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**THE DEATH OF DON JUAN: MODERNISM, FEMINISM,  
 NATIONALISM – RETHINKING UKRAINIAN LITERATURE**

**By Dr. Oksana Zabuzhko  
 Kyiv, Ukraine**

My lecture is closely connected with my most recently published book entitled, “*Notre Dame d’Ukraine: Ukrainka in the Clash of Mythologies*”<sup>1</sup>. In this 650-pg study which attracted in Ukraine more public attention than I could have ever expected, I made an attempt to restore one of the most important, and, through the 20th century, most blatantly ignored Ukrainian modern literary traditions which, if thoroughly scrutinized, could serve as a case study to illustrate one of the key problems of our civilization – the defeat of what once used to be known as “high culture” in the world run by almost unbridled populism, in whatever form the latter may exist in. For the purpose of the current presentation I have chosen to expand one of the “side plots” of the book which has an advantage to be internationally known, and, therefore, would not require from the audience any background in Ukrainian studies.

At the beginning I have to clarify my use of terms, of which the juxtaposition of feminism and nationalism probably sounds the most controversial. Needless to say, historically there have been too many “feminisms”, as well as too many “nationalisms” for me to risk at redefining and re-conceptualizing them, towards the 21st century view of a feminist theory of nations - especially taking into consideration, that such a view is in itself eclectic enough to blur the picture all the worse. My target is far more limited - to have a look at the development (or, more precisely, at the extinction) through the past 20<sup>th</sup> century of but one literary plot – namely, the Don Juan legend – in an attempt to see through its twists and turns something else than the understandable cultural changes in sensuality and sexuality. After all, it was G.B.Shaw who back in the 1<sup>st</sup> decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century first wrote what amounts to an obituary for the indispensable lover, so often held to be “the epitome of manliness” (according to the formula by Ortega-y-Gasset). In his preface to “Man and Superman” G.B.Shaw wrote: “Now it’s all very well for you at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to ask me for a Don Juan play; but you’ll see from the foregoing survey that Don Juan is a full century out of date for you and me; and if there are millions of less literate people who are still in the eighteenth century, have they not Molière and Mozart...? You’d laugh at me if at this time of day I dealt in duels, and ghosts, and “womanly” women”.

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<sup>1</sup> In English reviewed by Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak in: *Slavic Review*. Vol.68. No.3, Fall 2009. P. 682-683

Shaw's concern was, as one can see, predominantly about cultural changes, and his play indeed has nothing of the Don Juan legend in its action. Yet, the action itself notwithstanding, one may duly argue that since Tirso de Molina's classic, "The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest" written between 1612-1630, the Don Juan archetype has persevered through centuries as probably the central myth of European culture. For instance, "The Diary of the Seducer" by S.Kierkegaard, written some half a century before Shaw's scornful remark, although skips ghosts, duels, and "womenly" women as well, nevertheless succeeds in presenting quite an accurate psychological case study of the Don Juan of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (to give a hint at the hero's true lineage, Kierkegaard even names him "Johanness", which is the Danish version for Juan/Giovanni). It is not, thus, the plot, but the myth whose historical lot in the 20<sup>th</sup> century will be in question, and in following Don Juan's adventures in the literature of modernism I will try to see through them, -- the entrance upon the historical stage of the new dramatis personae, the new players, whose meaning we only become aware of today.

With this regard, literature provides an inexhaustible source of discoveries. Though generally regarded as a part of intellectual history, in fact it is only too often far ahead in time of purely intellectual trends, like philosophy or political theory, in shaping ideas, so that at close inspection, it can reveal the budding ideas which did not receive a full-fledged theoretical articulation (not to speak of public recognition) from previous generations.

Now, on my use of certain concepts, like nationalism, especially in its relationship to feminism... It is truly hard nowadays -- after all the apocalypses witnessed by Europe in the past century, to strip nationalism of its derogatory connotations and to restore its original meaning as stated by John Hutchinson and Antony D. Smith in their introduction to the anthology "Nationalism"<sup>2</sup>. Originally, we must not forget, the European idea of nationalism, before it turned, to quote Ernest Gellner, into "a political principle that holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent"<sup>3</sup>, used in order to occupy a firm place within liberalism and humanitarianism. That European nationalism, according to some historian's witty formula, "begins as Sleeping Beauty and ends as Frankenstein's monster", came largely as the result of the NATION-building process being replaced (or, more than once, halted), by the STATE-building process, which is certainly not the same thing. Whenever a state overshadows a nation, and the hyphenation mark between the two appears, it is precisely the point at which the 19<sup>th</sup> century dream of a free nation risks to turn into a nightmare of ethnic cleansings and deportations. Among many definitions of nationalism, I'd like to stress the one proposed by Adrian Hastings who, in answering the question about the relationship between nation and state, wrote: "Even when it is the state which has created the nation, it is not a nation until it senses its primacy over and

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<sup>2</sup> "Nationalism was, first of all, a doctrine of popular freedom and sovereignty. The people must be liberated - that is, free from any external constraint; the people must determine their own destiny and be masters in their own house" (Nationalism. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, p.4).

