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The Artist's Longing and Belonging: Cultural Sensitivity in Yurii Kosach's Narratives¹

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Abstract

As an émigré writer living outside of Ukraine, Yurii Kosach constructed an “imaginary homeland” through his treatment of history, culture, and memory in his literary works. This article analyzes these categories in Kosach's meta-narratives of the artist in exile, by focusing on the texts “Zaproshehnia na Tsyteru” (An Invitation to Cythera, 1945), *Skorbna symfoniia* (The Sorrowful Symphony, undated), and *Senior Nikolo* (Signore Nikolo, 1954). Kosach's characters are placed between exile and homeland, nation and empire, and self and other. All these notions are included in a discourse that is inclusive rather than oppositional. Following a strategy used by Lesia Ukrainka, Yurii Kosach also tests the artist's ability to create in lands beyond one's homeland and in conditions of cultural oppression. Each story plot of the analyzed narratives is constructed in terms of the cultural and national aspects of the artist's identity.

Key Words: Ukraine, exile, émigré literature, memory, past, Yurii Kosach.



Introduction

Prose writer, dramatist, poet, essayist, editor, and artist, Yurii Kosach (1908–1990), was a descendent of the Drahomanov-Kosach family, an old Ukrainian family with noble roots. He was the son of Mykola Kosach, who was the younger brother of Lesia Ukrainka (real name Larysa P. Kosach, 1871–1913), making him the nephew of the famous writer.²

Kosach was born on December 5, 1909 in Kyiv. However, according to Kolodiazhne village metrical records and the Volyn (Volhynia) State Archive, Kosach was born on December 5, 1908 in Kolodiazhne village, sometimes called the “Athens of Volyn.”³ And this is not the only paradox in Kosach's life and works. His whole life was ideologically adventurous and contradictory. After graduation from the Lviv Gymnasium, Kosach studied law at Warsaw University. He made his debut as a poet in the youth magazine *Molode zhyttia* (Young Life), and later authored,

1 I am grateful to Myroslav Shkandrij and Roman Veretelnyk for their thoughtful suggestions and comments on the earlier drafts of my paper.

2 Yurii Kosach was also the grandson of Olena Pchilka (1849–1930), a noted Ukrainian writer.

3 Here and subsequently I follow Serhii Romanov's version of Kosach's biography. See Serhii Romanov, “Yurii Kosach,” *Literaturna Ukraina*, accessed March 1, 2015, <http://litukraina.kiev.ua/ur-y-kosach>.

among others, the following poetry collections: *Cherlen*, 1932,⁴ *Myt z maistrom* (A Moment with a Master, 1936), *Kubok Hanimeda* (Hanimed's Cup, 1958), *Zoloti vorota* (The Golden Gates, 1966), *Manhattanski nochi* (Manhattan Nights, 1960). His lyrical verse demonstrated that he was a versatile modern poet influenced by Yurii Lypa, Yevhen Malaniuk, and Mykola Bazhan, and with an attraction to baroque stylistics.⁵

During the late 1920s Kosach published his literary works in *Literaturno-naukovyi visnyk* (The Literary Scientific Herald), a journal edited by the ideologue of Ukrainian nationalism, Dmytro Dontsov. After a falling out with Dontsov, Kosach cooperated with *Novi shliakhy* (New Paths), a Sovietophile journal edited by Antin Krushelnytsky.

Living in Warsaw, Yurii Kosach became the secretary of the "Partia ukrainskykh derzhavnykh natsionalistiv" (Party of Ukrainian State Nationalists), a student organization. Along with his colleagues he was targeted by Polish authorities for nationalist activity. In 1931 he was arrested for anti-state activity (*antyderzhavnytska diialnist*), and spent over eight months in a Warsaw prison. Shortly after his return in 1932 he was arrested in Lutsk. Escaping subsequent arrest, he illegally entered Czechoslovakia in May, 1933.⁶

From 1933 Kosach lived in Prague, Paris, and Berlin. There he published the following collections of short stories: *Klubok Ariadny* (Ariadne's Thread, 1937), *Charivna Ukraina* (Enchanting Ukraine, 1937), *13-ta chota* (The 13th Platoon, 1937). He also authored the following historical texts: *Sontse skhodyt v Chyhyryni* (The Sun Rises in Chyhyryn, 1934), *Dyvymos v ochi smerti* (We Look Death in the Eyes, 1936), *Chad* (Fumes, 1937), *Hlukhivska pani* (The Lady of Hlukhiv, 1938). These are examples of an innovative historical prose, in which "Kosach is much more interested in characters, psychology and the symbolic level."⁷ Vira Ageyeva also comments that Kosach focuses his attention on figures who are familiar with and well integrated into European culture.⁸

In the war period Kosach visited Lviv, and demonstrated his talent as a dramatist. After World War II he found himself in a DP (Displaced Persons) camp in Munich. Living in Germany, he became a member of the MUR literary group, and took part in all the debates and discussions of the group. Many of his essays of the 1940s are devoted to the fate of Ukrainian literature.

