early post-Soviet Ukrainian culture. Many of the best literary critics and scholars of Ukrainian literature were right away genuinely intrigued by Andrukhovych and the "Bu-Ba-Bu" phenomenon, praising their use of Bakhtinian carnival and its liberating reversals (Hundorova *Pisliachornobyl's'ka biblioteka*, Chernetsky *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures*); the group's playful performance of postcolonial hybridity (Pavlyshyn in several essays in *Kanon ta ikonostas*); and the ironic attitude of Andrukhovych's buffoons not only towards the Soviet myths but also towards the Ukrainian nationalist discourse (Hnatiuk [482] and many others). Zabuzhko, however, found the figure of the buffoon problematic in several ways, to which she pointed in *Fieldwork*, engaging in this novel in a hidden (and sometimes not so hidden) polemic with Andrukhovych.

As I mentioned before, Zabuzhko's first and main criticism of the Ukrainian buffoon character and his "creator," Andrukhovych, had to do with their extreme misogyny. Incidentally, this characteristic is true of the buffoon as a literary type in general and not only of its Ukrainian "incarnation." In "Living by His Wits: The Buffoon and Male Survival," Peter Murphy writes that the buffoon lives his life predominantly in male company and perpetually "acts out a contempt for women grounded in the traditional belief that they are available for sexual pleasure but never to be trusted or taken seriously" (1125). At the same time, Murphy finds that the buffoon depends on sex with women as well as on alcohol consumption in order "to confirm his always shaky masculinity" (1132). For the same reason, he also constantly brags about his ability to drink and sleep around more than other men, although frequently his exaggerated stories meet

with nothing but laughter. Andrukhovych's Otto clearly fits this description, as he spends much of the novel drinking and engaging in the most outrageous sexual escapades, although since he is the novel's narrator and an incorrigible braggart, many of these episodes should be taken with a grain of salt.⁸¹

However, Otto's contempt for women and his treatment of them as nothing but sexual objects also has specifically Ukrainian historical roots—a fact that emerges only vaguely in *The Moscoviad*, but is picked up and given a detailed treatment in Zabuzhko's *Fieldwork*. Andrukhovych's novel contains several letters from Otto to an imaginary exiled king of Ukraine, two of which are noticeably parallel: one relates Otto's relationships with women and the other tells the king about the protagonist's relationship with the KGB. The letter about women is a typical buffoon's tall story that exaggerates Otto's manly virtues and describes women of all ages and several nationalities (Ukrainian, Russian, and American) chasing Otto, who, as a result, is frequently forced to maintain liaisons with two women at once. Sexual contact, however, is not the only basis of these relationships—in most cases, Otto's facility with language (as a poet) leads to what he calls "sex in words," where women engage him in endless conversations on a variety of subjects or where he exhausts them with reading long poems, such as *The Odyssey*, out loud—pretending, by the way, that he is the poems' author (Andrukhovych, *The Moscoviad* 61). Each of these women's primary goal is to "catch" Otto and never let him go, but he always manages to get out of the relationship—until he meets a Russian woman who is a professional snake catcher (and, significantly, later turns out to be a KGB agent). This rather banal braggart's

⁸¹ While Otto seems to closely resemble Venedikt Erofeev's Venichka, the two characters actually represent distinct, if related, types—the Ukrainian buffoon and the Russian holy fool. For the differences between the two, see Shavokshyna, "Typolohiia smikhovykh personazhiv v ukrains'komu, ches'komu ta rosiis'komu postmodernizmakh (blazen' – pabitel' – iurodyvyi)." For the function of the holy fool in Russian culture and especially in Dostoevsky's works, see Murav, *Holy Foolishness: Dostoevsky's Novels and the Poetics of Cultural Critique*. For Venichka's use of irony, which is very different from Otto's, see Ready.

tale receives another, more sinister layer of meaning through Otto's next letter about his dealings with the KGB. Like the women, this Soviet institution is out to "catch" Otto and involve him in a "relationship." It invites him on "dates" (*pobachennia*), frequently with two agents at once, and most of the time during these "dates" is spent in endless, exhausting conversation, often on the subject of poetry and Otto's poetic talent, which the agents promise to help Otto develop if he agrees to cooperate with them. Otto stalls for time, using as much of his buffoon's wit as he can; he also tries to refuse, saying that when a guy wants to seduce a girl, he will promise her anything—only to dump her when the “deed” is done (Andrukhovych, *The Moscoviad* 95). Yet threatened with persecution of his family members, he is forced to agree to become an informer. He is spared the guilt and shame of betraying his compatriots only because at this point, the Soviet regime is already beginning to crumble.

Meant to be humorous and playful, Otto's equation of women with the KGB, and through it with the colonizing Other, actually reveals to what extent his identity has been shaped by his repressive colonial history—so much so that he views a relationship with *any* Other, including women, exclusively as a power struggle. Zabuzhko, who perceived this peculiarity of the Ukrainian buffoon, gave an explicit critique of it in *Fieldwork*—in the abovementioned scene when Mykola sarcastically asks Oksana if she feels like a female victor and in her overall argument that many Ukrainian men tend to compensate for their colonial humiliation through contempt and violence (both physical and verbal) directed against women.

Zabuzhko's second, related criticism of the Ukrainian buffoon as a literary type and a cultural model of behavior has to do with the fact that although in Andrukhovych's re-writing, the buffoon re-appropriates the colonially imposed mask and transforms it into a powerful liberating "weapon" against the colonizing Other, this transformation does not essentially change

the "hermetic" structure of his identity—or what I have described above as the insular Ukrainian identity. As with Darka's father, for Otto, the Ukrainian buffoon, the colonizing Other still remains his main "interlocutor" in the ongoing identity-defining dialogue. The power dynamics might have shifted—and now it is Otto who directs (mostly verbal) violence at the colonizing Other rather than vice versa—but this reversal does not open up the dialogue to any other potential interlocutors.⁸² This imparts to the character of Otto and to *The Moscoviad* on the whole a sense of confinement and "stuck-ness," which does not diminish even by the end of the novel.

As I pointed out before, Zabuzhko sees the insular identity as a general problem of the Ukrainian self—one that has affected both genders (albeit differently). In addition, it has also shaped the nation's collective self-perception. In *Fieldwork*, the heroine's authoritative intellectual voice explicitly reflects on this problem, expressing her frustration with this pathology of the Ukrainian identity—even if her postcolonial subaltern's voice laments her inability to free herself of such unfortunate thinking:

In psychiatry, I believe it's called victim behavior, but there's nothing I can do about it, it's the way I was taught; and in general all that Ukrainians can say about themselves is how, and how much, and by which manner they *were beaten*: information, I must say, not very enticing for strangers, nonetheless, if there's nothing else in either your family or your national history that can be scraped together, you slowly but surely begin to take

⁸² In his description of the roles played by the rogue, the clown and the fool—all related character types to the buffoon, Bakhtin states that "their being coincides with their role, and outside this role they simply do not exist" ("Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel" 159). This formulation is more radical than my concept of the insular identity, but in the case of Andrukhovych's buffoons, it does not seem to fit completely. Because his buffoon characters, by Andrukhovych's own admission, are all versions of his own very real self, they do still have a face and, more crucially, a body behind the mask.

pride in this—hey, come see how they beat us, but we're not yet dead—my Cambridge friends rolled on the ground with laughter when you translated the beginning of your national anthem as “Ukraine has not died yet”—“What kind of anthem is that?”⁸³—and truly, a pretty screwed up little opening line... (Emphasis in the original; *Fieldwork* 115)

Fieldwork's narrating heroine recognizes that Ukrainians' fixation on the colonizing Other and the violence they experienced from it only exacerbates their inferiority complex and perpetuates the insular structure of their identity. As Hall correctly noted, "[i]dentity is a narrative of the self; it's the story we tell about the self in order to know who we are" (346). Zabuzhko observes that the victimization narrative has become so prevalent among Ukrainians that it has turned into the meta-narrative of the Ukrainian national imaginary, which is evidenced by the fact that this story has become enshrined in the nation's anthem.⁸⁴ The anthem, as one of any nation's chief symbols, encapsulates the main elements of the nation's historical and cultural specificity; it is the story (song) of the national self which is told (sung) not only to the self, but also to the members of other nations. Oksana aptly points out that the problem with the story Ukrainians tell the world about themselves lies not only in the fact that it is self-denigrating, but in the act of telling as well. Such a story, if artfully told, also normalizes the self-denigrating pose, suggesting to others that perhaps such a history and identity is not that bad after all.

...I'm making the point, ladies and gentlemen, that it's not such a great thrill to belong to a beaten nation, as the fox in the folktale said, the unbeaten rides on the back of the

⁸³This exchange appears in English in the original.

⁸⁴ The Ukrainians' victimization narrative is general enough to fit Wertsch's definition of a narrative schematic template, which help organize collective national memory. I discuss such templates more in Chapter 1.

beaten—and that's what the beaten one deserves, *the problem is that in the meantime that beaten one manages to sing, let's say, the ballad of the misfortunate captives*,⁸⁵ and in this way—*legitimizes his own humiliated position*, because art, don't you know, always legitimizes, in the eyes of the outsider, the life that gave it birth; and in that fact lies its, that is, art's, gre-eat deception. (Emphasis mine; *Fieldwork* 104)

With bitter self-awareness, Zabuzhko directs her critique not only at *The Moscoviad*, but also at her own self and the story she tells in *Fieldwork*—the artful narrative of her autobiographical heroine's direct victimization by the Soviet regime as well as its indirect manifestation in the disrespectful and abusive behavior of her lover, who has been victimized himself. Zabuzhko realizes only too well the dangers and pathological effects of such a narrative, yet she still finds that the story must be told—as an act of personal and national self-therapy (“[l]iterature as a form of national therapy,” *Fieldwork* 158); as an address and self-explication to foreign audiences, who know so little about Ukrainians (which in itself is another effect of Ukraine's colonial past); and also as an attempt to open up the insular Ukrainian identity to the world.

Towards the “New Ethnicity”

In *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, Paul John Eakin suggests that “acts of self-narration play a major part” in “a lifelong process of identity formation” (101). Both *Fieldwork* and *The Moscoviad* are autobiographical narratives about the journey of the Ukrainian self through the labyrinths of the traumatic past to a (hopefully) new identity. To see if something like a new identity emerges in these texts, it is instructive to compare how the two

⁸⁵ “The Ballad of Misfortunate Captives” is a well-known Ukrainian folk ballad dating back to the seventeenth century. In it, the Zaporozhian Cossacks captured by the Turks lament their fate and long to return to Ukraine.

novels end. In many ways, their endings are very similar: both Otto and Oksana in the novels' final scenes are in transit—Otto is taking a train to Kyiv to get out of Moscow, which is perishing in what seems like an apocalyptic flood, and Oksana has just boarded a plane, presumably also for Kyiv, having completed her fellowship year in the United States and her "fieldwork in Ukrainian sex." Both protagonists express feelings of anger and disappointment about their life up to this point, filled as it was with experiences of violence, repression, and crushed hopes and dreams. Both voice a belief that a new chapter of their lives is beginning. Nevertheless, the two endings are also different—in a subtle but important way.

As he lies on the "third" upper berth, which is normally used only for luggage, Andrukhovych's Otto composes in his mind his final letter to the imaginary king of Ukraine, in which he once again articulates his resentment towards his people's colonial past and a desire to know what will happen to Ukrainians in the future. He also emphatically states that his escape from Moscow is really a *return* home.

Since tonight I *am not running away but coming back. Angry, empty, and with a bullet in my skull to top it all off.* Why the hell would anyone need me? I don't know that either. *I only know that now almost all of us are like this. And what remains for us is the most persuasive of all hopes, passed on to us from our glorious ancestors—that it will work out somehow.* The main thing is to survive until tomorrow. To make it to the station called Kyiv. (Emphasis mine; Andrukhovych, *The Moscoviad* 185)

In his final sentences, which, paradoxically, look *forward* to coming *back*, Otto rhetorically re-integrates himself into his nation. His "I" gets swallowed up by the uniform "we" of the

Ukrainian people (*now almost all of us are like this*), and on behalf of this "imagined community," as Benedict Anderson would put it, he voices (albeit not without his usual irony) a vague hope in the nation's future survival (*it will work out somehow*). Otto's urgent desire to return home and the collective, uniform voice of the nation reiterating one of its fundamental beliefs—the belief in its survival despite any of the circumstances (*Ukraine has not died yet*)—suggest that no new identity has really emerged as a result of Otto's "self-narration."

In a very cogently argued lecture, "Ethnicity: Identity and Difference," Stuart Hall puts forth the concept of "the new ethnicity" (347-9). He argues that we cannot do away with identity and ethnicity completely because "[t]here is no way (...) in which people of the world can act, can speak, can create, can come in from the margins and talk (...) unless they come from some place, they come from some history, they inherit certain cultural traditions" (347). Ethnicity is what gives people a place, a positioning from which to speak. Yet Hall also argues against "essentialist ethnicity," which is backward-looking, unchanging, and stuck in the past. Instead, he proposes that a new conception of ethnicity is emerging in our fast-paced, mobile, and diverse world: "The notion of an identity that knows where it came from, where home is, but also (...) knows you can't really go home again." (349)

It is a new conception of our identities because it has not lost hold of the place and the ground from which we can speak, yet it is no longer contained within that place as an essence. It wants to address a much wider variety of experience. (...) Those are the new ethnicities, the new voices. They are neither locked into the past nor able to forget the past. (349)

I would argue that while Otto in *The Moscoviad* does not manage to break out of the insular and essentialist Ukrainian identity, Zabuzhko's *Fieldwork*, especially in its ending, suggests that Oksana is beginning to move in the direction of "the new (Ukrainian) ethnicity." This is evident first and foremost in the change of temporality in *Fieldwork*'s final scene. If most of the previous narration was turned to the colonial past or the heroine's present in the United States, the novel's final fragment begins with a sentence in the future tense, which, significantly, looks forward to the trip itself rather than the homecoming (Kyiv or Ukraine are not even explicitly mentioned as a destination, although it is safe to assume that Oksana is going there). Further, despite the bitter sense of disappointment which the heroine articulates in this scene, she explicitly states that she no longer wishes her life to end (as she did in the beginning of the novel), and the reason she gives for this change of mood is very interesting:

When I was young, *I dreamed of such a death*: plane crash over the Atlantic, an aircraft dissolving in the air and the ocean—no grave, no trace. *Now I wish with all my heart that the plane land safely: I like to watch* the tall, sinewy old man with the hooked nose and deeply furrowed lines running down from his eyes (...), and *the Spanish-looking* brunette with the unbuttoned leather coat—she's on board with two children and while she removes the smaller one from her backpack carrier (...), the other one, a girl of about five, *narrow tanned face in a baroque frame of promisingly capricious curls*, flashes her eyes and her smile up and down the aisle in all directions, glowing with excitement—her first trip!—and her eyes stop on me:

"Hi!" she shouts happily.

"Hello there!" say I. (*Fieldwork* 160-1)

[— *Хай!* — щасливо випалює вона.

— *Хай!* — кажу я.]

(Emphasis mine; *Poliovi doslidzhennia* 142)

Having completed her "fieldwork," or "research," as Oksana herself calls it in English at one point in the text, Oksana has managed to come to terms with her painful past. The passage above suggests that she has resolved to stop dwelling on it and has put it aside, together with the thoughts of suicide, and this makes her free to finally turn away from the mirror and an examination of her own self, and to begin to look at others. In this act of opening up her previously insular identity to the world, she encounters ethnically different others, like the Hispanic mother and daughter; with the latter, she engages in as minimal a conversation as can be, which is nevertheless a very important one for Oksana and for the novel.

"Хай" in this conversation, as some commentators have pointed out (Monakhova, "Pidporiadkovane" and Amy Moore), functions as an interlingual pun, which is, unfortunately, lost in the English translation: it is a Ukrainian transliteration of the English greeting "Hi!", but spelled this way, it also means something like "Let it be!" in Ukrainian. In reply to the little girl's greeting, Oksana says "Хай" and means it both as a "hello" and a "let it be" — the latter referring to her life, her colonial past, and all those other disappointments she has voiced throughout the novel. This is the first instance in the novel when the heroine uses an English word or words without underscoring their difference from Ukrainian through leaving English words in the Latin script and/or using them as a means of "othering"—putting the English language and American culture at a distance from her own. Here, instead, "Хай" becomes the heroine's way to establish

genuine contact with the Other—both the girl and the English language. This is a significant step for the Ukrainian poet Oksana, who identifies so much with the Ukrainian language that she locates her "home" in it and who has earlier in the novel complained that living in a foreign-language environment (be it Russian-speaking Soviet Ukraine or the English-speaking United States) "pollutes" her native speech. Earlier, she had also described a strategy widely used by her and others to keep the foreign words from "making their home" in the Ukrainian speech: "to role-play, like we all do, using your voice to take the foreign words into quotation marks, place a kind of *clownish-ironic stress* on them like they were a citation" (emphasis mine; *Fieldwork* 29). This is basically a strategy out of the repertoire of the Ukrainian buffoon, so the characterization "clownish-ironic" is very appropriate here. Although the reader cannot hear the intonation with which Oksana says her final "Хай," the context around it leaves no doubt that she says it sincerely and without irony.

All of these clues suggest that in its final scene, *Fieldwork* moves in the direction of "the new ethnicity" for Ukrainians, as Hall defined it. This becomes possible, I think, because Zabuzhko has seen the drawbacks of the kind of Ukrainian identity Andrukhovych had constructed in his work and has learned from this experience. More importantly though, *Fieldwork* takes place in a foreign country, where both Zabuzhko and her autobiographical heroine are exposed to a different other and have a chance to observe the self from this other's point of view. Her experience of physical displacement to the United States thus plays a crucial role in enabling Zabuzhko to move beyond the insular and backward-looking structure of identity and to formulate and articulate her complex position between gender, nation, and dissemination.

This position is not essentialist or static: in fact, its hallmark lies in its movement between different discourses, expressed in the novel's poetics as the tension between the narrator's different voices, and in its opening up to others in dialogue (especially in the final scene). At the same time, however, this position is informed by the histories of personal and national oppression which *Fieldwork* recounts—it "knows where it came from," as Hall put it. And yet, this position is also based on a refusal to be contained by this legacy and a rejection of the Ukrainian national imaginary's victimization meta-narrative, encapsulated in the national anthem's first line: "Ukraine has not died yet." By the very act of pinpointing this narrative that underlies the Ukrainian national imaginary and by dramatizing and analyzing its self-denigrating effects throughout the novel, Zabuzhko undermines its grip on the structure of her own identity and, perhaps, the collective Ukrainian identity as well.

***Fieldwork* as a Bestseller: The Subaltern's Voice That Has Been Heard?**

Fieldwork's by now iconic status as the first bestselling and long-selling novel by a Ukrainian woman writer testifies to the fact that Zabuzhko has succeeded in making a Ukrainian woman subaltern's voice heard, at least in her homeland of Ukraine and at least to an extent. As I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, the novel ruffled quite a few "nationalist" feathers in Ukraine and incited a number of hostile or simply dismissive reviews. Since the mid-1990s, however, *Fieldwork* has entered into the canon of Ukrainian post-Soviet literature, which is evident from its adaptations for the stage and its place of prominence in textbooks on contemporary Ukrainian literature as well as college curricula.⁸⁶ Yet its position in the canon

⁸⁶ There have been at least two adaptations of *Fieldwork* for the stage: a monodrama by the Ukrainian actress Halyna Stefanova, which premiered in Kyiv in 2003, and an adaptation by the Polish theater *Polonia* in Warsaw, which premiered in 2006 (see Zabuzhko's official website: www.zabuzhko.com/ua/films/index.html). A college

continues to be challenged from time to time by the conservative functionaries from various institutions of Ukrainian culture.

A fairly recent example of such a challenge was the removal of Halyna Stefanova's monodrama—a very faithful adaptation of *Fieldwork*—from the list of three monodramas for which the actress was nominated for the National Taras Shevchenko Prize in 2008 (“Aktrysa Halyna Stefanova...”).⁸⁷ Already after the list of Stefanova's performances in the nomination was approved, the head of the Taras Shevchenko Prize Committee, Roman Lubkivs'kyi, single-handedly crossed out the *Fieldwork* adaptation from the list—most likely so that “the word ‘sex’ would not appear next to the word ‘Shevchenko’,” as one of the journalists quipped (Klymenko). Ms. Stefanova's letter of protest to Mr. Lubkivs'kyi yielded no positive results, and the actress decided to withdraw her name from the list of nominees, stating that the circumstances surrounding her nomination have become “humiliating” to her (Klymenko). As this incident demonstrates, some in the cultural establishment in Ukraine would prefer not to hear the female subaltern to whom *Fieldwork* gave a voice.

Besides the Ukrainian readers, Zabuzhko's novel has very specifically addressed Western audiences, which is most evident in *Fieldwork*'s construction of the authoritative first-person voice of the female intellectual who speaks to “ladies and gentlemen.” By means of this voice, Zabuzhko attempted to redress the invisibility of and lack of knowledge about Ukraine, Ukrainian women and Ukrainian writing in the West, and to do it *in Ukrainian*, even though, by her narrator's admission, the choice to write in this language “is probably the most barren choice under the sun at present” (*Fieldwork* 36). As Oksana explains, this is so “because even if you

handbook on contemporary Ukrainian literature, *Suchasna ukrains'ka proza*, by Rokšana Kharchuk devotes a separate chapter to *Fieldwork*.

⁸⁷ For more on the history and significance of this prize, see Chapter 2.

did, by some miracle, produce something in this language ‘knocking out Goethe's *Faust*,’ as one well-known literary critic by the name of Joseph Stalin would put it, then it would only lie around the libraries unread, (...) just like your unsold books which gather dust somewhere at home and in bookstores...” (*Fieldwork* 36) As we know, however, the novel that so lamented Ukrainian literature's and culture's invisibility in the world did find its foreign readers via translations into many languages (although the English one did not come out until 2011, when the translator was finally able to secure a publisher). Nevertheless, *Fieldwork*'s constructed voice of the Ukrainian female subaltern received mixed reviews in the West, which, as I pointed out earlier, frequently denied Zabuzhko's novel “feminist” credentials on the grounds of its “nationalism.”

Such a reception not only ignores *Fieldwork*'s tension of ambivalent voices, as I argued above, but also re-opens the long-standing debate on feminism between the so-called “First World” and the so-called “Third World.” Zabuzhko's contribution to this debate is that of a woman from the “Second World,” which nonetheless appears close to the position of third-world feminists. As Nira Yuval-Davis summarizes this (non)dialogue in *Gender and Nation*, “[o]ne side would call for women's liberation as the primary/only goal of the feminist movement. The other side would respond that as long as their people are not free there is no sense for them in speaking about women's liberation: how could they struggle to reach equality with their menfolk while their menfolk themselves were oppressed?” (117) Zabuzhko's significant focus on Ukrainian men's oppression under the Soviet regime in *Fieldwork* and her professed loyalty to her Ukrainian culture were often deemed by western critics as taking away from her “feminist” position, just as the third-world argument about men's oppression was frequently viewed by western feminists as not compatible with a ‘real’ feminism. Yet, as Yuval-Davis points out, work

by third-world scholars such as Kumari Jayawardena (*Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, 1986) demonstrates that “loyalty to one's national liberation movement does not necessarily mean that women do not fight within it for the improvement and transformation of the position of women in their societies” (118). Zabuzhko's *Fieldwork* is a good example of textual politics that does both—professes loyalty to the national liberation cause and critiques women's oppression at the hands of (formerly) oppressed Ukrainian men.

The denial of Zabuzhko's “feminism” by her western critics, like the chronologically earlier denial of the third-world feminism as a ‘real’ one, demonstrate that many western academics continue to reserve exclusively for themselves the right to define what “feminism” is and what it is not or that, as Yuval-Davis put it, non-First World women continue to be assessed “in terms of their ‘problems’ or their ‘achievements’ in relation to an imagined free white liberal [western] democracy” (118). Measured against such a yardstick, work by women like Zabuzhko comes up short, despite the fact that these women may self-identify as feminists—as Zabuzhko herself does. This peculiarity of *Fieldwork*'s western reception does not allow one to conclude that the voice of the Ukrainian female subaltern, constructed by Zabuzhko, has been *fully* heard after all.

