

Between History and Myth: Perceptions of the Cossack Past in Polish, Russian and Ukrainian Romantic Literature

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“We live in an historical age—in an historical age par excellence ... Now history exists not only in fact, but in the memory, the minds, the hearts of nations. We see it, we hear it, we sense it at every moment. It penetrates us through all our senses.”¹ These words of Bestužev-Marlinskij are emblematic of the intense historical consciousness of the entire nineteenth century, but are surely most apposite to the thought and literary practice of Romanticism. In this period, in both eastern and western Europe, history not only provides the ground for individual and collective, that is, national consciousness, but is seen as the *spiritus movens* that guides and determines all things. As the Polish critic Maria Janion put it (in effect, paraphrasing Hegel), “History is the incarnation of the Romantic God.”²

Metaphysics aside, it is clear that in the Slavic countries, the historicist interest also served to break new common ground and to introduce a new dimension in literary relations. In the case of Polish and Russian, and subsequently also Ukrainian literature, these relations found one of their most ramified and certainly most resonant common expressions in the theme of the Ukrainian Cossack past. The turbulence of that past and (at least in the early stages) the exoticism of things Ukrainian, the fact that due to its complex political and cultural history the Ukraine, for the Poles and the Russians, was seen as part of their broader respective national patrimonies, gave this subject a remarkable and long lasting hold on the artistic imagination. In each of the literatures it drew the attention not only of a host of minor writers, but of the major ones as well: Malczewski, Rzewuski and Słowacki, Puškin and Gogol', Ševčenko and Kuliš. In Polish literature, the Ukraine and the Cossack theme were for a time synonymous with the new Romantic mode. While never as artistically prominent in Russian literature as it was in Polish—though far from insignificant—this theme eventually gained a broad quantitative presence in the popular literature.³ Understandably, its impact was most profound in Ukrainian literature. Here, Cossackdom was the subject of purely literary concerns, beginning with Borovykovs'kyj, Metlyns'kyj and Kostomarov, of ethnographic interests (e.g., of Markevyč, Bodjans'kyj, Sreznevs'kyj and Maksymovyč), and of concerted historical and historiographic work,

primarily of Kuliš and Kostomarov. Ultimately, a new understanding of the Cossack past, especially as molded by Ševčenko, provided the basis for the rebirth of Ukrainian national consciousness.

In all three literatures, it should be noted, the Cossack theme reveals a significantly different complexion from other, even closely related themes. Thus, while depictions of the Cossack past are often embellished with folkloric and ethnographic moments, and occasionally subordinated to them, in the representative works that past clearly rises above mere "raw material" to be reworked (as with folklore), according to literary convention or the writer's artistic model, and instead assumes a kind of transcendent and abiding importance. On the other hand, while this past may at various times be essentially perceived in terms of a more universal (and quintessentially Romantic) theme, such as man's striving for freedom, the core of the phenomenon, the specific Ukrainian nature of the events and traumas of this past, invariably reasserts itself.

The differences in the treatment of the Cossack past in the respective literatures are readily apparent: while the great majority of Russian works turn either to the figures of Xmeľnyč'kyj or of Mazepa and to the far-reaching historical events associated with them, the preponderance of Polish works focus on the relatively recent and traumatic events of the hajdamak uprising of 1768, the Kolijivščyna.⁴ The thematic focus, of course, is determined by two very different historical experiences. Whereas in Russian history—first through the treaty of Perejaslav of 1654 and then Peter's victory at Poltava—the very subject of the Ukraine and the Cossacks is associated with the growth and triumph of the Russian state, in Polish historical consciousness the Cossacks, in light of ever-recurring conflicts and, most obviously, the bloody events of 1768 which presaged the first partition, were closely associated with the decline and fall of the Polish state. (It is quite revealing that at the height of the November uprising Joachim Lelewel symbolically reverses what for him was the calamitous fratricidal conflict of Cossacks and Poles by resurrecting the legend of Wernyhora, the seer and the emblem of Polish-Ukrainian, gentry-peasant solidarity.⁵) In Ukrainian literature there is a further fundamental distinction. The dominant perspective here is neither that of the triumphant state, nor of a nation's tragic political demise, but a much more complex issue—the uncharted process of the formation, as noted above, of a national consciousness and a national identity.

Even more than by thematic focus, differences of national perspective are expressed in terms of broadly articulated political or historiosophic judgments, and in polemics. Such a polemic is seen by various critics in Ševčenko's *Hajdamaky*, which they take as an implicit rebuttal of Czajkowski's version of the Kolijivščyna (i.e., in his *Wernyhora*) and perhaps even of Goszczyński's

Zamek kaniowski.⁶ A more involved polemic, which indeed goes beyond the Ukrainian theme, is the answer that Puškin gives in *Poltava* to both Ryleev's *Vojnarovskij* and Mickiewicz's *Konrad Wallenrod*.⁷ If non-belletristic polemics and counter-statements are considered, for example the Polish replies to Gogol's *Taras Bul'ba*, or Ševčenko's *Hajdamaky*, the subject expands into a separate and not insignificant subset of Slavic literary relations. If, in turn, the question is posed in terms of different ideological or artistic stances within a given literature, as in the instance of Puškin and Ryleev, or of Słowacki's comments on the "Ukrainian school" and Grabowski (in *Beniowski*), or of the many different reactions to *Zamek kaniowski*, then still another literary-historical framework can be established.

