

Modernism vs. Populism in Fin de Siècle Ukrainian Literature

A Case of Gender Conflict¹

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Marking an Epoch

The character of the Ukrainian *fin de siècle*, perhaps the most interesting period in the national culture, has never been thoroughly analyzed. This is a key period for understanding many of the problems that arose in the twentieth century, above all the problem of Ukrainian modernism. I use the term “modernism” to delineate the attempt at aesthetic and stylistic modernization of Ukrainian artistic culture around the turn of the century. This attempt polemized with the populist model which had taken shape along with the literature of the written popular Ukrainian language, and which by the end of the nineteenth century was established as a complete artistic system.² Among the challengers of populism, I will highlight two figures whose names are connected with revolutionary changes in Ukrainian literature at the end of the nineteenth century: Lesia Ukraïnka (1871-1913) and Ol'ha Kobylians'ka (1863-1942).

The modernist opposition to populism at the turn of the twentieth century was the first attempt to move away from the dominance of that cultural norm. The discussion it evoked slowly grew into a deep conflict, not between generations of artists, but rather between artistic convictions. Moreover, the conflict was marked by gender: it is no accident that it was the women writers, Ukraïnka and Kobylians'ka, who attempted to bring down the dominant ideology in the sphere of culture. Their opponents—who met modernism, intellectualism, and European-ism with caution, prejudice, or outright hostility—were almost exclusively men. Ukraïnka and Kobylians'ka enriched their culture both aesthetically and politically, and the last aspect should be especially emphasized. The linguistically eccentric letters of Lesia Ukraïnka and the stylistically brilliant stories of Ol'ha Kobylians'ka reveal a process of radical redefinition of self in protest against patriarchal culture. And although the conflict was painful, and technically the “modernists” were defeated, it nonetheless testified to a certain maturity of Ukrainian culture, the complexity of its discourse, and the polyphonic nature of its artistic thought. Indeed, the anti-populist ideology and the new artistic aesthetic of the end of the nineteenth century were not marginal phenomena from the point of view of the next one hundred years. Analogous attempts were made in the 1920s, 1940s, and 1960s, each carrying with it the imprint of a corresponding stage of literary development. One might say, paraphrasing Jacques Derrida, that the marginal appeared to be central in Ukrainian literature of the period.

In autumn of 1898, nationally minded Ukrainian intellectuals marked the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Ivan Kotliarevs'kyi's epic poem “Eneïda,” the first literary work in modern

1. This essay appeared in *Engendering Slavic Literatures*. Eds. Pamela Chester and Sibelan Forrester. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966. 83–103.

2. For the sake of my argument, I will define “populism” as a sociopolitical movement multifaceted in its theoretics, but with one underlying characteristic: belief that service to the “people,” a concept variously understood, should be the inherent *raison d'être* of culture (including art) and society (including politics). The term will be discussed and refined below.

Ukrainian, and of twenty-five years of scholarly and literary activity by the literary patriarch Dr. Ivan Franko. The tone of the jubilee celebrations in Kiev (in eastern Ukraine, under Russian subjugation) and L'viv (in western Ukraine, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) showed the extent to which Ukrainian literature at the time was dominated by a conceptual model that can be called “traditional-populist.” Franko himself envisioned artistic creation as a workaday routine, ennobled by the writer’s sense of obligation and concern with the topics of the day. The major function of the literature of a divided and socially underdeveloped people—a people without its own state—had to be in that literature’s service to the people, in assertion of that people’s national and human rights.

It would be a misinterpretation to view populism as a monolithic phenomenon. It was a system or hierarchy of styles, a system of views with many individual models, a system inclined to development and modification. On the level of artistic forms and styles, populism prescribed a particular gravitation toward traditional, old, or autonomous artistic structures (the baroque, burlesque), toward the active production—with the goal of self-preservation—of a romantic-populist ideology, toward the absorption and strengthening of didactic and ethnographic forms of creativity, and toward the use of conversational (chiefly low-style) language and not the written literary language, etc. (Hundorova and Shumylo, 55)

This pseudo-explicit and pseudo-realistic expression was actually superficial and always accompanied by mythmaking. Populism is not only patriarchal (its deepest characteristic) but also mytho-patriarchal. For example, the root of Panteleimon Kulish’s populism lay in the idealistic myth of the community, the folk, the “national” individual (soul), and, of course, the national woman. The patriarchal system was completed and secured precisely “with the help of an ideal female creature” (Hundorova, 16), in a series of impersonal, romantic female figures, the first of which was Kvitka-Osnov’ianenko’s Marusia. Populism was constructed “in the formation of a culture (as of a cult) with the aid of mythologizing thinking” (ibid.).

At the turn of the century, however, new currents were flourishing in the European literatures. In Ukraine, especially in the western region of Galicia, Czech and Polish “modernism” was spreading. Gerhart Hauptmann, Maurice Maeterlinck, Arthur Schnitzler, and Anatole France (to name just a few) were increasingly popular. Therefore, an acute question of choice faced every aspiring Ukrainian writer. On the one hand, populism advocated service to the people, however one understood “the people,” be it the peasant class, or everyone who worked, or the whole nation. On the other hand, writers were devoted to art and culture. The most cultured and most inclined toward aesthetic search understood that populism as an ideology restricted culture—it was ruinous for culture. At the same time, populism had an enormous innate appeal. Defending oneself against populism, trying to ignore the political circumstances of one’s work—particularly when, in the East, it was illegal to write in Ukrainian—was not only difficult but absurd. This dilemma produced an ambivalence among Ukrainian writers, a constant internal doubt which was only natural on both sides of the debate.

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One of the first signs of literary change was Lesia Ukraïнка’s address in late 1899 at the Kiev Literary Society (Kyïvs'ke literaturne tovarystvo), “Ukrainian Writers in Bukovyna”

(“Malorusskie pisateli na Bukovine”). Ukraïнка was twenty-eight, but since her literary debut at thirteen she had acquired considerable authority. Dr. Ivan Franko himself (in his role as literary arbiter and judge) had analyzed and praised her work in a long article the year before. She was the Wunderkind of Ukrainian culture, daughter of the writer and feminist Olena Pchilka and niece of the political emigre Mykhailo Drahomanov. Ukraïнка’s writing defended the Europeanization of Ukrainian culture and advocated a broad program of translation from other languages and integration of European values into Ukrainian spiritual life. Her speech in 1899 congratulated Ol’ha Kobylians’ka, among other writers of a new generation and a new aesthetic. Ukraïнка not only evaluated Kobylians’ka’s works positively; she also unequivocally alluded to the restrictions of populism, using the controversial word “modern.”

Ol’ha Kobylians’ka was the first in Ukrainian literature to write about the intelligentsia for the intelligentsia, in a completely new psychological style. She was eight years older than Lesia Ukraïнка, though she began publishing later. In 1899 Kobylians’ka was the author of two long feminist stories and several short stories, including the controversial “Valse melancolique.” From their first appearance, her works were variously perceived. Their reception and the polemics around them testify to the cultural conflict which marked the Ukrainian *fin de siècle*.