CHAPTER 4:
Foundational National Narratives by Ukrainian Women Writers—
And with a Difference

While in the late 1980s and the early 1990s Ukrainian women's fiction pondered the very possibility of women's writing in late Soviet/post-Soviet Ukrainian culture, with the publication and success of Oksana Zabuzhko's *Fieldwork* in the mid-1990s this possibility was no longer questioned. Moreover, Zabuzhko's bestseller seemed to open the floodgates of women's writing in Ukraine that placed female characters in the very center of their narratives and, in some cases, even created a new type of a female protagonist, dubbed by some literary scholars as “a thinking woman” (Filonenko). Prose by Yevhenia Kononenko, Sofia Maidans'ka, Svitlana Yovenko, Nadia Tubal'tseva, Teodozia Zarivna, Maria Kryvenko, Maria Matios, and other women authors began to appear in print more and more often in the second half of the 1990s, prompting the critics to speak of a special blossoming of post-Soviet Ukrainian women's writing (Naydan “A Conspicuous Blossoming”). Yet it was not until the 2000s that the themes of the nation, especially of Ukraine's Soviet past and its lasting impact on the post-Soviet present, along with a continued focus on women protagonists, began to dominate in the work by several of these women writers at once, so much so that one of them—Maria Matios—called her collection of short stories from the 2000s *The Nation*.

Through its pioneering examination of national and gender identity in the post-Soviet Ukrainian context, Zabuzhko's *Fieldwork*, no doubt, paved the way for these early 21st-century narratives of women and/in the nation. Yet the latter are also remarkably different from

Zabuzhko's bestseller. While *Fieldwork*'s tortured exploration of the ambivalent loyalties of the autobiographical self zeroes in on the intersections of gender and national identity in an individual psyche, women authors' national stories present themselves as clearly more fictional narratives that strive to cover a much larger terrain, writing of the nation as a collectivity and of women's various places, adventures, and roles within it at various times. These narratives conjure up simultaneous existence of different individuals embedded in their society and in what Benedict Anderson dubbed as “homogeneous, empty time,” thus serving as vehicles for imagining a national community (24-5). I will call these works “foundational national narratives”—texts that after the colonial Soviet period, strive to participate in the nation-building efforts by producing more or less authoritative representations of the Ukrainian nation and thus contribute to the Ukrainian national imaginary. This chapter will discuss four such works: Maria Matios’s collection of short stories, *Natsiia. Odkrovennia* (*The Nation. Revelation*, 2001, 2002, 2006⁸⁸), and her novel *Solodka Darusia* (*Sweet Darusia*, 2004); Yevhenia Kononenko’s murder mystery, *Imitatsiia* (*Imitation*, 2001); and Oksana Zabuzhko’s 820-page novel, *Muzei pokynutykh sekretiv* (*The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*, 2009).

I borrow the term ‘foundational’ from Doris Sommer's well-known study of Latin American “foundational fictions”—nineteenth-century “national romances,” produced in the period after the Latin American wars of independence, which aimed to aid in their countries' projects of national consolidation by plotting charming romance stories (with happy ends) between lovers from the opposing political, racial, or economic camps (*Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America*). By luring the readers with the passionate love of two attractive protagonists, these romances, Sommer claimed, popularized visions of unified national

⁸⁸ The contents of the collection were gradually expanded and revised by the author from the first to the third edition of the book. In this chapter, I use the fullest, third edition.

communities for the new independent states in Latin America. While only one of the Ukrainian texts examined in this chapter (Zabuzhko's *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*) can be seen as a Ukrainian “national romance”—trying to function in ways similar to the Latin American national romances examined by Sommer, all four works analyzed here facilitate specific imaginings of the Ukrainian nation and attempt to redefine it through various literary means. Significantly, all four works are also very women-centered, featuring complex, fully developed female protagonists and focusing on their life stories. This chapter will explore this woman-centered poetics of the foundational national narratives by the three prominent contemporary Ukrainian women writers in an effort to understand what kinds of a collective national identity these authors imagine and what role gender comes to play in their national visions.

The Poetics and Politics of a Foundational National Narrative

Before analyzing Ukrainian women writers' narratives about the nation, it is important to ask what usually makes a text count as a “national narrative,” especially in fiction. Are there thematic preoccupations and formal literary means that characterize “a national narrative”? Drawing on Anderson's argument about the realist novel's facilitation of national imaginings, Cairns Craig offers a useful nutshell summary of the kind of ideological work on behalf of the nation that the traditional novel has done in the past, especially in the “nation-obsessed” 19th century:

There is a profound similarity between the modern nation, with its implication of *all the people of a territory bound together into a single historical process*, and the technique

of the major nineteenth-century novels, whose *emplotment enmeshes their multiplicity of characters into a single, overarching narrative trajectory*. (Emphasis mine; 9)

Craig's summary points out three defining elements of any modern national imagining: its chief object of attention being “all the people” (1), located within a delimited “territory” (2), and subject to “a single historical process” (3). In a revised edition of *Imagined Communities*, Anderson included a chapter on the three modern “institutions of power”—the census, the map, and the museum—that helped various states in the past (especially the colonial states, as Anderson emphasizes) to fashion and popularize the three abovementioned elements of national imaginings (243). The census, according to Anderson, not only sorted the population according to “the ethnic-racial classifications” invented by the state, but also operated on the fictional premise that it could count everyone (“all the people”) (246). The map divided all those people groups, fashioned by the census, “by delimiting territorially where, for political purposes, they ended” (bounded “territory”) (249). And the museum constructed out of the historical past and its artifacts a common “album of ancestors” for ‘all the people’ (“a single historical process”) (255).⁸⁹ The traditional novel, as Craig suggests above, furnished its imaginative power and formal devices of “emplotment” to bind the three elements of people, territory, and history into one whole; it may be therefore seen as partly replicating and combining the ideological effects of the census, the map, and the museum.

There is no denying that the novel, in its more realist subgenres, has retained its nation-shaping functions in the twentieth and even the twenty-first century, at least in part and

⁸⁹ As Anderson explains, the colonial state carefully managed the functions of the “museumized” past it constructed: the foreign colonial ruling elites clearly did not share the native populations’ “albums of ancestors,” but eventually were able to present the colonial state as a benevolent “guardian of the local tradition” (253).

especially in the new nation-states concerned about nation-building, such as the post-colonial Third World countries and the post-Soviet states.⁹⁰ At the same time, however, many contemporary “national” novels, while still broadly engaging the questions of the nation's people, its territory, and its history/traditions, deconstruct, in a variety of explicit and more subtle ways, the hegemonic ideological effects of the census, the map, and the museum—especially, as will become obvious from the works' analysis below, if the national imaginings were produced by these institutions under the former colonial regime.

So how does a national narrative “emplot” its many different characters into “a single, overarching narrative trajectory” (Craig 9)? In other words, how does it transform a collection of individual stories into one collective story? One very popular way to accomplish this goal is suggested, once again, by Anderson, who ends his *Imagined Communities* with an interesting discussion of what he calls “the biography of nations,” comparing a modern person's (auto)biography and the biography of a modern nation (204). Both of these, through a complex interplay of remembering and forgetting, string together events into a narrative that imparts a sense of oneness and continuity, despite all changes and upheavals, to the (person's or nation's) identity. Both are also “set in homogeneous, empty time,” measured by the calendar, which in the case of a person is evidenced by the importance accorded to the calendar dates of his/her birth and death (204). Unlike individuals, however, nations have “no clearly identifiable births, and their deaths, if they ever happen, are never natural” (205). Because of this fact, Anderson insists, the only way to emplot a nation's biography (that is, *a foundational national narrative*) is to write it backwards, so to speak, from the present into the past. Crucially, this “archeological”

⁹⁰ As both Timothy Brennan and Elleke Boehmer point out, the nation-state remains an important and often the only collective platform for developing nations from which to resist the lingering “dependency” on the former colonizing powers, the various forms of neocolonialism and the frequently “hyper-exploitative” transnationalism (Brennan 58; Boehmer 210).

writing of sorts uncovers many deaths, but, Anderson points out, a nation's biography is interested only in the deaths "of a special kind": "exemplary suicides, poignant martyrdoms, assassinations, executions, wars, and holocausts," which, in order to become part of a nation's biography, "must be remembered/forgotten as 'our own'" (205-6). In this way, a national biography "transform[s] fatality into continuity," as Anderson puts it, refiguring and remembering as a heroic sacrifice for the sake of the nation's continued existence *those deaths* among its subjects that lend themselves to an ascription of a "national" meaning (Anderson 11).

Writing "true" biographies of nations has long been the province of professional historians; in fact, the kind of national narrative Anderson describes—focused on "assassinations, executions, wars, and holocausts"—is the stuff of conventional textbooks in national history many of us were taught at schools. However, such a view of history—an exclusive focus on "big" political events and historical macro-narratives has been critiqued in recent decades by feminist historians.⁹¹ The latter pointed out that in such historical narratives men figure as the chief protagonists and women often remain outside them altogether.

For example, there has been a strong gender (and class) bias in the kinds of deaths that made it into the national narratives and were remembered as "our own." As historian John Gillis notes of the nineteenth century, "national commemorations were largely the preserve of elite males, the designated carriers of progress," and even though in the twentieth century "national memory practices became more democratic," women were still often assigned in them either "allegorical" or auxiliary roles, such as that of mourners for the dead (male) national heroes (10-12).⁹² In a national narrative then, a woman's death would either come to stand as symbolic

⁹¹ A foundational text containing such a critique is Joan Scott's seminal *Gender and the Politics of History*.

⁹² These fit well into the framework of women's roles in the nation, elaborated by Nira Yuval-Davis and discussed in Chapter 1.

of the nation (of the nation's perilous situation, for example) or would not be remembered at all. One prominent example of such a symbolization of a woman's death in Russian literature is Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's 1963 short story "Matryona's Home," in which an old peasant woman's death prompts the male narrator to reinterpret her person as a symbol of the Russian nation and its traditional values, made almost extinct under the Soviet regime. In Ukrainian literature, a well-known example is Ulas Samchuk's 1933 novel *Mariia*—the first literary work about the Ukrainian Famine of 1932-33 in which the nation's tragedy is symbolically rendered through the starvation and eventual death of the eponymous female protagonist.

In light of such gendered poetics and politics of a national narrative, the four works by Ukrainian women writers seem quite unconventional: while most of them emplot their versions of Ukraine's national biography backwards—from the present into the past, as Anderson suggested is standard for national narratives—the deaths around which most of them are structured and in which they are especially interested are individual *women's* deaths.⁹³ Moreover, the authors of these texts (with the possible exception of Zabuzhko) make sure that most of these deaths cannot be read as simple patriotic symbols of the nation. Instead, sometimes the writers (Matios in particular) allow their women characters themselves to speak about the meaning of their future deaths, and this meaning often turns out to be critical of the nation and the roles assigned to women within it. In other texts, a woman's death prompts another (usually female) character to investigate its circumstances, and this investigation becomes a simultaneous inquiry into a woman's unique life story and into the nation's bloody past (and still very unstable

⁹³ Sadly, Anderson's poetics of a national biography, with its overwhelming focus on deaths, works particularly well for Ukraine, which had a staggering death toll in the Stalinist repressions and the events of World War II (but also in World War I and the Bolshevik Revolution). In a recent book, historian Timothy Snyder even invents the term "bloodlands" to refer to the human suffering in the space and time "between Hitler and Stalin," in which Ukraine occupies a prominent position.

present). This inquiry shows, however, that in this national story, women play a multiplicity of different roles: some are victims, some villains, some heroes (even “national” heroes, but always on their own terms), and some disconcerted observers; some willingly take on the roles of cultural reproducers and some reject these roles, preferring instead a position of cultural critique, etc. In a word, these women are agents in their various circumstances, even if sometimes they only have a modicum of agency.

Equally importantly, as they portray and investigate women's lives and deaths in twentieth-century Ukraine, all four texts also engage the “broad” national questions outlined above—the questions of people and their ethnic and cultural heterogeneity, of the land and its borders, and of the Soviet past. In this respect, the women authors themselves take on the roles of cultural critics and make various interventions into the Ukrainian national imaginary. They confront the fact that the ethnic composition and the present-day borders of the independent Ukrainian nation-state are a result of the often brutal modernization policies of the Soviet regime as well as wartime annexation and ethnic violence. Such a provenance accounts for the ongoing tension and disagreement on policies within Ukraine between its various constituent parts (somewhat simplistically conceptualized as Western and Eastern Ukraine, or sometimes as Ukrainophones and Russophones⁹⁴). As David Marples explains in *Heroes and Villains: Creating National History in Contemporary Ukraine*, Ukraine does not yet have one national narrative about its recent history, which would be accepted by most of its population. According to Marples, it remains a point of contention whether Ukraine should be seen as a descendent of the Soviet state and an inheritor of its fundamental historical myth of the “Great Patriotic War,” in which the Soviet citizens, at great personal cost, defeated the Nazis (a narrative more accepted

⁹⁴ See my summary of Taras Kuzio's postcolonial theorization of Ukraine in Chapter 1.

in the East), or whether it should be seen as “the child of Ukrainian nationalists,” who fought the Soviet regime's occupation of Western Ukraine during and after World War II and who produced in the 1960s-1980s many of Ukraine's dissidents (terms from a 2005 *Kyiv Post* editorial; quoted by Marples, 301). Thus, a foundational historical myth of origins for present-day Ukraine that would hold it firmly together is missing from the Ukrainian national imaginary.

Because it is such an important issue for contemporary Ukraine and Ukrainians' identity, three of the four texts examined in this chapter go back to the events of World War II and especially to the Soviet incorporation of Western Ukraine after the war. In their national narratives, Matios and Zabuzhko (who themselves hail from two different parts of Western Ukraine, although both now live in Kyiv) show the violence that accompanied this incorporation. However, while Matios portrays it more as a clash between the ideology and policies of a ruthless modern state and the worldview of a pre-modern peasant society, and focuses on the lives of civilians, especially women, Zabuzhko creates a more heroic and mythical narrative in which Western Ukrainian guerilla fighters figure prominently (although even this narrative is not devoid of complexity and ambiguity). By contrast, Kononenko (a native Kyivan) turns her attention to Ukraine's East and the internal cultural boundaries within Ukraine that separate the East from the center (Kyiv) and from the West. In their different ways then, all four works intervene into the national imaginings produced by the ideological institutions of the census, the map, and the museum, and make women an essential part of this intervention.

Who Belongs to *The Nation* and How? An Alternative National “Census” by Maria Matios

Maria Matios's *The Nation. Revelation* is not a novel but rather a collection of ten stories (divided into two cycles), written between 1984 and 2006. Many of them were published in

literary journals—long before the collection first appeared in 2001 or took its final shape in the third edition of 2006. Nevertheless, its fullest edition does possess a degree of narrative unity, with stories arranged chronologically and describing events roughly from before World War I to the present day, all taking place in Matios's native region of Bukovyna in Western Ukraine. Before northern Bukovyna was annexed from Romania by the Soviet Union in 1940 and then, after intermittent German and Romanian occupations, incorporated into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic at the end of World War II, it was a truly multiethnic region—especially in the times of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, to which it belonged until 1918. Fred Stambrook writes that Bukovyna's population was “the most ethnically diverse” of all Austrian lands, with mixing and interconnectedness of ethnic groups in daily life—and relatively peaceful coexistence, at least until the beginning of World War I (185).

However, as Matios notes in an introduction to one of her books, from 1914 to the end of World War II, her native Hutsul part of northern Bukovyna⁹⁵ had experienced regime changes almost twenty times (*Vyrvani storinky* 25). In the course of these political upheavals, especially the ones of World War II and the subsequent Soviet incorporation, the multicultural mosaic of northern Bukovyna disappeared, leaving behind a decimated and largely homogeneous Ukrainian community (in terms of ethnicity and class) and a Soviet administration, composed of ethnic Russians, Eastern Ukrainians, and some locals. The first cycle of stories in *The Nation* portrays this unraveling of the multicultural community and the ensuing political conflict between the representatives of the Soviet regime and the locals, some of whom join the guerilla resistance forces, known as the UPA (the Ukrainian Insurgent Army). The cycle does so, however, in micro-narratives about individuals, some of them taken from real life and some

⁹⁵ Hutsuls are Ukrainian highlanders that constituted the majority (but not all) of the population in the ranges of the Carpathian Mountains in the northern part of Bukovyna (“Hutsul region,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Ukraine*).

invented, and depicts the perspectives on the dramatic events of those involved on all sides, including the perpetrators of violence, with great psychological nuance. The resulting picture is not black and white, but a canvas with many shades of grey, which moreover does not make claims of total knowledge or comprehensiveness.⁹⁶ The fact that *The Nation* is not a novel but a collection of stories, each of which captures only a tiny fragment from the great historical drama that unfolded in Bukovyna—just one small region of Ukraine—underscores the author's efforts to position her text as only one of any number of national narratives rather than *the* definitive national narrative. This kind of portrayal itself stands in stark contrast to the ideology and the governance practices of the Soviet regime, which Matios shows wreaking such havoc and destruction in Bukovyna.

The story of the Soviet state's transformation of cultural complexity and ambiguity into divided ethnic groups and then ethnic homogeneity has been recently told by historian Kate Brown. In *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland*, she describes how this process occurred in a different part of what is present-day Ukraine, beginning two decades before the Soviet occupation of Bukovyna with an all-Soviet drive to re-organize and modernize society, including through “counting national bodies,” or a Soviet census (38). According to historian Francine Hirsch, such policies were implemented in an “effort to turn so-called backward peoples into nations—that is, to delineate new political boundaries and foster national-cultural distinctions—within the context of a unified state with a colonial-type economy and administrative structure” (204). As Brown poignantly demonstrates, the Soviet census imposed discrete “nationality” identities onto peasants many of whom thought of themselves as

⁹⁶ As Matios stressed in one of her interviews about *The Nation*, her account of “the nation” is personal and subjective: “...I attempted to create *my own*—living—picture of Ukrainian life and its recent—post-war—history.” (*Vyrvani storinky*, 293).

‘simply “local”’; it had no tolerance for fragmentariness and ambiguity, striving to account for everyone and to disentangle the mix of cultures that existed in the first decades of the 20th century in the borderlands between Russia and Poland (40). The Soviet census, just like the colonial ones in Southeast Asia, described by Anderson, applied to its domain “a totalizing classificatory grid,” “the effect” of which “was always to be able to say of anything that it was this, not that; it belonged here, not there” (254). Brown shows that there was a connection between this search for absolute clarity and the invention of reified national categories on the one hand, and the later mass arrests, deportations and exterminations of different population groups, both by the Soviet and the German administrations,⁹⁷ on the other. Both were part of the process of “creating distilled nation-space for modern governance” (230).

If in much of what is today's Ukraine the Soviet “census mentality” came first and the physical violence in the form of deportations and exterminations followed after some time, to Bukovyna (as to other regions in Western Ukraine) the two came hand in hand. The local population was deemed suspicious by the new authorities from the outset. In a “census-like” move, the Soviet administration right away issued passports to the locals—for the sake of better control of the population (Musiienko 474). Thousands of individuals were arrested and deported from northern Bukovyna in just one year of the first Soviet occupation. Like Brown, although through fictional means, Matios portrays the local population's bafflement at the violence brought by the new administration. Trying to comprehend what was happening to them and to their world, the locals attempted to fit these events into their own “grid” of thinking—their religious beliefs, folk traditions and omens.

⁹⁷ Brown notes that among the first efforts of the occupying Nazi administration was to single out ethnic Germans and Jews, for which they used “Soviet records and read the demographic maps drawn up by Soviet cartographers in the mid-twenties” (198).

Thus, the collection's first story—about the dissolution of the ethnic mosaic and the gradual destruction of the Bukovynian Jews, told through the prism of the intertwined fates of a Ukrainian and a Jewish family—is named from the locals' perspective—“The Apocalypse.” If the pre-World War I Bukovynian village of Tysova Rivnia is described as a “human medley,” with ethnically diverse families participating in each other's customs (Ukrainian neighbors joining a Jewish family for Purim or a Jewish man wearing a traditional Hutsul goatskin vest over his regular garment), the First World War brings the first pogroms, perpetrated by the regiments passing through the village, World War II brings successive Soviet and Romanian occupations (a period the story describes as the time “when the fish population in the rivers increased and the human population decreased”), and the Soviet annexation of 1945 brings an order to Jews, “the former Romanian citizens,” to get out of the Soviet Bukovyna (*The Nation* 7, 23).

This broader historical context though is given by the omniscient narrator, whereas the villagers themselves comprehend it in more relational and mystical terms. Members of the different ethnic communities refer to each other's traditions and families as “our” and “your,” but these terms are not exclusive of each other (as becomes especially obvious when a Jewish widow has a child with the man from the neighboring Ukrainian family), whereas with the Soviet annexation, the new administration redefines all the remaining Jews as “foreign” [*chuzhi*], effectively depriving them of home (*The Nation* 23).⁹⁸ Moreover, the story gives a mystical explanation of the destruction, grounded in folk belief: in an early scene that once again shows

⁹⁸ In this story, Matios does not portray the period of the Romanian occupation in detail, although she writes about the persecution of the Jews during World War II, including the Nazi-allied Romanian administration in Bukovyna, in her novel, *Sweet Darusia*, in her recent collection of essays and autobiographical fragments, *Pages Torn out of the Autobiography* (*Vyrvani storinky*, 2011), and her very recent newspaper articles (see, for example, “Omelian Kovch and Emil' Klugman”).

the mixing of ethnic traditions, the mother in the Jewish family warns the father from the Ukrainian family against using the wood from the aspen tree, which, according to a Hutsul superstition, brings misfortune. The father does not heed her advice and uses the wood to make the barn floor and a walking stick. At the end of the story, out of the two large neighboring families—one Jewish and one Ukrainian—only the Ukrainian father and his daughter-in-law remain. The final scene shows the old father sitting with his walking stick near his house, mourning his dead wife and half-Jewish daughter, who stayed behind with the Ukrainian family after her mother and siblings left Bukovyna, and later unexpectedly joined the guerilla movement in the local forest that fought the Soviet administration. The story reverses the traditional gender roles, showing the father as the mourner of the dead and giving the role of the resistance fighter to a woman (while her half-brother, as the old father says with contempt, “counts sheep droppings in the kolkhoz,” 26). It also works against the common historical narrative, according to which the guerilla forces in the UPA were ethnically all Ukrainian. Yet perhaps the greatest surprise of this story is the unresolved tension it sets up between the “external” historical explanation of the tragedy and the local mystical comprehension of it, which vividly dramatizes the encounter of the two worldviews, but also introduces ambiguity into the drama of the two families.⁹⁹

Almost all the texts in the collection are built around such or other kinds of ambiguities—for instance, the story “Mother, Get Up...,” subtitled “Revelation of 1947.” When a well-to-do Hutsul family is told by a sympathetic local member of the Soviet administration that the following day they will be taken to be deported to the Siberia as *kulaks*, they decide to avoid deportation at any cost. With this goal in mind, they stage an elaborate performance of a Hutsul

⁹⁹ For a Derridean reading of this short story, in which the concept of *undecidability* is central, see Szymczyszyn.

funeral for the mother of the family, who climbs into a casket and plays dead. The family's youngest son is told to run and hide in the forest, as he might inadvertently give out the truth to the Soviet officials. When the administration representatives arrive, they find the family in mourning, engaged in the wake and funeral preparations, and are invited to join in. The officials remark that the family has turned out “lucky with death,” which spared them from the deportation, but one of the local officials notes in passing that a cheek on the mother's face is flushed, which, according to folk beliefs, is a sign that another death will soon strike the family (67). Having feasted at the wake, the officials leave, and the youngest son returns—only to find his mother actually dead in the casket. The abrupt, shocking ending sends the reader back into the story in search of some sort of explanation, which the text, however, refuses to give—beyond the ominous folk sign.

Contrary to one critic's suggestion,¹⁰⁰ this is not a narrative of the mother willingly sacrificing herself for her family because her death was supposed to be just a performance. The choice of the mother for this role was strategic—akin to the predominantly female participation in the peasant rebellions against the Soviet collectivization campaign and deportations in the 1930s in what is now central Ukraine. As Brown explains, “[w]omen went to the forefront of battles partly because they were conscious of the fact that they were considered too dark and ignorant to be held criminally responsible for their actions. (...) The government responded more leniently to women rebels.” (104) How are we to read this mother's real death then? As the fulfillment of the omen (which was not “real” anyways because the mother was still alive when her cheek became flushed)? As some cosmic punishment for playing with death, or for deception? Or as symbolic of the fact that while this particular family escaped deportation, many

¹⁰⁰ An interpretation suggested by Irina Zhrebkina in *Gendernye 90-e* (160).

others in the community did not (which would then make the mother a figure for the nation)? The text does not contain any clues to be able to say for sure.