In this brief overview, however, my intent is not to focus on such differences, nor, more generally, to argue on the literary-historical plane—except by way of presenting background. The goal here is more intrinsic: it is to examine, for the most part synchronically, the basic levels and structures in the various perceptions of the Cossack past. It is a very provisional attempt at expanding our notion of Romantic historicism.⁸

The contours of the specifically Romantic apprehension of the Ukraine and its past can already be seen through a simple juxtaposition with earlier treatments. In the late Classicist period, the Ukraine was seldom if ever the subject of historicist interests; if it appears at all, it is as a newly discovered land, with colorful people and customs. In Russian literature this "discovery" is best conveyed by such travelogues as V. Izmajlov's *Putešestvie v poludennuju Rossiju* (1800-1802) or I. Šalikov's *Putešestvie v Malorossiju* (1803). In Polish literature, Stanisław Trembecki's *Sofiówka* (1806) is also a description, specifically of Potocki's extravagant park in the midst of an untamed Ukrainian countryside which still remembers the turbulence of Tartar and Cossack raids. I. Kotljarevs'kyj's *Enejida* (1798), the travesty of the *Aeneid*, which by its use of the vernacular ushers in modern Ukrainian literature, is also in a sense a description, or, as various critics were quick to observe, a virtual encyclopaedia of Ukrainian life, customs and manners and even—presaging Gogol—cuisine. In all of these works the history of the land never appears other than as an echo or a reminiscence. Even if the subject is ostensibly historical, as is the case in Nerežnyj's *Bursak* and *Zaporožec*, the rationalist *Westanschauung* and sentimental convention entirely submerge the actual historical reality—and indeed any empathy for or true interest in the past. Similarly, when the Cossack appears in Kniažnin's *Troiste wesele*, or Šaxovskoj's "Kozak-stixotvorec," or even, *mutatis mutandis*, in so excellent a work as Kvitka's "Kono- tops'ka viďma," he comes from the realm of vaudeville, not the past.

The pre-Romantic period, however, especially in Polish and Russian literature, presents a very different picture. Now the history of the land becomes a

paramount concern in the various treatments of the Ukraine. Even more, this historicist focus is closely identified with a programmatic stance: at the very least, history is taken as a *magistra vitae*, and its events, most frequently, as a barely concealed analogue to the present. In Polish literature, two dramas, both entitled *Bohdan Chmielnicki*, one by the well-known writer Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz (1817) and the other by the minor poet Tymon Zaborowski (1823), illustrate the premises and the poetics of this phase. Even though their judgments on the title hero are diametrically opposed—for Niemcewicz, the Hetman, in his fratricidal anger and thirst for blood is nothing short of a new Attila, while for Zaborowski he is a noble leader intent on purging corruption and restoring freedom to his fatherland, the Commonwealth—their common ground is much more important. For both writers the central issue, indeed a moral imperative, is that of Slavic brotherhood and unity, and both subordinate historical fact and social and cultural realia to apotheosize this moral end. In the process, didactic and patriotic moments are often interlarded with sentiment and melodrama. (Melodrama is virtually the only dimension of such a work as J. N. Kamiński's *Helena, czyli Hajdamacy na Ukrainie*.)

Russian pre-Romantic interests in the Ukrainian past are largely synonymous with the writings of the Decembrists. If anything, their treatment of the subject is even more intensely determined by immediate and pressing moral and political concerns than in the Polish case. Ryleev's oft-cited dictum (from the dedication to *Vojnarovskij*), "Ja ne Poët, a Graždanin," epitomizes their overarching sense of literature as civic statement and duty. In the several Decembrist works on the Ukrainian historical theme—N. Gnedič's unrealized history of the Ukraine, F. N. Glinka's *Zinobij Bogdan Xmel'nickij, ili osvoboždennaja Malorossija* (1819), and above all Ryleev's *Vojnarovskij*, as well as "Nalyvajko" and several other fragments—the Cossacks, and the Ukrainian past in general, are seen as a quintessential expression of the struggle for freedom.⁹ Along with their recourse to patriotism, didacticism and sentiment, the Decembrists, very much in the spirit of 18th century rationalism, saw little if any distinction between the past and the present.¹⁰ And it was principally for this reason that for them, as shown paradigmatically by *Vojnarovskij*, events from the past could serve as such clear lessons for the task of the present.

Ukrainian pre-Romanticism (which in the absence of a clear-cut consensus on this period I would simply identify with the early works of Borovykovs'kyj, as well as Metlyn's'kyj and Kostomarov¹¹) is largely free of historicist interests. While the Cossack past is actually quite prominent as a theme, it is viewed almost exclusively through the prism of nostalgia, of melancholy contemplation of time's passing, and of various folkloric motifs. Here, above all, this past is simply a static, "poetic" object—and even less a subject of historicist focus than it was for the Polish or Russian pre-Romantics.

The Romantic treatments of the Cossack past are many and diverse. In Polish literature, which is by far the most varied in this regard and which has the greatest number of important writers turning to this subject, we can easily distinguish four distinct groupings: the original "Ukrainian school" (legitimately consisting, as I would argue, only of Malczewski and Goszczyński), the Cossacophiles (Zaleski, Czajkowski and Padurra), the so-called St. Petersburg Coterie, especially Grabowski and Rzewuski, and, finally, by mid-century, a number of minor epigones. As we shall see, Słowacki, by himself, constitutes a separate and crucial category. In both Russian and Ukrainian literature it is hardly possible to speak of groups or schools. One is obliged, for the most part, to speak only of individual writers. It should be noted that in Russian literature, in contrast to the preceding Decembrist phase, the number of works focusing on the Cossack theme is considerably smaller;¹² moreover, various works appearing now, as, for example, Maksymovyč's *Bogdan Xmel'nickij* (1833), reveal a clear Decembrist influence and poetics. More significant is the fact that the clear majority of such works appearing after the 1820's are written by Ukrainians and in a majority of instances can legitimately be considered a part of Ukrainian literature (viz. the already noted *Bogdan Xmel'nickij* of Maksymovyč, Hrebinka's *Čajkovskij*, the occasional historical sketches of Kvitka, and especially the first, 1846, published version of Kuliš's *Čorna rada*, which, although appearing in Russian, was explicitly described by the author as a translation from the Ukrainian).¹³