“Modernism” that did not aspire to destroy the deep patriarchal cultural canon and its idealizing mythology remained on the level of superficial aesthetic experiments and applied itself fully only to the modernization of populism. The evolution of Hnat Khotkevich, who made his debut in 1898, or the silence of Vasyl’ Stefanyk from the beginning of this century, ran along these very lines. It was instead the women—Ukraïнка and Kobylians’ka—who rose up not only against the formal characteristics of populism, but also against the patriarchal model of culture which underlay those characteristics.

This was not a mere intellectual exercise. Ukraïнка and Kobylians’ka acutely sensed the neglect accorded them in comparison with men. The structure of society foresaw no place for them, they had no chance at a formal career, traditional marriage did not attract them, and thus, without anything, they had nothing to lose. Expanses of freedom opened beyond the bounds of social structure—intellectual freedom based on education and an orientation toward Europe, creative freedom centered on the priority of art, freedom of political thought, and, finally, the ideals of personal freedom and feminist liberation, in contrast to women’s general lack of rights in society.

Conflicted Reception

Although Lesia Ukraïнка and Ol’ha Kobylians’ka fundamentally valued intellectual knowledge, neither was able to obtain a systematic education, and each had to learn by herself. Both suffered terribly from the inadequacy of their formal education and regretted the lack of a university education, though they were extremely learned for the time. Both judged themselves rigorously and noted that the lack of regular criticism was a great defect of Ukrainian literature. Both had complex relationships with their milieux. This often resulted in unjust condemnation of Kobylians’ka and silence toward Lesia Ukraïнка, and both women faced a lack of understanding and were later canonized on the basis of lesser works. Both had unhappy personal lives and suffered terrible illnesses, but neither was afraid to challenge social norms in life as well as in

literature: Lesia Ukraïнка lived for some time in a common-law relationship (with Klymentii Kvitka), while Ol'ha Kobylins'ka, after a long, painful affair with Osyp Makovei, never married.

In literature, both writers emphasized professionalism and condemned dilettantism, amateurishness, and lack of literary technique. In poetry, Ukraïнка most valued a command of technique. The “Westernizing” of Kiev’s younger generation was for her the principal sign of this professionalism. She considered herself part of it, and she was very much its chief ideologue. Kobylins'ka valued technique and style in prose above all. The two writers loved each other’s artistry and were well aware of their exceptional place in the Ukrainian literary tradition. Ukraïнка wrote to Kobylins'ka at the beginning of their friendship, “You are an artist. In our public this is not valued very highly, but I love it above all. *Es lebe die Kunst!*”³ (Ukraïнка 1970, 516). “Artistry,” “art,” *Kunst*—were watchwords signifying opposition, and opening onto a future of deep communion.

The place of Ol'ha Kobylins'ka as the leader of a new school of Ukrainian literature at the turn of the century is completely assured, but Lesia Ukraïнка stands, as it were, outside movements and schools. She is the third cult figure in Ukrainian literature—after Shevchenko and Franko—because of her poetry, mainly that part of it which corresponds to Franko’s ideal of a poetry of struggle, or, to paraphrase the poet herself, “word-armament.” However, aside from the politically programmatic and patriotic poetry, her legacy also included philosophical dramas, which she considered the most important part of her oeuvre, as well as prose, essays, and translations, which she worked on throughout her life and often considered more significant than her own poetry.

Translations (of works by Heine, Hauptmann, Byron, and Polish and Russian authors) played a special role in Lesia Ukraïнка’s system of values. They served to broaden the narrow framework of Ukrainian culture and gave an alternative to populism, which sought its basis solely in internal cultural tradition. When Ukraïнка was only eighteen, she wrote to her uncle Mykhailo Drahomanov, a political emigre who decisively influenced her Europeanism.

Europeanism has recently begun to spread among young Kyivans: they are beginning to learn European languages and are getting interested in European literature. Proof of this might be that we (the young people) have conceived a plan of publishing a whole series of translations of the best works of European and Russian authors. (Ukraïнка 1970, 97–98)

Under Drahomanov’s influence, Ukraïнка developed broad democratic views on culture, social order, and nationality. She was an intellectual and cosmopolitan, impatient with provinciality or restrictions of culture. She saw no place for herself among the Ukrainophilic, nationalist, populist intelligentsia. Correspondingly, the populists viewed her with suspicion. She wrote about this to Drahomanov:

It was in vain that they reproached me for cosmopolitanism in this affair; my cosmopolitanism stays with me, and the patriotism of the nationalists remains with them, and that’s the end of it. Perhaps I will indeed suddenly turn out to be a traitor—then I will be very happy. (1970, 244)

Lesia Ukraïнка traveled a great deal, mainly in western Europe, from one doctor to another, seeking treatment for tuberculosis first of the bones and joints, then of the lungs. Her first encounter with western Europe in 1891 had an enormous effect on her.

My first impression was as if I had arrived in some different world—a better and freer world.

3. *Trans. note:* German, “Long live art!”

Now it will be even more difficult in my own country than it was before. I am ashamed that we are so enslaved, that we are in chains and sleep in them peacefully. Thus did I awake, and it is difficult for me, and sorrowful, and painful. (1970, 136)

In contrast to Ukraïнка, who lived under Russian subjugation, Ol'ha Kobylians'ka had grown up in Europe. Her homeland was southern Bukovyna, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. However, this part of Ukraine was cut off not only from the cultural centers of Europe, but even from the cultured Ukrainian region of Galicia, with L'viv at its center. Kobylians'ka had no opportunity to travel, and this added to her sense of isolation. She was raised in a German environment, which deeply influenced her creative work. Her first short stories from the early 1880s (still unpublished) and the intimate “Diary” were all written in German. The first drafts of her novels *A Person* (*Liudyna*, written 1886 and published 1894) and *The Tsarivna* (*Tsarivna*, written 1888-93 and published 1895) were also written in German. The Ukrainian versions are filled with German quotations, epigraphs, and imagery, and are inspired by German literature, in particular by the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Kobylians'ka came by her native Ukrainian with difficulty at the beginning of her literary career. Therefore, no Ukrainian critic would refrain from reproaching her for her dependence on German culture—at best with respect to language, and at worst with respect to thematics, ideology, and psychology. Ukraïнка alone saw this trait not as a shortcoming but as an advantage. When the two writers began to correspond in May 1899, Ukraïнка noted in her first letter to Kobylians'ka:

the Galician critics reprimand you on account of Germany, but I think that your salvation was in this Germany. It led you to recognize *world* literature, it transported you out into the broader world of ideas and art—this simply leaps out at one, when one compares your writing with that of the majority of Galicians....