His postwar novels reflect postwar frustration and skepticism, and deal with the formation of the modern Ukrainian nation. In his novel *Enei ta zhyttia inshykh* (Aeneas and the Lives of Others, 1947), Yurii Kosach revised Dmytro Dontsov's philosophy of active nationalism. The

4 This title is difficult to translate. This word is a noun and it originates from the Ukrainian *cherleni* (adj.) which poetically and dialectically means "dark red color."

5 For a detailed analysis of Kosach's poetry see: Bohdan Boychuk and Bohdan Rubchak, eds., "Yurii Kosach," in *Koordynaty: Antolohiia suchasnoi ukrainskoi poezii na zakhodi* [*Coordinates: An Anthology of Contemporary Ukrainian Poetry in the West*], vol. 2 (New York; Munich: Suchasnist, 1969), 87–92.

6 For more information on this period, see Romanov, "Yurii Kosach"; Serhii Hupalo, "Kinets kovelskoho pidpillia [The End of the Kovel Underground Activity]," *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, July 12, 2002, accessed March 1, 2016, http://gazeta.dt.ua/SOCIETY/kinets_kovelskogo_pidpillia.html.

7 Vira Ageyeva, "Mizh ekzotyzmom i tradytsieiu [Between the Exoticism and Tradition]," in *Proza pro zhyttia inshykh: Yurii Kosach: Teksty, interpretatsii, komentari*, ed. Vira Ageyeva (Kyiv: Fakt, 2003), 7.

8 Ageyeva, "Mizh ekzotyzmom i tradytsieiu," 7.

Ukrainian émigré critic Yurii Sherekh-Shevelov interpreted this revision as Kosach's "farewell to the past" (*proshchannia z uchora*).⁹ In the 1940s Kosach mastered historical prose. Analyzing his novel about Bohdan Khmelnytsky, *Den hnivu* (Day of Rage, 1948), Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern asserts: "Ukraine and Ukrainians in the novel embody the concept of a nation in the making for which nothing has been set in stone, even its ethnonyms."¹⁰

Kosach moved to the USA in 1949. There he became an editor of the Soviet-oriented journal *Za synim okeanom* (Behind the Blue Ocean). Kosach's works were published in Soviet Ukraine and he was invited to visit his homeland from the 1960s to the 1980s. His novels were published by his Ukrainian-American patron, Marian Kots (1922–2011). They are: *Suziria Lebedia* (The Constellation Cygnus, 1983), *Volodarka Pontydy* (Regina Pontica, 1987) and *Chortivska skelia* (Devil's Rock, 1988). All his works were written in Ukrainian, thus contributing to Ukrainian culture, and reflected Ukraine's complex history in the twentieth century.

The interaction of cultures and the question of belonging are often important issues for intellectuals and artists who have straddled more than one culture during their lifetimes. Playing with the notions of cultural hybridity, Jhumpa Lahiri (b. 1967) wrote *The Namesake* (2003), in which the main character's name is Gogol. Here, the Ukrainian Mykola Hohol (who wrote in Russian and is best known as Nikolai Gogol),¹¹ becomes interesting (perhaps surprisingly) for an American Indian writer in the twenty-first century. Displacement and its discontents are also topics for reflection in Kosach's work. In some of his books Hohol appears as a central character, along with other artists-protagonists.

The notions of memory and the imaginary are crucial categories in Yurii Kosach's literary works. The writer was deprived of his homeland in two ways: he spent most of his life abroad and never lived in an independent Ukraine. In this sense, paraphrasing Salman Rushdie, for him the present was foreign, and the past was home.¹² Kosach turned to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in search of plots that would depict artists deprived of their homelands in turbulent times, in both physical and metaphysical terms.