Most of the stories in the collection, however, are built upon an ambiguity of identity. “Self” [svii] and “the other” [chuzyi] are not obvious or stable categories in *The Nation*. This fact makes this work the exact opposite of the colonial census, the effect of which Anderson described as that of “always to be able to say of anything that it was this, not that; it belonged here, not there” (254). That is why I see Matios's collection as an alternative “census,” which deconstructs the Soviet “totalizing grid” and its reified categories while at the same time deconstructing exclusionary national imaginings. Although on the whole villagers in many stories perceive the Soviet administration as foreign, its representatives are not uniformly portrayed as villains. In fact, some of them turn out to be more merciful and understanding than some of the locals or the guerilla fighters.

This occurs, for example, in the story “My Father Is Asking, My Mother Is Asking...”¹⁰¹ (“Prosyly tato-mama...”), subtitled “Revelation of 1990” because, in keeping with Anderson's reverse poetics of the national narrative, it is told backwards—from the present into the past. When Korneliya accompanies her son to Chernivtsi (the largest city in northern Bukovyna) to help him choose a suit for his approaching wedding, she faints in the street after coming face to face with a man who carries a blue and yellow flag (now the national flag of Ukraine) in his disfigured hand. Back at home, she tells her son the story from her past involving that man, named Koliay. In 1950, Korneliya and Koliay, with whom she was in love, were still part of by

¹⁰¹ This is a traditional Ukrainian beginning of a ritual oral invitation to a wedding, still used in rural Ukraine today.

then miniscule guerilla forces, fighting a clearly losing battle against the Soviet regime.¹⁰² Ordered to disband by the commanders, Korneliya, Koliay and another male fighter had to find a safe way to get to a different part of Bukovyna and “legalize” themselves in civilian life, under the watchful eye of the Soviet operatives from the MGB (the Ministry of State Security). Korneliya suggested that they walk in broad daylight, pretending to be a bridesmaid and groomsmen on a mission to invite people from the neighboring villages to a wedding, which was really taking place at their final destination (hence the wedding invitation formula in the title of the story). The male fighters agreed, but in the morning, Korneliya found that they had already gone and left her to fend for herself. She walked through the countryside alone, pretending to be the bridesmaid, until in one village, she ran into the real wedding party that was going around issuing wedding invitations—and into the MGB officers. While the bride from the party, Korneliya's old-time friend, agreed not to give her out to the MGB only with great reluctance, Korneliya's life was really saved by the MGB officer who willingly chose to believe her lie. As Korneliya's son finds out only forty years later, that officer eventually became Korneliya's husband and his father, helping Korneliya become “legalized” by getting her a forged identity document.

The story does not idealize the guerilla fighters, showing both them and the MGB operatives embroiled in a vicious, self-perpetuating cycle of revenge, with both sides committing brutalities against the civilian population. After Koliay's girlfriend is killed by the MGB and her entire family is deported, Koliay, blind with rage, murders a school teacher, sent to Bukovyna

¹⁰² Nowhere in her texts does Matios call the guerillas “UPA” (the Ukrainian Insurgent Army) but rather “those from the forest” or simply “the forest.” This is the name for the movement used by the locals at the time of its activity and until Ukraine's independence (mentioning “UPA” openly was unsafe).

from Central Ukraine, disregarding all the orders from his superiors. When Korneliya begs the commander not to execute Koliay for this crime, the former gives her a poignant answer:

...I don't want to walk around with a sin on my soul for the rest of my life. These times will pass—and someone, sometime in the future, will sort through our bones. I don't want them to be shaking with anger and cursing us. It would be good if white were white and black were black, but that's not the case. In this time, we've been deceived by so many from all sides that I don't want us to also deceive ourselves. (*The Nation* 108)

The perspective of the MGB officers and of other Soviet representatives on the violent conflict in Bukovyna is given in another story from the first cycle, “Yuryana and Dovhopol.” This text is based entirely on real events, with all central characters having real-life prototypes, including the Russian MGB operative Dolgopol and Matios's grandmother, who is the female protagonist in the story (*Vyrvani storinky* 282-4). The central motif is blood, which mediates the locals' and the Soviet representatives' understanding of who is *svii* [self] and who is *chuzhyi* [the other], but in the final scene, undermines the boundary between the two categories.

Although Yuryana is bleeding after yet another miscarriage, she shows up for work at her village's collective farm, in fear of being reprimanded by the strict supervisor from the MGB, Dovhopol. Called “Solomon” in the village for her sharp mind (including by Dovhopol himself), Yuryana nevertheless cannot understand what is happening in her community, with people “dying like flies”: “Brother has gone against brother. Alright, *these* are a different story, but brothers... *Svii* is going against *svii*! Till they bleed to death!” (45). Yuryana is referring to the local guerillas taking revenge on their own villagers for not supporting them, but “not everyone

can go to the forest,” she reasons (51). She and her husband, Ulasii, for example, have young children to support. When her husband is arrested though—ironically, on suspicion of having ties with the guerillas—Yuryana goes to Dovhopol rather than to anyone else to beg him to intercede for Ulasii, and Dovhopol makes sure Ulasii is freed. As Yuryana's bleeding gets worse, the Russian nurse Dusia, sent to Bukovyna with the Soviet administration, insists that she be taken to the regional hospital—in the same car as Dovhopol, who has been shot by the guerillas. Dusia thinks to herself that Yuryana should have come to her earlier, but many Hutsuls do not want to go see the nurse from Russia. “How do you explain to them that she wishes them well? (...) Dusia has gone through war and the blockade, and she knows that blood doesn't have a nation.” (54)

Dusia's important comment ushers in the last scene in the story, which is a stream-of-consciousness narration from the perspective of the MGB operative Didushenko, who is the head of the convoy accompanying the bleeding Dovhopol and Yuryana to the hospital. Didushenko cannot comprehend why Dusia and Dovhopol himself begged him to take Yuryana with them. He notes that he can look at Yuryana's blood, but not at Dovhopol's. He begs Dovhopol not to die, “or I will shoot all of these mountains of theirs, and no one will stop me!” (56) But at the same time, he wonders why there has been so much merciless killing on both sides, and as he watches the two wounded passengers, he sees only blood and no difference between them.

In a tendentious reading of *The Nation*, critic Irina Zherebkina identifies in the collection (which she mistakenly calls a novel) just “a rigid and uncompromising division of the world into ‘the self’ and ‘the other’” (156). Such a reading is possible only if one completely ignores positive (real-life) characters, such as Dusia, and the poetics of many stories. In fact, I have tried to show that one of Matios's chief goals is to undermine such a ‘rigid division,’ which the

brutality of war and the Soviet annexation, as well as the “census” mentality, have brought about in Bukovyna. Yet Matios does not posit an “inherently good” local population, which was somehow “spoiled” by the Soviet regime. For example, throughout the collection, there runs a subtle parallel between the drive of the new administration to gain total knowledge (and therefore total control) of the people and the area, and the locals' desire to know everything about everyone and spread rumors through their well-established gossip networks. Both are shown to have similarly devastating consequences (I will say more on this in the analysis of Matios's *Sweet Darusia*). Moreover, the collection's second cycle of stories, the action in which takes place in the peaceful times either before or after the tumultuous period of World War II and the ensuing Soviet incorporation of Bukovyna, establishes other parallels between the Soviet “census” mentality and the local approaches to life.

The story “Recognize Your Child,” for instance, which tells of an episode in one Bukovynian family's life at an unspecified time after the war, demonstrates the danger and folly of seeking a firm demarcation line between ‘the self’ and ‘the other’—especially in physical or racial terms. A drunken villager, nicknamed Tataryn, blurts out to Dmytro, the father of a Hutsul family, that the latter's oldest daughter looks remarkably like himself. While Dmytro's wife dismisses the comment as silly, her husband takes it to heart and begins to spend hours comparing the photos of himself and his daughter Tania, studying his face in the mirror and hers when she is asleep. He also spies on Tataryn in order to examine his appearance, even stealing his photograph for this purpose. The more he looks at the photos, the more likeness he sees between Tania and his offender: both he and Tania have blond hair, unlike anyone else in Dmytro's family. No longer able to bear the sight of this difference from the self, Dmytro makes his wife and both daughters wear identical white kerchiefs when at home. He becomes

withdrawn, loses interest in work, and finally slaps Tania on the face. The story ends with Dmytro's wife lamenting her husband's folly to his mother as Dmytro himself once again looks in the mirror. This time, the only things he sees there are “pain and fear” (171). This story is thus reminiscent of “Yuryana and Dovhopol”: both deconstruct the drive to fix the categories of ‘the self’ and ‘the other,’ so that it would be possible to “say of anything that it [i]s this, not that; it belong[s] here, not there” (Anderson 254).

If the collection's opening story dramatized the utter loss of the interconnected community life of various ethnic groups in a Bukovynian village, *The Nation's* final piece, “Don't Ever Cry for Me,” shows that the very principle of interconnectedness—even after the polarizing war and violence—has survived and continues to function in the post-Soviet present. The story is one long conversation, in *skaz*, between the old peasant woman Yustyna and the I-narrator, who elicits from the woman stories of the past while helping her air out the casket and other items Yustyna has been storing for many years in preparation for her death. Yustyna explains that despite the villagers' mocking and their children's protests, both she and her husband had their caskets made decades ago—because of uncertain times. In over 25 years since then, they both have “lent” their caskets dozens of times to various individuals and families in the village—for the burial of their relatives (all of whom died natural, not violent deaths). Yustyna's account thus becomes a mini-history of the village through stories of all the people who were buried in “their” caskets. Yet this history does not in the least sound morbid: it reflects Yustyna's very common-sense approach to life, of which death is a natural (and important) event. If anything, her account is amusing (chiefly because of the *skaz* narration) and instructive, as it turns out that “their” caskets became the final “home” for the bodies of all sorts of people: old and young, men and women, poor and well-to-do, Ukrainians and Gypsies, those working

directly for the Soviet regime and those harboring resentment towards it. In the story, the casket figures as the physical point of and the metaphor for interconnectedness; no one is refused the lending of the casket, not even the family of the deceased female head of the village council, against whom many in the village have a grudge for toeing the communist party line—“for although she was a head, but still a person” (178).

The narratives of death Yustyna gives are nothing like Anderson's “exemplary suicides, poignant martyrdoms, assassinations, executions,” which, according to him, make up a nation's biography and which were more prominent (but not the only ones) in the first cycle of Matios's collection. These deaths are not and cannot be ascribed a “national” meaning in Anderson's sense—as sacrifices for the nation, for example. Yet in *The Nation*, they are shown to be no less important and worthy of remembrance than the first type.

In a positive review of Matios's book, written for the Ukrainian leftist website HASLO, Iryna Chebotnikova finds it “paradoxical” that the main protagonists of *The Nation* are women, yet does not elaborate on their roles in the stories or on Matios's women-centered vision of “the nation.” What I see Yustyna and some other women characters in Matios's collection doing is providing a vital corrective to the narrow, masculinist view of the nation's biography described by Anderson. As historian Yaroslav Hrytsak points out and as *The Nation* poignantly shows on the example of Bukovyna, in Ukraine “the transition ‘from peasants to a nation’ occurred during wars and revolutions, and violence was among the main instruments of building a modern society” (94). This fact makes war an inevitable part of a foundational national narrative for modern Ukraine. Yet, as Yustyna's account shows, war does not make up the entire narrative.

In *The Nation*, women characters are also frequently the ones who reject the conception of national belonging in terms of a rigid and irreconcilable opposition between ‘the self’ and ‘the

other,' especially in exclusivist ethnic terms—like the Russian nurse Dusia, who makes the statement “that blood doesn't have a nation” (54). The collection itself shows women playing a variety of roles in their communities—from traditional to unconventional, and does not reduce its women characters to mere symbols of the nation. In Matios's “census,” women do not belong only to one or two categories: they appear everywhere and sometimes critique the categories themselves.

Although Matios's *The Nation* is entirely set in Bukovyna and predominantly elaborates a sense of local identity (reflecting the way in which much of Ukraine's rural population continues to think of themselves), what makes it relevant for all of contemporary Ukraine are the frequently touchy subjects, such as the UPA, on which the author offers her own perspective. Matios reveals and validates most guerilla fighters' desire to defend themselves and their families against the violent policies of the Soviet administration, but she does not gloss over their often brutal tactics and lack of tolerance for other points of view. In the end, *The Nation* does not suggest that we see today's Ukraine as “the child of Ukrainian nationalists”—one of the two lineage options mentioned by Marples and described earlier in this chapter. Neither, of course, does it approve the other option—that of “a descendent of the Soviet state.” Instead, it hints at the fact that both sides had a hand in the process of making Ukraine what it is today—but so did many ordinary women, whose voices Matios interjects into the national narrative.

Women on the Borders of the Nation: the Map of Ukraine in Matios's *Sweet Darusia* and Yevhenia Kononenko's *Imitation*

If *The Nation*, through its subject-matter and the fragmentary form of a short story collection, engaged with and deconstructed the Soviet census imaginings and the polarized

wartime opposition of the self and the other, the next two texts analyzed in this chapter are novels that scrutinize the peculiarities of the Ukrainian map, which acquired its present-day shape in the Soviet era. Matios's *Sweet Darusia* (2004), like *The Nation*, focuses on the incorporation of mostly rural Bukovyna into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic—a colonial map-making moment, while Yevhenia Kononenko's *Imitation* (2001) captures the Ukrainian elite's post-Soviet imaginings of the Ukrainian territory and its internal divisions, showing them to be an exaggerated reaction against the Soviet policies. Remarkably, both novels are built around a woman's death and tell their stories backwards, in agreement with Anderson's reverse poetics of a national narrative. In both, women's suffering and/or deaths are connected to the nation's borders, physically taking place on a boundary between two regions or in the liminal space of a railway station. These deaths also reveal much about how the real and imagined boundaries of and within Ukraine have come about, and the role gender can play in such processes.

The National Map and Its Boundaries in *Sweet Darusia*

In many ways, *Sweet Darusia*, Matios's most famous novel to date, continues and develops the major themes and narrative techniques of *The Nation*. It portrays the violent transformation of Bukovynian life as a result of World War II and the Soviet annexation of northern Bukovyna through the micro-lens of life in one village and through one family's history in particular. It re-visits the brutal confrontation between the Soviet MGB forces and the UPA guerilla fighters, and zeroes in on the fates and viewpoints of civilian peasants, caught in the middle of this conflict. And it pays very close attention to women's roles and voices in this dramatic moment of Ukrainian history. What appears to be a vital new element of this national

narrative, in comparison with the collection of stories, is its intense focus on the borders and boundaries—physical, moral, and symbolic—as well as their breaking and their constitution.

As Francine Hirsch has detailed in her articles on the formation of the Soviet Union, the internal borders between the constituent Soviet republics were based on the census determinations of nationalities—not for the sake of nation-making itself, but “with the aim of consolidating the Soviet state” (“Toward an Empire of Nations,” 209). Soviet government officials decided “that borders drawn along national or ethnic lines would be more durable than those established according to natural geographic boundaries or economic principles” (Hirsch “The Soviet Union as a Work-in-Progress,” 252). During and after World War II, however, the Soviet government aptly deployed the nationality rhetoric and presented itself as a “defender” of the national rights of its republics on the international scene in order to justify its territorial gains. The Soviet annexation of Western Ukrainian lands, including northern Bukovyna, in which ethnic Ukrainians constituted a majority, was externally presented as the historically just “reunification” of Eastern and Western Ukrainian brothers. As Matios shows both in *The Nation* and in *Sweet Darusia*, to simple peasants in the remote, mountainous regions of Bukovyna, this “reunification” looked just like another regime change—but this time much more violent. As the physical borders between states were redrawn, all kinds of moral boundaries were crossed and many people, especially women, were pushed to their limit.

Sweet Darusia tells a fictional story (but with some real-life prototypes) of one family deeply traumatized as a result of the Soviet takeover of Bukovyna. In the novel’s center stands Darusia, a mute woman who lives in the predominantly Hutsul village of Cheremoshne in northern Bukovyna. Darusia is nicknamed “sweet” by the villagers because of her pathological reaction to offers of candy: for days afterwards, she suffers from excruciating headaches and

does not leave her hut. The text is a retrospective narrative in three parts (called “dramas”): the first two show Darusia's difficult daily life in her community in the unspecified present, with many mocking her and calling her dumb or crazy, and the last and longest part reveals the history behind Darusia's trauma. In 1940, just before the first Soviet occupation of Bukovyna and right on the then border between the Western Ukrainian regions belonging to Poland and Romania—along which the village Cheremoshne was located—a Ukrainian MGB officer captured Darusia's mother Matronka and, during the lengthy process of interrogation, tortured and raped her, releasing her only on condition that she would not say a word about what had happened. In the late 1940s, when the Soviet troops occupied the village the second time, Darusia was a ten year-old child. Striving to find out whether Darusia's father had cooperated with the UPA guerilla fighters, one of the officers (the same one who had raped her mother) extracted the truth out of Darusia by luring her with candy. After Darusia had told him how during the night her father Mykhailo was giving food to the UPA partisans, her family faced a likely deportation to the Siberia. Darusia's mother, who recognized her torturer, finally confessed about the rape to her husband and hanged herself the next night out of hopelessness and despair. Darusia, who had witnessed her mother's suicide, became mute and terrified of candy and anyone in military uniform for the rest of her life.

The liminal physical setting of this tragic story—the banks of the Cheremosh river, which marked the border between Poland and Romania before World War II and divided two Hutsul villages, both named Cheremoshne—defines the novel's central preoccupation with boundaries. The redrawing of boundaries takes place first of all in the geographical and political sense. In the course of World War II, the two villages are occupied at different times by different forces, which as the novel shows, brings confusion and all kinds of suffering to the civilian population.

Darusia's mother Matronka is captured by the Soviet MGB and taken for interrogation across the border into the Soviet-occupied Cheremoshne on the Polish side while her own village is still under Romanian control. With the first Soviet occupation of Cheremoshne on the other bank, all the Jewish businesses, such as the tavern and the mill, are forced to close, and several Ukrainian village activists are arrested and their families deported. With the beginning of the German-Soviet war, the Bukovynian Cheremoshne is occupied by Romanians, briefly by Germans, then their Hungarian allies, and finally by the Soviets again. In the chaos of these border re-drawings, moral boundaries collapse. Some locals from the village participate in the lootings of homes of the deported families and of those Jews who managed to escape, and the Jewish taverns are all burnt down. Some villagers also prove quite adept at serving whatever regime is currently in power: as Matronka notices to her dismay when the Germans enter the village, the local who comes out to greet them with the traditional Ukrainian bread and salt is the same man who had aided the Soviets in her capture. With the Soviet annexation of the Bukovynian Cheremoshne, one of the village's favorite past-times—gossiping—is often put at the service of the MGB, which seeks to stamp out the guerilla resistance. Thus, Matronka's husband, Mykhailo, gets in trouble with the MGB when a “kind” neighbor informs on him.

The personal drama of Darusia's family takes place against the background of this border dissolution and boundary collapse. However, Matios shows that while some boundaries disappear, others are constituted. National imaginings and brutal technologies of power, brought into Cheremoshne by war, draw sharp national fault lines, including right through women's bodies, which in this new discourse come to symbolically represent their community and its territory. In *Boundary Politics: Women, Nationalism and Danger*, Jan Jindy Pettman describes how the pervasive gendered imagining of the nation and its land as female endangers women

especially during war, when they become “terribly vulnerable to rape in war, both as spoils of war and as ways of getting at ‘other men's women’” (189). Such rape is both a technology of war and, because of the equation of woman with the nation, a symbolic act of taking control over the Other.¹⁰³

Matronka's torture and rape by the MGB officer, some details of which Matios took from real life,¹⁰⁴ may be read in such terms: committed right before the first Soviet takeover of the Bukovynian Cheremoshne, it is meant both as a means of intimidation and an assertion of control over the territory across the bank and its population. It later also makes Matronka a victim of her husband's suspicions and violence, when during the Romanian occupation the officials tell him that he is considered unreliable because of the dubious circumstances under which Matronka had disappeared, hinting that they suspect her of sexual contact with the enemy. The same day, Mykhailo for the first time in his life brutally beats his wife, tying her to the bench with her long, thick braid—the quintessential symbol of femininity in rural Ukraine. The narrator tells us that Mykhailo is guided in this violence by one thought—“that his wife has been in the hands of another—*foreign*—man” (emphasis mine; 144). This explanation points to the fact that Matronka's supposed adultery is perceived by Mykhailo not simply as an affront to his own honor, but also to that of his community. As this episode shows, even the best among the Cheremoshne villagers, most of whom, including Mykhailo, do not appear to think in national terms before the war, adopt polarized national imaginings in its course—and women's bodies come to mark the symbolic boundaries between national communities in such imaginings.

¹⁰³ James Messerschmidt, among others, writes of the widespread use of mass rape in World War II, both by Nazi and Soviet troops. In particular, he analyzes motivations behind the mass rapes of German women in Berlin by the Red Army soldiers in 1945, concluding that they “functioned (...) to establish masculine domination over Other women, Other men, and the Other nation” and “to frighten and intimidate the Berlin civilian population” (710).

¹⁰⁴ In her *Pages Torn out of an Autobiography*, Matios writes about her aunt Hafiia, the mother of a one-year old at the time when she was interrogated and tortured by the MGB—in ways similar to Matronka (126).

Matronka is an innocent victim of this rapid constitution of gendered symbolic national boundaries. Through her character, Matios reveals women's frequently complicated positioning in and vis-à-vis the nation. While the novel clearly suggests that the brutalities of war and the Soviet occupation were primarily to blame for Matronka's suffering, it also implicates Matronka's own husband and her community in it. In the end, after Matronka's rapist elicits from her daughter incriminating information against her parents, Matronka finally tells her husband about the rape and later commits suicide. Her death may seem to qualify as one of Anderson's "poignant suicides"—those which become important for a national narrative—yet Matios makes it difficult to incorporate it into an unproblematic narrative of national martyrdom by showing the complicity of those closest to Matronka in her death. Significantly, the author does it in part by giving voice to Matronka herself and letting her interpret her suffering. These are Matronka's last words in direct speech before she hangs herself, and they take a form of a kind of desperate verbal revolt against Mykhailo and the religious values of their village community, which Matronka now cannot reconcile with what had happened to her:

What did I do to God that he sent my torturer today into my home? I thought that for my suffering my torturer has rotted away long ago, and today he made me an enemy out of my child? So where is God? Did he go blind, Mykhailo, when I so ardently prayed to him all my life, and he even took your sanity because you beat me as cattle, and I had to keep quiet?! (172)

Matronka's passionate speech reveals her utter despair, and her suicide becomes the only way she sees of getting out of her position of a complete victim. She hangs herself using instead

of a rope her braid—that symbol of Ukrainian femininity—as if to suggest being strangled by her gender. Her speech precludes an ascription to her death of a “positive” national meaning—that of a heroic or tragic sacrifice for the sake of the nation. Likewise, Matronka's speech, as well as the fact that her death is a suicide, makes it impossible to see this character as a mere symbol of her nation. Thus, despite sharing the name with Solzhenitsyn's Matryona, Matronka plays a very different role in Matios's narrative. If anything, Matronka's death appears to be a protest against the symbolic national order that is being constituted—in which her body is constructed as a symbolic boundary between national communities.

The novel's central character, Darusia, whose trauma is caused by her inadvertent betrayal of her parents and the witnessing of the horrible scene of her mother's suicide, seems to invite a more symbolic reading. As literary scholar Myroslav Shkandrij has recently suggested, “Darusia's muteness becomes a symbol of a traumatized generation unable, or unwilling, to relate its experiences.” (226) This trauma thus can be seen as yet another boundary with roots in the wartime and post-war events in Bukovyna—a barrier between those who witnessed the colonial map-making process in Western Ukraine and their descendants, who knew nothing about the nature of this process until recently.¹⁰⁵

Yet Darusia is also a highly individualized character, to whom Matios gives voice, literally, all through the first part of the novel: her present-day life in the village is narrated in free indirect discourse almost entirely from mute Darusia's perspective. As Elleke Boehmer notes, the figure of “the dumb, oppressed body” is ubiquitous in colonial as well as postcolonial literature, with the latter attempting to grant this body opportunities for “self-articulation” and

¹⁰⁵ In *Pages Torn out of the Autobiography*, Matios writes that she grew up almost ignorant of the real World War II events in her village and Bukovyna in general. Her grandparents, and especially her grandmother, were afraid to tell the truth to their children and grandchildren. She began to learn these historical facts and collect oral histories in rural Bukovyna only in the late 1980s.