For all their diversity—in narrative form, thematic focus, plot, and, not least, artistic quality—an essential feature, or structure, repeatedly asserts itself here. It is the writer's paramount concern for discovering the deep, hidden meaning of the past. This, rather than the attempt to convey the past fully, to "paint" a true and faithful "picture" or "canvas" of the past, in effect, the more or less conscious desideratum of "realism," is what I would take to be the most basic feature of Romantic historicism.¹⁴ History is no longer merely a moral or civic lesson as it is for a Niemcewicz or Ryleev. It is, to be sure, often an object of intense emotion, of nostalgia ("Ex, starina, starina!" as Gogol' says), of profound melancholy (cf. Malczewski's *Maria*), of a sublime regression, where, as for Zaleski or Czajkowski or Gogol', a recapturing of the past and of the feelings and sense of childhood are inextricably linked. Above all, for many of the Romantics in question the past is felt as something contradictory and tragic (and indeed frightening—again Gogol') which resists pure cognition and intellection, but which nevertheless holds the key to the present and perhaps even the future.

Two moments are implicit here. Even if the writer (like Puškin, for example) is not deeply, emotionally committed to the Ukraine and its past (and such a commitment and sense of identity with the land and the people in fact

characterizes virtually all the Polish and Ukrainian writers under discussion), his depiction of the Cossack past will still resonate with structures of collective thought, with collective representations. Consequently, an examination of the common features of these works must inevitably turn to the deep structures, and to the symbolic in general.

The typology I propose here is two-tiered. The basic division in it is determined precisely by the manner and the degree to which symbolic elements and a general symbolic coding determines the given work or the given author's whole "historiosophy." The first tier embraces those works (the great majority, as it turns out) where the "historical vision" draws on several different sources: Romantic convention (e.g., the Byronic poem, the Scottish novel, the stylized oral narrative, the Ossianic rhapsode), historical sources (e.g., Bantyš-Kamens'kyj's *Istorija Maloj Rossii*, the Cossack Chronicles, and so on), quasi-historical sources such as memoirs, popular legend and lore, and, finally, the symbolic, pre- or unconscious, collective representations. In the second tier or category these elements may indeed be present, but the "historical vision" is clearly determined by the symbolic moment, and reveals, in fact, the consistency of a code. The existence of such a code is often revealed by negative evidence: a reading that is not attuned to it will find the work to be not only historically "inaccurate," but "inconsistent," or "grotesque," or logically absurd. Although this category consists only of three writers—Słowacki, Gogoł and Ševčenko—it overshadows the entire field. And the mythical thought that animates these writers also assures them an extraordinary impact and vitality.

The range of works subtended by the first category can be more productively examined for our purposes not so much in terms of extrinsic, literary-historical groupings as through dominant modes. To be sure, the first such mode, that of sentiment and self-projection is largely congruent with the writing of the Cossacophiles, that is Józef Bohdan Zaleski, Michał Czajkowski, and, in a very minor way, Tomasz (Tymko) Padurra. The essential, defining feature of the Cossacophilism of a Zaleski, Czajkowski or Padurra was the writer's total identification with the Cossack past, with Cossackdom—as he saw it, of course. Each, on numerous occasions, spoke and wrote of himself, and was addressed and known as a "kozak."¹⁵ (Czajkowski's first public avowal of Cossacophilism came in a programmatic, polemical and characteristically hyperbolic statement when he, as "un Kozak," took part in the 1835 Historical Congress in Paris. In his paper "Quelle a été l'influence des Kozaks sur la littérature dans le Nord et dans l'Orient?" he speaks of the Cossacks as exemplifying love of liberty, sketches their history, and then, as the crux of his argument, makes the bizarre assertion that all of Polish

literature to date had been imitative and sterile, and that only the appearance of Zaleski, *Maria*, Padurra's "Ukrainian melodies" and *Zamek kaniowski* "élevèrent la poésie de la Pologne et la placèrent au niveau des sublimes poésies d'Orient et d'Europe.") The corpus of each writer is predominantly focused on the Ukraine and its Cossack past; for Czajkowski this is virtually his only theme, in fact, an *idée fixe*. Each (especially Padurra, clearly the weakest of the three) tries his hand at writing in Ukrainian.

Historically, Cossacophilism goes back to a legend of dual Cossack-gentry origins (and in the case of Czajkowski to actual ties to the Cossack *staršyna*). It expresses local patriotism and postulates the prerogatives of greater freedom, exotic dress and behaviour, and a sense of superiority towards one's gentry brethren from Crown Poland. Psychologically, the writings of Zaleski and Czajkowski do show a kind of infantile fixation on the land, the experiences and emotions of childhood—which was nurtured, undoubtedly, by the exile in which they spent most of their adult years. Zaleski's depiction of the Cossack past in his many poems is almost exclusively idyllic and his vision of the Ukraine both naive and sentimental; he himself is the last Cossack Bard. In his many works Czajkowski is more conventionally "realistic," even harshly so. His novel *Wernyhora* (1838), for example, depicts the bloody events of the *Kolijivščyna* with a kind of crude gusto; his highly programmatic intent is to show the Polish-Cossack conflict as above all a product of Russian machinations, as well as priests' intrigues. His historicism, which culminates with the notion of Cossackdom as a universal democratic principle, is basically self-projection: past and present, Pole and Cossack, are integrated in the figure of Czajkowski himself, and his fond hopes for a new Cossack order are projected onto the life and goals of the historical Cossacks. His eccentric politics are summarized by his image of himself as a reincarnation of Hetman Sahajdačnyj or Vyhov'skyj. It is revealing, of course, that no analogue to this phenomenon existed in Russian or Ukrainian literature. Cossacophilism remains the most fantastic of the perspectives on the Cossack past, a perspective predicated, among other things, on cultural and social distance, political trauma and exile, and a suspension of mature judgment.¹⁶