It is a good thing that you came to our literature through the German school, and not through the Galician-Polish one.... It does not matter that you learned our literary language late—instead, you *learned* it, while the others straight away *thought that they knew*. (1970, 482–83)

Another letter to Kobylians'ka elaborates: “If, for example, Dr. Pavlyk knew that I praise you for your Germanism and urge you on to [read] Russian things, then he would blow up at me! So I think I will tell him—I like to scandalize my compatriots from time to time” (ibid., 486). She kept her word and wrote to Mykhailo Pavlyk, the well-known publicist, maintaining that Kobylians'ka's work was saved rather than destroyed by “the Germanism.” She compared Kobylians'ka with “patriot-writers, who write for patriot-readers” to the patriots' detriment, adding, “think about it yourself: who is exotic? She with her Germanism, or they with their ‘Ukrainianism?’” (490).

As Kobylians'ka's critics continued to harp on her “Germanism,” some decided that she could not be called a Ukrainian writer. A broad dialogue about what was appropriate and inappropriate for Ukrainian literature—whether only folk life could be the subject of Ukrainian literature, or whether the life of the intelligentsia was also a suitable subject—entwined with the polemic that developed over Kobylians'ka's story “Valse melancolique” in 1897 and 1898. The three heroines of that story were called “creations of purely European culture” (*Ol'ha Kobylians'ka*, 42), too European to be wholly adequate for Ukrainian literature. Kobylians'ka could be pleased with such accusations of “foreignness” and un-Ukrainianness and wrote: “Preserve me, O Lord, from being a Galician-Ruthenian author” (5: 324). But she mourned that even her defenders seemed to consider that “my Ruthenian-ness in my writings is completely German” (5: 338).

For a while Kobyliańska maintained cordial relations with Osyp Makovei, the literary critic, publisher, and populist prose writer; this grew into love around 1897. After his marriage, the relationship broke off. His wife was beautiful, well-off, and traditional in her views—as befitted an important publisher and “Galician-Ruthenian author.” Over the course of several years Makovei played the role of teacher and confidant for Kobyliańska, although they were complete antipodes in their work. She subconsciously understood this and was often harshly critical of his writings. The few letters that have survived, and Makovei’s articles on Kobyliańska, give the impression that he feigned understanding rather than actually comprehending her. The affair was doomed by the fact that she, as a writer and as a person, fit poorly into the dominant cultural norms he represented. However, in 1898 they were still close friends, and it was to him that Kobyliańska confided her indignation over unjust criticism of her first publications. Makovei repeated her comments on her own work almost verbatim in his positive article about her. The affirmative tone of his article is unique for the time; other critics tended to approach Kobyliańska’s work with prejudice: “Narration in the form of a maiden’s diary for more than 400 pages—Brrr! I thought to myself, looking through this book” (Hrushevs’kyi 1898a, 174, reviewing *The Tsarivna*). Serhii Iefremov’s colossal article in *Kievskaiia starina* in 1902, “In Search of a New Beauty” (“V poiskakh novoi krasoty”),⁴ stands out as the most aggressive denial of Kobyliańska’s literary persona, but it was not unique in its condemnation.

The fact of the matter is that in all areas of intellectual life we have so few workers [...], and every purposeful waste, even if it is of one’s own personal powers, is not simply recklessness and carelessness, but already a crime against our native country and people. (119)

Mrs. Kobyliańska [...] has created a dangerous, anti-social tendency in literature which will lead weaker minds astray and which will not pass, indeed is *not* passing without leaving its mark. (120)

Besides Makovei, at this stage (before the appearance of *The Land [Zemlia]*) only Lesia Ukraïнка understood and unconditionally supported Kobyliańska, though she did criticize her on particular points. Ukraïнка was later somewhat frightened by the new tendency toward “rusticism” in Kobyliańska’s works at the beginning of the twentieth century, but she came to see that this “rusticism” did not mean glorification of the rural village, but rather its demystification. In fact, Ukraïнка so strongly identified with Kobyliańska’s position that her health suffered after she read Iefremov’s brutal rejection of Kobyliańska—an indirect criticism of Ukraïнка’s support for the Bukovyna writers and the new direction in Ukrainian literature which they represented.

4. *Trans. note:* This is in Russian, as were all other Ukrainian scholarly works published at this time in the Russian Empire. Tsar Alexander II’s Ems Ukase in 1876—reinforcing and broadening the Valuev Circular of 1863—banned publication of all Ukrainian-language texts except for belles-lettres and historical documents, and prohibited the import of Ukrainian-language texts from abroad, use of Ukrainian in schools, and use of Ukrainian in theatrical presentations. It included directives to remove Ukrainophile teachers from schools in the Ukrainian provinces and to maintain a majority of ethnic Russian teachers there. The Ukrainian language had already been banned from the churches. Later (1881) provisions allowed the publication of Ukrainian-language dictionaries, as long as they were in the Russian and not the Ukrainian Cyrillic alphabet. Stage performances in Ukrainian were allowed only if approved by the provincial authorities. There was no such ban on the Polish language in the Russian Empire. Also, there was no such ban against the Ukrainian language in the western part of Ukraine (including the cities of L’viv and Peremyshl), which at that time formed part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Even so virulent a populist as Iefremov would think twice before criticizing Lesia Ukraïнка more directly. Franko had canonized her in an article published in 1899, setting her poetry next to Shevchenko's. However, he mentioned only the poetry that corresponded to his ideals, and he used telling terms of gender:

reading the soft and neurotic or coldly pedantic writings of the contemporary young Ukrainians and comparing them with those works that are lively, powerful, and daring, moreover comparing them with the likes of the simple, sincere words of Lesia Ukraïнка, one involuntarily thinks that this sickly and weak young lady is perhaps the only man in all of modern Ukraine. (Franko 1981, 31: 270–71)

The “writings of the young Ukrainians” of course refer to “modernism” or the “new school,” which are never directly named, although the discussion assigns them two possible roles—namely, the neurotic and the esoteric.

Franko dismissed Lesia Ukraïнка's dramas in a single line, asserting that they did not measure up to her talent. Incontestably, they did not fit the concept of “word-armament.” However, Ukraïнка considered these dramas the center of her creative work. Critics either treated them negatively, as with *The Blue Rose* (*Blakytna troianda*), or paid no attention to them. Ukraïнка commented much later, in 1911: “my dramas belong precisely to those things that are ‘lauded, but not read’ (Rusova, for example, read nothing that she was reviewing)” (Ukraïнка 1970, 847 and 850). Franko, as I have already mentioned, did not even consider it necessary to review them.

Critical reception of Lesia Ukraïнка and Ol'ha Kobylins'ka thus unequivocally alludes to the conflict between two outlooks and artistic principles. Populism meant Ukrainianness, patriotism, glorification of the village, isolation of culture, conservatism, realism, and depiction of folk life, while modernism, correspondingly, meant Europeanism, cosmopolitanism, intellectualism, openness of culture, democratism, aestheticism, and depiction of the life of the intelligentsia. However, there was still another crucial opposition between these two paradigms—feminine and masculine, the feminist and the patriarchal. All the participants in the literary discourse of the time were completely aware of this.