<sup>3</sup> Ernest Gellner. *Nations and Nationalism. New Perspectives of the Past*. (Cornell University Press, 1983), p.1.

against the state”<sup>4</sup>. It is an important point, and I fully share the opinion of those historians who see the pitfalls of nationalism in Nazi Germany or in Serbia under Milosevic as manifestations not of the advanced, but, on the contrary, of the underdeveloped and retarded nation formation process.

I am placing emphasis on this point as a reason most immediately connected with the feminist cause. In the Western academic consensus, nationalism and feminism in Europe are generally regarded as incompatible and mutually exclusive positions<sup>5</sup>. Nationalism is tacitly identified by most Western European feminists with the Nazi-like supremacy of the “white”, or ethnically pure, males in the patriarchal state, which by definition excludes any room for the very idea of women liberation. In my opinion, the advocates of the “incompatibility” theory fall prey of a certain intellectual trap which, until recently, had not received much notice in either scholarly or political discourse. Such a theory deliberately reduces the variety of European “nationalisms” to the one and only pattern taken into consideration, – to the state patriarchal ideology. It deliberately ignores – as being supposedly irrelevant to European history, - since there are only too many cases of positive relationships between feminism and nationalism in Eastern and Central Europe, the cases of “nationalism without state”, in which this part of Europe has been particularly abundant throughout modern history (to be precise, since 1848). By implicitly erasing the difference between “state” and “nation” (between nationalism as a doctrine of self-determination, and nationalism as state political practice), the proponents of the “incompatibility” theory seem to be marked, even if unwillingly, by the old Hegelian/Marxist prejudice which had associated the European lot with the so-called “historical nations” only. The cold-war inertia of separating “proper” (i.e., Western) Europe from the one on the other side of the iron curtain, from that called by Czeslaw Milosz “The Other Europe” - the one made of nations considering themselves “the losers of history” (M.Kundera) endangered in their very national being - owes, I assume, a lot of its sustainability to its long-term fusion with that Hegelian/Marxist tradition of thinking. And speaking of Marxism, I find it really ironic, that Western feminists who aligned themselves, in opposition to German nationalism, with Marxism and communism, fell short to see that since WWII nationalism had established itself as a state ideology in nearly all the countries of the communist block - if not in words, then in practice.

Noteworthy, even the most ardent proponents of the “incompatibility” theory, like Gisela Kaplan, have to admit that in what they define as “European tradition” one can also find examples of mutually fruitful relationship between feminism and nationalism. Gisela Kaplan mentions two such cases - the 19<sup>th</sup> century Italy (under and after the Risorgimento), and the 20<sup>th</sup> century Finland - yet, characteristically, she claims them both to be but “chance encounters”, “exceptional instances”. She does not go as far as to trace any semblance between the two, neither to place them into a broader context of European nation-building. Such a one-dimensional vision of what belongs to the “European

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<sup>4</sup> Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood.: Ethnicity, Religion and Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.25.

<sup>5</sup> See: Gisela Kaplan, *Feminism and Nationalism: The European Case*, in *Feminist Nationalism*. Lois A. West, ed. (New York; London: Routledge, 1997), p.3-40.

tradition”, and what does not, apparently demands for corrections, especially now, when the expansion of the EU has long called for the revision of the very concept of “Europeanness”, and for discovering a new common denominator for the European identity.