The response to the enthusiasm and sentimentalism of the Cossacophiles that appeared in Polish Romantic literature in the writings of the so-called St. Petersburg Coterie can also be taken as the clearest instance of the second and by far the broadest mode in our schema—the "ideological." By this term I simply mean that the works of this category have at their conceptual center a vision of a social order which the Cossack past that they reconstruct is meant to elaborate and propound. The writings of Michał Grabowski, the critic and ethnographer and antiquarian, the first theoretician of the "Ukrainian school of Polish poetry" and the most ardent propagator of the Scottish novel, and

Henryk Rzewuski, the most talented and most controversial member of this group, exemplify this stance. In regional terms, they too saw themselves as “Ukrainians,” but they were far from any idealization of the Cossacks. On the contrary, Rzewuski and Grabowski (and such second-rank followers as Fis and Groza) focused their attention on the hajdamak uprisings and showed the Ukrainian side as anarchic and bloodthirsty. Their interest was primarily regional and historical, and for them the Ukraine was the land where old Polish customs and traditions had been most fully preserved. The emphasis on ties to the land, on history seen through an antiquarian prism was synthesized in the idea of family history and the genre of the “powieść narodowa.” This, for Grabowski, was the most adequate vehicle for presenting national history; this was the key to the national experience. Within this framework Cossackdom was the antithesis: a wild and fascinating, but ultimately anarchic and destructive force. In Grabowski’s *Koliszczyzna i stepy* (1838) the future of the descendants of the Cossacks, the hajdamaks, lay in accepting civilization in the guise of the envisioned patriarchal order. Rzewuski’s undoubtedly greater talent made his essentially similar historical and social vision much more resonant. In his *Pamiętki Soplicy* the Cossack way of life, with its mix of exoticism and spontaneity, danger and violence, infects and molds the Polish characters as well, be it the renegade nobleman Pan Wółk of “Sicz Zaporoska” or Count Potocki in “Zamek kaniowski.” As fascinating as it may be, however, the Cossack ethos does not have his approval; his prescription for the Cossacks—the best among them—is to aspire to nobilitation into gentry ranks (cf. “Sawa”). Interestingly enough, the absolute importance he placed on conservative values and traditions led Rzewuski, in his novel *Zaporożec* (1853), to see the Ukraine—now conceived as a direct inheritor of Kievan Rus’—as preferable to a Poland perverted by foreign influence and radical thought. Here, the Cossacophile Czajkowski and the conservative Rzewuski found common ground.

Pantelejmon Kuliś’s *Čorna rada* (1846, 1857), the first Ukrainian historical novel and at the same time, as has been persuasively argued,¹⁷ the first Ukrainian social novel, is emblematic of the use of history to convey a vision of social order. Kuliś’s affinity with Grabowski, their common ethnographic and antiquarian interests, and the debt both owe to the Scottish novel is well documented.¹⁸ Beyond such common premises and, of course, a shared conservative ideology, however, Kuliś’s work also introduces a number of new elements. Like Grabowski he is intent on contrasting the camps of anarchy and of structured, civilized values, and his identification with the latter is clear (even though the Zaporozhians and their paragon, Kyrilo Tur, are given extended and sympathetic treatment). But his scope is much broader: while family history does provide the basic plot line, his real concern is with the

whole of Ukrainian society in the Cossack period, as well as with the nature of the Ukraine's internal discord and the causes of her subsequent incorporation into the Muscovite state.¹⁹ While achieving this, Kuliš's novel, perhaps paradoxically, is also signalling the end of the Romantic interest in the Cossack past; while it is clearly a product of Romantic poetics, *Čorna rada* also points to a post-Romantic stance. At its core is a belief not in the primacy of emotion and symbol but of reason directed at social and cultural analysis. It is surely revealing that the epilogue to the novel is a calm and balanced and highly insightful inquiry into the interrelation of Ukrainian and Russian (i.e., all-Russian, imperial) literature.

A sense of history as moving to a more rational end and the idea that the bridling of the Cossacks was tantamount to the establishment of civilization over anarchy is not confined to later Romanticism or to the novel. It is strikingly present in Puškin's *Poltava* (1828), the first Russian historical poem and a work that while reflecting (though not without important divergence²⁰) the poetics of the Byronic poem, is also influenced by Scott. Here, Ryleev's apotheosis of freedom and republican self-sacrifice is directly challenged by the apotheosis of the state and the greater good of power, reason and Empire. Although Puškin still draws on elements of romance (the love intrigue of Mazepa and Maria)—thus creating, as Belinskij was the first to observe, a certain dissonance with the poem's epic principle—his clear and conscious intent is to repudiate Romantic individualism, the heroization of the individual in conflict with society, and, in choosing the theme of the state, to set for himself the task of speaking for society and the maturity and order that it implies.