“self-expression” (127, 131). Matios's novel is a similar attempt, in which Darusia gains a modicum of agency by reinterpreting her muteness as a voluntary decision on her part not to speak: “She doesn’t know how to live among people *with her language*. The people themselves made her stop speaking. And now let them tolerate her muteness.” (Emphasis in the original; 31) Darusia's interior monologue of the novel's first part is also a narrative technique that allows Matios to offer a defamiliarizing, non-national perspective on the Ukrainian past and present: to Darusia's childlike mind, there is no difference between the MGB officers who caused her trauma decades ago and her present-day villagers, many of whom taunt her and call her a fool—all of them are simply “people” [*liudy*] with whom she does not want to talk. Matios thus empowers Darusia's character by making her position one of valuable cultural critique. Like in *The Nation*, the picture of the past which emerges from this position is far from being black-and-white.

As Catherine Nash has theorized using the example of Ireland, the “tension between the assertion of national identity in the postcolonial nation and the presence of the female subaltern can be paraphrased as a problematic relationship between the map and the body” (39). In *Sweet Darusia*, the story of the violent making of the Ukrainian map, which could be interpreted or refashioned as a narrative of national martyrdom, is disrupted by the presence of two female subaltern bodies—the traumatized one of Darusia and the dead one of Matronka. But the disrupting power of these two figures comes from the fact that Matios has given each of them a voice in the novel, which presents a differing perspective on the past. In the novel's reception, which has been very positive in Ukraine and beyond—with the novel earning the Taras Shevchenko National Prize in 2005 and the title of “The Most Widely Read Book in 2007” in Ukraine—the authenticity of these voices, however, has not always been preserved. For example,

in one of the stage adaptations of *Sweet Darusia* (by the Chernivtsi Music and Drama Theater), neither Matronka's protesting speech nor Darusia's inner monologues appear at all. The latter, of course, are extremely difficult to transfer to the stage, especially because the character is mute. Nevertheless, their absence and other subtle shifts of emphasis practically remove Matios's gendered critique of the nation from the work, making it into a national narrative that, in Anderson's parlance, "remembers/forgets" Matronka's suicide and Darusia's trauma as "our own."

Post-Soviet Postcolonial Desire and Ukraine's Internal Other in *Imitation*

Like *Sweet Darusia*, Yevhenia Kononenko's murder mystery *Imitation* (2001) examines the imaginings of Ukraine's national map and does it through a narrative that works its way backwards to discover the circumstances of a woman's death. However, if Matios's novel is an "archeology" of a historical trauma that occurred in rural Western Ukraine, Kononenko's novel is a contemporary detective investigation of a Kyiv-based female intellectual's murder, which happened in an Eastern Ukrainian provincial town. While the two works could not be more different in setting or literary style, their similar thematic preoccupations and structural parallels make for a useful comparison and justify including them in the same section. In fact, reading *Imitation* right after *Sweet Darusia* brings into focus a telling and very ironic reversal, which took place in Ukraine when it gained independence in 1991. If in the 1940s the Soviet state sought to radically transform the consciousness of Western Ukrainians and "Sovietize" them, fifty years later the pro-democratic and pro-European post-Soviet elite attempted to Europeanize Ukraine's Eastern regions, which were perceived as the most Soviet. And if in *Sweet Darusia* the agents of change are military men, who act through violence and terror, in *Imitation*, the chief

agent of change is a single-minded woman intellectual, who works with the help of European grants. Her murder and its subsequent investigation reveal deep internal fissures within Ukraine, but also invite the post-Soviet Ukrainian reader to critically examine his/her own national imaginings of contemporary Ukraine's territory.

Despite the post-Soviet boom in detective fiction by women writers, Kononenko's *Imitation* cannot be categorized together with the wildly popular murder mysteries by the Russian authors Aleksandra Marinina and Daria Dontsova. Some critics have called *Imitation* a “bestseller for the ‘elite’” and the well-known Ukrainian literary scholar Maksym Strikha even suggested that this work is a detective novel only to the degree that Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What Is To Be Done?* or Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* may be considered detective fiction (Solovey 58; Strikha). Although Strikha's statement is an exaggeration, Kononenko's novel certainly puts the detective genre to a very special use—as a literary device to paint a broad panorama of the Ukrainian post-Soviet era and to engage in a cultural critique of Ukraine's intellectual elite and their national imaginings. As I will highlight at times throughout this section, the conventions of popular detective fiction—and even more so, the subversive modifications of these conventions—have greatly aided Kononenko in accomplishing these goals.

In *Imitation*, a smart, self-made Ukrainian woman from Kyiv, Maryana Khrypovych, who works for a Ukrainian branch of the non-profit Western foundation *Gifted Child International*, is run over by a freight train in a provincial Eastern Ukrainian town. Unlike Anna Karenina, however (whom the text playfully references in this and other aspects), Maryana is pushed under the train by an angry 12-year-old boy, who had failed to trick Ms. Khrypovych into sponsoring his supposedly talented handicapped sister. The boy shows Maryana a few paintings,

which he created himself by imitating a young local talent, already supported by the foundation, and presents them as his sister's, but Maryana rejects them as atrocious, laughable imitation. For this rejection, she pays with her life. On the surface of it, Maryana's death looks tragic and perhaps even heroic—as a tireless worker for the benefit of Ukraine's advancement and the better future of its talented young generation, she perishes “in the line of duty,” so to speak. Kyiv's intellectual circles mourn her death as a “national” loss. Yet the novel prevents the emplotment of Maryana's death into the national narrative as a heroic sacrifice for the nation. Instead, it subtly turns the investigation of Maryana's murder into a critical examination of post-Soviet Ukraine's prevalent national discourses.

Maryana's murder, motivated by fury at the “arrogant” lady from Kyiv who works for “the rich Americans” but refuses to help the provincial boy's family out of their desperate poverty, occurs in the context of the early post-Soviet 1990s. The collapse of the Soviet economic system, the onslaught of wild capitalism, and the renewed contacts with the West in this period enabled the rise of new elites in Ukraine while at the same time plunging the majority of the population into destitution. In *Imitation*, Kyiv emerges as the base of Ukraine's new intellectual elite and the new center, which replaces Moscow, the old colonial center. However, as it soon becomes obvious, most new ideas, policies, programs, and cultural forms spreading in Ukraine originate not in Kyiv, but in the West. Rather than showing Ukraine's Westernization to be the result of cultural imperialism, the novel identifies Kyiv's new elite, and Maryana as one of its unmistakable representatives, as the driving force behind it—and gives much insight into what I term here as *the post-Soviet postcolonial desire* of Ukraine's intellectual elite, which accounts for their “love affair” with the West. As *Imitation* shows, this is a desire for

“authenticity,” which, paradoxically, gets realized through imitation. It is this desire which ultimately causes Maryana's demise.

To Maryana Khrypovych—a new Ukrainian woman intellectual—whose sudden death sets the novel's action in motion, there was absolutely nothing worse than imitation: she herself was a master at distinguishing between what was genuine and what was imitated, be it art, foreign wine, or precious jewels such as her pre-revolution emerald ring, with which she never parted. Maryana's job at *Gifted Child International* consisted in finding *real* talents among Ukrainian children in the provinces and supporting their work as well as sometimes sending them to the West to get an education. Maryana's abhorrence of imitation stemmed partly from the “imitation epidemic” that had seized the post-Soviet Ukrainian society in which she lived: she saw most of the Kyiv elite as “pseudo-intellectual nobodies,” capable only of pushing and shoving at various presentations and other social gatherings, lured there by the free reception fare (*Imitation* 7, 14). In this vast sea of imitators, whose behavior Maryana viewed as a peculiar characteristic of *homo sovieticus*, used to getting everything for free, Maryana prided herself on standing out as a real scholar, a genuine European intellectual, and a connoisseur of true talent.

Maryana's obsession with authenticity and the West as her model may be understood as a specifically post-Soviet desire that is also postcolonial: this is the desire explained by David Chioni Moore in “Is the Post- in Postcolonial the Post- in Post-Soviet? Toward a Global Postcolonial Critique” and briefly discussed in Chapter 1. While summarizing the findings of different colonization scholars about the people who have undergone lengthy subjugation, Moore pointed out two types of “compensatory behavior” in which such people tend to engage: 1) “an exaggerated desire for authentic sources” of their own past and identity; and 2) “mimicry, (...)”

when subjugated peoples come to crave the dominating cultural form” (118). Moore then argues that these two behaviors are strangely combined in the post-Soviet case:

This postcolonial compensatory tug plays out differently in post-Soviet space, since postcolonial desire from Riga to Almaty fixates not on the fallen master Russia but on the glittering Euramerican MTV-and-Coca-Cola beast that broke it. Central and Eastern Europeans type this desire as a return to Westernness that once was theirs. Any traveler to the region quickly learns that what for forty years was called “East Bloc” is rather “Central Europe.” (118)

In other words, a yearning to claim as one’s own “authentic source” of identity the Europe that was for decades inaccessible because of the Iron Curtain paradoxically results in many post-Soviet countries (including Ukraine) in the mimicry of the West, which, in turn, is nothing else but “a headlong westward sprint from colonial Russia’s ghost or grasp,” as Moore puts it (118).

Moore’s perceptive observation explains a lot of Maryana’s actions and choices: her “super-Euro-apartment where Maryana decisively eliminated the kitchen as an element of the Soviet philistine subculture”; her many sojourns abroad during which she absorbed as much of Western knowledge as possible, resulting in her distinctly un-Soviet book, *The Devil in the 20th-Century World Culture* (as well as in her ability to buy that super-apartment in the center of Kyiv); her shocking pseudo-feminist pronouncements that love does not exist; and even the name she chose for her son whom she sent to study abroad—Yurii—“so that even the sound of his name would usher him into the European context because in English that continent’s name is pronounced ‘Yurop,’ *Europe*” (emphasis in the original; 66, 46, 107). The post-Soviet

postcolonial desire also explains Maryana's vision of the mission of *Gifted Child International*: unlike her friend and colleague, Sashko Chekanchuk, who wanted the foundation to support children's art and music institutions, “Maryana thought that such an approach would be Soviet-style leveling [*sovko* *zrivnialivka*], that the goal of the foundation was not to give social aid but to support the best of talents—that is, big grants for the most gifted, their personal exhibitions, concerts, their studies at prestigious schools...” (76)

The reader gets Maryana's psychological portrait from her three friends—Ukrainian intellectuals from Kyiv, a lot like her—who are the novel's chief narrators and agents: they reminisce about Maryana as they write her obituaries, puzzled by her mysterious death, and finally decide to undertake a private investigation to learn what had really happened to their resourceful and tenacious friend in that remote provincial town in the Donetsk region. In the course of their investigation, the readers gradually discover that Maryana's principled commitment to “authenticity” in some cases was less than principled, and that her desire for European values produced some doubtful results. For example, after many years abroad, her son Yurii had become what Maryana's friend Chekanchuk described as “a real specimen of *European upbringing*” (107). He changed his name to George Moldanski, forgot his Ukrainian, and came to resemble most of all Maryana's pragmatic American boss and boyfriend with a telling name, Jerry Bist (Beast). “[I]f Yura-George is a real value, then I, in my forty years of life, haven't understood a thing about this world and its values,” remarks Chekanchuk gloomily at one point (107).

Most importantly, what Maryana seemed not to notice, but what is revealed with increasing clarity as the investigation progresses, is that her “headlong westward sprint from the colonial Russia's ghost,” to use again Moore's formulation, has led her to adopt a completely out-

of-touch perspective from which she views her foundation work in the Eastern Ukrainian provinces. In fact, this is the perspective of her foreign boss and his superiors in London, who have their own agenda and care about the local circumstances only to the degree to which these circumstances could hinder the achievement of the foundation's goals. For instance, Maryana's friend Ryzhenko recalls her complaint about the difficulties in working out an efficient strategy for the foundation's work:

Usually, in order to discover gifted children in the countries of *the Third World*, information on grants is sent to art and music schools, municipal councils and religious communities, and the data from there is sent to the Headquarters. But in Ukraine this strategy doesn't work because everyone *is very clever and all are used to getting a free ride*. They are flooded with absolutely irrelevant applications and were forced to take on two more employees who handle nothing else but rejections, after which they receive complaints and sometimes even threats. (First emphasis in the original, then mine; 10-11)

Maryana's overwhelming concern for lessening the workload of the Headquarters and her own branch to the exclusion of local needs, which are dismissed with a disdainful characterization of her compatriots as 'very clever' [*duzhe hramotni*] and used to 'a free ride' [*na khaliavu*], speak volumes of her priorities. As the novel makes clear, the local needs in the provinces are usually very basic, and the foundation's goals are often a good match for these needs only by accident, as in the case of the funeral the foundation had held once upon the death of their young beneficiary from a provincial town: "*Gifted Child International* (...) sponsored the funeral dinner in the town cafeteria, and there was a lot of food, and children got chocolate bars, and all the local

inhabitants were very grateful to the young deceased boy because everyone ate their fill and took food home. The half-starved God-forsaken little town in the Kharkiv region hasn't had such a nutritious meal in a long time.” (17-8)

Even Maryana's repeated talent scouting trips into the Eastern Ukrainian provinces, during which she had a chance to observe their life up close, did not seem to alter her perspective. Her death results largely from her insensitivity and even contempt for the horrifying conditions of life in these provinces. However, the readers get their own chance to become familiar with the provincial life during the investigation, which takes Maryana's friends into the heart of the local needs and problems. Setting a lot of her detective novel in the provinces of the Donets'k region was an important choice on the part of Kononenko; as Stephen Knight writes in *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction*, “[s]election of setting is a crucial ideological feature in crime fiction” (94). Knight uses the example of the Sherlock Holmes stories to demonstrate how the setting can be used for conservative ends: “The real threat to respectable life posed by the grim areas where the working-class and the ‘dangerous classes’ lived is thoroughly subdued. (...) When the plot needs to recognise such people and such areas, which is not often, Holmes goes among them, frequently in disguise, but the story does not go with him.” (94) This omission allows the Holmes stories to preserve for their middle-class readership a comforting illusion of safety in their city. Kononenko, by contrast, takes a significant portion of her story to these “grim areas” of Eastern Ukraine and lets her readers see them, albeit through the eyes of the Kyiv elite. From their perspective, which is informed by their post-Soviet postcolonial desire (and this desire itself is shown to have a strong class underpinning), provincial towns in Eastern Ukraine and their population look like the epitome of “Sovietness”:

Despite the fact that Novozhakhiv (New Horrorville) recently celebrated its 250th anniversary, no traces of its past as an old district town have been preserved. There were a few nondescript five-storied apartment blocks and your standard *mis'vykonkom* (town executive committee), department store, and a recreation center—all made out of concrete. The rest of the town consisted of village-type houses, varied in the level of shabbiness they displayed. From the bus station, Chekanchuk set out immediately for the NCAC—the New Horrorville Children's Art Center, with the director of which, Maria Vasylivna, he was acquainted—she had come to Kyiv before to seek the support of the foundation. At the NCAC, they had already heard about the death in Kombinatne and didn't know how to react—whether to invite a priest to sprinkle the premises with holy water or to hold a moment of silence. So for now they haven't done anything—they were waiting for instructions [*chekaly vkazivky*]. Chekanchuk explained that their foundation wasn't an *oblvno* (the regional administration of people's education) and therefore it couldn't give relevant instructions. (31)

Kononenko might have overdone it a bit by naming the town Novozhakhiv (New Horrorville), but this is exactly how Maryana and her friends perceive it—as almost an alternative, surreal post-Soviet reality, depressing in its poverty, dirt, ideological confusion and, as later episodes reveal, disease and crime. Through scenes like the one above, given from the Kyiv elite's perspective, Eastern Ukrainian provinces emerge as “European” Ukraine's still-Soviet, and therefore backward, internal Other.¹⁰⁶ This becomes clear even from the humorous detail about

¹⁰⁶ That this vision has a strong basis in reality is clear from scholarship about regional identity in Ukraine by historians and political scientists. Kataryna Wolczuk, for example, writes about the still existing Soviet “regional identity” of Donbas, an Eastern Ukrainian region that includes the Donets'k *oblast*, “which played the role of a shop

the Center's baffled reaction to Maryana's death, when the Center employees hesitate about which ideological model to apply to the situation—the Soviet one or the Christian one (in fact, neither would be appropriate for Maryana). Tellingly, their “default” response is to “wait for instructions” from the authorities—a typically subservient Soviet reaction.

It is interesting that the Otherness of Eastern Ukrainian provinces in the eyes of the Kyiv elite in *Imitation* is constructed in terms of “Sovietness,” provinciality and class rather than ethnicity. Although one important difference of Eastern Ukraine (and as well as Southern Ukraine and the Crimea) from Western and Central Ukraine is a greater concentration of ethnic Russians and predominant use of Russian there, language is not an issue in the novel. Characters from the Eastern provinces speak *surzhyk* (a mixture of Russian and Ukrainian) or try to speak grammatically correct Ukrainian for the sake of the visitors, but this is not what makes them the Other in the Kyiv elite's perspective—most likely because Kyiv itself is both Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking. In a paper from the mid-2000s, John Paul Himka has called the “identity formation” he saw taking root in Kyiv at the time “the Euro-Ukrainian identity” (495). The name is very fitting for Kononenko's portrayal of the Kyiv elite in *Imitation*. Ultimately, it is this identity and the post-Soviet postcolonial desire underpinning it, as well as the class-based discursive construction of the Eastern provinces as Ukraine's internal Other, that are the central object of Kononenko's critique in the novel. Yet she puts forth this critique in an unusual way, making use of a special subgenre of detective fiction.

Carl Malmgren, a scholar of murder fiction, subdivides this popular literature genre into three types—mystery fiction, detective fiction, and crime fiction—according to their “narrative dominants” (118). If mystery fiction focuses on “the investigation and solution of the mystery

window of Soviet communism” (673). At the same time, she argues that in contemporary Ukrainian nation-building, “the idea of Europe and, more generally, the West plays a pivotal role” (676).

(...) generated by an initial crime” and detective fiction “foregrounds the actions and adventures of the investigating hero,” the narrative dominant of crime fiction “is the character of its central protagonist” who is usually “implicated in the crime” and from whose perspective the narrative “unfolds” (121, 127). Because the readers are given no other perspective, they are forced to identify with the “the problematic Self” of crime fiction, becoming “the narrative's accomplice” (129-30). This makes a work of crime fiction, as Malmgren explains, “more a subject to be experienced, less an object to be known” and creates a reading experience that “is decidedly disturbing, disquieting, even disorienting.” (131)

Imitation is a subtle example of crime fiction, as defined by Malmgren. It gives almost all of the narrating authority to Maryana's three friends—Kyiv intellectuals who conduct the investigation. The reader has no choice but to identify with them and with the play of their post-Soviet postcolonial desire, which makes them see the Eastern provinces as Ukraine's internal Other. Although they see the poverty-stricken post-Soviet life in these provinces up close, they do not engage in any social analysis of these circumstances, which is something rarely done in conventional detective stories anyways. As William Stowe explains, in classical examples of the detective genre, “...crime is usually seen as a symptom of personal evil rather than social injustice,” therefore a detective story “celebrates community by defining it as a relatively innocent ‘we’ over against a clearly guilty ‘other’” (570, 574).

In the end, these Kyiv intellectuals interpret Maryana's murder as the result of the young boy's personal pathologies, caused in part by his poverty, in which, however, they do not seem to notice much “social injustice” (Stowe, 570). The final scenes of the novel take place back in Kyiv, with their little investigative community gathered over a festive meal, celebrating the New Year and the successful conclusion of their so-called search for truth. As they discuss the

disappearance of the little criminal and benevolently pronounce: “let him go on living, if he can...” (Kononenko, 179), there is no doubt that they see themselves “as a relatively innocent ‘we’ over against a clearly guilty ‘other’,” as Stowe put it. It is at this point especially that the reader's identification with them feels most disturbing, jolting him/her out of the easy, escapist mode of reading for which conventional murder mysteries are intended.

Thus, *Imitation* not simply makes visible the internal boundaries on the map of independent Ukraine, but also makes the reader experience the disquieting and indeed dangerous psychological dynamics of othering, which creates and maintains such boundaries. Maryana ends up being murdered on such an internal boundary of her own making—between her (imagined) “Euro-Ukraine” and the hopelessly backward and still-Soviet Eastern Ukrainian provinces. This boundary is symbolically represented by the liminal space of the train tracks, leading from New Horrorville back to Kyiv.

The novel shows Maryana to be at once a victim and a perpetrator—a complex female character who is an active, if misguided, producer of her national culture. It is, of course, profoundly ironic though that Maryana's efforts on behalf of her nation turn out to be not original, but rather a rather poor imitation of Western models.¹⁰⁷ In this respect, *Imitation* appears to present the post-Soviet equivalent of postcolonial mimic men (as first portrayed in *Mimic Men* by the postcolonial writer V.S. Naipaul) —except it places in its center a mimic woman. What this woman mimics, among other things, are the Western feminist ideas about women's emancipation, career focus, and sexual liberation, but with them, she also adopts some of the elitist bias of Western feminism and the occasional tendency to uncritically apply Western feminist models to the post-Soviet space. Kononenko, who considers herself a feminist, is not

¹⁰⁷ For a detailed explanation of nationalism ascribing to women a role of cultural reproducers, rather than producers of new cultural meanings, see Chapter 1.

making fun of Western feminism in this novel—instead she simply demonstrates the foolishness of blind imitation of any kinds of behavioral models from elsewhere, without taking into account the local circumstances.

Unearthing Ukraine's “Album of Ancestors” in Oksana Zabuzhko's Museum-Novel

Out of the four foundational national narratives examined in this chapter, Zabuzhko's *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* (2009) is not only the longest and most ambitious, but also the most mythical. It comes closest to Anderson's definition of a national biography, which through a kind of “archeological” writing from the present into the past unearths deaths, to which it ascribes a “national” meaning, remembering them as “our own.” It is also an attempt at a Ukrainian national romance—à la the Latin American foundational fictions examined by Doris Sommer: the novel's central plotline brings together a woman from Central Ukraine and a man from Western Ukraine in a happy and sexually fulfilling union (a far cry from Zabuzhko's *Fieldwork!*) that is clearly meant to cement in the reader's imagination a symbolic vision of Ukraine as one, unified national community. What makes this national narrative more ambiguous and interesting is its critical inquiry into how history is produced—via this novel's engagement with the concepts and institutions of the museum and the archive. In the process, Zabuzhko's text highlights not only the subjective and necessarily incomplete nature of history, but also the national imaginary's dependence on imaginative literature, especially if it is the national imaginary of a postcolonial nation. The novel's second point of interest for the purposes of this project is Zabuzhko's construction of Ukraine's Soviet past and post-Soviet present as one continuous gendered history, in which many men have usurped and abused positions of power. This section will explore how the first of these two preoccupations relates to Zabuzhko's

mythical and heroic national narrative, and the next chapter will revisit Zabuzhko's mammoth text and deal with the novel's construction of Soviet/post-Soviet history as a gendered history—while placing it in a comparative framework with one Russian woman writer's national narrative.

By her own admission, Zabuzhko conceived *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets* (hereafter *Museum*) as a novel about “the connection of the times” (Teren). Indeed, this 821-page text weaves together several storylines that unfold in Ukraine between the 1940s and the early 2000s and bridges the Soviet/post-Soviet divide through a focus on its characters' daily lives, their perceptions of the present, and their memories and explorations of the past. To a large extent, *Museum* combines most of the historical and present-day themes of the three previous works (wartime and postwar conflict between the UPA and the Soviet MGB in Western Ukraine, Ukraine's ethnic and regional diversity, and divisive past, women's roles as subjects in history, Kyiv's Euro-Ukrainian identity, etc.), and adds many other ones. In this sense, Zabuzhko's text is truly a monumental and “national” work—in what I see as a new hybrid genre of a museum-novel.