Apart from Italy and Finland, feminism has constituted an inseparable part of the landscape of national revival almost everywhere in Europe – as long as the construction of nationhood has not been viewed in patriarchal terms. Unifying a nation in its struggle for liberation is in itself a gendered project which created – in many cases for the first time in history, a significant public place for women. This is still the tradition to be reviewed and restored in European history, “the drawn Atlantis”, as it too often happens to be the case with women’s history. It never fails to amaze me how efficiently the obliteration mechanism works when it comes to women’s roles in history, even where it concerns recent events of which all the participants and witnesses are still alive. For example, you will never come across any mention in the contemporary Ukrainian textbooks that the first public organization in the then Soviet Ukraine, the organization which had in fact started our “velvet revolution for independence” back in 1989-1991, was that of women, – the *Soldier’s Mother’s Union* (Spilka Soldats’kykh Materiv). Its leadership consisted of women whose sons were killed in the ranks of the Soviet Army during Soviet colonial war in Afghanistan, and the activities of these resourceful ladies were very visible at the time. In fact, they have challenged the Soviet patriarchy in its most sensitive area/ discussion topic, - the Soldiers’ Mothers’ major political goal was that Ukrainian conscripts were not to be sent for the service outside of Ukraine. This, of course, was immediately attacked by the communist power as a blatant nationalist demand (and so it was, in full accord with the definition provided by Hutchinson and Smith); but the Soldiers’ Mothers gained a vast public support, and in 1990 their demand was included on the list of the Ukrainian Student’s Union under their famous hunger strike - it was only then that Ukrainian authorities were forced to satisfy it. This was the actual beginning of Ukrainian independence – and, quite possibly, of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Now, 19 years later, this episode is at best a footnote to the heroic deeds of other public organizations of the time which were led by men, - the typical example of how innovative initiatives on the part of women absorbed by power systems soon become credited to the system’s account. (It should be also added that in the age of information, the speed of forgetting the past seems to increase dramatically, and women’s contribution usually falls first prey to this change.) This example, I think, is quite spectacular in proving how careful historians should be when making judgements on the role and place of women in any political landscape of the past, nationalist included.

Unlike in Germany where the nation was a “fatherland”, in many countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, it has been the “motherland”, an embodied femaleness which called for protection against violation by foreign males (rape was often used as a key metaphor for national humiliation). From within such a discourse it would have been hardly conceivable either for Italian/Finnish, or for Polish/Ukrainian woman public figure to share the famous argument by Virginia Woolf that “as a woman, she had no country”. The feminist discourse in these countries was turned the other way around - rather than challenging nationalism, it was introducing a new dimension to it, revealing a double

discrimination, a twofold burden to which women were subdued - both as women and as members of their national group. It is largely the same rhetoric as articulated in the writings by Jewish American feminists of the 1970s, like Adrienne Rich and Erica Jong, on how Jewish woman is twice marginalized, twice discriminated against, both as a woman and as a Jew; but we must not forget that there have been precedents for this rhetoric in European history, and Finland is certainly not an exceptional occurrence with this regard.

The preceding speculations were meant to clarify a little bit of the ideological context in which I am going to discuss in the evolution of the Don Juan story in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Let me remind you that the mutinous 19<sup>th</sup> century, which had so inadvertently determined the course of the subsequent century, had also been, – and hardly by mere coincidence so, – the age of Don Juan’s utmost glorification. No longer a trickster or debauchee, nor even a mere libertine like in Molière, since Mozart’s Don Giovanni the “epitome of manliness” had been reshaped, subsequently, by Hoffmann, Byron, Merime, Zorilla et al., into a Rebel Son, who defies authority, be it earthly or heavenly, and whose lineage thus includes Prometheus, Cain, Satan, Hamlet and Faust among many others. As G.B. Shaw epitomized it, in the same piece that which I quoted at the beginning, “what attracts and impresses us [in D.J. – O.Z.] is the heroism of daring to be the enemy of God. <...> Don Juan became such a pet that the world could not bear his damnation”. True, fin de siècle Europe had witnessed the upsurge in popularity of the philosophy of “Donjuanism”. This is, of course, the subject not to be covered here, I will just refer to the classical 3-volume study by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar “No Man’s Land. The Place of the Woman Writer in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century” - its 1<sup>st</sup> vol. (entitled “The War of Words”) reveals, among other things, the existing, however subtle, connection between literary cult of manliness and the later developed discourse of war. Now, it is all the more remarkable that in the very years preceding the outburst of WWI the Don Juan legend for the first time in 300 years met with the interpretation “on the other side” – the stand that was taken up by women.

Two women authors, both coming from the margins of the European continent, simultaneously, though independently, not knowing of each other’s work, produced their own versions of the central European myth of victorious manliness. The play “Don Juan Tenorio” by Anna Ekerheilm appeared in Sweden in 1909; followed in Ukraine (then part of the Russian Empire) in 1912 of the drama-in-verse “The Stone Master” by Lesia Ukrainka. This was the major contravention of tradition well-guarded by the over 2300 male versions of the theme<sup>6</sup>. I must note, that neither the Swedish, nor the Ukrainian play succeeded to wreak havoc in the European literary scenery of the pre-war time, though