The final mode of our schema, which for want of a more precise term we may simply call the "tragic," is found in two of the earliest works in our purview—Malczewski's *Maria* (1825) and Goszczyński's *Zamek kaniowski* (1827). While the poems differ in various important respects, not the least of them artistic quality (*Maria* is clearly far superior), and while the very fact of their grouping is a legacy of the early, simplistic notion of the "Ukrainian school,"²¹ they do highlight the one basic common structure that bears most centrally on our discussion. In both poems the Ukraine and its past are shown as profoundly flawed and tragic. The external, depicted events—the murder of Maria and the implied parricide of Waclaw in *Maria*, and the bloody (and highly Byronized) deeds of the hajdamak rebellion in *Zamek kaniowski*—are variously shown as being but the surface emanation of a deeper flaw, indeed a "curse" of a land flowing with milk and honey ... and blood. The attempt to see this "curse" in rational or realistic terms, in effect as social conflict or the problem of Revolution, can only be reductive.²² It is not one aspect of the Ukrainian past that is signalled out here, but its totality. In both *Maria* and

Zamek kaniowski, and, of course, in many other works, including some of those already discussed, nature herself, in her wildness and desolate emptiness, resonates with the human tragedy, and the terrible events that are conjured up by the poet are cast not as something discrete in time, but as a recurring, ominous *fatum*, as the very essence of the Ukrainian historical experience.

In the works discussed so far, in all three modalities, there are a number of common structures, ranging from those that are quite on the surface to the much deeper ones. In this archeology, so to speak, the layer closest to the surface is constituted by, on the one hand, Romantic convention, especially as regards types, for example the Cossack as free spirit (in *Maria*) or as demonic lover (Goszczyński's *Nebaba*, Siemieński's *Gonta*, Puškin's *Mazepa*), and, on the other, the actual historical, or legendary events. The setting, the land—perceived mostly as wild, or as primal and idyllic nature—also corresponds to a Romantic poetics, although it is not always a conscious convention. A much deeper common structure is the sense of conflict and disharmony in the Ukrainian past, not merely in the obvious historical confrontation of Cossacks vs. Poles or Russians, but in the emotionally charged, symbolic “crimes against nature”—the recurring motifs of murder, parricide or incest. So, too, is the sense of the Ukraine of the Cossack past as leading a pre-social, “childish,” “primal” or “wild” existence. In fact, it is in the working out of this sense of the past that we have the deepest, symbolically most coded and emotionally most resonant common structure. In metaphoric terms this would be the “death” of the Cossack Ukraine. Speaking non-metaphorically, this is the sense that the Ukraine is undergoing a fundamental transition, a rite of passage, from childhood to maturity, from the pre-social to the social. As in all such symbolic transitions, the central, liminal phase is marked by a suspension of normal existence, by a limbo, where opposites coexist, where the past is not yet dead and the future not yet born.²³ For after all, the Cossack world which is so alive and vibrant and fascinating to each of these writers is in fact long dead. And yet at the same time it lives on in memory, in legend and tradition, in the whole collective sense of the past that most if not all of them were steeped in from their very childhood.

The Romantic sensibility, as is well known, was generally attuned to the liminal in the broadest sense—to the interface of the conscious and the unconscious, of nature and society, to the margins of “normal” social existence; hence its interest in the rebelling individual, in prisoners, outcasts and in common humanity as such. And here the Ukraine provides a remarkably fertile ground: the whole land and its past come to be perceived as quintessentially liminal, as situated not just between East and West but between civilization and a primal state of existence. Above all, it was liminal in that it was rapidly disappearing and yet still vibrant in poignant memories.

To convey the oppositions of this world, and their emotional impact, of course, virtually all the writers discussed here turn to symbolic structures and to collective representations, in a word, to patterns and elements of mythical thought. In the sense, however, that their work is also determined by the rational and conventional or, to put it differently, in that the level of events is as significant as the level of deep structures, their vision of the Ukraine stands somewhere between history and myth.

In the case of our last three writers, on the other hand, we can speak of myth proper. Two qualifications must be added, however. For Słowacki, Gogoł and Ševčenko the content of the myth is not merely the Cossack past—here the myth is coterminous with their sense of the entire Ukrainian experience, both past (where Cossackdom plays the central role) and present; for Ševčenko it embraces the future as well. Secondly, no one work of the given author articulates the myth fully; it is expressed in the course of the whole oeuvre.

For each writer the myth is a means for expressing and resolving, in symbolic form and through a series of oppositions and mediations, his sense of deep conflict within the society and within himself. For each, in short, the myth is also a personal release, a symbolic exorcism.

The most succinct, and, quite literally, the most dramatic instance of such a release is found in Słowacki. His interest in the Ukrainian theme began conventionally, with the juvenile, Zaleski-like “Dumka ukraińska” and then the vivid but eclectic poem “Żmija”. In *Wacław*, a rethinking of the subject of *Maria*, his vision of the Ukraine is already resonant and tragic. His last works on the Ukrainian theme, *Beniowski* (especially the later cantos) and above all his symbolist masterpiece, one of the most difficult dramas of 19th century Polish literature, *Sen srebrny Salomei*, present his vision through the structures of myth. It is a myth about the death, in the gore of the massacres and reprisals of the Kolijivščyna, of the “silver Ukraine” of ideal and hence dream-like gentry-Cossack amity (an amity which is in fact, very much like the various misbegotten marriages in the drama, an unnatural union) and from it the birth of two new, still only faintly perceived entities, the Polish and the Ukrainian. The basic symbolic pattern, which repeats itself in concentric circles, from the broadest social and historical dimension to the innermost, personal one, is the rite of passage. The work, as already noted, also effects a psychological passage and purgation, a release from Słowacki’s personal Ukrainian “curse,” which is his burden of childhood and his Oedipal relationship with his mother. In the end, as Wernyhora departs to conceal himself among the *kurhany* (but not to die—for he is immortal) the land of idyll and bloody violence is transformed into poetry, and this is a fitting culmination to a uniquely productive theme in Polish Romanticism.