Feminism

Feminist ideas began to spread in Galician in the 1870s. The need for equal rights for women became part of the complex of new, revolutionary ideas that Natalia Kobryns'ka (1855-1920) set out in the title of her well-known short story “The Spirit of Time” (“Dukh chasu”), written in Vienna in 1883. Kobryns'ka was in the first group of Galician intellectuals that arrived in the Austrian capital to study at the university, or simply to imbibe the European spirit, culture, and new areas of scholarly inquiry.

Kobryns'ka was the central figure in the Ukrainian feminist movement of the time. It was she who founded the Society of Ruthenian Women (Tovarystvo rus'kykh zhinok) in Stanislav (present-day Ivano-Frankivs'k) in 1884, with the help of Franko and Pavlyk. Immediately after this she began preparation of an almanac, which she published with Olena Pchilka (Lesia Ukraïнка's mother) in 1887 as *First Garland* (*Pershyi vinok*). Franko and Pavlyk warmly greeted its appearance in the press.

The pieces by the editors are of the greatest interest among the essays, articles, and belletristic works by and about women in *First Garland*. There is a set of articles by Kobryns'ka on the

woman's question and a novel by Pchilka, *Women Friends (Tovaryshky)*, written a la Turgenev, about two young Ukrainian women studying at the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Zurich—a subject the author defined as “about the emancipation of womanhood” (Kobryns'ka and Pchilka, 358). A pair of poems by Lesia Ukraïнка, who was sixteen at the time, found their way into the almanac. However, a story by Kobylans'ka, “Lorelei” (“L'orel'ai”), the first variant of *The Tsarivna*, was kept out on the advice of Franko, who assisted in the preparation of the almanac.

The feminist ideas of Lesia Ukraïнка did not always lie on the surface, as was the case with Kobryns'ka, or even with Kobylans'ka's early work. Two main positions emerge in Ukraïнка's views: one is that feminism seems natural and needs no supporting proof; the other, that the position of women is miserable and demands struggle. All the figures in Ukraïнка's plays—from Liubov in *The Blue Rose* to Oderzhyma, Boiarynia, Cassandra, and Mavka—are variations on the theme of women's tragedy: betrayal in relationships with women, women's solitude, women's patriotism that is sometimes deeper than men's, and dramatic feminine devotion to truth. (See Weretelnik for further discussion of this subject.)

The first Ukrainian feminist critical article was written by Lesia Ukraïнка. Her “New Vistas and Old Shadows (‘The New Woman of Western European Belles-Lettres’)” (“Novye perspektivy i starye teni [‘Novaia zhenshchina zapadnoevro-peiskoi belletristiki’]”) was published in 1900, in Russian, in the Saint Petersburg journal *Life [Zhizn']*. At the same time, she expressed skepticism about the exclusively feminine literary publications that Kobryns'ka propagated. Ukraïнка did not support this sort of “separatism.”

The works of Ukraïнка and Kobylans'ka unequivocally show that they both saw and strove to represent the deep gender conflict in society. It is interesting that one of Ukraïнка's first letters to Kobylans'ka discussed Galician men, with whom “one cannot... feel free.... Among the Galicians I sense some strange, difficult relationship toward women: they all either look down at us from on high, or else look up to us from below, but for them to look at us as equals is impossible!” (486). Ukraïнка was not surprised that “Galician minds” had not influenced Kobylans'ka, and that Kobylans'ka did not trust the “Galician progressives” when they expressed their empathy for woman.

Of course, she was right. The Galician progressives were never constant or even sincere in their support of the feminist movement. At a deeper level there remained a concealed fear of the subversiveness of feminism, a desire to set the movement within the bounds of “decency,” to control it with an authoritative male hand; this, in fact, is to some degree what Franko, Pavlyk, Makovei, and others managed to do. Makovei betrayed a deep fear of feminism: in an unpublished letter to Kobylans'ka, trying to give reasons for their separation and to soften it, he writes:

In 1950 some savage feminist will write in your biography, “Osyp Makovei played an integral role in Kobylans'ka's life. This blockhead thought that he could satisfy a woman with friendship. He even wrote something about her—and completely favorable—and he was interested in her work, but nonetheless when his dull head could not lift itself to higher attestations of friendship, he left such a burning love behind for...” (this will be published in 1950)....

Where are you, O feminist of 1950? If only I knew where you're prowling in the world and whether you're already here, I would find you and give you a good drubbing straightaway.
(Makovei)

The early works of Kobylans'ka that frightened men, programmatically feminist (*A Person*,

The Tsarivna) and inherently feminist (“Uncultured,” “Nature,” “Valse mélancolique”), impressed Lesia Ukraïнка. Few understood them as well as she did. Her own short story “Pity” (“Zhal”), dated in 1890 on the basis of correspondence, was in its way a variation on the same plot as *The Tsarivna*, only more severe and more realistic. Ukraïнка’s heroine, the companion of a rich aristocratic woman, does not happily marry the son of her mistress, but instead kills the aristocrat because of her cruelty.

Kobylans'ka's *A Person* was dedicated to Kobryns'ka and was undoubtedly written under the influence of her “Spirit of the Time.” In 1894 Kobylans'ka was one of the founders of the Society of Ruthenian Women in Bukovyna (Tovarystvo rus'kykh zhynok na Bukovyni). Her address “On the Idea of the Women’s Movement” (“Deshcho pro ideiu zhinochoho rukhu”) of that same year was published by Pavlyk. Her first two long stories, *A Person* and *The Tsarivna*, treat a feminist subject. The center of attention in both is a woman smothered by middle-class life who enunciates feminist ideas and fights for her human rights. The first work narrates the defeat of such a woman, but the second shows her victory—in the end she marries for love and even becomes a writer.

Ol'ha Kobylans'ka's heroines are intelligent people with principled convictions gained from books. Reading is their only consolation in the oppressive petty-bourgeois atmosphere of the provincial middle class. They prefer to read Western, German literature, and trust books and book learning more than their own surroundings, which provide neither freedom, nor logic, nor intelligence. All this crystallizes in the maxim “A free person with intelligence—this is my ideal” (Kobylans'ka, 1: 227).

Natalka in *The Tsarivna* not only reads, she also tries to write. At first she sets out her thoughts on the rights of women, then she begins to write artistic works. Intellectual experiences take on an emotional life: “having read J. Stuart Mill, I cried. From that point on I read with doubled intensity. The realization of my low level of education weighed on me and humiliated me greatly. I set for myself the goal of somehow gaining a higher education” (Kobylans'ka, 1: 123).

In the beginning, Kobylans'ka set forth feminist ideas in a fairly linear fashion. Her stories, especially *The Tsarivna*, seem in parts more like essays than works of belles-lettres. Natalka's life in *The Tsarivna* also outlines a feminist position. She leaves her relatives, supports herself independently by serving as the companion of a rich widow, and sews on consignment. She refuses to marry someone she does not love—and even someone she does love.