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<sup>6</sup> For the sake of accuracy, it should be noted that the very first attempt at undermining the Don Juan myth from a gender perspective was made by George Sand, in her novel “Lelia”, though it was not a full version of the legend. Neither did it represent a confrontation of equally matched opponents – the chapter on Don Juan is more of a frustrated lamentation of an abused victim. Yet, it should be taken as an evidence that as soon as women’s emancipation first received its cultural articulation, the Don Juan myth had been perceived in the budding women’s literary tradition as a certain stumbling block, as a “teasing theme with something diabolical about it” (as Ukrainka confessed in her letter), something which called for revision, if only in order to get rid of the dependence on it.

for different reasons. Anna Ekerheilm was considered to be a minor writer, and her contribution was ignored, allegedly, for artistic reasons – it is hard to tell whether this was really the case, since her “Don Juan Tenorio” was never translated into any other language, and in Sweden she is by now completely forgotten. The case of Lesia Ukrainka on which I focus in my book is, however, far more complicated, and far more interesting.

Though by no means a minor writer - on the contrary, a celebrated national classic (nowadays the only woman pictured on Ukrainian money, whose currency presents the whole pantheon of national heroes since the medieval Kyivan Rus' Princes), she nevertheless belonged to the minor literature, the very existence of which was then endangered<sup>7</sup>. Quite understandably, from within the endangered literature her message in her challenging the Don Juan legend could not be heard outside of the country. Until now, Lesia Ukrainka remains very little known in the West - in this she shares the lot of the entire Ukrainian literature. Her entry in the English version of Wikipedia, accompanied with “the portrait of an artist as a young girl” (while she died at the age of 42, as a celebrated classic authoring some 16 volumes of literary works) could give a good wholehearted laugh to anyone familiar with the subject. None of Ukrainka's works are featured in it, no bibliographical references in Western languages are provided (though there are some translations of Ukrainka's major dramas, as well as thorough studies on her available in English and in French) - instead the authors do not fail to claim that it was Ukrainka's hairstyle which inspired the famous on-the-head braid by Julia Tymoshenko (which is not even the truth, since Tymoshenko's hairstyle was copied not after Lesia Ukrainka, but after Marko Vovchok, another Ukrainian woman classic of the 19<sup>th</sup> century). Out of the twenty dramas which Lesia Ukrainka wrote only two are mentioned, and “The Stone Master”, which is her recognized masterpiece, is not among them. The message, thus, remains unheard. (Whether it was really heard inside the country, that is another story, which, regrettably, goes beyond the framework of this lecture.) Now, onto the message itself...

In its general setting and plot, “The Stone Master” dutifully follows the tradition. Don Juan pursues a lady, Donna Anna, kills the Commander, her husband who defends her honor; later he issues an insulting invitation to the stone statue of the Commander, and the play ends when the Commander returns to life to destroy Don Juan. The story itself remains thus untouched, but that is where the similarity with the previous versions ends. Without resorting to any disrupting changes, Lesia Ukrainka produced not a version of the legend, but rather a subversion of it, and, most importantly, of its archetypal contents, by giving a floor, for the first time, to full-fledged women characters.

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<sup>7</sup> In the Russian Empire Ukrainian language had been officially banned to use in public since 1863, and for nearly 50 years it was due to the Western part of the country incorporated into the far more liberal Habsburg Empire that Ukraine was able to preserve its linguistic and cultural identity. The myth of the “Golden Age under Franz-Joseph” has persevered in Galicia until now (though probably for different reasons which cannot be scrutinized in the framework of this lecture). In any case, the truth is, were it not for the uninhibited development of the Ukrainian press, publishing, schools and academia in Galicia, by the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ukrainian culture would, most likely, have found itself on the verge of extinction.

It was since the 18<sup>th</sup> century treatments of Don Juan (in fact, since “Don Giovanni” with its Elvira), that women characters began to take more place, thus reflecting the changing position of women in European society and literature. However, in all the versions authored by men, women characters were developing in the accordance with the archetypal angel/monster dichotomy which remained central to the myth. Contrary to that tradition, “The Stone Master” depicts what can be described, at first glance, as the classical battle of sexes - the battle ultimately lost on both sides, though for entirely different reasons. What proves to be on stake, behind the habitual setting of “duels, ghosts and “womanly” women”, is not love (nor even sexual pleasure), but power.