Gogol, as we know, tried his hand at writing a history of the Ukraine, but he quickly abandoned this, and suggested that the reason lay in his disappointment in the available chronicles.²⁴ But it is clear that history—whether it was to be written or taught—was quite uncongenial to him. By its very nature it required a reasoned exposition of events, causes, processes, and so on, while he passionately wanted to convey the *totality* of the past, with all its emotional states and experiences. In fact, he wished to make the past contemporaneous, timeless—and this can only be given in the symbolic system of a myth.

Such a myth, encompassing both the past and the present, is given in Gogol's Ukrainian stories of *Dikan'ka* and *Mirgorod*. Not each story gives a full statement of the myth, but when they are superimposed and ordered a coherent world results, in effect a world which despite its comedy and exuberant activity is in decline and moving to decrepitude. It is a world, as we see from the story "Zakoldovano mesto," that is suspended in an abnormal state, where almost everything is ultimately "ne tak." Taking the stories cumulatively, it is a world that is "cursed," or, more precisely, in the process of transition.

For Gogol the fundamental opposition in the Ukrainian world is that between man and woman, and upon this he builds the further distinction between the settled and the Cossack way of life.²⁵ This opposition takes on many hypostases—the vaudeville-like battle of the sexes in "Soročinskaja jarmarka," the sexual terror of "Vij," the tragi-farcical picture of a stagnating and deteriorating society of "The Old-World Landowners" and the two Ivans. In *Taras Bul'ba*, Gogol's ostensibly most historical work, but in fact a work that in its fusion of the ideal and the true (let alone its telescoping of historical time and disregard for all historical accuracy) follows precisely the mythical mode,²⁶ these oppositions are given paradigmatically on several levels: within Taras's family (Taras and his sons contrasted with the womenfolk, and later the total contrast in the fates of Andrij and Ostap), within the fabric of Ukrainian society (the Cossacks vs. the settled peasants), and even within the body of Cossackdom (the Cossacks who betray the sacred cause and make peace with the Poles are guilty of a womanly (!) deed). *Taras Bul'ba* can well be taken as a recapitulation of the myth—and its fullest narration. It presents the flowering of Cossack strength (paradigmatically the induction of the sons into the brotherhood of the Sič), the emergence of conflict (paradigmatically Andrij's betrayal of the cause for a woman) and the passing of the Cossack spirit into immortality and a new sphere. As for Stowacki, the basic symbolic movement is that of initiation—which succeeds for Ostap and fails for Andrij. Through their sacrifice (paradigmatically of Ostap and Taras) the Cossacks and the Ukraine they represent pass on to a new, higher, more mature state, implicitly into the all-Russian imperial context. The rite of passage in

Taras Bul'ba can thus be seen as a synecdoche for the entire myth: the Ukraine and the Cossacks in fundamnetal transition, passing through the "curse," through abnormality and "death," into a different existence. Again as with Słowacki, however, while in one sense the Cossack Ukraine is transfigured into poetry and memory, the author can transcend the dross that remains ("Skučno na ètom svete, gospoda!") only by purging himself of it—and this Gogol' does by fleeing it and by immersing himself in a new, all-Russian reality.

To speak of Ševčenko's mythical thought in but a few paragraphs, without benefit of the structural analysis that supports the argument and in the face of a highly solidified body of traditional interpretations, seems nothing short of foolhardy. But the attempt should be made, even if only to outline the problem.²⁷

Ševčenko's poetry is not only extraordinarily intense, affective and immediate, it is also highly symbolic, virtually encoded; the inability of so many critics to come to grips with its total, systematic meaning is due precisely to the tendency to approach it solely from its external "causes" (intellectual influences, folkloric models, literary models, and so on) and not its immanent metaphoric structures and paradigms. Ševčenko's "history" (or his "historiosophy" or "historical views") is clearly mythical, as attested by his radical unconcern for historical accuracy, causality and processes (just as in Gogol'), his free telescoping of events (cf. "Slipyj"/"Nevoľnyk"), his intellectual *bricolage* (where historical fact is easily compounded with quasi-history, legend, folk motif or personal reminiscence), and above all by the fact that his avowed task is not to find the *reasonable*, let alone scholarly version of the past (which he explicitly mocks), but the holy history-truth (*istorija-pravda*). His task is to peer into the collective memory, emblematically the *mohyly* that are the Ukraine's chronicles (cf. "Buvaje v nevoli inodi zhadaju" or "Za bajrakom bajrak"), and to find there, as in a "Great Crypt", the concealed truth, and the Word that will be the means of his countrymen's salvation.

The central structure of Ševčenko's mythical perception of the Ukraine's past and present is the irreconcilable conflict he sees between the realms of *communitas* (the poor, the weak, the victimized, the marginal, common humanity) and *structure* (the world of authority, rank, property, the tsars and their minions, dogmatic religion, and so on).²⁸ Just as the Ukraine of the present is racked by a profound disharmony and conflict, which manifests itself not only in social and political victimization, but also in unnatural family and sexual relations (the everpresent themes of the bastard and orphan), and ultimately in his own fate, which recapitulates the whole, so also is the Ukraine of the Cossack past caught in a fatal opposition. For Ševčenko, in short, the Cossacks are both *communitas* and *structure*, they embody both the "native"

values of freedom, equality and emotional spontaneity and the “foreign” qualities of authority, hierarchy and power. This opposition is not at all simply the function of class differences, of the tension between the poor rank and file, the *sirjaky*, and the Cossack upper classes, the *staršyna* and *karmazyny*; it is only the most concrete and painful instance of a universal opposition. For as stark as it is, the inversion of the Cossack ideal, the change from total freedom and equality which he postulates in his original ideal order to a situation of total power for some and slavery of others (an echo of the fact that after the dissolution of Cossackdom most of the Cossack elite became incorporated into the Russian imperial serf-owning nobility while the rank and file Cossacks, their former brothers, became serfs), this, for Ševčenko is only the narrower case of a universal curse hanging over mankind, namely man’s unbridled drive to control and oppress fellow man.²⁹