Kobylans'ka was well aware of the originality of her female protagonists: “my merit lies in the fact that... side by side with the contemporary Marusias, Hanusias, and Katrusias can stand women of European character, who are not especially Galician-Ruthenian” (5: 322). Beside this, her women lacked the romantic, populist impersonality of female characters in masculine populist literature. Kobylans'ka transformed Nietzscheanism in a rather original way, portraying strong women and feeble men. In her first two novels all the men, excepting Marko, are negative characters.

The best of these male characters, the student-medic in *A Person*, is “a boring pedant, . . . spiteful” (1: 75), and moreover inclined to alcoholism. Another, a forester, is an uneducated he-man who lives by his basest instincts. In *The Tsarivna* the socialist Oriadyn “befouled himself with his impotence” (1: 181). Although Kobylans'ka's male characterizations were less daring

than the female ones, and more schematic, the very attempt to show a man who was inadequate in his social role was a serious challenge to the patriarchal norm.

One further point: The women protagonists of both Ol'ha Kobylians'ka and Lesia Ukraïнка share a certain pattern of behavior that is peculiar to them. They strive for true, free love, but on the other hand they fear it; they want—and then do not want—to love. Liubov flees from Orest in *The Blue Rose*; Natalka pushes Oriadyn away in *The Tsarivna*. This is a fundamental fear of any relationship with a man, a terror of patriarchal confines. The model repeats countless times, reflecting a subconscious terror—not only of the characters, but also of their authors—in the face of inequitable relationships with men. One alternative to this is the relationship between women described in “Valse melancolique,” discussed below.

Analyzing Kobylians'ka's work in her address “Ukrainian Writers in Bukovyna,” Lesia Ukraïнка indicated: “Subsequently, she significantly cooled to feminism, perhaps because it became for her an ‘outlived moment,’ and the idea itself of women's equal rights appeared to her to need no theoretical proofs” (Ukraïнка 1977, 8: 69). Kobylians'ka herself came to consider her first works programmatic even earlier, in 1895. “For me the woman's question is a point that has been overcome, and from now on I won't even write programmatic novels on the order of *A Person*, for example. Also, I do not want to serve two masters, that is, an agenda and poetry” (Kobylians'ka, 5: 283).

Posing the question in this way did not mean a denial of feminism, but rather its deeper aesthetic achievement. Literature as art was broader than any single concept, whether populist or feminist, and it could not be solely the vessel of that concept. Nonetheless, the feminist idea remained one of the underpinnings of anti-populism.

Anti-Populism

In one of her formulations of her literary role and calling, Lesia Ukraïнка wrote: “I cannot give up the thought that my work, or, as it were, ‘calling,’⁵ is Ukrainian literature and that it is free in every sense of the word; well, such a ‘calling’ can bid one go far” (1970, 381).

“Liberty” (*volia*) represented a challenge to aesthetic canons, stylistic recipes, cultural isolation, national oppression, political despotism, and the like. Populism was a form of dependence, limitation, canonicity. Anti-populism was the logical consequence of Europeanism, intellectualism, high culture, and a rational rather than mythologizing view of Ukrainian reality. Thus, liberty, which included the idea of equality between the sexes, necessarily came into conflict with populism at every level. However, Ukrainian critics almost never mentioned Ukraïнка's acute denial of literary ethnographism or national theater, nor Kobylians'ka's wearisome declarations about the unpleasant, exasperating impotence of her native people. These views were too out of step with the accepted images of the self-consciousness and self-valuation of the Ukrainian writer.

Lesia Ukraïнка was interested in folklore and collected folk songs, like every Ukrainian writer of her time without exception. However, her view of them was unique. She did not transfer ethnographic leanings into her original writings, but rather looked at ethnography from the point

5. *Trans. note:* Here Ukraïнка gives the Russian word *prizvanie*, “calling, vocation,” within her Ukrainian text.

of view of literature: “I cannot help but look at folk poetry through a ‘literary’ lens, and perhaps it is because of this that I love our lyric songs so much” (1970,170).

Ukraïinka sharply challenged excessive populism in culture, whether in the novels of Nechui-Levyts'kyi or in the theatrical works of Sadovs'kyi and Saksahans'kyi: “For God’s sake, don’t judge us on the novels of Nechui, for you would have to condemn us completely without cause. At the very least, I do not know a single intelligent person in Nechui’s novels. If one were to believe him, then all of Ukraine would appear to be a dunce” (1970,156).

Ukraïinka emerged as a playwright largely as a result of her dislike of folk theater. She liked various styles of contemporary European theater (Ibsen, Hauptmann, Maeterlinck), and she translated and popularized these authors. Her rejection of populist theater came to some extent from her mother, who wrote to her daughter in 1894-95: “Those deadheads have to think something up, because the public is beginning to comprehend that Sadovs'kyi and *tutti quanti* are simply stupid, and the public is already too annoyed by their lambskin hats to applaud” (1970, 286; see also 308).

Olena Pchilka was nonetheless an ambivalent figure. On the one hand, she conjured up resonantly populist pseudonyms for herself and her daughter.⁶ On the other hand, she was an educated person with a European orientation, and a feminist. She saw education and knowledge as indispensable for better service to the people—for the modernization of populism. At the same time it is clear from the example of her views on populist theater, among others, that for Pchilka education modeled cultural behavior.

Returning to Lesia Ukraïinka, we note one of her letters to Drahomanov:

Someone also complained that I hide from “folk” themes while I compose with folk language, that I climb into “belles-lettres land” and “intellectualize.” But here the whole problem is certainly that I understand the words “populism,” “literariness,” and “intelligentsia” differently than my critics do.... Here in Ukraine these eternal polemics will never end, and how can they end when the combatants do not understand each other? (1970, 123)

Reading Ol’ha Kobylans'ka for the first time, Ukraïinka understood that she had found an interlocutor who posed an even more decisive and uncompromising challenge to traditionally populist views. She was not mistaken. Kobylans'ka, steeped in Nietzscheanism, formulated her disenchantment with the Ukrainian folk (*narod*), which was bereft of inner energy and power for struggle. A strong heroine would want to belong to a strong people. However, her people were oppressed, colonized, resigned. For this reason Natalka in *The Tsarivna* says:

“I hate... the uniform, mournful-sick smile on the pale faces of our people. We have all grown weak from sorrow for the past; and the sorrowful melody that reverberates in our souls and that we understand so well has lulled all of our energies into impotence. Isn’t it so? Ah,” she finished sadly, “it is so. I too am a daughter of the Ruthenian-Ukrainian people.” (Kobylans'ka, 1: 215)

This feebleness of the folk—“a melancholy sadness, which is inscribed in everything, and upon which this unfortunate people reminisces” (1: 401)—wells up in some of Kobylans'ka’s characters, as in the heroine of *Nature*. The other side of this weakness is the heroine’s inherent sexual urge toward power. She loves physical power, although she herself does not exercise it, and reduces it almost to a cult: “Physical strength and beauty meant a lot to her, and although she

6. *Trans. note:* Pchilka means “Little Bee.” Ukraïinka means “Ukrainian woman.” Their real names were Ol’ha Petrivna Kosach-Drahomanova (Pchilka) and Larysa Petrivna Kosach (Ukraïinka).

rarely ‘loved’ anyone, all the same, handsome, strong men were pleasant to her” (1:411). The cult of power, of course, does not sit well with feminism, but the discovery of physical pleasure, about which we will speak below, does.