The critics are probably right in stating that it is not Don Juan who *is* the central character in “The Stone Master”, but Donna Anna. It is her story and, essentially, her tragedy. Such a reversion of the traditional gender roles is considered (by Gilbert and Gubar) to be a *birthmark* of literary modernism, and it was particularly characteristic for Lesia Ukrainka. In her dramas she succeeded in "rewriting" a significant part of Greek and Christian mythology from a woman's point of view, having transformed each story into a female myth. Her story of the Trojan war was told as the tragedy of Cassandra; her story of Christ was told in two dramas about his women disciples, one, “The Possessed”, about Mary (or Miriam, as she is named in the play, in accordance with the Gnostic tradition), another, “Joanna, the wife of Chuza”, about the character mentioned in the Gospel of Luke 8:3. Both dramas introduce an extremely powerful feminist dimension to the Christian myth, all the more remarkable that in this Lesia Ukrainka was at least half a century ahead of her time<sup>8</sup> (she also had a drama on Judas, but comparing to her “women's heresies”, it turned out less innovative). What she accomplished can be comprehended, to a considerable extent, as retaking European cultural history from men, repossessing it by women, and the Don Juan myth could not but present to her the most momentous challenge with this regard.

It is true then, that “The Stone Master” is first and foremost Anna's story. Don Juan himself admits that she is his equal, and that is precisely what makes her so appealing to him (“That's why I strove so hard to win you”, he says), yet in fact he is clearly her inferior, I even dare say, her instrument - from their very first meeting at which she immediately takes control of their relationship, to the tragic finale when she seduces him with the prospect of becoming a successor to the honors and power of the late Commander. She encourages him to try the Commander's overcoat, and having done so, Don Juan symbolically becomes the Commander's replacement – at this moment the ghost of the Commander emerges from Juan's reflection in the mirror, and, placing his hand on Juan's shoulder, petrifies him. Such an ultimate merging of the two principal male characters underscores what little difference really exists between them. At the beginning they seem to be the opposites. Don Juan performs as a mutinous “knight of freedom”, defying all social constraints, restrictions and conventions. He is banished

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<sup>8</sup> It was not until the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the development of the so-called “feminist theology” that the participation of women in early Christianity received a thorough scholarly revision. See Elizabeth Schuessler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroads, 1983).

from Spain for his innumerable duels and amorous escapades, but takes a risk to return, full of contempt for any danger - on the whole, he is portrayed as an embodiment of an archetypal woman's dream of a Liberator, which Simone de Beauvoir found common both among young girls (who believe he will take them away from their family) and for married women (who believe he will take them "from under a marital yoke"<sup>9</sup>). Donna Anna is not alien to that dream, either. To her friend Dolores, another major female character of the play, Don Juan's loyal fiancée committed to him in a kind of a religious self-sacrifice, Anna reveals, in the opening scene, her recurring dream which becomes the key metaphor of the play. In her dream, Anna envisages herself as a princess locked in an impregnable fortress high atop an in-scalable stone mountain. Although many knights might try, none has yet been able to fight his way into a fortress. This Freudian dream of a Liberator clearly reflects Anna's, as probably any woman's, inner conflict between her secret hope to find love without having to surrender her freedom, on the one hand, and her need in a hideaway, in the inaccessible retreat where she at the same time could be "atop" (that is, in control of the forces which protect her), dealing with her emotions from a position of strength, on the other hand.

The Commander Don Gonzago, to whom Anna is first engaged, then marries, is to her "a stone mountain". Because of him, she rises to the highly honorable social position (Gonzago's ambition goes as far as contriving the plot in order to gain the throne), but the price she has to pay proves to be evenly higher: Anna finds herself virtually locked in the cage of societal code and "petrifying" courtly restrictions. It is in the moment of moral exhaustion that she surrenders to Don Juan, or rather permits him to seduce her, and to play a liberator – to his, however brief, satisfaction. For that is exactly how Ukrainka's Don Juan sees himself – as a donor, liberator, redeemer of women who gives them what they want and enables them to reach their potential (a pattern of male behaviour also noted by Simone de Beauvoir). To Donna Anna he claims that it is his "duty to save her proud free soul". All the more disappointed and disconcerted is he to discover that by killing the Commander, he has not in anyway completed a "liberation" – Anna is not going to subjugate herself to her "liberator". On the contrary, she strives by all means to keep her social position. In the eyes of society, she dutifully plays an honorable and respectable mourning widow, and finds nothing but laughable Don Juan's proposal to flee with him into exile. True, there is no point in doing this, since Anna has disguised the Commander's death as a result of robbery, and Don Juan is not a suspect. The problem is, that, apart from escaping, now and again, with a woman at his will, in order to "force the world to reject him", as he proudly declares ("Only he's free from the world whom the world rejects, and that I've forced it to do"), Don Juan has no other behavioural pattern in his mind. Anna's well-elaborated plan to invite "the liberator" into her fortress as her new husband, rather than to subjugate herself to his will, appears to be the first, in the history of the legend, truly serious test for Don Juan's proverbial revolting individualism, and this test Don Juan fails to stand.