For Ševčenko the Ukraine of the past is undoubtedly an ideal and an existential, not a political category. Similarly, for him the Cossacks are a mythical not a historical phenomenon. Not only are they not presented historically, their reason for being is not simply to embody the past and its glory, but to reveal the innermost truth about Ukrainian existence *and* to serve as a touchstone on which to base an ideal future—his millenarian vision. As we see in so many of his poems, they appear from beyond the grave with the revelation of what the Ukraine was and what it can be. In the fallen and ignoble present the full meaning of this message—the secret of the “Great Crypt” that is the Ukraine and the *mohyly* that are Cossackdom—is known only to the poet. His prophetic task is to pass it on, to inculcate it in the hearts of his countrymen. In this sense of his role, as well as in his millenarian solution, Ševčenko differs greatly from Słowacki and Gogoł. The resonance of his vision, the most persuasive evidence of the impact of his poetry on the collective, is the ongoing cult of Ševčenko—the recapitulation of myth in ritual.

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NOTES

¹ A. Marlinskij, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij*, vol. X, St. Petersburg, 1839, p. 251; cited in S. M. Petrov, *Istoričeskij roman A. S. Puškina*, Moscow, 1953, p. 4. An extensive treatment of the subject of this paper will appear in my forthcoming book, *The Myth of the Ukraine: A Study of Polish, Russian and Ukrainian Romanticism*.

² Maria Janion, *Romantyzm, rewolucja, marksizm*, Gdańsk, 1972, p. 85.

³ Cf. Vasyľ Sypovs'kyj, *Ukrajina v rosijs'komu pys'menstvi* (UAN: Zbirnyk istorično-filolohičnoho viddilu, No. 58), Kiev, 1928.

⁴ As a historical phenomenon, the hajdamaks, mainly peasant rebels, are quite different from the Cossacks, with their structure, laws, politics, and so on. In the popular, and in the literary perception, and in the historical thinking of the day, these differences were frequently blurred.

⁵ See *Patriota*, December 12, 1830. Cf. also L. M. Kasjan, "Wernyhora. Zarys dziejów postaci w literaturze polskiej," *Zeszyty naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika*, Toruń, 1962, pp. 53-120.

⁶ Cf. B. Navroć'kyj, *Hajdamaky Tarasa Ševčenka: Džerela. Styl. Kompozycja*, Kiev, 1928.

⁷ See .V. Sipovskij "Puškin i Ryleev," in *Puškin i ego sovremenniki*, vol. I, St. Petersburg, 1906, No. 3, pp. 68-88 and W. Lednicki, "Mickiewicz's Stay in Russia and His Friendship with Puškin," in *Adam Mickiewicz in World Literature*, Berkeley, 1956, pp. 45-7.

⁸ The term "historicism" has come to assume in the course of time many, often contradictory meanings. It has stood for the German school of Historismus, for relativism of value in historical knowledge as seen by Troeltsch and Mannheim, and for Croce's historicization of philosophy; it has been identified with and attacked as historical prediction by Popper. Meinecke's understanding of historicism as not only a world view but as a deep and pervasive awareness of the concrete and individual in each age associates the historiosophic sense of the term with the literary context. For some critics, as for example Lukacs, the identification of historicism with realism, specifically with the way in which the role of "the people," class conflict and social awareness are portrayed, has led to implicitly normative judgments; "historicism," in short becomes a term for evaluating a writer's ideological stance. (Hence for Lukacs "reactionary" Romantics can only engage in "pseudo-historicism.") Cf. Dwight E. Lee and Robert N. Beck, "The Meaning of Historicism," *The American Historical Review*, Apr. 1954, vol. LIX, No. 3, pp. 568-77 and Wesley Morris, *Toward a New Historicism*, Princeton, 1972.

⁹ This is said in so many words, and in the spirit of Hegel, in Gnedič's sketch toward his history of the Ukraine; cf. I. N. Medvedeva's "N. I. Gnedič i dekabristy," in *Dekabristy i ix vremja*, Moscow, 1951, pp. 101-54.

¹⁰ As G. A. Gukovskij put it, "Neither Kniažnin, nor Ryleev, nor even Küchelbecker in the *Argivjane* distinguished between the past and the present. In the past they saw the same thing as in the present, ignoring both the changeability of the human psyche and the changing bases of social existence ... they did not see rules of causality in history." *Puškin i problemy realističeskogo stilja*, Moscow, 1957, pp. 12-13.

¹¹ Kostomarov's early dramas, *Sava Čalyj* (1838) and *Perejaslavs'ka nič* (1841) are an obvious exception here.

¹² Of the eighty-eight works dealing with 17th century Ukrainian history that Sypovs'kyj lists in his *Ukrajina v rosijs'komu pys'menstvi* only a small number actually reflect the Romantic production; the majority pertain to the Classicist and pre-Romantic phase. The number is further swelled by various short (and very tangentially "historical") poems and sketches.