The Land (1902), Kobylians'ka's central work, has often been considered a return to the populist theme and a critique of private ownership, since it depicts brother killing brother over land. Land appears as a terrible power which enserfs and brutalizes people. Culture exists at the opposite pole. Only landless Anna has some chance of breaking free from the land and moving nearer to culture. In this sense she is the main character of the work. However, the all-encompassing, murderous dependence on the land, characteristic for all the other characters of the novel, destroys her life too.

In terms of populist culture, *The Land* was a revolutionary work. First, it showed that life in the village lacked harmony, and so argued against the patriarchal, populist myth of the entire culture. The work demystified and demythologized critical understandings that were all sacred to the populist contingent—the ideal nature of the community and the natural person (the Ukrainian villager), the ideal nature of women (mentioned above). Kobylians'ka was the first to assert that the romantic purity of interpersonal relations and family harmony in the village was a myth. Violence, instinct, sexual passion, and incest ruled in the village; neighbors lived in mutual suspicion and ill will, and parental tyranny verged on bestial savagery. Human nature, not constrained or refined by culture, was abominable when human relations were deformed by patriarchal norms.

Sexuality

Beside this, *The Land* is filled with eroticism. It confirms that life in the village has little of the sexual puritanism described by Kvitka-Osnov'ianenko. Ol'ha Kobylians'ka was not only the first psychologist in Ukrainian prose, but also the first to touch upon sexuality as an experience and as a problem. Her heroines are conscious of the human body, sensuality, and physical necessities that might conflict with spiritual needs and intellectual abilities. Thus, Olena Liaufer in *A Person* marries not for love but because of material difficulties, against her feminist principles. However, she chooses a young forester, whose masculine body attracts her.

Interest in the physical side of sensations was motivated largely by feminism. Among the legitimate and organic rights of a woman was the right to satisfaction from a physical relationship with a man. This process in women (becoming aware of one's attraction to another's body, desire for physical contact, and actual sexual contact) was of the utmost interest to Kobylians'ka the psychologist. Feminism challenged male chauvinism by gazing where the populist was afraid to look.

The short story “Nature,” written in 1887 in German, published in 1895 in Stuttgart and then in 1897 in Ukrainian, has the first scene of physical love in Ukrainian literature. It plays on a familiar model, with an educated woman from the middle class and a coarse Hutsul⁷ who considers his passion a witch's provocation. They differ in class, culture, status—in everything,

7. *Trans. note:* The Hutsuls are a Ukrainian ethnic group living in the Carpathian Mountains; they are the people featured in Sergei Paradzhanov's film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*.

but they are united by physical attraction, instinct, and nature.

Nature is the first symbol of eroticism in the works of Kobylians'ka. The second such symbol is music, “fettered passion.” Quite often music appears as a euphemism for erotically tinged sensation. Music arouses sexual fantasy, which might become a sharp physical sensation of orgasmic character, as in the scene in *A Person* where a Chopin etude, the “Impromptu phantasie,” causes an ecstatic state bordering on neurosis. The heroine once heard this music during a confession of love. Then, “it had been a deep-welling force, a powerful, uplifting force that knows no obstacle, which is frightened by nothing, which, while laying down a new road, tears everything from itself and often destroys what laws and custom and time built up with difficulty.” Now, the same music recalls that state of being in the heroine:

The music now snatched up the young girl in its embrace. She began to laugh nervously, quietly, quietly and yet so fully that her entire supple figure trembled. An exclamation broke from her mouth, but she pressed her hands to her face even harder, she ground her teeth together, she wanted to be calm.... O, God, calm!...

A little later she lay motionless with her exhausted head against the spine of the divan and moved only to cover her eyes with her hand. (Kobylians'ka, 1: 72)

Music's movement and rhythm, resonating with the vibration of the aroused body, stimulate or substitute for physical love in Kobylians'ka's intellectual heroines: “I drink and become intoxicated by it [music], as by the caresses of a living being, so to speak” (1:155). Music is often described as a physical partner. The musical background of “Valse melancolique” unambiguously underlines the sensual nature of the relationships binding the three female protagonists of the story.

The critical reaction—exclusively male—to this aspect of Kobylians'ka's work was predictable. Makovei commented on “Nature” and “Uncultured” with Aesopian language, hinting at what he would not risk discussing: “This is a rather sensitive business, and in our social circles especially one does not talk explicitly about the needs of the flesh” (Makovei 1899, 45). He even gently criticized Kobylians'ka for placing greater emphasis on love than on social freedom for women. Iefremov, the ardent populist, broached the topic of sexuality in his article “In Search of a New Beauty” with all the pathos of the male chauvinist. For him it was all simply “filth,” unacceptable in such a serious arena as literature. He cited no convincing example of this “filth”; he only raged. His logic was that the cult of beauty is the cult of love:

the cult of love turns into a cult... of the naked body, of course mainly female... And this, if you please, was inevitable [...]: if the *entire* meaning of life is located only in beauty and in sexual love, then sooner or later this beauty and love will hinge on one point—simple sensuality and the most naked pornography. (Iefremov, 110)

Iefremov's analysis is perhaps the sharpest manifestation of the populist's terror when faced with sexuality. His storming indicates the true reason for the hostility that male populist critics displayed toward Kobylians'ka: her extraordinarily open—for Ukrainian literature—depiction of and sensitivity to eroticism.

Lesia Ukraïnka had a completely different, though unpublished, reaction. She liked “Valse melancolique,” “Uncultured,” and “The Battle” (“Bytva”) best among Kobylians'ka's stories of the 1890s. About “Uncultured” she wrote:

I did not expect from an Austrian Ruthenian woman such sincerity and the daring with which both character and situations are portrayed. While I read, from time to time I would think: Bravo! Miss Kobylians'ka! Es lebe die Kunst! Es lebe die Freiheit! You must chide your “dobrze

wychowani” countrymen,⁸ because they have not gotten used to the fact that a woman, even though a writer, could screw up her courage to undertake “such as this.”⁹ Do not think, though, that I see “such as this” in your “Uncultured.” In my opinion there is nothing untoward in it. (1970, 508)

Mykhailo Mochul's'kyi, in 1907, was perhaps the only critic to acknowledge that “O. Kobylans'ka preaches free love in a very delicate manner, retaining artistic tact” (*Ol'ha Kobylans'ka*, 149).