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<sup>9</sup> Simone de Beauvoir. *The Second Sex*, trans. H.M.Parshley (New York: Knopf, 1953), p.551.



First he is defeated by Dolores, his ever-forgiving fiancée, the born victim whose only goal in life seems to be to sacrifice herself in order to save his soul (the triangle Anna-Juan-Dolores is even more interesting than Juan-Anna-Gonzago, if only because the women's competition is far more subtle and nuanced, as compared to men's duels, and women's fight is over man's soul, rather than over his body). In her ultimate expression of self-sacrifice, Dolores prostitutes herself to obtain from the king Don Juan's pardon, which Don Juan gladly accepts and congratulates himself, rather self-conceitedly: "What a beautiful soul I've forged!" – reasoning that through him Dolores has reached "a high reverent pinnacle"<sup>10</sup>. Juan's conceit, however, cannot be taken otherwise as a big delusion on his part, as in reality, the things are just the opposite: it is Dolores who, by surrendering her chastity for, rather than to, Juan, enters into possession of him, becomes the "spiritual Juan". She ingests his spiritual identity and, in the final output, his manliness, like the archetypal Mater Edax, the devouring mother. As a rehabilitated nobleman, and no longer a social outcast, Don Juan takes his place as no more than a cog in the same ominous social machinery once personified by the Commander. That he is then so easily tempted by Anna's proposal to take the Commander's position (this is, again, the typical modernist reversion of the gender roles, for it is clearly Anna who seduces Don Juan, not the other way around), that he yields to the temptation and agrees to partake in the system which he has professed to rebel against, completes his downfall and proves that his heroic individualism has really been fake, meant to disguise his weakness, rather than his long-glorified strength.

Both women, thus, each in her own way, defeat Don Juan by unmasking him. The reason why both lose their battle is not because Don Juan is a winner, but because the confrontation is not evenly matched: whether opposing the Commander or merging with him, Don Juan makes part of an unshakable, "stone" system of patriarchy, whereas each of the two women stands alone. That is what makes Ukrainka's Don Juan so subversive of his archetype. The play is not about a strong individual whose Promethean revolt allows him to rise above the norm to a height from which he can challenge God and capture the imagination of those around him, as the Don Juan myth maintains, but about "The Stone Master", not an individual but an elaborate system of the patriarchy which might consist of insignificant men, yet it is designed to endow these insignificant men with invincible power.

Let me remind you that the play was written in 1912 – that is, 32 years after a woman in literature was born as a hero. In 1880 almost at the same moment Ibsen and James delegated to a woman, for the first time in European cultural history, the burden of the tragic action. This clearly designated - probably in more convincing, and surely more visible way than hundreds of then existing women's organizations - the arrival of women upon the stage of history. Lesia Ukrainka was a second generation feminist (her mother, Olena Pchilka, was herself a public figure of impressive caliber and leadership, a writer,

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<sup>10</sup> This is the motive often found in Ukrainka's work (and not only in hers) - a man subdued to a social oppression makes a woman to pay for his humiliation; I call it a "syndrom of Abraham in Egypt" (referring to the story in the Old Testament: when in the Egyptian slavery, Abraham became Sarah's pimp, giving her to Faraon as a concubine and pretending to be her brother). In modern times this motif is particularly characteristic of the feminist nationalist discourse.

one of the luminaries of Ukrainian nationalism and a co-founder of the Ukrainian Women's League). Ukrainka's highly sophisticated feminist attack on the central myth of the European patriarchy, achieved by giving a language to the gender experience previously left mute, had in a way confirmed G.B. Shaw's argument: in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Don Juan is, inevitably and irretrievably, dead. To play a hero, he needs a society that keeps its women behind barred windows. To execute his power over women, he needs women to be disempowered, left with nothing but dreams. In a way, it is women themselves who had created him, through their own dreams. Why wonder then, that it is women who put an end to their own creature as soon as he was no longer needed – that is, as soon as they started to gain control, however limited, over their own lives?

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that in the subsequent literary tradition of the century's old Don Juan, gradually turns into an object of ridicule. In Karel Čapek's story "The Confession of Don Juan" (1932) the great seducer is portrayed on a deathbed, confessing his many sins to the monk who happens to be at hand, but stubbornly refusing his past commitment to the main capital sin ascribed to him – that is, to the violation of the Seventh Commandment. So the fight between an ardent monk and an inveterate sinner goes on and on, until the interference of the monk's more intelligent superior clarifies the situation: it appears that Don Juan has been a life-time impotent, and his pursuit of women, aimed at gaining a woman's heart and escaping at the decisive moment, was nothing but a psychological compensation for his physical disability. This is, of course, the bottom of the Don Juan's downfall, which, quite ruthlessly, leaves the archetype with no chances for resurrection in whatever distant a future.