In *Stalinist Cinema and the Production of History*, Evgeny Dobrenko theorizes the museum's handling of history and argues that “[t]he museum is above all not a collection but a composition—a conception of the past, an ideological montage. The fundamental characteristic of all the functions of the museum is the appropriation of history...” (8). By its very title, Zabuzhko's novel claims the museum's appropriative power regarding the past, and because it is a self-proclaimed “museum,” the novel accesses and constructs history primarily by meditating and commenting on various real objects from the past, especially photographs. By doing so, it strives for “authenticity,” appearing to subscribe to Walter Benjamin's argument that “History

does not break down into stories but into images” (quoted in White, 66). However, because it is, after all, a novel, it uses the photographs and other artifacts which it “puts on display” as starting points for story-telling. Out of them, through her characters' story-telling and their narratives about how these stories were or could not be unearthed, Zabuzhko fashions for contemporary Ukraine what Anderson called a common “album of ancestors,” which, however, is necessarily—and explicitly—fragmentary. This is the chief difference between Zabuzhko's *Museum* and conventional historical museums, especially those of the Soviet era: while the latter tend to present a comprehensive narrative—with gaps disguised by what Dobrenko calls “ideological montage,” the former underscores both the gaps and many of the techniques of putting a narrative together.

Museum focuses on the stories from three generations that lived in Ukraine between mid-20th and the early 21st century, and in most of these stories women are central characters. These narratives are pieced together by the novel's protagonist—the Ukrainian television journalist, Daryna Hoshchyns'ka, who is on a personal mission to uncover various buried and abandoned secrets of her own and her nation's past. The more important among these include: the personality of Daryna's deceased father, a talented Kyiv architect who was placed in the Soviet psychiatric clinic as punishment for his repeated attempts to defend to the authorities in Moscow the initial project of the Kyiv concert hall, known as Palace “Ukraine”¹⁰⁸; the circumstances behind the car accident that killed Daryna's lifelong female friend and famous Ukrainian painter, Vladyslava, in the late 1990s; and a curious photograph from the 1940s portraying a group of the

¹⁰⁸ According Zabuzhko, who has stated in interviews that the story of the concert hall was based on real events, Palace ‘Ukraine’ was first built in the 1970s upon the approval of the project in Moscow; however, when the local authorities realized that the Palace turned out to be more opulent than the Kremlin Palace of Congresses in Moscow, they shut it down ‘for repairs,’ stripped it of its elegant furnishings, reopened and placed the blame for this ‘oversight’ on the project's architects.

UPA partisans and prominently featuring a woman among the male insurgents. In the novel's various chapters, dubbed "halls" (as in 'museum halls'), some of the mysteries get solved, some receive only hypothetical or even mystical explanations, and some remain locked forever, to the chagrin of the curious and very enterprising Daryna.

What Zabuzhko's "museum" then strives to put on display is not a totalizing knowledge of the past, but rather the very process by which partial knowledge of the past may or may not be discovered. The point of access to this knowledge is seemingly insignificant objects, memories, and scraps of writing. Thus, when Daryna finds the single word "This!!!," followed by three exclamation points, scribbled in the margins of one of her father's books next to the sentence that speaks of Hamlet's indecisiveness in the face of evil, she feels that this word gives her a tiny glimpse into the personality of her father, about which she knows so little, and into his assessment of his own position vis-à-vis the Soviet regime. Small things like this one word in the margins of a book, which, incidentally, is turned into the name of this museum-novel's first "hall," become the narrator's clues to the past:

Since then I have more faith in misplaced trifles than in rehearsed stories, which always feel like something gutted, stuffed, and roasted before being served for me to gobble up. (...) I know that these excavated remains of vanished civilizations, the many, many civilizations that had once existed under people's names, do not lie. If we have any hope of understanding anything about another's life, this *this!!!* is it. We've heard all the other stories before, thank you very much, and we're sick of them. (Zabuzhko 34-5)¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ All translations from Zabuzhko's *Museum* are by Nina Shevchuk-Murray (2012).

At the same time, Zabuzhko's heroine is perfectly aware that her own uses of these clues result in nothing other than stories. As a journalist, she understands the power of the story and its allure, yet is also committed to the truth. Thus, when her friend and famous painter's tragic death in an automobile accident causes unsubstantiated rumors to spread among the Kyiv elite, Daryna both passionately fends off suspicions and realizes where they are coming from:

...and it took me more than a few months (...) to learn not to blush like a ripe tomato and screech mean things, quite without composure, every time someone asked me the question, with its probing emphasis, "Are you sure it was an accident?" —more than a few months to grasp that it was not truth people asked for, whatever it ultimately turned out to be, but a story. Amen. And who am I, who makes a living manufacturing such stories, to judge them? (78)

Drawing attention to the mechanisms by which stories, including the stories of the past, get constructed is a strategy Zabuzhko uses throughout the novel in order to deal with her anxiety about making the leap from objects to narratives, which is the conventional museum's standard operation. As Dobrenko explains, "...museumification is the process of selection of what has been constituted as 'history' (collection), the assembly from this selection of a coherent picture of the world (conservation), and the advancement of this picture into the space beyond the museum (exhibition)" (12). At one point, Zabuzhko shows the work of selection/collection and exhibition in the related ideological medium of television, for which her principal character works. One of the "halls" includes a description of Daryna's television interview with her friend Vlada (not long before her death) from the point of view of the camera-eye, so to speak. This

objectifying description of the two young women in conversation differs considerably from what Daryna herself feels like and perceives as a participant of this interview. Such a contrast lays bare the process in which the TV camera, not unlike the museum, produces power: according to the museum studies scholar Kevin Walsh, this is “the power of the gaze, an ability to observe, name and order, and thus control” (32). In addition, the interview description contains a number of parenthetical comments, presumably made mentally by Daryna to herself, indicating the parts of the interview that will be later cut out. This, of course, highlights the process of ideological montage typical both of documentaries and museums.

Zabuzhko's own, final narrative in *Museum* is a similar montage, although one self-consciously made and full of gaps. This comes out clearly in the way the novel's most important mystery—that of an elegant-looking young woman portrayed on a photograph from the 1940s among a group of the Ukrainian male insurgents—gets solved. Because none of those pictured in the photo are alive, Daryna goes on a wild goose-chase all over Ukraine to find any surviving relatives of the insurgents or archival evidence about them. Daryna's attempts to obtain any information about these partisans from the archives of the Ukrainian Security Service (formerly the KGB) in Kyiv fail because the records she needs were either transferred to Moscow or burned in the summer of 1991, when the KGB was hastily destroying the incriminating evidence of the Soviet liquidation of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army's units in Western Ukraine. The story that she finally pieces together from interviews with the young woman's surviving relatives, from chance conversations with a former KGB agent and from her own conjectures is full of unknowns.

However, the most important part of the story—its imaginative, emotional portrayal and an inner perspective on the events—comes to Daryna through the mysterious dreams of her

boyfriend, who is the nephew of the woman in the photograph. Adrian (Daryna's partner in Zabuzhko's national romance) keeps seeing very coherent, vivid dreams about the life in the underground of his aunt and her male colleagues pictured in the photograph, in which he “is” one of the male partisans. The dreams seem so real that he actually speculates about the possibility of an existence somewhere “out there” of a giant virtual *archive* containing the filmed experiences of everyone who ever existed—from their point of view—and of the likelihood that what he is seeing are not dreams, but rather the “film reel” of that one male partisan’s life.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, the archive is an important topos in postcolonial literatures and cultures. Julie Mullaney explains in her general overview of postcolonial writing that the “interest[s]” of this writing in both “history” and “‘metahistory’, the analysis of processes of historical inquiry informing the ‘writing’ of history” come together in “the image and idea of the archive” (38-9). The topos of the archive in Zabuzhko's narrative serves exactly this function: on the one hand, the unavailable or burnt archives of the Soviet era underscore the very real impossibility of uncovering the history of some controversial episodes in Ukraine's colonial past; and on the other hand, Adrian's phantasmatic concept of the complete, unedited dream/film archive of every person's life from his/her perspective (which would be a perfect archive, if it existed!) points up the existing archives' shortcomings—what Mullaney calls “the selective, contradictory and powerful technologies embedded in the construction and maintenance of the archive as a repository of knowledge” (39). The fact that Daryna and Adrian actually make use of this “dream archive” to fill in the blanks in the story of the female insurgent makes this story highly subjective and fictional, but also highlights what an important role imagination—and imaginative literature as one of its sources and products—play in the making of the national imaginary: because none of us have access to the “dream archive,” we inevitably rely on our own

imagination and fiction to help us conjure up the many past and present lives of individuals in the nation.

The story about the female insurgent, named Helia, which Daryna uncovers, and some missing pieces from which she imagines with the help of Adrian's "dream archive," is a violent story of death and betrayal. In 1947, the commander of the little group of insurgents in the picture, whose child the female insurgent was carrying, gave out the information about the group's location in the forest to the MGB—in exchange for his life and the life of pregnant Helia. When the MGB came to arrest the insurgents, the entire group, including Helia, refused to surrender and came out of the bunker with hand grenades, blowing up themselves and some of the MGB operatives. It is significant that Zabuzhko herself undertook detailed historical research and collected many oral histories from the surviving former UPA insurgents both to plot this story and to write Adrian's dreams from his "dream archive." There is little doubt that the story of Helia and her insurgent group is a plausible one, true to the ethos of the UPA and the historical circumstances of those times. Women were active participants in the armed resistance, and although less numerous than men, they were nevertheless a significant presence. In *The Nation*, Matios also includes female guerilla insurgents, but Zabuzhko's narrative, unlike Matios's stories, shows a woman in combat. Helia's death does acquire a "national" meaning in the novel: unlike the remaining male insurgents in her group, who have only two choices—to die in battle or to be arrested and tortured in a Soviet prison—Helia has the option of being freed because of the commander's deal with the MGB. Yet she chooses to die rather than betray her ideals. This death, however, is a conscious choice of an active subject in the nation rather than a symbol of the nation.

What the “dream archive” adds to this story is mostly an internal perspective on these events of another male insurgent, which allows the reader to better understand the motivations, ideals and problems of the UPA, and this, in turn, humanizes the insurgents, but does not idealize them. These dream sequences show, for example, the cruelty and abuse of power by the group's commander, the daily witnessing of death, the internal conflicts, and the frightening realization that if the brutality of the confrontation with the MGB stays at the same level for much longer, there will be few civilians left to defend. *Museum* also offers the perspective of the opposite side through Daryna's long conversation with a former KGB agent—and the son of an MGB operative. He is not a negative character in the novel, but rather a product of his time and a strict, almost military-style upbringing by his father. His tale also allows the reader to understand the motivations and the reasoning of those serving in the MGB.

Museum's mystical and heroic national narrative thus comes mostly not from the “historical” dream sequences or the present-day discussions about the past by the novel's characters, but rather from the way in which Zabuzhko emplots these figures and events from the past into the present-day narrative. And she does it through the tropes of the family and family genealogy, both biological and “spiritual.” As Anne McClintock points out, “nations are symbolically figured as domestic genealogies” (262). This kind of figuring occurs in *Museum*, which actually includes on its very first page a three-generation family tree of Daryna and a similar family tree for Adrian. The two, as I have mentioned before, form Zabuzhko's national romance couple, bringing two different histories (from the East and the West of Ukraine) and various family stories into a unified romantic plot. The female insurgent Helia is Adrian's aunt, and Daryna meets Adrian through her professional interest in Helia's story. When at the end of the novel Daryna finds out she is pregnant, she and Adrian think of their child as a “spiritual”

heir to the child Helia did not birth because of her death. In a further twist of Zabuzhko's convoluted national family plot, it turns out that the former KGB agent, with whom Daryna spoke, was the biological son of another female insurgent fighter, who died in prison, and of the male partisan whose life Adrian “saw” in his dreams. Thus, through the symbolism of the (national) family genealogy, Zabuzhko suggests that independent Ukraine is really “the child of Ukrainian nationalists,” as Marples put it, denying any lineage connections between it and the Soviet state. This kind of symbolic dynamic in the novel may be understood as a form of ideological montage in itself, and this is the kind of montage which Zabuzhko's *Museum* does disguise—by figuring the author's preferred political affiliations as “natural” family filiations.

Among other figures in Ukraine's “album of ancestors,” which Zabuzhko creates, are Daryna's late father and her recently deceased friend Vlada. While her father dies in a provincial psychiatric clinic under mysterious circumstances—a tragic victim of the Soviet regime, Vlada's seemingly random death in a car accident in the 1990s at first appears to have no “national” meaning. Through discussions with Vlada's boyfriend and in the process of her search for her friend's paintings, which had disappeared from the site of the car crash, Daryna gains glimpses into possible reasons for the crash, but eventually another hypothetic, and this time “national,” answer is suggested by people who live near the crash site. They explain to Daryna that many decades earlier that stretch of the highway was the site of a mass grave for the victims of the Ukrainian famine of 1932-33, and that many car accidents occur there every year. Like Adrian's dreams, Vlada's death thus appears to be connected to the national past by some mystical ties.

In the end, “The Museum of Abandoned Secrets” of the novel's title refers to all of Ukraine—a nation with many little known or yet unresolved historical traumas, which continue to haunt the nation's often unsuspecting present-day subjects and influence their daily lives in

profound ways. And this is what links all of *Museum's* characters—even minor ones, which are not incorporated into the symbolic national family plot. The novel's protagonist, Daryna Hoshchyns'ka, is not only a central figure in Zabuzhko's symbolic genealogies, but also an investigator and a commentator of the nation's Soviet past and some of its major secrets. And despite her awareness and frequent laying bare of the ideological montage involved in making narratives, the stories she does attempt to uncover and imagine come together to make one very heroic and mystical national narrative.

Laying Foundations for the Nation and National Writing

The four works examined in this chapter have all garnered much attention from critics and readers in Ukraine and beyond, and propelled their authors to the forefront of Ukrainian literary life, carving out space for them in Ukraine's literary canon. They received literary prizes, were or still are translated into other languages, and some (both *The Nation* and *Sweet Darusia* by Matios) were adapted for the stage. Thus, it might be safe to say that these texts did make a contribution to Ukraine's national imaginary, even though the authors' intentions did not always coincide with how their texts were received. So what are the foundations that these foundational national narratives attempt to lay down?

First and foremost, all four works show, even by the very fact of reverse, “archeological” narration, that the roots of and clues to Ukraine's modern identity are to be found in its Soviet past, and especially in its most traumatic aspects, such as the Ukrainian Famine, the violent incorporation of Western Ukraine during and after World War II, and the large-scale social transformations undertaken by the Soviet regime. All four texts also suggest that this past produced and continues to sustain internal divisions within Ukraine, which the three authors

attempt to address or resolve in a number of ways. Matios and Kononenko do so by revealing and critiquing the dynamics of othering involved in the creation and maintenance of such boundaries, and Zabuzhko tries to help readers overcome the fractures in their national imaginings by resorting to the symbolic plot of a national romance. Matios and Zabuzhko also strive to create “bridges” over internal boundaries by presenting perspectives from both sides of the UPA-MGB confrontation. In addition, Matios holds up Bukovyna's pre-World War I legacy of multiculturalism and interethnic connectedness as an example of unity in difference. While all four works are written in Ukrainian, they contain some fragments in Russian, *surzhyk*, or English (the latter especially in Kononenko), as well as various Ukrainian dialects and sociolects, and show this variety to be a positive rather than a negative characteristic (English in Kononenko is an exception, since it is an element of Euro-Ukrainian identity). All these representational strategies used by the authors ultimately imply that these women writers consider Ukraine's national community in its present-day borders to be a value worth preserving—despite the fact that the borders themselves were forged by the Soviet regime. At the same time, through their interventions into the national imaginary and their critique of biased perspectives, writers like Kononenko and Matios advocate more inclusive conceptions of a collective national identity—based on the civic rather than ethnic models of the nation.

By making their narratives focused on complex, well-developed, individualized, both positive and negative women characters of all ages and social strata, the four texts undermine the exploitative use of women as mere symbols of the nation. Matios critiques the role of symbolic national border-guards, ascribed to women in nationalism, and shows how such imaginings endanger specific women's lives. Both Kononenko and Zabuzhko in their novels change the standard nationalist focus on male heroes to that on activist heroines. And all three authors not

only generally attempt to make the nation “more hospitable to women’s presence,” to use Elleke Boehmer’s formulation (12), but also present women’s perspectives on the national past, present, and future, sometimes even giving their female characters positions of cultural critics of the nation.

The latter role is what the three writers themselves have also taken on by authoring their national narratives. It is telling that in all three cases, this move is exactly what gained these authors recognition as Ukrainian writers rather than “only” *women writers*. Zabuzhko’s first national narrative—*Fieldwork*—despite its hostile reception, earned the author all-Ukrainian literary fame. Maria Matios, who has been writing poetry and short stories for decades, only gained national popularity and acceptance into the Ukrainian literary canon after her publication of *The Nation* and *Sweet Darusia*. Similarly, although Kononenko was known in narrow literary circles by her masterful short stories, the national literary reputation came to her only after *Imitation*. This fact, of course, points up Ukrainian culture’s misunderstanding of and bias against women writers, as well as its obsession with all things national at present, but at least, the contemporary situation with women writers in Ukraine is a far cry from the late 1980s and very early 1990s, when both Kononenko and Zabuzhko wondered in their texts whether and how a Ukrainian woman can write at all.

CHAPTER 5

Narrating the Post-Soviet Nation and Its Gender:

A Russian-Ukrainian Comparison

In tracing the development of prose fiction by Ukrainian women writers from 1989 to 2009, I have suggested that at least for the female authors from the *visimdesiatnyky* (*the eightiers*) generation, the goal of writing themselves into their culture's literary canon went hand in hand with and was greatly aided by their literary engagements with Ukraine's national imaginary. While some of these women writers (Kononenko and Zabuzhko), in their early works, attempted to claim a place in the canon by aligning themselves through intertextual means with the already canonized Ukrainian women authors from the pre-Soviet era, it was their literary (and mostly novelistic) treatment of the nation's Soviet past and its post-Soviet present that in the end secured them such a place.

This cultural scenario of contemporary women writers' recognition was not unique to Ukraine—it played out in a similar way in post-Soviet Russia, even though, as I argued in Chapter 2, the tradition of Russian women's writing did not experience as dramatic an interruption during much of the Soviet era as did the Ukrainian one. This chapter will briefly compare the Russian case of late Soviet/post-Soviet women writers' canonization to that of Ukraine's female authors. It will then examine the parallels and differences between the Russian and Ukrainian women writers' interventions into their respective countries' national imaginaries by contrasting two well-known national narratives from these post-Soviet nations—Zabuzhko's

The Museum of Abandoned Secrets and *The Slynx* (Kys', 2000) by the Russian writer Tatiana Tolstaya.

The Russian-Ukrainian comparison broadens the scope of my study of women's writing in the post-Soviet space by bringing in the experience and perspective of the politically and culturally dominant nationality of the former Soviet Union. Russia's privileged status in the Soviet state partly accounts for the somewhat different trajectory of development of Russian women's writing from that of Ukrainian women's fiction. At the same time, because Russia often figures as the former colonizer in the Ukrainian national imaginary, as well as one of the primary cultural Others against which present-day Ukrainian national identity is defined, it seems that a study of this identity cannot avoid a discussion of Russia. Yet my inclusion of a Russian text, and especially of Tolstaya's novel *The Slynx*, is also explained by my wish to explore more fully the post-Soviet post-colonial condition, one important feature of which is the phenomenon of Russia's internal colonization, as theorized by Alexander Etkind.¹¹⁰ In my estimation, *The Slynx* is one of the best contemporary “national” novels, which sheds light on the mechanism of internal colonization and its modifications in the Soviet era. Finally, the specific Zabuzhko-Tolstaya comparison brings together not simply two foremost female writers of their respective nations, but also women from roughly the same generation (Tolstaya is 9 years older), who, despite their numerous differences, display affinities in their fiction and have remarkably similar views on the Soviet past.

¹¹⁰ See a detailed explanation of Etkind's thesis of internal colonization in Chapter 1.

New Women's Prose and the Russian Canon

During the Soviet era, Russian women writers as a “group” have had a presence on the literary scene at least since the end of World War II, according to Beth Holmgren (see Chapter 2) and many other scholars (Holmgren 226). Writing back in 1994, Helena Goscilo, for example, pointed out that “even a cursory overview” of contemporary fiction by Russian women would necessitate an examination of literary production by “four generations of women”: from “those born” before 1917 (like I. Grekova) to those who were born “in the post-Stalin era (like Svetlana Vasilenko) (Goscilo, “Paradigm Lost?” 207). Goscilo's many essays and edited collections on the topic of contemporary women's writing (and other cultural production) in Russia include several dozen names of female authors from these four generations, and Benjamin Sutcliffe's 2009 book-length study on the uses of everyday life in recent Russian women's prose traces the development of the latter “from Khrushchev to Putin.”¹¹¹ Although clearly outnumbered by men, Russian women writers were nonetheless active in Soviet literature, and therefore, there was no need for new women authors, who began publishing with the advent of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, to question their very ability to write in their culture (as did Ukrainian female authors).

Nevertheless, the explosion of women's writing (especially prose) which occurred both in Russia and Ukraine with the end of the Soviet era has been unprecedented, and the heretofore unparalleled quantity of women's fiction as well as its new qualities have produced a baffled (and often baffling) reaction from the male-dominated literary establishments in both post-Soviet nations. As in Ukraine, in Russia this phenomenon has been given the label of “women's

¹¹¹ See Goscilo's essays “Women's Wards and Wardens: The Hospital in Contemporary Russian Women's Fiction,” “Coming a Long Way, Baby: A Quarter-Century of Russian Women's Fiction,” “Perestroika and Post-Soviet Prose: From Dazzle to Dispersal” and the ones gathered in the collection *Dehexing Sex: Russian Womanhood During and After Glasnost*. See also the special issue of *Russian Studies in Literature*, entitled *Skirted Issues: The Discreteness and Indiscretions of Russian Women's Prose*, edited by Goscilo.

literature” (or “women's prose,” or “new women's prose”). As Goscilo and others have shown, in Russia (as, to a lesser extent, in Ukraine) this label has carried a negative connotation, implying this literature's supposed inferiority in content and style (Goscilo summarizes women's literature's perceived faults as follows: “superficial, trivial, decorative, excessively descriptive, philistine in outlook, saccharine in tone, and overly preoccupied with romance” [“A Paradigm Lost?” 206-7]).¹¹² Such a perception has led many Russian women writers to deny, paradoxically, that they were *women* writers, stating, as Liudmila Petrushevskia once did, that they “write ‘in a male mode,’” or that their gender has no bearing on their literary works (Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex* 16). Furthermore, as Anna Uliura has demonstrated in her 2008 analysis of the post-Soviet Russian women's writing reception, the label of “women's literature” has frequently given Russian critics the excuse not to treat works that fall within this rubric seriously. Uliura gives the instructive example of the 2001 experiment done by the well-known Russian critic Andrei Nemzer, who wrote reviews for all six literary works shortlisted for the Russian Booker—one of the most prestigious literary prizes in contemporary Russia—“each time pretending that the prize had gone to the book being reviewed and suggesting reasons for the panel's decision” (Uliura 83). Uliura notes that while his reviews of four works by male writers were factual and useful in their detailed literary analysis, the reviews of the two novels by women were “identical,” containing no analysis and not “even a simple assessment of [the texts'] artistic qualities,” but rather an ironic, quasi-sensationalist announcement of the fact that finally, “the prize for the year's best Russian novel has fallen into female hands” (83-4). As Uliura

¹¹² While the concept of “women's literature” has not acquired as strong a pejorative connotation in Ukraine as it did in Russia, and many women writers, including Zabuzhko and Kononenko, happily self-identify as women authors, one could still detect an aura of suspicion surrounding women's writing. Roman Ivanychuk, for instance, objected to another writer's designation of Nina Bichuya as “the queen of women's prose” (Ivanychuk, “Neshchodennyi shchodennyk” 47), and the compiler of the first post-Soviet anthology of Ukrainian women's writing, Vasyl Gabor, placed the word “women's” in quotation marks in the anthology's title and his introduction to it (*Neznayoma* 7).

pointedly remarks, “[w]hat matters here is not Nemzer's misogyny (...), but that he can find no way to define a text as bad (from his viewpoint, of course) other than to stereotype it as having been written by a woman.” (84) Uliura's major conclusion about the reception of women's writing by the Russian literary establishment is summed up in her essay's title—“One Scoring System for Men, Another for Women”—which underscores the still existing discrimination (negative, not positive), directed at women's writing in Russia.