Describing the interaction of past and present, Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone state:

It reveals certain presuppositions about the relationship between the present and the past, which have both historical and political purchase; and the discourse of

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- 9 See Yurii Shevelov, "Proshchannia z uchora ('Koly zh pryde spravzhnii den?') [Farewell to Yesterday ('When Will the Genuine Day Come?')]," in Yurii Shevelov, *Vybrani pratsi u 2 kn., kn 2. Literaturoznavstvo*, ed. Ivan Dziuba (Kyiv: Vydavnychi dim "Kyievo-Mohylianska Akademiia," 2008), 679–726.
- 10 Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, "On the Other Side of Despair: Cossacks and Jews in Yurii Kosach's *The Day of Rage*," in *Stories of Khmelnytsky: Competing Literary Legacies of the 1648 Ukrainian Cossack Uprising*, ed. Amelia M. Glaser (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2015), 185.
- 11 To stress Hohol's duality, George Luckyj provides a double name for his subject — Mykola Hohol, a.k.a. Nikolai Gogol (his book is entitled *The Anguish of Mykola Hohol, a.k.a. Nikolai Gogol*).
- 12 Salman Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands," in Salman Rushdie, *Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 9.

memory has come to have a central part in thinking about that relationship. The idea of contest in the literal sense is apparently a straightforward one: it evokes a struggle in the terrain of truth.¹³

The “terrain of truth” in Kosach’s works is connected to the search for a genuine self in cultural, political, and national terms. Deprived of a physical homeland, an artist has to search for it in other dimensions. Thus, the concept of homeland as the past is fully realized in Kosach’s “An Invitation to Cythera,” *The Sorrowful Symphony*, and *Signore Nikolo*. All three are based on actual historical figures: Antin Losenko (1737–1773), Dmytro Bortnianskyi (1751–1825), and Mykola Hohol (1809–1852), respectively.

In Kosach’s works cultural oppression results in dubious identity and serves as a test for the artist’s sensitivity, reflecting Kosach’s own experience and showing a concern for the cultural self. Disappointed with the present, the artist searches for self-realization in other dimensions and identifies with other worlds that transcend temporal bounds. Such depictions constitute Kosach’s literary strategy. The roots of these poetics and aesthetics can be found in early modernism, especially in so-called “decadent” influences of the 1890s and 1900s. Thus, the image of the artist in Kosach’s narratives is marked by early modernist tendencies and by both the cultural and national issues that are of prominent concern in his writings.

The image of his artist in exile is marked by mental illness. In her treatise, *Illness as Metaphor*, Susan Sontag claims that illness is “the night side of life, a more onerous citizenship.”¹⁴ In Kosach’s works, mental illness is associated with a search for cultural underpinnings, and is simultaneously connected to an existential choice. Michel Foucault asserts that madness presumes two elements: cosmic (part of a worldview) and critical (irony).¹⁵ This is precisely how Kosach’s artist can be characterized. Protagonists in the writings of Kosach’s aunt, Lesia Ukrainka, perceive their ailment critically and are capable of self-reflection. Her dramatic poem “Kassandra” (Cassandra, 1907) perfectly illustrates this thesis. In Kosach’s works critical reflection is achieved through outer influence. In his narratives a character who can foresee the future and perceives reality critically is always marginal.

In his literary works Kosach doubts the possibility of the artist’s cultural mission in turbulent times, a theme often present in Lesia Ukrainka’s works. However, her characters seem to be much more Apollonian than Kosach’s, as their criticism results from an inner impulse, not an outer gaze. Kosach’s characters are placed between Apollonian and Dionysian worldviews, between exile and homeland, nation and empire, and self and other. All these notions are included in a discourse whose logic is more inclusive than oppositional.

13 Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, “Introduction: Contested Pasts,” in *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, ed. Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (New York; London: Routledge, 2014), 1.

14 Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), 3.

15 Michel Foucault, *Istoriia bezumiiia v klassicheskuiu epokhu [A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason]*, trans. I. Staf (Saint Petersburg: Universitetskaia kniga, 1997), 47.

An Unreachable Object of Desire (“An Invitation to Cythera”)

“Zaproshehnia na Tsyteru” (An Invitation to Cythera) is a short story that describes Antin Losenko’s (a “free artist’s from Ukraine”) second journey to Western Europe. The historical Antin Ivanovych Losenko (1737–1773) was an artist of Ukrainian origin who became President of the Saint Petersburg Academy of Arts, undoubtedly having the protection of the Russian Empress. The very description “free artist” indicates the direction of the narrative. Kosach raises the question of how an artist can be “free” while living in a space somewhere in between imperial and national cultures. While enjoying the protection of the Russian court, Losenko presents himself as a “free artist of the Academy.” Here Kosach tests the idea of a free artist to verify the idea of “pure art” in turbulent historical times. Can the artist be truly free if he/she creates without a native audience? If imperial identity is a given and appellation to its corresponding audience is evident, what does it mean to be a free artist in a stateless nation, and to associate oneself with a cultural entity with no political dimensions?