Some last glimmering reflections of the once potent cult could be still traced in the novels by Milan Kundera, yet one can not but notice that his numerous "Don Juans" exhausting themselves in sexual games fail to perform as anything more than unhappy "dancers", whose plenipotence is nowadays limited but to the technical ability to come into their partners' face - quite a pathetic remnant of what was once perceived as a Promethean challenge to God. Interestingly, in "The Book of Laughter and Forgetting" Kundera has an impressive eulogy of the irresistible sexual power of the "male stare", which on the spot turns a desirable woman into a mechanical object, in a tool similar to a hammer in man's hand. Yet, admits Kundera, the only problem with the irresistibility of the male stare is, that women know sometimes to look back - and meet it with their own look, totally undisturbed and inexpressive, which immediately ruins all the male magic and leaves a man with an uncomfortable feeling as if a hammer in his hand suddenly had eyes. It is quite an astute observation, which can also serve as a modern epitaph to Don Juan: he was staying irresistible precisely as long as women, metaphorically speaking, "did not look back".

However as much Kundera himself might try to conceal it, it is pretty obvious that the narcissistic gratification, which his late 20<sup>th</sup> century machos pursue in their sexual relationship, has its roots not as much in a sensual pleasure, but in the exertion of power, in whatever degraded form it might be experienced. This is precisely what makes the true core of Don Juanism, first revealed in Lesia Ukrainka's "The Stone Master", and, over seventy years later, on the new stage of feminist movement, epitomized by Julia Kristeva

in her “Tales of Love”. According to Kristeva, Don Juan “is not exalted by sensuality, even autoerotic, but by the evidence of his being able to place under his power by diverting them from their own path (seducer) all the women he meets”<sup>11</sup>. Kristeva’s deconstruction of the Don Juan myth nowadays reads as a brilliantly provocative theoretical comment to what Lesia Ukrainka had accomplished in “The Stone Master”, no matter whether Kristeva herself was familiar with the play or not. What really matters, and what I find to be of particular importance, is the continuity in the exploration of the symbolic order which can be seen between two phases of European feminism - the first one represented by the Ukrainian writer, the second one by the French philosopher.

Such a continuity seems to me all the more significant, that most analysts prefer to discuss, on the contrary, a disruption between the early - and late 20<sup>th</sup> century feminism. True, in its beginnings, the European women’s movement, however universalistic in its approach, however much aimed at globalizing the problems of women of different classes, nations, and milieu under the label of a “Universal Woman”, was deeply rooted in the sociopolitical life of nations. Feminism merging with nationalism was then by no means, as I have already stated, an extraordinary occurrence. It is enough to say that “The Stone Master”, as well as many other Ukrainka’s works, appeared as part of her response to the escalating campaign of Russian imperialism of the time, which resulted in a backlash against Ukrainian culture (Ukrainka’s political opponent, Piotr Struve, argued the illogic of the independent existence of the Ukrainian culture and questioned its ability to “embrace the higher spiritual achievements of mankind”, and there is enough evidence that in her decision to write “a Don Juan of our own” the political motives were hardly separable from her gender concerns; in any case, as a Ukrainian nationalist, which she undoubtedly was<sup>12</sup>, she had to be double sensitive to the petrifying affect of the imperial machinery). On the whole, I assume, the political involvement of the early feminism (which so many historians see as its distinctive feature, especially when compared to the post-1968 phase) helped women a great deal in “killing Don Juan”, not just in symbolic, but in practical terms as well (from equal pay for equal work, to taking power in social institutions on an equal footing with men).

Yet, there arises probably the most serious question of the unwritten drama of contemporary history: namely, if it is not Don Juan but Anna who puts on the Commander’s overcoat, will the Stone Master be in any trouble? Up to now, the assumption of power by women has not yet introduced any radical changes in the nature of this power. Once promoted to the decision-making positions, women quickly become petrified into the pillars of the established order. This identification by women with the initially denied status-quo, with the very power structures which were previously, when inaccessible, considered oppressive, was first noticed by Kristeva back in the early

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<sup>11</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p.201.

<sup>12</sup> During the brief historic interlude of Ukrainian independence in 1918-1920, Lesia Ukrainka was even labeled, posthumously, as “the poet of Ukrainian Risorgimento”.