Nemzer's demeaning comments aside, both books by women authors, which he reviewed in 2001, did win prestigious literary prizes that year. The Russian Booker went to Liudmila Ulitskaya's novel *The Kukotskii Case* (*Kazus Kukotskogo*), and the other novel—Tatiana Tolstaya's *The Slynx*—won the Triumph Prize, Russia's first independent award “for outstanding achievements in the arts” (Uliura 83). Ten years later, *The Slynx* also won the Students' Booker of the decade. Generally, the history of literary awards, received by Russian women authors in the post-Soviet era, reveals significant parallels in the canonization of women's writing in Russia and Ukraine. As in Ukraine, the privileged literary genre in Russia appears to be the novel;¹¹³ and as with Ukrainian female authors, Russian women writers have been only occasional recipients of literary prizes.¹¹⁴ The Russian Booker, for example, which is the nation's most important independent literary prize, established with the help of the commercial sponsor of the British Booker and awarded since 1992, has been given to a woman writer only four times,¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Two of Russia's most prestigious literary prizes—the Russian Booker and the National Bestseller—are awarded for novels.

¹¹⁴ For more details on women awardees of different literary prizes in Russia, see Uliura. One prize which she does not discuss is the Anti-Booker—perhaps because no woman writer has even won one in the short history of this award's existence (1995-2001).

¹¹⁵ For the sake of comparison, the British Booker Prize, which has been awarded since 1969, went to a woman writer 16 times out of 44—that is, more than in 1/3 of all cases. The first woman recipient of the British Booker was Bernice Rubens in 1970, and the most recent woman awardee was Hilary Mantel in 2012. (For all Booker Prize recipients, see the list at the Prize's official website: <http://www.themanbookerprize.com/timeline>.)

beginning in 2001 with Ulitskaya.¹¹⁶ Significantly, three of the four novels by women writers which received the Booker prize—Ulitskaya's *The Kukotskii Case* (2001), Olga Slavnikova's dystopic novel *2017* (2006), and Elena Chizhova's *Women's Time* (*Vremia zhenshchin*, 2009)—deal with important “national” themes, such as survival in and memory of the Soviet past (Ulitskaya and Chizhova) and Russia's future (Slavnikova). Thus, as in the Ukrainian case, it seems that women writers in Russia “merit” national recognition mostly when they begin to write about the nation.

While all three of the abovementioned Russian works by female authors engage the questions of the Russian nation, this chapter focuses on a novel which, in my opinion, has made the most original and multifaceted intervention into the national imaginary of Russia thus far—Tolstaya's *The Slynx*. This one-of-a-kind Russian dystopia, which since its publication in 2000, has firmly established its author in the Russian literary canon¹¹⁷—despite being Tolstaya's only novel—effects a simultaneous double intervention into Russia's national imaginary and its literary canon. It achieves the latter by weaving a dense, playful intertextual web, which helps its author claim a place in the Russian literary tradition, yet also juxtaposes her to it. Crucially, *The Slynx* is also a novel that engages with Russia's imperial legacy and deconstructs the gendered imaginings underpinning some Russian national myths and narratives. These thematic preoccupations, which resemble those of Ukrainian women writers in this project, as well as the fact that this work was written between 1986 and 2000—a period that extends across all three of

¹¹⁶ Unlike in Ukraine, the State Prize for achievements in literature and other arts, awarded by the President of the Russian Federation, has been discredited in the Putin era and is not taken seriously by most Russian literati. It is also a telling sign that since 2005, it has been awarded in the area of literature only once, in 2009, and even then its recipient was a poet of the older generation—Yevgeniy Yevtushenko.

¹¹⁷ As one of the novel's reviewers put it, “Tolstaya has been famous for a while, but after the publication of *The Slynx* she woke up a [literary] classic.” (Paramonov)

the decades examined in this dissertation—make *The Slynx* an ideal text for this chapter's Russian-Ukrainian juxtaposition.

***The Slynx* as a Logocentric National Dystopia**

As a dystopic text, Tolstaya's *The Slynx* paints a characteristically exaggerated, dark picture of Russia and advances a comprehensive critique of the Russian national community. The novel portrays—sometimes playfully, but mostly with biting sarcasm—what Tolstaya sees as the vicious circle of Russia's national history and culture. The effect of circularity is created in part by the way in which Tolstaya modifies the generic conventions of a dystopia: as Daria Kabanova points out, instead of a futuristic setting, *The Slynx* presents the reader with a society that looks very much like the Russia of the past, complete with “feudalistic social structures and pagan cosmology” (148). This inversion of “the time of national history” (Kabanova 159) makes *The Slynx* into a variation of Anderson's reverse national biography plot, discussed in the previous chapter. Yet unlike conventional national narratives, which work from the present into the past to transform various historical upheavals and fatalities into national continuity, *The Slynx* offers both a parody and a serious critique of such a narrative, depicting the usually longed-for continuity of the nation as sinister, oppressive sameness.

The events in *The Slynx* are given to the readers from the point of view of its central character, Benedikt—a young inhabitant of what has become of Moscow two hundred years after ‘the Blast.’¹¹⁸ It is through his limited perspective (Benedikt, like many other inhabitants, is not very bright) that we come to understand that despite all the biological mutations in the characters'

¹¹⁸ The date when Tolstaya began writing *The Slynx*—1986—suggests that the Blast is a reference to the Chornobyl nuclear reactor explosion, which happened that year on the territory of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. Yet Tolstaya has denied a link to Chornobyl in interviews (see, for example, *Vstrechi na Mokhovoi, Tatiana Tolstaia*).

bodies—the ‘Consequences’ of the Blast—the cultural values and beliefs of the population seem uncannily familiar. In keeping with the genre of dystopia, Tolstaya focuses on the most outrageous of these Russian cultural continuities: **1)** the ideal of strong, centralized and rigidly hierarchical power, which is both revered and disliked (“*That's not what a Murza is there for, to like or not. He's there to keep things in order. (...) Dock you for absences, for drunkenness, or to give you a whipping—that's what he's for. You can't get by without a Murza, without him we'd get everything mixed up.*” [92]); **2)** the negatively valued free speech and thought (“*...why is it that the Lesser Murzas, who are there to watch us, never laugh? Why do they stare at you like you've been dished out of the outhouse with a ladle? (...) And then... but no, no, that must be Freethinking. No, no, I mustn't think. No.*” [23-4]); **3)** disregard for basic human rights and freedoms (“*Benedikt wrote: 'The reading of Oldenprint books is permitted.' He thought a minute and added: 'but within reason.'* (...) *He thought some more. No, what'll that lead to? Anybody can just take books and read them? Free to take them out of the larder and lay them out on the table? What if that table's got something spilled on it or it's dirty? (...) No! You can't trust people. But what's the big deal? Just take them away and that's it.*” [259]); **4)** idealization of The Woman accompanied by daily violence against real women (“*You can poke the simple Olenka in the ribs, like regular people do, and tell her a joke, or play a trick on her: while she's drawing you can sneak up and tie her braid to the stool, for instance. (...) You can't joke that way with the other Olenka, the magical vision, you can't elbow her in the ribs...*” [64-5]; “*Then he'd grab her by the hair. She'd scream, call on the neighbors, but you wouldn't hear a peep out of them: it's just a husband teaching his wife a lesson. None of our business. A broken dish has two lives.*”

[11]).¹¹⁹ This is to name only a few most prominent “Russian” cultural traits of the post-Blast community, called Fyodor-Kuzmichsk—after its tyrant and chief Murza.¹²⁰

The last passage quoted above is especially interesting for its citation of a well-known Russian proverb, “A broken dish has two lives” (*Bitaiia posuda dva veka zhyvet*), which is usually uttered as an encouragement and means that someone who has been wounded or crippled will live a long life (*Slovar' poslovits i pogovorok*). Such set pieces of “folk wisdom” in *The Slynx* stand in stark contrast to the “mutations” undergone by language itself in the novel’s post-Blast world: Tolstaya chose to give alternative, usually descriptive or quasi-archaic names to the most familiar of objects and places, such as the pen—“stick for writing” (*pis'mennaia palochka*), the abacus—“counting sticks” (*schetnye prutiki*), or the market— *torzhyshe*, —in order to show the degradation in culture, yet she accurately reproduced the folk proverbs and sayings (*The Slynx* 14, 11; *Kys'*). Through this contrast Tolstaya underscores the enduring power and the unchanging character of Russia’s cultural beliefs and values captured in the proverbs.

In her *Kniga o Rodine*, Irina Sandomirskaia discusses phraseology (*fraseologiya*) as one of the keys to a culture (38). She explains that it is “the imagery of a language” (and proverbs are the most stable units of such imagery) in which a culture's experiences, traditions, and beliefs, accumulated throughout its history, get stored (39). To the native speakers of a language, the latter's imagery appears self-evident and goes unnoticed, and it is exactly this imagery that constitutes them as a separate cultural community: this imagery “carries in itself information about (...) idiomatically non-transparent elements of cultural knowledge—stereotypes, ideals, criteria, etc. with which a subject of culture ‘measures’ his world” (39). This imagery is not

¹¹⁹ All translations from the novel are by Jamey Gambrell (see Tolstaya, *The Slynx*).

¹²⁰ “Murza” is an aristocratic Turkic title that was in use in pre-Petrine Russia; Tolstaya uses it to mark the temporal throwback in *The Slynx* to the era prior to Russia’s Westernization by Peter the Great and to evoke associations of Russia with tyrannical “East.”

completely unchanging, of course; it evolves together with the language in the course of historical changes in the life of a community, and Tolstaya shows such an evolution (or, rather, degradation in the dystopic world of *The Slynx*) through a variety of linguistic mutations. Yet her narrative emphasizes, and critiques, the continuities. She sees the latter stemming in part from the fact that the successive regimes in Russia, for all their seeming differences, brought little real historical change, and in part from the power of language, with its hidden imagery, to reconstruct its cultural community after every successive “blast,” as long as enough speakers of Russian survive.

Tolstaya highlights this property of language—its ideological power—by fitting her entire imagined world of post-Blast Russia into the old Russian alphabet, which serves as the novel’s structuring principle, with chapters bearing the old-fashioned names of Russian letters (Az, Buki, etc.). As one commentator of the novel points out, however, the alphabet Tolstaya uses is quite “fantastic”: it does not correspond exactly to any of the historical alphabets of Russia, but rather combines letters from all of them (Khvorostyanova 121). Like the inversion of the flow of national history in the novel, the confusion of various Russian alphabets is a device used to erase the historical evolution of Russia, with its underlying idea of progress, and to point up the ahistorical sameness of the Russian symbolic order, represented by the (arbitrary) order of the alphabet. More than anything else, this representational gesture locates the origins of culture in language, and although language can “mutate” together with biological bodies, much of its imagery and, importantly, its basic structures remain the same: as a system of oppositions, of

relationships based on differences, language offers itself as a model for community/order constitution.¹²¹

In *The Slynx*, this structuring principle of language is illustrated through the operation of several sets of binaries, the most obvious of which is “one of your own” (the Self, *svoi*) vs. “stranger” (the Other, *chuzhoi*):

A stranger is a stranger. What's so good about a stranger? (...) Maybe he doesn't even get that hungry. Maybe he'll manage without. (...) But one of your own—he's cozy. His eyes are different. You just look at him and you can see he wants to eat. You can feel his stomach grumbling. One of your own is almost like you. (32)

These are the terms in which Benedikt, post-Blast Russia's “primitive man,” begins to make sense of the world around him early on in the novel. Since “collectivities are organized around boundaries which divide the world into ‘us’ and ‘them’,” the identification of ‘them’ (the stranger, the Other) is one of the first steps towards community constitution (Yuval-Davis 19). In *The Slynx*, the Other is identified first in ‘the Chechens’ (“*You can't go south. The Chechens live there. (...) In the middle of the town there's a watchtower with four windows, and guards keep watch out of all of them. They're on the lookout for Chechens.*” [4]); then in ‘the Cockynorks’ (“*You throw the rock because the Cockynorks, they don't talk like us: all they say is blah-blah-blah and blah-blah-blah—you can't understand a thing. Why do they talk like that, why don't they want to talk like we do? Who knows. Maybe on purpose.*” [39]); and once the community

¹²¹ Thus, although Tolstaya's critique of sameness is directed first and foremost at Russia, *The Slynx* is not only about Russia. It is also a more fundamental critique of language and logocentrism. For more on logocentrism in *The Slynx*, see Lipovetskii (“PMS”), Nefagina, and Kovtun.

gets delineated more specifically—with boundaries in the form of the protective walls around the town—there begins a hunt for the Other *inside* the community, which eventually ends with a terror campaign against ‘the Oldeners’ (those born before the Blast, who, as a Consequence of the Blast, have lived for hundreds of years).

The Oldeners stand out in the post-Blast community of ‘Golubchiks’ (those like Benedikt, who were born after the Blast) as the carriers and mourners of pre-Blast culture, which they remember with nostalgia and long to reconstruct.¹²² They are the biological and spiritual parents of the Golubchiks and the ones who passed on to those born after the Blast the Russian language, together with its imagery, hidden in sayings and stable expressions. Ironically though, the Golubchiks prove to be incapable of comprehending many abstract notions of this language, such as ‘conscience’ or ‘memory.’ While they inherit and accept the most pernicious values and beliefs, preserved in idiomatic language (for instance, that physical beatings are normal and may be even beneficial), they cannot grasp the figurative meanings of poetry or what ‘a historical landmark’ is, taking all of these things literally (230). Thus, the novel's central Golubchik Benedikt, who works as a scribe copying the literature from the pre-Blast era, which the town's chief Murza Fyodor Kuzmich has usurped and passes off as his own creations, comically misinterprets much of what he copies—and what the reader, who has the Oldeners' baggage of memory, recognizes as poems by the most well-known 19th- and 20th-century Russian poets. Yet the Oldeners (whose speech is recognizably that of Russian intelligentsia) are as much, if not more, a target of Tolstaya's parodic critique as the Golubchiks: in fact, Tolstaya uses the Golubchiks' utter lack of understanding of figurative language and “lofty cultural practices” as a

¹²² The third ‘class’ of citizens in Fyodor-Kuzmichsk are ‘the Degenerators’—pre-Blast-born part-human/part-animal mutants, who are used by the Golubchiks as horses, which is perhaps Tolstaya's equivalent to Russia's institution of serfdom.

way to mock and defamiliarize a variety of Russian cultural and national imaginings, treasured by the Oldeners (and, by extension, the readers).

For instance, when the Oldener Nikita Ivanich gives a speech about wanting to make a “contribution to the restoration and rebirth of culture,” his lofty word “renaissance” gets butchered in the Golubchiks' account and becomes “runnysauce” (21). And when Nikita Ivanich, in order to preserve the memory of the past, puts up signs all over town, bearing the names of Moscow's cultural landmarks, such as the Arbat Street, the Golubchiks “just scrape off ‘Arbat’ and carve something new: ‘Pakhom lives here,’ or cuss words”—because “[c]uss words are fun to carve” (22). Tolstaya uses Golubchiks' naiveté and cheerful barbarism to deconstruct Russian intelligentsia's most treasured values of ‘culture,’ ‘tradition,’ and ‘literary heritage,’ which, according to the latter, form the nation's foundations.¹²³ To the Golubchiks' simple minds, however, such abstract notions are literally fictions—or, as Sandomirskaia puts it, “products of collective cultural construction” that do not exist except as discursive formations (34-5).

The difference between the Golubchiks and the Oldeners—in their worldview, their memory of the past, and their speech—may initially seem to be a potential source of profound changes in Russia's national history, but it is one of *The Slynx*'s central claims that whether the ‘fate’ of Russia is in the hands of the Oldeners or in the hands of the Golubchiks, the end result inevitably proves to be the same. In order to understand this claim of Tolstaya's, it is necessary to turn to the concept of Russia's internal colonization.

¹²³ While Tolstaya's strategy reminds one of Bakhtinian carnival, where the ‘high’ and the ‘low’ are reversed, *The Slynx* as a whole is not a carnivalesque text. In fact, some commentators have dubbed it an “anti-carnival”—see, for example, Potvin. See also Shavokshyna, “Transformatsiia toposu karnavalu v rosiis'komu ta ukrains'komu postmodernizmakh.”

***The Slynx* as a Postmodern Romance of Russia's Internal Colonization**

As I summarized in Chapter 1, Aleksandr Etkind's theory of internal colonization describes Russia as “both the subject and the object of colonization,” and focuses especially on Russia's “story of internal colonization, in which the state colonized its people” (*Internal Colonization* 2). Etkind argues that the Russian imperial elites included many intellectuals who aided the internal imperial project by constructing the people of the Russian heartlands as the exotic Other to be studied, educated, restrained—in a word, colonized (“The Shaved Man's Burden” 134). In the late imperial period, these same intellectuals, animated by the “feelings of guilt,” a fascination with the Russian *narod*, and a belief that true ‘Russianness’ was to be found in this *narod*, developed the ideology and practices of populism, which included a variety of attempts to get closer to the people (ibid. 135). If the British and French colonial literature dramatized “the relationship between East and West,” Etkind maintains, the Russian classics centered on the dichotomy of intellectuals vs. the common Russian folk (ibid. 139). Building on Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the idyllic chronotope and René Girard's concept of triangular desire, Etkind proceeds to analyze what he views as the “master plot” of internal colonization in the Russian fiction of the imperial period—which he dubs “the romance of internal colonization” (ibid. 141, 124).

This plot structure stages an encounter between the Russian ‘Man of Culture’ and the Russian ‘Man of the People,’ who become engaged in a relationship of mutual fascination and even desire (ibid. 141). The Man of Culture, “an ambivalent agent of internal colonization,” is attracted by the Man of the People because the latter is the child and inhabitant of the idyllic, timeless chronotope of national authenticity and essence (ibid. 141). This desire, however, is mediated according to the Girardian triangular structure by a woman, ‘the Russian Beauty,’ for

whom the two men compete, but who is really just a passive, “national object of desire” (141). In this standard, masculinist representational move, the Russian Beauty symbolizes Mother Russia itself, and how she fares in the novel comes to represent the fate of Russia. As Etkind points out, this plot often ends with the “motif of sacrifice: the rivalry is resolved by the sacrifice of one of the participants in the triangular structure” (141).

Etkind examines how this master plot operates in three celebrated prose works by canonized Russian male authors: Aleksandr Pushkin's “The Captain's Daughter” (1836), Fiodor Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* (1868), and Andrei Belyi's *The Silver Dove* (1909). In the first work, the plot ends with the punishment of the leader of the peasant rebellion, Pugachev, and the Russian Beauty character, Mashenka, who is captured for a time by the rebels, is finally released and “given” back to the Man of Culture, Grinev. *The Idiot* describes a relationship of bizarre attachment between the two rivals, Prince Myshkin and Rogozhin, in which the Russian Beauty, Nastas'ia Fillipovna, plays a completely incidental role. The novel ends with the perverse, unexplainable killing of Nastas'ia Fillipovna, which Etkind reads as a “deconstructive, anti-utopian denouement to a utopian narrative” of Russia's salvation through populism (“The Shaved Man's Burden” 143, 145). Finally, Belyi's novel sacrifices the Man of Culture, Darial'skii, whose irrational attraction to the peasant couple of Kudeiarov and Matrena leads him to join their religious sect—with devastating consequences. As Etkind explains, the different endings of the three novels symbolize different political outcomes:

The sacrifice of the Man of the People restored the political balance and, therefore, promised the preservation of the colonial order. (...) The sacrifice of an innocent woman raised the narrative to the level of a final, apocalyptic catastrophe. The sacrifice of the

Man of Culture now represents the victory of the colonised People, which the metropolitan elite cannot, indeed do not want to resist. Possessed by a sense of historical guilt, the elite oversees its own destruction, organises its own sacrifice. (“The Shaved Man's Burden” 145-6)

The elite's sacrifice Etkind has in mind is, of course, the proletarian revolution, which swept Russia only eight years after the publication of *The Silver Dove*, ushering in the Soviet era. As becomes clear from a published discussion between Etkind and another noted scholar of Russian literature, Mark Lipovetsky, as well as from a recent article by Lipovetsky, the same master plot of internal colonization continues to play out in much of the Soviet and especially post-Soviet literature (Lipovetskii and Etkind, “Vozvrashchenie tritona”; Lipovetskii “Sovetskie i postsovetskie transformatsii siuzheta vnutrennei kolonizatsii”). In his article, Lipovetsky ascribes to this plot “a paradigmatic role” in Russian, Soviet, and post-Soviet cultural imaginary (840). One significant difference, however, is that in the 20th- and 21st-century Russian fiction, the Man of Culture is no longer the representative of the state; instead, the state and the Russian culture become embodied in two different male characters (as examples of this change, Lipovetsky analyzes Yuri Olesha's *Envy* and mentions scores of other works). Another difference, which reflects the Soviet “dictatorship of the proletariat,” is that the Man of the People in the post-1917 fiction often becomes the ‘Man of State Power.’ What does *not* change is the gendered structure of this plot: the drama of Russia's fate is still played out and decided by male agents, while Russia itself is embodied in a passive female character. This fact is consistent with the analysis of gendered “Russian body politic” by Harriet Murav, summarized in Chapter

1: in the master plot of internal colonization, the nation is still “Mother Russia” and its rulers and agents are still “Father Tsar” (Murav 32).

Tolstaya's *The Slynx*, I would argue, is a postmodern variation on the romance of internal colonization, as outlined by Etkind—it stages the same master plot, yet Tolstaya's version appears to be at once playful, parodic, and “vengeful.” Tolstaya intervenes into this meta-narrative that has dominated Russian literary and national imaginings for almost two centuries and modifies it in several important respects. First, she mocks the intellectual fantasy of *narod* by portraying it from the inside, giving over the narration to the Man of the People (while all three works analyzed by Etkind privilege the perspective of the Man of Culture). Second, she actually shows the encounter of the Man of Culture and the Man of the People to be a unidirectional relationship—a kind of colonization of the Man of the People through culture (whereas the three 19th-century works focused on the irrational attraction of the two men and on the fate of the Man of Culture). Third, Tolstaya foregrounds the oppressive state as a vital player in the plot of Russia's internal colonization, exploring the connections between the Man of Culture and the Man of State Power. Finally, Tolstaya both parodies and undoes the gendered structure of this master plot, freeing women from their symbolic burden of representing the nation and rewriting the historical drama of Russia basically as a “men only” violent power struggle, which produces a terrifying sameness instead of progress.

Tolstaya's Man of the People is Golubchik Benedikt. Because *The Slynx* is narrated in free indirect discourse, which presents almost everything in the world of the novel through Benedikt's eyes, the reader is put in the awkward position of identifying with the naive, “primitive child of Russia” Benedikt. By using such a mode of narration and by stylizing Benedikt's speech with quasi-folkloric expressions and inflections, Tolstaya both fulfills and

subtly mocks the populists' desire to identify with the Russian *narod*. The folkloric diction sounds charming and very “Russian,” constituting much of the novel's reading pleasure—until some of the things Benedikt utters in his innocent voice shock the readers out of the lull induced by the novel's rhythmic and repetitive folkloric cadences. These include his statements about the fun of violent folk games, his attitudes towards women and strangers, and other “Russian” cultural and national traits, discussed in the previous section. And yet, despite these statements, Benedikt remains attractive (as he should be, according to the populists' logic). Tolstaya achieves this complex effect by making use of *stiob*—a form of “ironic aesthetic,” as Alexei Yurchak identifies it, which became especially popular in late Soviet culture:

Stiob was a peculiar form of irony that differed from sarcasm, cynicism, derision, or any of the more familiar genres of absurd humor. It required such a degree of *overidentification* with the object, person, or idea at which this *stiob* was directed that it was often impossible to tell whether it was a form of sincere support, subtle ridicule, or a peculiar mixture of the two. The practitioners of *stiob* themselves refused to draw a line between these sentiments, producing an incredible combination of seriousness and irony, (...) refusing the very dichotomy between the two. (Emphasis in the original; Yurchak 249-50)

There is no doubt that Tolstaya identifies with her protagonist in many ways, at least in the first part of the novel, even as she pokes fun at his naiveté. Yet the chief target of her *stiob* is the idealized imagining of *narod*, still alive and well in the minds of many Russian intellectuals. It is for them that she creates in the opening chapters a timeless national space through Benedikt's

narration—idyllic through its quasi-folkloric mode—only to expose it as a dystopian national space of poverty, ignorance, violence, and state terror. Tolstaya’s parodic idyllic space, however, is permeated from the very beginning with elements of danger and fear: the two things of which Benedikt and other Golubchiks are terrified are a mysterious creature named the Slynx (*kys’*), who supposedly lives in the forest and preys upon them, and ‘Illness,’ whose victim is immediately taken away by the ‘Saniturations’ (a state security service) (25).