¹³ The phenomenon of Ukrainian literature written in Russian is, of course, a highly complex and very central literary-historical problem in its own right, and one that deserves much more attention than it has received to date. I have touched upon it in *Toward a History of Ukrainian Literature*, Cambridge, 1981, pp. 98-101 and in "Three Perspectives on the Cossack Past: Gogol, Ševčenko, Kuliš," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, vol. V, No. 1, June 1981, p. 172. A somewhat more extensive treatment is given in my article on "Ukrainian-Russian Literary Relations in the 19th Century: A Formulation of the Problem," forthcoming in the Proceedings of the McMaster Conference, *Russia and Ukraine in Their Historic Encounter* (October 1981). I can only repeat here a few salient points. In various periods of its history Ukrainian literature has been bilingual (relying also on Polish and Russian) or multilingual (relying also on Latin and Greek). In the first half of the 19th century virtually all Ukrainian writers, including Ševčenko and Kuliš, wrote as much, or even more, in Russian as they did in Ukrainian. This does not make these writings, or these writers, any less a part of Ukrainian literature, of the Ukrainian literary process. The use of the language criterion as the sole determinant of a literature (in effect a continuation of the Romantic, or, more precisely, Herderian identification of a people (Volk) and its spirit

(Volkgeist) with its language) is inadequate as a historical tool; it cannot demonstrate, for example, the continuity of various literatures as they shift linguistic medium or differentiate between different literatures sharing the same language. "Literature," or rather literary products and processes reflect a given society and serve its needs; the structures and the mode of existence of a society are reflected in its literature. If that society is bilingual so too will be its literature.

¹⁴ A good example is Ševčenko: hardly any of his "historical" poems show any concern for the reality of the past.

¹⁵ This identification with Ukrainian culture, one should note, was significantly different from that of the *balahuly*, the young squires who in their carousing affected peasant manners, language and dress in order to shock, to épater, the local gentry. The following discussion of Polish Romanticism draws in part on my "The History of Polish-Ukrainian Literary Relations: A Literary and Cultural Perspective," *Poland and Ukraine: Past and Present*, Peter J. Potichnyj, ed., Edmonton-Toronto, 1980, pp. 107-131.

¹⁶ One of the harsher estimations of this writing was given by Ivan Franko; cf. his "Jozyf Bohdan Zales'kyj," *Tvory*, vol. 18, Kiev, 1955, pp. 126-34.

¹⁷ Cf. Viktor Petrov, *Pantelymon Kuliš u p'jadesjati roky*, Kiev, 1929, pp. 436-48.

¹⁸ See V. Hnatjuk, "Poľs'kyj literator M. A. Hrabovs'kyj i joho pryjatel'juvannja z P. O. Kulišem," *VUAN Zapysky istoričnoho viddilju*, vols. 19 (1928) pp. 227-47 and 23 (1929) pp. 97-124, Kiev.

¹⁹ Petrov makes a strong argument that Kuliš's statement at the end of the epilogue to *Čorna rada* concerning the inevitability of the Ukraine's union with Russia is really made solely *ad maiorem censuræ gloriam*; op. cit., p. 439 and passim.

²⁰ Cf. V. Žirmunskij, *Bajron i Puškin*, Leningrad, 1924, pp. 176-82.

²¹ Cf. Grabowski's tripartite division: "Our three Ukrainian poets depicted three entirely different Ukraines: Goszczyński the hajdamak Ukraine, Zaleski the Cossack Ukraine, and Malczewski the Polish, gentry Ukraine ... The wild physiognomy and bloody adventures were taken by Goszczyński; colorful life and chivalrous deeds by Zaleski; Malczewski took the most extended part: the melancholy of those places and times." *Literatura i krytyka*, I, 2, Wilno, 1840, pp. 114-15.

²² Cf. Maria Janion, "Romantyczna wizja rewolucji," *Problemy polskiego romantyzmu*, Wrocław, 1971.

²³ See especially Victor Turner, *the Ritual Process*, Chicago, 1969.

²⁴ See his letter to Sreznevskij of March 6, 1834, in N. V. Gogoľ, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij*, vol. 10, Moscow, 1952, pp. 298-99. The following discussion of Gogoľ and Ševčenko is an abbreviated and slightly modified version of the argument of "Three Perspectives on the Cossack Past: Gogoľ, Ševčenko, Kuliš"; cf. also *The Poet as Mythmaker: A Study of Symbolic Meaning in Taras Ševčenko*, Cambridge, 1982.

²⁵ Cf. his article "Vzgljad na sostavlenie Malorossii" published in the *Arabesques* with the subtitle "A Fragment from the History of the Ukraine. Volume I, Book I, Chapter 1." This is all that appeared of Gogoľ's planned History of the Ukraine in "six small or four large volumes."

²⁶ In his study *Istoričeskaja povest' Gogolja*, S. Mašinskij sees the fusion of totality of perspective with factual indefiniteness, of the real with the ideal, as an instance of "realistic historicism": "The power of Gogoľ's novel lies not in the creation of a concrete historical event or figure, etc., but in the fact that it could include highly important features typical of the life of the *whole* epoch of the National Liberation struggle of the Ukrainian people against the "Polish Yoke." Nalyvajko and Pavljuk, Taras Trjasylo and Ostrjanycja could recognize themselves in Taras Bul'ba ... And in this lies the greatest triumph of the realistic historicism of the artist." Moscow, 1940, p. 137.

²⁷ The full argument is given in my *The Poet as Mythmaker: A Study of Symbolic Meaning in Taras Ševčenko*.

²⁸ Cf. Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, p. 96 and passim.

²⁹ In the poem "Saul," structure and authority are seen as originating with Satan himself: "Až os'lyxyj carja nese / Z zakonamy, z mečem, z katamy, / Z knjazjamy, temnymy rabamy ..."

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