1980s<sup>13</sup>. The tendency has often been used by totalitarian regimes; nowadays it is clearly seen in Eastern Europe where gender issues are particularly touchy - and for a good reason so. The experience of living under totalitarianism has proven that every kind of social humiliation affects men more directly and profoundly than women. There is even a reasonable anthropological explanation for that, -- while for women work and family are equal and parallel (and, more than often, competing) ways of learning social behaviour; for men they are inseparably linked together. This makes men much more dependent on the social climate "outdoors". Whereas for a woman a kitchen and a nursery always remain a place where she can retreat, for a man, there is no such place. Therefore, paradoxically enough, despite the fact that all power in totalitarian societies was blatantly concentrated in the hands of men, it has been a man, not a woman, who fell the most immediate prey of the political system, not just physically (in terms of men making a majority of the GULAG population), but psychologically as well. As F.S. Fitzgerald wrote in "Tender Is the Night", no mature man "is able to profit by a humiliation. When he forgives it becomes part of his life, he has identified himself with the thing which has humiliated him". The key word which has to be stressed in this passage is "mature". The totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe have left us with the long-term legacy – millions of men, since their young years traumatized with the need to identify themselves with socially humiliating institutions and are never able to reach the stage of psychological maturity, and millions of women exhausted with the lifetime need to perform as survivors, and, more than often, breadwinners, while men were revenging on them for their own defeats "outdoors".

This, I believe, fully explains the now widely discussed post-communist "fear of feminism" which, since the 1990s, has embraced vast territory, from the Balkans to Russia, regardless of the differences in the political and cultural traditions throughout the region. It also explains, on the other hand, the striking success of women politicians like Julia Tymoshenko, with their immediate, metaphorically speaking, "merging with the Commander's ghost" as soon as they attain power. Of Tymoshenko, it can be said exactly what Umberto Eco has diagnosed in her Italian colleague Silvio Berlusconi, that "he is an entirely new kind of politician, perhaps a postmodern one, and precisely because his actions are baffling, he is bringing into a play a complex, shrewd, and subtle strategy <...> - a *sales technique*"<sup>14</sup>. Throwing into the media preposterous populous promises, launching provocations and denying them the next day, playing victim of persecution, and, most important of all, performing on TV on a daily basis. All these are the salesmen's devices that are widely used today by "postmodern politicians", to keep the precarious equilibrium of power. To their supporters these new Annas who have risen to the top, give what is still in demand, -- to men suffering from the deeply hidden totalitarian trauma, along with good looks and sexuality, a soothing promise that "mom will take care of everything"; to frustrated women, – a rewarding hope that "this one will

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<sup>13</sup> See: Julia Kristeva. *Women's Time*, trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake. *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndt, eds. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991), p.452-455.

<sup>14</sup> Umberto Eco. *Turning Back the Clock. Hot Wars and Media Populism* (London: Vintage Books, 2008), p. 133.

revenge against the unworthy males for us all". Feminism, under the circumstance, turns into a kind of an intellectual reservation "for the chosen", with not much of an ambition to influence the realm of public policies.

Now, when we look at the other side of the former "iron curtain", we will see that more or less similar things happened to Western feminism after 1968. This second wave of feminism has been mainly interested in the specificity of female psychology and its socio-cultural realization, in (re)constructing and recognition of an irreducible female identity; it relies heavily on the psychoanalytic and aesthetic experience, and at the same time it has been clearly marked with what Kristeva described in "Women's Time" as "an exacerbated distrust of the entire political dimension"<sup>15</sup>. It looks almost as if by partaking in political history proved to be too precarious a business for feminism to side with – especially after the trauma of German totalitarianism and the subsequent disillusionment in the so-called "Eastern socialism", the biggest ideological fraud of the past century, which nevertheless succeeded in having kept Western feminists under its spell for quite a long while. My preliminary assumption is, thus, that in Europe as a whole, both in the East and in the West, feminist self-alienation from the sociopolitical aspect of history could be regarded as a remote consequence of the experience of living under totalitarianism, which, whether German or Soviet, has been certainly a major disruption in the history of all European liberation movements, - the utmost triumph of the Stone Master over any aspirations Anna and Dolores might have ever cherished.

I tried to show, thus, that the entrance of women on the stage of history over a century ago did kill Don Juan, but it did not kill the Stone Master. The latter proved to be far more successful a seducer. Whether women have enough strength to oppose the Stone Master, rather than playing in accordance with his established rules, remains a question to be answered in the new century.

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<sup>15</sup> Julia Kristeva. *Women's Time*, p.447.