Tolstaya’s Man of Culture is the Oldener Nikita Ivanich, who serves as Benedikt’s mentor in the course of the novel. In keeping with the post-1917 modifications of the master plot, described above, the state is represented separately by the Man of State Power, who is at first Fyodor Kuzmich, later deposed in a revolutionary coup and replaced by Benedikt’s father-in-law—with the help of Benedikt himself. The Man of the People eventually becomes the Man of State Power. In a gesture that suggests the author’s conscious rewriting of the conventional Russian master plot, Tolstaya includes playful allusions to the three works analyzed by Etkind. Thus, Benedikt’s father-in-law is named Kudeyar Kudeyarich—after the peasant sect leader, Kudeiarov, from Belyi’s *The Silver Dove*. The sect’s religion of mystical spirituality, the symbol of which is a dove, is travestied in *The Slynx*: the “religion” of Kudeyar Kudeyarich’s family is food, enacted in truly Rabelaisian rituals of incessant feasting, for the purpose of which Kudeyar keeps a menagerie filled with all kinds of birds.¹²⁴ Tolstaya alludes to *The Idiot* by making the bond between Nikita Ivanich and Benedikt develop around the figure of Russia’s national poet and “founding father,” Pushkin—in *The Idiot*, as Etkind points out, Prince Myshkin manifests his love for Rogozhin by “read[ing] the merchant ‘all’ of Pushkin” (“The Shaved Man’s Burden” 145). *The Slynx* mocks the “lofty” cultural and spiritual meanings of this quintessentially Russian

¹²⁴ It is also entirely possible that the name for the post-Blast Russians, ‘the Golubchiks’ (meaning ‘little doves’), is a playful allusion to the dove-worshipping peasants in Belyi’s *The Silver Dove*.

practice by materializing it: in its dystopian world, the cult of Pushkin survives only as *pushkin* the idol—an ugly wooden statue of the poet, which Benedikt carves under Nikita Ivanich's tutelage and instruction, and which, to both men's consternation, is later used by the Golubchiks to hang out their laundry.¹²⁵ Through the carving of *pushkin*, Nikita Ivanich attempts to educate Benedikt about the culture that was lost, to elevate this Man of the People out of his ignorance—in a word, to make him a Man of Culture. He succeeds, in a perverse kind of way (as we will see), and the symbol of Benedikt's transformation is the cutting off of his tail (Benedikt's particular mutation as a Consequence of the Blast), which Nikita Ivanich performs for him, thus initiating Benedikt into the realm of culture.

Tolstaya's less obvious allusion to *The Captain's Daughter* helps pinpoint who (or, rather, what) plays the role of the Russian Beauty in this parody of the triangular romance of internal colonization. At the Belogorsk fort, where Grinev is sent to serve in Pushkin's short novel, he meets his love interest, Mashenka, the captain's daughter, and develops a taste for reading (Pushkin, “Kapitanskaia dochka”). Tolstaya picks up on this detail of Pushkin's narrative and develops it in *The Slynx* into a major element of her plot: when (now tail-less) Benedikt marries his initial love interest Olenka, the daughter of Kudeyar Kudeyarich, who is the town's ‘Head Sanituration,’ Tolstaya's protagonist quickly trades Olenka for an overwhelming interest in reading. Kudeyar Kudeyarich has a large library of Oldenprint books, which he confiscates from the population in periodic security raids (supposedly because they cause Illness). Having become his son-in-law, the former petty scribe Benedikt first becomes an avid reader of this library, then

¹²⁵ The carving of *pushkin* is Tolstaya's parody of the highly significant and periodically repeated Russian national ritual of Pushkin commemorations through the unveiling of monuments to the national poet: as Lyudmila Parts notes, the first iteration of this ritual, which occurred in 1880 in Moscow, was “initiated by the intelligentsia,” and “the unveiling of Pushkin's monument (...) became the moment when (...) ‘modern Russian national identity concentrated around its literature, with Pushkin as its focus’” (25-6).

joins Kudeyar in his raids to acquire more books, and eventually agrees to help Kudeyar oust Fyodor Kuzmich in order to gain control of the tyrant's extensive library. Thus, Russia in *The Slynx* is not equated with Olenka, or any other woman character for that matter, but rather is, literally, *fiction*—as befits a literature-centric nation.

In his discussion with Mark Lipovetsky, Etkind points out and critiques the ubiquitous replication of the woman-homeland-nation connection in the post-Soviet versions of the master plot of internal colonization (Lipovetskii and Etkind, “Vozvrashchenie tritona”). He suggests that the next crucial step in the contemporary modifications of this plot would be to recognize that “homeland [*rodina*] is an abstraction that does not have a gender” (ibid.) “Only I don't know if one can write poems [fiction] about it,” he adds (ibid.). As I see it, Tolstaya's novel, much of which is actually written in poetic diction, proves that one indeed can write literary works about it, albeit perhaps only in a parodic vein. Indeed, in order to make her version of the Russian Beauty truly ‘an object of desire,’ to use Etkind's formulation, Tolstaya still has to give it a material embodiment in the Book (which is grammatically feminine in Russian) —and then to personify it in Benedikt's imagination: “You, O Book, my pure, shining precious, my golden singing promise, my dream...” (189) Benedikt's perverse substitution of the book for his wife is quite literal, which becomes clear from how he understands love lyrics and poems he had sung and read:

Please do not tell my wife,
That on the steppe I froze,
And that I took with me
Her undying love!

What love is he talking about? It was a book! What else could you love but a book? Huh?

(*The Slynx* 243)

In acquiring his obsession with books, Benedikt proves to be a faithful, if simple-minded student of the Man of Culture, Nikita Ivanich—who taught Benedikt that “Pushkin is our be all and end all” and that life is merely a search for “the Book of Being”—the pursuit of the ideal “law” that will help bring about a utopia (*The Slynx* 138). The two ideas are related and form an important part of the Russian national imaginary. Pushkin is not only “the master signifier of the national literary tradition” (Kabanova 66), but also a symbol of Russianness itself: as Stephanie Sandler points out in “‘Pushkin’ and Identity,” the cliché ‘Pushkin is our everything,’ ubiquitous in the Soviet era, suggests that “Pushkin absorbed fully Russia's being, its spirituality,” becoming “a gigantic vessel able to contain any experience shared by Russians” (206). The myth of the Book in one sense has to do with the role that literature has played in defining Russian national identity, but in another is connected to the larger myth of Russian logocentrism, which Mikhail Epstein succinctly defines as “captivity to the word and the ideological principle” (328). As a postmodern work, *The Slynx* functions “as a parodic unmasking of centuries of logocentrism in Russian culture” (a function Epstein ascribes to all of Russian postmodernism), but it also goes beyond parody to show the devastating political consequences the “captivity to (...) the ideological principle” has had in Russia (Epstein 328).

Benedikt may not understand why Pushkin is so important, but he learns from Nikita Ivanich to “love that pushkin so much” [*prosto do nevozmozhnostev*] (*The Slynx* 260). Likewise, he may not comprehend the “lofty” ideal of the Book, which promises the perfect law and a utopian society, but he unconsciously learns from the Oldeners to privilege words, texts, and

culture over actual human beings. He learns this lesson gradually, at first observing Nikita Ivanich and his friends bury an Oldener woman. At the funeral ceremony, the Oldeners reduce the meaning of her life to a list of pre-Blast documents she might have left behind, of which they can only locate one—a guide to using a meat grinder. The Oldeners proceed to give an absolutely ridiculous series of speeches about the deceased Anna Petrovna's “contribution to the restoration of our Lofty Past”—via her preservation of the useless guide, since the actual meat grinder is nowhere to be found (110). In a spoof on the ending of Solzhenitsyn's “Matryona's Home,” Tolstaya has the Oldeners reinterpret Anna Petrovna's role as that of “a keeper of the hearth, the cornerstone, the pillar of the whole world” (111). Then a dissident Oldener begins to ascribe political meanings to the meat grinder itself: “Ladies and gentlemen, this is symbolic: the world may perish, but the meat grinder is indestructible. The meat grinder of history.” (112) As the absurdity of speeches increases, Anna Petrovna falls completely out of the picture—a poor victim of runaway Russian logocentrism. Once again, we see the principle of Anderson's national biography in operation: an individual death is ascribed a “national” meaning, which transforms this fatality into national continuity. In the scene of the funeral, Tolstaya creates a hilarious parody of this principle.

A confused observer at the funeral, Benedikt with time discovers the charm of letters, words, and texts, assimilating the Russian ideological principle to an extreme degree: “The meaning is over there, in the book; the book is the only real, living thing. Your bed, stool, room, father- and mother-in-law, your wife and her lover—they aren't alive, they're like drawings!” (235) For the sake of the Book, Benedikt neglects his wife, joins the previously dreaded Sanituration forces, and accidentally kills another Golubchik.

Yet Benedikt learns not only from the Oldeners. His other mentor is Kudeyar Kudeyarich, the Head Sanituriion and thus a Man of State Power. He teaches Benedikt “the governmental approach,” which he explains in very vague terms, but which boils down to the principle that “Illness isn't in books, (...) it's in people's heads,” and in order to lead *narod* “toward the bright, lofty future,” one must “treat” the Golubchiks (157-161). It is not coincidental that the Oldeners agree with this general principle: throughout the novel, they attempt to convince the Golubchiks that both Illness and the Slynx are only superstitions of an ignorant people, and Nikita Ivanich himself explains Benedikt's fear of the Slynx as a neurosis. And while the Oldeners disagree with the Sanituriion method of “treating” the Golubchiks—chasing after them with hooks and taking them away, after which they never reappear (an obvious reference to the Stalinist Terror)—they, too, believe in the necessity of “treatment” itself—through education and reinstitution of culture (and thus, through books). By means of her metaphors of ‘Illness’ and ‘treatment,’ Tolstaya draws an unmistakable parallel between Russia's Man of Culture and its Man of State Power, which became separated and opposed to each other in Soviet fiction. The efforts of both, directed at the Golubchiks, collude in the Foucauldian power/knowledge nexus and put in motion the recurring, never-ending project of internal colonization. By the end of the novel, this nexus becomes literally embodied in Benedikt, who masters both the ideological principle and the governmental principle, turning into an extreme and perverse version of both the Man of Culture and the Man of State Power. In the process, he also “becomes” the Slynx.

Most commentators of Tolstaya's dystopia attempt to explain who or what the Slynx is. Some correctly point out that this signifier structures Tolstaya's entire fictional world (Kabanova 166), some see it as a creature that represents the supposedly essential Russian

melancholy—*toska* (Nefagina 193), some argue that it is the symbol of Russian logocentrism—“the religion of the word” (Lipovetskii, “PMS”), and some claim it stands for Russia itself (Paramonov). The Slynx is purposely mysterious—a source of productive ambiguity in the novel, which accounts for such a variety of interpretations. In order to explain my reading of the Slynx, I find it necessary to turn to another important intertext for Tolstaya's dystopia—Fyodor Sologub's satirical novel *The Petty Demon* (1905).

Tolstaya gives an early clue of her novel's connection to Sologub by playfully naming the post-Blast Moscow's tyrant after this author—Fyodor Kuzmich. Pushkin and Sologub are thus the only two Russian writers who figure as characters in Tolstaya's intensely intertextual dystopia. While Pushkin represents Russia's most highly cherished ideals—culture, literature, and everything that is positive (and which is no longer present in Tolstaya's post-Blast world, hence Pushkin is only *pushkin*), Sologub's namesake is very much alive—and stands for everything that is despicable about Russia (see the short list in the previous section). This is because Sologub, in his best-known novel, *The Petty Demon*, has depicted many of the same features of Russian society, albeit without Tolstaya's political implications. Yet the most important parallel between *The Petty Demon* and *The Slynx* lies in the mysterious creatures, whose textual appearances structure both novels—the grey, giggling dust bunny, *nedotykomka*, which drives Sologub's central character, Peredonov, to insanity and murder; and the invisible, howling Slynx, which supposedly causes Benedikt's nervous breakdowns and scares him so much that he murders a Golubchik.

One of the central ambiguities of *The Petty Demon* is “whether Peredonov's *nedotykomka* exists solely within the confines of his (deranged) consciousness, or whether the figure assumes a greater, more universal significance” (Hastis 634). In other words, is Peredonov simply ill or

does he inhabit a strange, hellish space, populated by creatures such as *nedotykodka*? A related question has to do with the identity of “the petty demon” of the novel’s title: is it *nedotykodka* or Peredonov himself (or, possibly, other characters as well)? The critics disagree about how to answer these questions. Tolstaya creates a similar, although more politically-inflected, ambiguity around the Slynx, who seems to “really” exist out there in the forest for the Golubchiks, but not for the Oldeners, and who seems to impart some of its physical and behavioral features to Benedikt, making him into the title character. I would argue that this kind of ambiguity, borrowed from *The Petty Demon*, makes the Slynx into “the demon of Russia,” and who or what exactly that is depends on the one who interprets the image. Thus, the Slynx can be both a real demonic force and a figment of primitive imagination, which keeps *narod* in a state of fear; a symbol of any particular negative feature of “Russianness”—such as *toska* or logocentrism, and an embodiment of a collective memory of terror.¹²⁶ In the text, the Slynx is also opposed to the white and lovely ‘Princess Bird’ (*Ptitsa Paulin*), which appears in Benedikt’s daydreams about beauty, perfect life, and a utopian elsewhere. As its conceptual opposite, the Slynx then represents the inhabitants’ terrible life in their dystopian town. Finally, when Benedikt kills another inhabitant, the killing is described as if it was an action of the Slynx, and Benedikt himself blames the Slynx for it. And after the coup, when Benedikt becomes a Man of Power together with his father-in-law, they accuse each other of being the Slynx:

¹²⁶ This last meaning is suggested in one textual appearance of the Slynx: “You suddenly imagine your izba far off and tiny, (...) and the empty fields around, where the blizzard rages in white columns like *someone being dragged under the arms with his head arched back*. (...) and on the branches, swaying up and down, is the invisible Slynx—it (...) reaches for the hearth, for the warm blood pounding in people’s necks: *SSSLYYYNNXXX!*” (First emphasis mine, second in the original; 45)

“You're just a... a... a... you're the Slynx, that's who you are!!!” cried Benedikt, scaring himself—words just fly out of your mouth and then you can't catch them. He was scared, but he shouted, “Slynx, Synx!”

“Me? Me?” laughed Father-in-law, suddenly loosening his fingers and letting go. “Nanny nanny foo foo, you got it wrong. You're the one who is the Slynx.”

“Me?!?!?”

“Who else? Pushkin? You! You're the one and only...” Father-in-law laughed, shook his head (...) “Go take a look at yourself in the water... (...) Yes, the Slynx, that's just who you are... No need to be frightened... no need... We're among friends... [*Svoi vse, svoi...*]

(*The Slynx* 265; *Kys'*)

In this dialogue, the father-in-law makes Benedikt recognize his part in the coup and in the newly established regime. Kudeyar Kudeyarovich's “Who else? Pushkin?” sounds quite ominous: as Sandler explains, this “rhetorical expression” is part of Russians' everyday vocabulary and is meant as an appeal to someone to take responsibility onto oneself for any number of actions (204). Because of his positive image, Pushkin could never be the Slynx, and Benedikt is forced to acknowledge his radical difference from his beloved idol. At the end, Kudeyar Kudeyarich assures Benedikt that they are all *svoi*—which suggests their common belonging to the same kin and camp of the Slynx. In these last textual appearances, the Slynx acquires the meaning of oppressive, totalitarian government, which is the historical “demon of Russia.”

The image of the Slynx also mediates the entire transformation process of a Man of the People into a Man of State Power. This is a process which Tolstaya sees recurring time and again

in Russian national history. She suggests as much in her review of Robert Conquest's book *The Great Terror*, where she expresses her conviction that Stalinist terror came out of previous centuries' "little terror": "...totalitarian thinking was not invented by the Soviet regime but arose in the bleak depths of Russian history, and was subsequently developed and fortified by Lenin, Stalin, and hundreds of their comrades in arms, talented students of past tyrants, *sensitive sons of the people*." (Emphasis mine; "The Great Terror and the Little Terror," 22). Thus, the Slynx may also be understood in terms of this sinister principle of oppressive leadership coming out of *narod* itself—a repeated transformation of the internal fear of the howling Slynx in the forest into the external rule of terror over others.

As befits a romance of internal colonization, the novel ends with a sacrifice of one of the participants. It is perversely ironic that the victim is the Oldener Nikita Ivanich—the Man of Culture from whom Benedikt learned to value culture over people. Now Benedikt is blackmailed by Kudayar Kudayarich to choose between Nikita Ivanich and his beloved books, and Benedikt convinces his old mentor to sacrifice himself in order to save "art" (270). It is another perverse irony of the novel that Nikita Ivanich is to be burned at the stake—the "stake" being the *pushkin* which Benedikt carved under Nikita Ivanich's direction. However, because the new rulers unwisely use too much gasoline (a sarcastic reference to Russia's oil reserves), the fire wipes out the entire town, leaving only a few predictable survivors—a confused and terrified Benedikt, the mysteriously ethereal Nikita Ivanich and his dissident Oldener friend, and the badly burnt *pushkin*. The novel comes full circle, with the participants of the triangular structure (a Man of

the People, Men of Culture, and Pushkin as a love object akin to the Book¹²⁷) in place to begin a new cycle of internal colonization.

Despite its charming folkloric narration, the overall vision of Russia in Tolstaya's novel is so terrible¹²⁸ that the explosion with which the novel ends, destroying the newly established regime, comes as a necessary, even liberating, measure. *The Slynx* portrays Russian history caught in the vicious circle of periodic "burnings" and "re-buildings," the latter differing very little from the previous orders. It is therefore significant that Tolstaya ends the novel before the "founding gesture of a new order" is ever made (Žižek 36). According to Slavoj Žižek, such a gesture is always masculine, whereas the feminine gesture is the radically negative act of exiting the symbolic order. It seems to me that Tolstaya's ending attempts to effect for the author herself some sort of such metaphoric exit from the vicious circle of Russia's history and culture, which has been made what it is chiefly by men. As Tolstaya makes it abundantly clear through her numerous allusions to the (male) classics of Russian literature, this national/cultural order is also literary—it is Wachtel's nation-forming "corpus" of literature, or the canon.¹²⁹ Thus the final explosion in *The Slynx* may be also understood as Tolstaya's attempt to metaphorically clear out the literary space for herself.

Perhaps that is why Tolstaya ends the novel with a quotation from a work by a female relative and literary predecessor, Natal'ia Krandievskaja-Tolstaya, rather than any of her celebrated male relations, canonized in Russian literature. While critic Natal'ia Ivanova has justly

¹²⁷ The figure of Pushkin is best suited for the function of Russia's permanent national love object: as Lyudmila Parts explains, unlike the cultural myths of other Russian writers, "the Pushkin myth is immune to changes in political and literary epochs," especially because Pushkin has become "the embodied foundation of Russian national pride" (26).

¹²⁸ In fact, one of Russia's most respected critics, Natal'ia Ivanova identifies the contrast between the message and the language of *The Slynx* as its most significant feature: "It is the tension *between the sorrow and wrath of the internal message and the ornate execution* that makes Tolstaya's novel a distinctive word in the new Russian prose." (Emphasis in the original; 77)

¹²⁹ See my discussion of the connections between literature and the nation in Chapter 1.

argued that *The Slynx* gives us “none of what we know as the *author's* word, the *author's* intonation,” I would suggest that the only place where the author's position is felt is in her final, non-parodic quotation from Krandievskaja-Tolstaya's poem (emphasis in the original; 77). The final stanza, which Tolstaya quotes, is preceded in the poem by one that describes ruptures and explosions as liberating:

My heart will gladly greet the blast,
At night I'll open the door to the blow,
Please understand that I so long
*For a liberating loss!*¹³⁰ (Emphasis mine)

O joyless, painless moment!
The spirit rises, beggarly and bright,
A stubborn wind blows hard, and hastens
The cooling ash that follows it in flight. (*The Slynx* 275)

Tolstaya does not quote the last but one stanza, but by concluding *The Slynx* with the poem's final stanza she sends the reader, mystified by such an ending, to the original text, which indeed gives clues about the author's stance. Like the Ukrainian women writers then, whose strategy of aligning themselves with their female literary predecessors I described in Chapter 2, Tolstaya

¹³⁰ English translation of this stanza is mine. The original reads:
И будет сердце взрыву радо,
Я в бурю, в ночь раскрою двери.
Пойми меня, мне надо, надо
Освобождающей потери! (Krandievskaja)

draws her literary lineage to a woman writer who came before her, even as she puts on display—through her playful allusions and parodied plots—her knowledge and mastery of the male-authored Russian classics.

As a post-Soviet romance of internal colonization, *The Slynx* is a poignant illustration of Etkind's theory and, in particular, of his claim that Russia's system of internal colonization has been caught in “the vicious circle of infinite self-replications” [*durnaia beskonechnost' samovosproizvedenii*], extending into the Soviet era (Etkind, “Fuko i tezis vnutrennei kolonizatsii”). However, Tolstaya's literary vision of this process also points to the role of Russian logocentrism in keeping this vicious circle going. Lest the reader thinks that Tolstaya has grossly exaggerated the role of logocentrism in Russian national history and culture, I will give a real-life example of it—found in one of the critical reviews of *The Slynx* (and this is perhaps the greatest irony of all). In the middle of his superlative praise of Tolstaya's novel, Boris Paramonov makes the following statement: “While savoring *The Slynx*, one feels that it was all worth it: living through such a history was worth it if that was necessary for the production of such a text.”¹³¹ Further commentary is surely unnecessary.

As an ABC of “Russianness”—a text that strives to convey, albeit in the parodic mode, the elusive Russian identity—*The Slynx* raises the serious question of Russia's imperial and colonial past, and its relationship to Russian national identity. Tolstaya's novel seems to capture what the editors of *National Identity in Russian Culture* call “...part of the ‘problem’ of Russianness”—the fact that “[i]t lies, in a sense, on a fault line between imperial and national identities; or more precisely, between geo-political and ethno-cultural criteria of self-definition” (Franklin and Widdis 5). We see this problem embodied in the relationship, mutual dependence

¹³¹ The original reads: “Наслаждаясь “Кысю”, вы чувствуете, что игра стоила свеч: стоило прожить такую историю, чтобы породить такой текст.” (Paramonov)

and sometimes coincidence (as in Benedikt) of the Man of the People, the Man of Culture, and the Man of State Power. The character of Benedikt is Tolstaya's reply to those who have sought to construct a depoliticized, idealized Russian identity based on the folklore and culture of the Russian *narod*.

Finally, although critics like Lipovetsky, who claim that Tolstaya's works do not raise the question of female identity's construction, have a point,¹³² *The Slynx* does engage and critique the attitudes towards women and the gender/nation nexus in Russian culture (Lipovetskii, "PMS"). Tolstaya's dystopia shows sexist attitudes and violence against women to be pervasive among the Russian *narod*, and the novel's undoing of the conventional gendered structure in the romance of internal colonization constitutes a major intervention into the Russian national imaginary, in which 'Mother Russia' is female by definition. In portraying Russian history and culture as the same terrifying narrative, repeated over and over by men, Tolstaya also deconstructs a ubiquitous (and not only Russian) gendered stereotype about national time. As Ann McClintock explains in "'No Longer in a Future Heaven': Nationalism, Gender, and Race," the temporal paradox of nationalism—its "veering between nostalgia for the past and the impatient, progressive sloughing off of the past"—is solved by representing national time "as a natural division of gender" (263):

Women are represented as the atavistic and authentic body of national tradition (inert, backward-looking and natural), embodying nationalism's conservative principle of continuity. Men, by contrast, represent the progressive agent of national modernity

¹³² Tolstaya is notorious for her vociferous repudiations of Western feminism and its applicability to the post-Soviet Russian society. See, for example, her interview with Sally Laird (Laird), her essay "Women's Lives," and Goscilo's introduction to *The Explosive World of Tatyana N. Tolstaya's Fiction*.