“Valse melancolique” was unique in Ukrainian literature for its portrayal of the relationship of three women: Sophia, a pianist, Hannusia, an artist, and Marta, the narrator. Marta refers to each of the others simply as “woman” and idolizes both of them. All three live in an atmosphere of music and painting, isolated from society and ignoring society’s norms. However, this short-lived idyll is destroyed when the musician dies, having played her favorite waltz one last time, after learning that her relatives have refused her the money for study at the conservatory in Vienna.

For Kobylans'ka, the story is not about the cruelty of the world, which ultimately serves the dramatic denouement in the *fin de Siècle* style. Rather, the essence of the story is its relationships or, more precisely, the tragic love relationships outside traditional bounds. The musician was disillusioned in her relationship with a man, and she remembers it with hatred. The artist does not even admit the possibility of relationships with men—she sees only humiliation in them. This despair over the spiritual potential of men (“There is a type of love in women ... which a man will never understand. For him it is too broad to comprehend” [Kobylans'ka, 2: 389]) engenders female separatism. Feelings meant for someone of the opposite sex are expressed to a woman, the only person capable of receiving and valuing them.

It is not surprising, then, to read:

The artist fell in love with her, as a man would, and almost suffocated her with her sincere feelings, which seemed to the very being of the other one—Sophia—stormy and overly expressed.

But I quietly prayed for her.

Hannusia found new beauty in Sophia every day. She worried over her appearance as she would over a child. She combed her long, silken hair. [...]!, for my part, loved her without “conditions.” No, I loved them both. (2: 383)

Typical for European culture of the time were elements such as the beauty of youth and of death, thoughts and feelings on the limits of permitted morality, the neurotic sensuality of the heroine, and the sensual nature of the text itself, in the spirit of a Chopin etude. All this set “Valse melancolique” in the cultural context of the Viennese stories of Arthur Schnitzler or portraits by Gustav Klimt. By virtue of its protagonists’ character, its style, and its inherent ideas, “Valse melancolique” became a manifesto, high point of a new style and a type of artistic thought that was discordant with traditionalist populist thought.

Personal Relations

8. *Trans. note:* Es lebe die Kunst! Es lebe die Freiheit! *German:* Long live art! Long live freedom! The comment “dobrze wychowani” (Polish “well educated”) refers to the fact that Kobylans'ka’s part of Ukraine was long under Polish influence, so that many Ukrainian intellectuals became Polonized (as opposed to the many Russified Ukrainian intellectuals in the East).

9. *Trans. note:* Ukraïнка here parodies the Galician intellectuals who will not even name female sexuality, referring to it only by innuendo.

“Valse mélancolique” was written three years before Ol'ha Kobylans'ka met Lesia Ukraïнка. However, from their correspondence one can trace analogous relations between the two women writers, in mutual sympathies, spiritual closeness, and emotional tension. Unfortunately, aside from a single letter from Kobylans'ka to Ukraïнка, only Ukraïнка's letters to Kobylans'ka have been preserved.

As mentioned above, the correspondence began in May 1899. The initial letters, written in Ukraïнка's typically intense style, treat mainly literary affairs and events. Ukraïнка's style changed significantly after she met Kobylans'ka in the Carpathian Mountains in 1901. Thereafter, her businesslike, amicable tone became emotional and even intimate; this contrasted with her previous letters to Kobylans'ka, and even more with her letters to other people. In the later correspondence an esoteric, idiosyncratic language appeared; one could say that these letters are her most enigmatic works.

All the letters are written in the third person, rather than the first person, and exclusively in the masculine gender. The masculine gender appears primarily in the way Ukraïнка and Kobylans'ka refer to themselves: “someone” and “someone” (*khtos* for both correspondents), or “someone white” (*khtos' bilyi* for Ukraïнка) and “someone black” (*khtos' chornen'kyi* for Kobylans'ka).¹⁰ This use of the third person can confuse a reader today, but along with the general style it masks quite daring passages and declarations. For example, the phrase “someone loves someone” (*khtos' kohos' liubyt'*), a cipher for “I love you,” ends almost all the letters. Other cliché greetings are used no less frequently: “Liebe, liebste Wunderblume!” (“Dear, dearest wonder-flower”).

The homoerotic element in the letters underlines the growth of the writers' professional and personal friendship. On the one hand, the two women considered themselves partners in aesthetic questions, and this partnership was equivalent to opposition to everything propagated by Franko, Makovei, et al. On the other hand, they drew even closer together because both had already experienced personal tragedies in relationships with men.

Lesia Ukraïнка arrived in Chernivtsi in 1901 after a difficult loss. Her friend Serhii Merzhyn'skyi had died of tuberculosis in March. Their affair began in the summer of 1897 in Yalta. From January 1901 until his death, Ukraïнка lived in Minsk, taking care of the dying Merzhyn'skyi's every need. In particular, he did not hesitate to dictate love letters to another woman, Vira Kryzhaniv'ska-Tuchaps'ka. All of this undermined Ukraïнка's health. In May 1901, a relation wrote to Kobylans'ka: “Lesia buried her dear friend; this in and of itself is such a great sorrow.... For two months she did not leave the side of the sick man, and he died in her arms. After the burial she suffered a very severe nervous attack” (Ukraïнка 1970, 537). Ukraïнка's relatives hoped that her trip to Bukovyna would help her put the tragedy behind her. Her relationship with Klyment Kvitka was just developing. In the future, she would live with him in a common-law marriage, despite her family's resistance, and later would formally marry him. At this earlier period she still treated him like a good friend and wrote to Kobylans'ka:

Although someone [i.e., Ukraïнка]¹¹ is now great friends with Mr. Kvitka and has fraternal relations with him, he [Ukraïнка] still cannot talk with him [Kvitka] about every topic, because

10. *Trans. note:* Ukrainian “someone” (*khtos'*) is grammatically masculine, though it can have both masculine and feminine referents.

11. Bracketed material in quotations hereafter will be the translator's.

some topics might irritate Mr. Kvitka, he being a man and nervous, and others might only be understood by a woman, and of the age of someone [Ukraïнка] and also someone [Kobylians'ka], because younger women (happily for them) do not understand everything. (1970, 560)

In 1901 Ol'ha Kobylians'ka broke off relations with Osyp Makovei. In a letter written much later (the only one from her to Ukraïнка that survives), she speaks about the influence of these relations on her life and attitudes toward men:

She [Kobylians'ka] spent some time with her whole soul on a young man named Ostap Luts'kyi, but she stopped having faith in him. Os(up) Makovei killed any faith she had in men, and she already has no faith even in Luts'kyi. Makovei himself is miserable. He married a very coarse type. He would like to draw closer to her [Kobylians'ka] again, but she *no longer wants it*. (Ukraïнка 1970, 831)

The meeting in 1901 brought the two women emotionally closer, as the following passages from Ukraïнка's letters unambiguously show:

2 August 1901, from *Burkut*: And if now both someone [Ukraïнка] and someone [Kobylians'ka] were here, they would go out together on the Cheremosh, as on this dark, very dark night, and they would listen to the gurgling of the water [...], and they would recall silently, not saying a word, all the worst and all the best of their lives. Their views and their hands would meet in the darkness and it would be so very quiet in spite of the river's gurgling ... and then someone [Ukraïнка] would return to his house already less saddened. (1970, 558)