(forward-thrusting, potent and historic), embodying nationalism's *progressive, or revolutionary, principle of discontinuity*. (Emphasis mine; 263)

The Slynx, of course, completely undermines such a division, taking women out of their symbolic role altogether, and instead showing that the efforts of the supposedly “progressive (male) agents” of Russia produce not just conservative continuity, but a sinister sameness. Such a portrayal provides a stark contrast to a number of late Soviet and post-Soviet Russian works in which the stagnation of Russian history is represented by the identically grim lives of several successive generations of women (the best known of these is Petrushevskaya's “The Time: Night”).¹³³ Surprisingly, such a portrayal also makes *The Slynx* similar to an otherwise very different work by Oksana Zabuzhko—the Ukrainian foundational national romance *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*.

Tolstaya vs. Zabuzhko: Post-Soviet National Romances and Gendered History

Back in the mid-1990s, when both Tolstaya and Zabuzhko temporarily lived and worked in the United States,¹³⁴ Zabuzhko's autobiographical heroine of *Fieldwork* (the first draft of which was written in the USA) made a characteristic complaint about her inferior status in the West as compared to Tolstaya:

¹³³ For an analysis of a series of such works, see Goscilo, *Dehexing Sex*, pp. 39-42.

¹³⁴ Between 1990 and 1999, Tolstaya shared her time between Russia and the United States, teaching Russian literature and creative writing at Skidmore College, lecturing at other universities and collaborating with magazines such as *New York Review of Books*. Zabuzhko had two longer stays in the United States in 1992 and 1994, teaching at the Pennsylvania State University as well as at Harvard and the University of Pittsburgh.

And you also might say—appearing with a lecture at some American university, or at the ‘triple-A, double-S’ conference, or at the Kennan Institute in Washington, or wherever else the ill wind blows you, an honorarium of a hundred, two hundred bucks max, plus travel costs—and thank you very much, you're not Yevtushenko or Tatiana Tolstaya...
(*Fieldwork* 29)

To Zabuzhko's heroine, their difference in status reflected the disparity in influence and cultural weight between Russia and Ukraine in the international arena. Since that time, both writers have returned to their respective home countries, within which they have acquired comparable visibility as well as high literary and cultural status. Their “national” novels, for reasons that were discussed above, played an important part in securing them this status.

The Slynx and *The Museum* are drastically different, even opposite, in tone, style, and genre. Tolstaya's parodic, playful dystopia, populated with fantastic creatures and written in a semi-invented, stylized language, seems to have little in common with Zabuzhko's serious, heroic family saga, which is after the “hard,” albeit elusive, facts of history and a realistic portrayal of Ukraine's various historical and regional dialects and sociolects. The differences stem not only from varying aesthetic preferences, although these are a significant factor—they also have much to do with what the two writers perceive to be their respective nations' most urgent tasks: if *The Museum* strives to lay mythic foundations for a nation that has not been in the position to write its own history until very recently, *The Slynx* dismantles the mythic foundations of a dominant nation, which have often made its history disastrous both for itself and for its neighbors. In this respect, Tolstaya and Zabuzhko do not venture very far outside the

venerable Slavic tradition of politically engaged art (although Tolstaya's novel goes further than Zabuzhko's), and this is exactly what makes their novels comparable.

As ambitious national narratives, both *The Slynx* and *The Museum* make use of totalizing frameworks—the alphabet and the museum—as structuring devices, although both writers also strive to undermine these closed and all-encompassing systems, underscoring their constructed character. Tolstaya's mixing of historical Russian alphabets parallels Zabuzhko's laying bare of the process of ideological montage, involved in constructing a museum. And yet, in both cases these gestures do not completely undo the effect of comprehensiveness, which makes both women's texts into authoritative visions of their nations' past and present.

The two novels are also romances endowed with a “national” meaning. As such, they exemplify another popular way (in addition to Anderson's reverse national biography through deaths) to emplot a collective national story. Although *The Slynx* parodies the conventional romantic plot of internal colonization while Zabuzhko constructs her romantic story in all seriousness, the underlying structure of both romances is similar: two individuals that represent opposing camps in their society (be they classes, as in *The Slynx*, or politically and culturally opposed regions, as in *The Museum*) are brought together for the sake of national unity. The difference lies in how these romantic plots play out. The romance of internal colonization, which captures centuries of Russia's political experience at imperial nation-building, recognizes the utopian dimension of longed-for national unity, especially as part of the inherently unequal internal colonial project—and this recognition is reflected in the plot's inevitable ending of sacrifice. By contrast, the foundational national romance, which is a new plot for the literature of the 22-year old Ukrainian nation-state, is a utopian narrative that embodies in the two protagonists' egalitarian romantic relationship the idealized imagining of the nation as a unified

and “horizontal” community of equals, to use Anderson's term (7). Yet Zabuzhko's utopian portrayal of Daryna and Adrian's romance is set against the background of a realistic depiction of Ukrainian history and society, in which gender inequality is shown to be a major factor. In the course of the novel, Zabuzhko's female protagonist Daryna gradually realizes that there exist numerous parallels between Ukraine's Soviet past and its post-Soviet present, and a crucial one is the continued usurping of political power by men. As did *The Slynx*, *The Museum* shows how history has been made by men—particularly through their abuses of positions of power.¹³⁵

Such a portrayal in *The Museum* comes through in three structurally similar conversations which Daryna has with different men in power—both during the Soviet and the post-Soviet era. In fact, Daryna is able to navigate the later, post-Soviet conversations successfully exactly because they remind her of the one she had in 1987 with a captain of the KGB. Her memory of how the captain attempted to recruit her as an informer on her university friends helps Daryna in new, ethically questionable post-Soviet situations. Relying on that memory, she is able to stand against the director of the independent channel where she works, when in the early 2000s, amidst partial return of mass media censorship under Leonid Kuchma's presidency in Ukraine, the channel is bought by some rich members of the new post-Soviet economic elite. When Daryna's boss gives her a long and extremely vague speech about the channel's new format and her chance to become its “face,” promising her a prime time slot and a salary unheard of in post-Soviet Ukrainian television, Daryna recalls how similarly the KGB captain “prattled about who-knows-what for two hours straight, like wind blowing sand at her from all sides at once, and then offered her an opportunity to ‘cooperate’.” (Zabuzhko, *The Museum* 222). This parallel prompts

¹³⁵ This portion of my argument about Zabuzhko's novel is explained in greater detail in Shchur, “Ukrainian Women between Communism and Post-Communism: Memory and the Everyday of Ideology in Oksana Zabuzhko's *The Museum of Abandoned Secrets*” (*The Everyday of Memory: Between Communism and Post-Communism*).

Daryna to be cautious and ask more questions about the sources of the channel's future financing. When her boss finally mentions the plan of the channel's owners to launch a TV beauty pageant, Daryna suddenly intuits from his veiled explanations that this beauty pageant is meant to recruit girls to be used later in a sex trafficking scheme, and that the high salary he promised her would be coming out of its profits. Like the KGB captain, the channel's director asks that their conversation remain between them, but Daryna not only rejects his offer of “cooperation,” but also determines to interfere in her boss's despicable scheme.

Having no faith in corrupt police officials, Daryna turns to her acquaintance and member of the Ukrainian parliament, Vadym—the only individual with real political power whom she knows. Yet her conversation with Vadym suddenly begins to follow the pattern of the previous two. Vadym dismisses Daryna's story about the plotted sex trafficking scheme, responding that he has “more important affairs to attend to”—business “of the state” (Zabuzhko *The Museum* 355). And when Daryna retorts in anger that she could not care less about a state in which sex trafficking becomes “the norm,” Vadym replies that she should be more “realistic” (ibid., 355). Then, like the KGB captain and the channel's director, Vadym gives Daryna a long, confusing lecture (this time the topic is ‘successful’ state politics) and makes her an offer of ‘cooperation.’ He invites her to work as his PR agent in the upcoming electoral campaign, implementing some of the questionable PR techniques he had advocated earlier in the conversation.

It is no accident that the three conversations in *The Museum* are also reminiscent of Benedikt's discussion of the governmental principle with Kudayar Kudayarich in *The Slynx*. Like Zabuzhko's men of power, Kudayar equivocates and obfuscates, trying to recruit Benedikt to work for the Saniturion forces. In the process, poor Benedikt becomes completely confused by “the governmental approach”: “You think this is the way things should go, but no, it's like this,

not like that. No way you could guess for yourself.” (Tolstaya, *The Slynx* 157). Very similar meetings with Men of State Power (the KGB) are also described by Yuri Andrukhovych in *The Moscoviad*, analyzed in Chapter 3. The encounter between the (Soviet) state and the people in post-Soviet fiction seems to be habitually emplotted as a confusing “cooperation conversation”—a modern equivalent of the traditional “deal with the devil” motif.¹³⁶ However, if Andrukhovych and other writers use this motif in depictions of the Soviet state only, both Tolstaya (through the timelessness of her dystopia) and Zabuzhko (through the parallelism between the Soviet and post-Soviet conversations with men in power) suggest its applicability to Men of State Power across the Soviet/post-Soviet divide.

Nonetheless, the two women writers point the reader towards different conclusions about men's abuses of power in Russia and Ukraine. In Tolstaya's dystopic vision, they are a constant and ubiquitous feature of Russian history, in which, Tolstaya seems to suggest, positive male leaders have been non-existent. By contrast, Zabuzhko's heroine comes to think of these abuses as characteristic only of a certain type of men (and, theoretically, women as well, although *The Museum* does not show such female characters). These are men who seem “strong” when, in fact, they are just unscrupulous opportunists, quickly adjusting to any regime change for their own benefit. *The Museum* puts together a mini-gallery of such male characters—from all historical periods portrayed in the novel, from different regions of Ukraine, of different professions and political affiliations. They stand in contrast to Adrian and other positive or neutral male characters, who, however, are not in positions of power. Yet because the plot of *The Museum*

¹³⁶ For a brilliant recent exploration of the literary connections between the secret police and the devil in Soviet literature (esp. in Bulgakov's work), see Vatulescu.

ends several months before the so-called Orange Revolution,¹³⁷ its final note is one of anticipated positive change: political power in Ukraine may be in the hands of unscrupulous men, but the novel's main characters are hopeful that there are enough honest and politically engaged people in Ukraine to resist these men's most egregious abuses of power.¹³⁸

While the authors of both *The Slynx* and *The Museum* make their narrations of the two post-Soviet nations into stories about gender (among other things), Zabuzhko also writes women into her story—in ways in which Tolstaya does not, either in *The Slynx* or in any of her other works.¹³⁹ In Daryna and her friend Vlada, Zabuzhko creates complex heroines, who stand in the very center of Zabuzhko's national narrative and take active part in the making of their society. Daryna and Vlada represent a fairly new type of female characters in Ukrainian literature: they are outspoken women intellectuals and independent cultural producers, who through their work (television journalism for Daryna and experimental visual art for Vlada) attempt to critique and remake their nation and its culture from within. Their observations, comments and life choices differ radically from those of their mothers as well as most women around them. For instance, Daryna notes that her mother harbors a profound mistrust towards “political concepts”: she “still doesn't know the difference between liberalism and democracy, or what a civil society is—they're all men's games for her, only relevant to her own life inasmuch as they can one day

¹³⁷ Mass protests of Ukrainian citizens against the rigged presidential election of 2004, which helped overturn the falsified election results.

¹³⁸ *The Museum's* ending has acquired a good dose of irony in 2010, when the presidential candidate whose team was responsible for the 2004 falsifications was elected President of Ukraine. Obviously, writing national utopias is always risky business, but in this particular case, history made corrections to Zabuzhko's national vision almost as soon as it was published.

¹³⁹ In the dystopian world of *The Slynx*, female characters fare only slightly better than male ones—chiefly because they are marginal to the narrative. Benedikt's wife, Olenka, and her mother are primitive creatures, interested only in food and sexual pleasures (Olenka). They also completely support the villainous Kudayar in his thirst for power because his status as the chief Murza gives them access to all kinds of luxury. Two other more significant female characters—Benedikt's co-worker and the Oldener woman who is given the grotesque funeral—die in the middle of the narrative, and serve as devices to expose the logocentric obsession of the Oldeners and the cruelty of the Golubchiks.

ruin it” (Zabuzhko, *The Museum* 245). All of Daryna's female friends, except for Vlada, hold similar opinions. The comment about “men's games” is telling, as it supports Zabuzhko's portrayal of men's usurping of power on the one hand and reveals why women by and large have not intervened into these men's games on the other. By contrast, Daryna does attempt to intervene into some of these “games,” as her conversations with her boss and Vadym demonstrate. And even though Vadym at first declines to do anything about the sex trafficking scheme, Daryna's intervention does produce a positive result in the end—ironically, when Vadym spreads information about it as part of the negative PR campaign against his political opponents. Yet Daryna herself does not enter the political arena, preferring the role of a cultural producer and critic (which is also Zabuzhko's own preference¹⁴⁰).

Interestingly, Tolstaya has played the role of a cultural producer and critic in Russia for over a decade—not only as a writer, but also as a television program host (just like Daryna). Her immensely popular show, which bears an ironically gender-marked title—*The School of Slander* (*Shkola zlosloviia*),¹⁴¹ functions as a public platform from which to critique Russian culture, society and politics. Yet her fiction, because of the author's political and aesthetic preferences, has altogether avoided creating autobiographical heroines or complex female characters.

All in all, the comparison of *The Slynx* to *The Museum* reveals important similarities between Tolstaya's and Zabuzhko's portrayals of their respective post-Soviet nations. Despite the novels' radically divergent styles, the two texts are alike in their structuring devices, in their status as national romances, and, most of all, in the gendered visions of (pre-Soviet)/Soviet/post-Soviet history, which they put forth. Yet their differences remain as vital as their similarities.

¹⁴⁰ This is in contrast to another Ukrainian writer discussed in this project—Maria Matios, who has recently joined a liberal centrist political party and was elected to the Ukrainian parliament in 2012.

¹⁴¹ The show's title creatively rethinks and redeploys gossiping—conventionally thought of as a feminine pastime—as a form of cultural critique.

Tolstaya's decision to use for her "national" novel the genre of a dystopia, which has become very popular in Russia in the post-Soviet period and especially since Putin's ascent to power,¹⁴² points to the writer's disillusionment with the oppressive forms in which the Russian "national idea" has been embodied time and again in Russian history, as well as with the national idea itself. The apocalyptic ending of *The Slynx* and the author's quotation of Krandievskiaia-Tolstaya's poem about liberating explosions bespeak the desire to break free of the obsessively repeated myths, narratives and rituals that constitute the Russian national imaginary. By contrast, Zabuzhko's heroic family saga and especially its utopian national romance plot supply a unifying myth for the Ukrainian national imaginary and suggest that despite all the present-day economic difficulties, internal political conflicts and gender discrimination, for the "young" Ukrainian nation-state the time of literary dystopias has not yet come.

¹⁴² On the cultural functions of post-Soviet dystopias in Russia, see Tchantsev's "Fabrika antiutopii" and Kabanova (Chapter 3).

CONCLUSION

From Bichuya's autobiographical narrator, who cannot utter a single word in her recurrent nightmare, and the image of a mute child whom she encounters in another dream; to the gagged woman poet in Kononenko's "On Sunday Morning"; to the struggles of Oksana in Zabuzhko's *Fieldwork* to find a place from which she could speak; to Matios's mute Darusia, who is nevertheless given a critical voice in the novel; to Kononenko's Maryana in *Imitation*, who is murdered because of her cruel, mocking words and all too forceful a voice; to Daryna's various attempts to unearth the voices from the past in Zabuzhko's *Museum*—much of Ukrainian women's prose fiction from 1989 to 2009 displays an overwhelming interest in speaking as self-expression, a form of power, and a basic way to signal one's presence in the world. While gaining a voice has long become a commonplace of feminist theorizing, it remains a vital first step, and it has been a very important one for post-Soviet Ukrainian women writers in the two decades following the collapse of the Soviet Union. As Rosi Braidotti has stressed more than once in various contexts, "[i]n order to announce the death of the subject, one must first have gained the right to speak as one" (169).

Yet these authors have been searching for a voice not only for and as women (writers), but also for and as Ukrainians. In their case, Braidotti's dictum has to be coupled with a similar statement about the nation: in order to announce the death of the nation as a paradigm (as many nationalism scholars have done in the last two decades or so¹⁴³), one must first have gained the right at least to try to use it "as a viable space for political self-expression" (Boehmer 191). Because Ukraine only became independent in 1991, and because the writers whose work I

¹⁴³ See, for example, Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*, pp. 190-2.

examine have all lived a part of their lives under the Soviet system that organized and policed literary production in Ukraine and other non-Russian republics somewhat differently and more stringently than in Russia, an independent nation-state has seemed to them a necessary precondition for being able to speak, write and publish as Ukrainian women authors, including on previously forbidden topics. The explosion in Ukrainian women's writing that followed the collapse of the Soviet Empire suggests that these authors were right in this respect.

Nonetheless, as I argue throughout this project, the national visions which these women have put forth in their works are often critical, and an important part of this critique stems from their focus on women characters and their lives. As many gender/nation theorists have argued and as I have reviewed in Chapter 1, national discourses circumscribe women's (and women writers') roles vis-à-vis the nation; the writings by Zabuzhko, Kononenko, and Matios have often attempted to redefine these roles and/or critique other aspects of the Ukrainian national imaginary—and that is precisely why some of their reception has been either hostile or manipulative. Still, the very fact that they addressed the topic of the nation in their fiction has allowed these authors to gain significant literary recognition in Ukraine—just as writing about Russia's national past as well as its present problems has propelled several Russian women authors, including Tatiana Tolstaya, to national fame. Ukrainian and Russian women writers' present-day visibility in their cultures undoubtedly suggests that important changes have taken place in the two post-Soviet nations since the disintegration of the Soviet state and its gender order—at least, in the domain of literary production. Some women writers, as I have shown, have been able to successfully position themselves as critics of their cultures and have gained recognition as such, especially as authors of “national” narratives.

In this project, I have examined the national narratives by Ukrainian and Russian women writers as variations on two types of national plots—Anderson’s reverse national biography, which transforms individual deaths into national continuity, and a national romance. (In Zabuzhko’s *Museum* and Tolstaya’s *The Slynx*, the two types of emplotment of the national story are combined, but the romance plot predominates.) In particular, I traced how women authors undermined the conventional gender patterns in these plots, such as symbolization of the nation through a woman’s death in the national biography (as in Solzhenitsyn’s *Matryona’s Home* or in Samchuk’s *Mariia*) or the equation of the female character in the romance of internal colonization with Russia and its fate (as in the three Russian novels examined by Etkind). Even though in many cases the women writers parodied or changed the gendered dynamics of these plots—and thus took the national symbolic burden off of women characters—it is possible to argue that by using these plots in the first place, even if in somewhat subversive ways, these authors still emplotted the nation—gave it an “enabling” form, as Boehmer put it (11).

For example, although Kononenko’s *Imitation* put a female activist in the center of the narrative and refused to ascribe a sacrificial national meaning to her death (as well as critiqued the Euro-Ukrainian identity and the construction of the East as Ukraine’s internal Other), it still “enmesh[ed]” a “multiplicity of characters” “into a single, overarching narrative trajectory,” to refer back to Cairns Craig’s formulation (9). Granted, this “trajectory” revealed conflict and internal division within Ukraine, yet it still brought characters from Kyiv and the East onto the pages of the same text and into the twists and turns of the same narrative—and thus staged that very simultaneity of co-existence which Anderson considers to be the novel’s major “national” function. Of course, there is a significant difference between such a narrative and a conventional nationalist plot—not only in the dynamics of gendering, but also in how they conceive of a

collective national identity: while the latter might imagine a monolithic, ethnically exclusive national community in which women symbolize the nation, Kononenko's novel conceives of Ukraine as a country in which citizens with different conceptions of their identities attempt to coexist—and where various national and gender discourses collude and collide. Nonetheless, *Imitation* still allows readers to imagine Ukraine as a distinct entity and thus still helps produce the Ukrainian national imaginary. In addition, through its critique of internal Othering processes, the novel attempts to help readers become aware of their own possible Othering attitudes, directed at the Ukrainian East. It may therefore be seen as trying to generate “consensus” about the Ukrainian nation—a function of the novel of which Lynch and Warner speak in *Cultural Institutions of the Novel* (4).

In this respect, it is interesting to consider Tolstaya's *The Slynx*—the novel that goes the farthest, out of all examined in this project, in trying to deconstruct a national master plot. This author's dystopic parody of Russia's romance of internal colonization is so total and it critiques and undermines so many aspects of “Russianness” (imperial, cultural, folk, gender, etc.) that its emplotment as a novel does not appear to leave behind any positive imaginings. Yet had it not been for its “explosive” ending, which wipes out the entire constructed world of post-Blast Russia—had the novel ended on a less apocalyptic note—the emplotment could have still worked. It takes a very radical ending, and an earnest quotation of another woman writer's poetic pleading for a “liberating loss,” to negate all the remaining effects of national imaginings, generated by the very form of the novel. *The Slynx* is thus a vivid example through negation of the extraordinary power of narrative plots to project imagined worlds, including national ones. The plots are one source of the ideological staying power of the national imaginaries, which I discussed in Chapter 1.

In *The Slynx*, Tolstaya advanced a most comprehensive critique of her nation and culture. In a sense, after the novel's definitive and radically negative ending, there was nothing left to write—at least in the genre of a “national” novel. Since 2000, Tolstaya has not written another large work of prose, although she has published short stories and children's books. By contrast, the Ukrainian women writers examined in this project have authored several new works of prose fiction, some of which fit the parameters of this project and continue to stage important interventions into the Ukrainian national imaginary.

Since *Sweet Darusia*, Maria Matios has published several other works about twentieth-century life in northern Bukovyna, a few of which feature female protagonists—often women who are marginalized in their rural communities. Perhaps the most interesting of these is her 2008 short novel *Moskalytsia (The Moscovite)*,¹⁴⁴ which tells the story of a half-Russian woman, named Severyna, who was fathered during World War I by a Russian soldier passing through the village. For the reason of her mixed ethnic origin, she is nicknamed *moskalytsia* and teased by many in the community—until the village is occupied by the Soviets, and Severyna's neighbors all of a sudden begin to call her by her real name. She eventually moves outside the village to a little hut and makes a living practicing folk medicine, which gives her a reputation of a witch. When the Soviet authorities attempt to arrest her, she manipulates her reputation and scares the officers off with snakes, who had made a home in her roof. Severyna survives the multiple regime changes in Bukovyna, including Ukraine's independence in 1991, and the novel filters all of these events through her critical, skeptical point of view. Like *Sweet Darusia* then, the novel offers a non-national, outcast woman's perspective on the tumultuous recent history of Bukovyna, but extends Darusia's critique into the independence period as well. Still more

¹⁴⁴ The title does not have a good equivalent in English; *moskalytsia* is a derogatory term for a woman of Russian ethnicity.

recently, Matios has begun to collect oral history about the extermination of Bukovynian Jews during World War II, and has written several newspaper articles about it. It is thus entirely possible that her next work of fiction will be on this topic, which has been treated only marginally in her works thus far.¹⁴⁵

One other recent work by a woman writer, which deserves a mention, is Yevhenia Kononenko's 2012 novel, *Rosiis'kyi siuzhet* (*The Russian Plot*). Like *The Slynx*, it is a language- and literature-centric work with many playful allusions to the well-known literary classics. Its main intertext, however, is Pushkin's novel in verse, *Eugene Onegin* (1825-32), the story of which Kononenko transplants to the Ukrainian village of the early 1990s and later to the transnational scene of academic conferences in Slavic studies. As she stages this Russian plot in the Ukrainian context, Kononenko raises the question of Russia's continued cultural and literary domination in and influence on Ukraine, as well as that of the two nations' very unequal present-day cultural weight in the international arena. The novel thus appears to combine some of the central concerns of *The Slynx* (the imperial and colonial role of Russian culture) with those of Zabuzhko's *Fieldwork* (Ukraine's invisibility in the world)—and, fittingly for this study, asks to what extent “the Russian plot” still organizes the Ukrainian national imaginary.

¹⁴⁵ For more on Matios's writings about the Holocaust, see footnote 12 in Chapter 4.

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