24 August 1901:.. someone [Ukraïнка] was nasty and lazy, and did not want to write anyone letters, although he very often thought about someone [Kobylians'ka] and wanted to talk with someone, and most of all wanted to sit down half-undressed on that someone's bed, as someone in a scarf under a comforter who wants partly to sleep, but also partly does not want to sleep, and who has dark eyes with golden sparkles. If only someone knew that someone (white) needed someone to support his soul, because that someone's soul often happens to be quite beaten down. (1970, 560) 5 November (continuing a letter dated 20 October) 1901: Someone [Ukraïнка] now and forever loves someone [Kobylians'ka] likewise and wants to "incline the heavens" to someone, but sometimes he does not know how to write as he would want: a sour stomach, a headache, various superfluous thoughts get in the way. Thus, someone writes so blandly in a way, apathetically, entirely not the way that he thinks about someone, that he loves someone. But if he were now with someone, then he would not need to sit and dab this pen over the paper. Rather, he would lie down next to someone and would make hypnotic gestures at someone, and perhaps would say little, but on the other hand would say more than this incompetent letter. (1970, 573)

19 December 1901 (*New Year's Day, 1902, New Style Calendar*): Someone [Ukraïнка] would like to kiss someone [Kobylians'ka], and caress someone, say much, and gaze much, and think much. (1970, 582)

20 March 1902:... someone loves someone (this is the latest thing). (1970,610) 3 October 1902, from *Kiev*. And someone [Ukraïнка] loves someone [Kobylians'ka], and never gets angry at someone, and never got angry, and never will get angry ... [someone] kisses someone and gazes and so forth, and so forth ... and still so forth. (1970,636)

With time the letters become more restrained; however, a unique style remains, where phrases in the spirit of "O, you, my priestess of beauty and purity" sound completely natural. In one of Ukraïнка's last letters to her friend, written in Egypt at the end of 1912, she wrote: "someone and also someone *die gehoren zusammen* [belong to each other]. Someone loves someone" (1970, 860). When she died, her mother, Olena Pchilka, wrote to Kobylians'ka, "I know that you not only respected her as a talented writer, but that you *loved* her. She also loved you very much. There truly was some sort of spiritual affinity between you" (1970, 878).

The bisexual affections of the women writers and corresponding depictions of lesbian caresses were not exceptional for early modernist culture. However, Ukraine with its particular

circumstances did not, and indeed could not, shelter a bohemian artistic milieu like the Parisian avant-garde salons, where such things were tolerated and embraced. In this way the United States and Britain were similar to Ukraine—for example, Renee Vivien (Pauline Tarn), one of the first lesbian poets of the twentieth century and also one of the first twentieth-century expatriate writers in Paris, could change her whole identity when she came to Paris in 1898 (Annan, 11-22). Nonetheless, the setting and development of these themes in “Valse melancolique” and the loving correspondence between Lesia Ukraïнка and Ol’ha Kobyliańska were organic phenomena of their time.

Finale

In 1906, as the political situation in Russia grew especially acute and the tsarist government became more repressive, Lesia Ukraïнка wrote from Kiev to Kobyliańska:

Does someone [Kobyliańska] know that one of his fiercest critics (S. Iefremov) has been in jail (as a “political”) since Christmas, and now he has gotten ill with tuberculosis and is in the prison hospital, and they say that things are very bad for him. This fate has overtaken many people, and who knows therefore if this country will ever exist.... And still *pendant*, the one (H. Khotkevych) who was so censured along with you by that critic is now in emigration (also a “political”) after all the troubles—this means that now the “idealists” along with the “non-idealists,” the “realists” along with the “decadents,” the “exotics” along with the “workadays”—have all been made equal. (1970, 774–75)

And in truth, the tsarist regime did not stop to analyze the aesthetic or political divergences of the Ukrainian intellectuals it was persecuting. It was not interested in their dilemma of choice between service and art, nor in the complexes, fears, dreams, and doubts connected with that dilemma.

In 1912 Serhii Iefremov published his first *History of Ukrainian Literature (Istoriia Ukraïns'koho pys'menstva)*, in time to present it to Lesia Ukraïнка. He wrote admiringly of her poetry, but deemed the dramas not worthy of broader analysis. His characterization of Ol’ha Kobyliańska was somewhat softer in tone, although without substantial revision of his 1902 critique. Later, Iefremov’s views came to undergird the socialist canons of the history and theory of Ukrainian literature. However, he himself was arrested in 1929 for anti-Soviet activities and perished in theGULag in 1939.

In 1913 Lesia Ukraïнка died, in terrible pain from tuberculosis in multiple organs. Ol’ha Kobyliańska lived until 1942, although her literary talent peaked at the turn of the century. By 1910 she had become a cult figure for “Young Muse” (Moloda muza), a group which united the new generations of Ukrainian poets. Franko, who died in 1916, fought against them with all the might of his polemical pathos.

Ukrainian feminism, which had such vocal resonance at the end of the nineteenth century, had no champions during the modernist experiments of the 1910s and 1920s. There were no writers who proposed to analyze the relationship between the sexes in terms of the conflict between them. The question either was not posed at all, or else it was dominated by a masculine approach—usually under a neopopulist, neopatriarchal scheme. Sexuality, and especially sexuality from a woman’s point of view, returned for a long time to the realm of the taboo.

* * *

This study shows that Ukrainian modernism was *not* deprived of gender, as the majority of scholars have surmised—never having delved into the topic. On the contrary, it had direct, genetic links to gender. In the context of Ukrainian *fin de siècle* literature, things feminine and things feminist became both a cause and a symbol of modernity. Women writers of this pivotal period rejected and replaced the patriarchal reified images of women that had dominated the national literature in the nineteenth century; they also smashed the myth of the eternal passivity and weakness of women and the eternal activity of men. They placed everything in doubt—from fundamental social norms to linguistic traditions. Ukrainian modernism and the Ukrainian *fin de Siècle* were in no way exceptional phenomena. Analogous processes—though in somewhat more pronounced forms—developed in European and American literatures (Gilbert and Gubar).

The creative careers of Lesia Ukraïnka and Ol'ha Kobylians'ka testify unequivocally to a crisis of traditional Ukrainian masculinity. Their female protagonists—new, autonomous, self-sufficient, and strong women—had no corresponding male partners. The more openly this thought was expressed, whether in stories or in plays, the greater the fear it aroused in men. The perception of personal danger spilled over into patent hostility among critics of Kobylians'ka and Ukraïnka, or into the purposeful silence which fills the critical texts of this period—the masculine, populist criticism which laid down the aesthetic canons of culture for decades to come. The apparent victory of populism, however, proved illusory. Today it is clear that modernism, with its feminine face, belongs among the central phenomena of Ukrainian literature.

Translated by Rob de Lossa

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