Losenko arrives in Mainz with no purpose. He then proceeds to Paris, a city with which he associates the best memories of his youth. The artist recollects his first voyage to Europe, and also the past. In this way Losenko expresses nostalgia for the time of his youth, not its place. He recalls how he abandoned his fiancée Solange for the sake of his art. A similar plot can be found in Yurii Kosach’s last novel, *Regina Pontica* (1987), in which the protagonist also abandons his beloved and chases a whimsical idea called “Ukraine.” The myth of the “freedom” of the artist is obscured in Kosach’s works. Losenko’s trip to Europe may seem purposeless, but on it he unexpectedly undergoes a change of mind and decides to return to Ukraine, in his words, to die.

In Germany, Antin (or Antos, as his comrades from the Academy call the artist) meets his friend from the Royal Academy, the Polish painter Tadeusz Kościuszko. They have not seen each other for six years. Kościuszko exhibits a passion for action, while Losenko is passive and melancholic, sleepy and apathetic. Kościuszko perceives his time as an age of possibility. Losenko is skeptical of Kościuszko’s thoughts and denies that anything in the world is new.

Following the logic of the story’s plot, the reader expects the author to provide reasons for Losenko’s melancholy. Kosach, however, disappoints the disoriented reader, who only finds Losenko’s vague thoughts on the vanity of life itself: “Vanity of vanities, — thought Losenko, — devilish tightness and vanity.”¹⁶ Here the baroque motif of vanity is clearly articulated. This short story was written in two days, on December 4–5, 1945, after the end of World War II. Kosach’s works are grounded in the ruins of ideology and are marked by melancholy and the aesthetics of contemplation. While the protagonist of V. Domontovych’s (Viktor Petrov, 1894–1969) attains his highest degree of pleasure in wandering through ideologies, Kosach’s main character finds himself disoriented on their ruins.

Losenko and his servant Havrylo Lukych resemble Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. Havrylo is also from Ukraine. Antin finds him drunk in St. Petersburg and decides to hire him as a model for his paintings on biblical themes. Havrylo subsequently becomes his servant. It is mentioned that they are similar — both men are apathetic and indifferent. Reflecting on the image of Don

16 Yurii Kosach, “Zaproshehnia na Tsyteru [An Invitation to Cythera],” *Kurier Kryvbasu* 268–69–70 (2012): 239. All translations from the Ukrainian are mine.

Quixote, Harold Bloom states: “Romantics [...] see Quixote as hero, not fool; decline to read the book primarily as satire; and find in the work a metaphysical or visionary attitude...”¹⁷ In Europe, no one understands Kosach’s heroes, they are strange to the place, and the place is strange to them. Furthermore, Losenko is not interested in the nobility’s life or in Europe itself. He looks ridiculous and totally alienated at Duke Karlo-Theodore’s reception.

After the Duke’s reception, a young poet invites Losenko to a feast given by the Duke, to have a good time. Losenko recollects that he had dreamt of Jean-Antoine Watteau’s painting “The Embarkation for Cythera” (or “Voyage to Cythera,” “Pilgrimage to the Isle of Cythera,” 1718–1719). The trip to the island provides the central theme for Kosach’s short story. Cythera is interpreted as an island of love and erotic joy, and also of a “late autumnal youth.” Cythera, to which Losenko is invited for an orgy, embodies temptation and passion for action. Here an allusion to Lesia Ukrainka’s play *Orhüia* (The Orgy, 1912–1913) can be seen. The opposition of colonial and imperial cultures can be seen in both texts. But unlike the setting of the Roman orgy in Lesia Ukrainka’s play, Cythera is “an island of luxury, an island of joy, an island of everlasting, intense, full life,” unattainable for Losenko.¹⁸ He interprets Cythera as a temptation and a call for action: “The sense of Cythera is grasped — that was the temptation! Temptation of the sin to discover, the sin to dare.”¹⁹

Cythera is a temptation for the young poets, who find themselves under the Duke’s protection. The ending of the story shows that such an existence is impossible for Losenko. Cythera embodies the joy of an artist’s life, protected and supported by the nobility. The Duke tempts the artists with Cythera, and Losenko resists the temptation. On the other hand, the island’s possibilities are on display. Unexpectedly, right after the invitation to Cythera, Antin falls in love with Amalia, the young Princess of Bayreuth. Losenko’s journey both attempts to return lost time and is about the impossibility of this intention. In the end, Losenko burns a letter he has written to his mistress and decides not to go to Paris, but to return to Ukraine.

Life around Losenko is eventful, yet he is alienated from it. In this way Losenko is a typically baroque personage who perceives both the fluidity and the vanity of life. Kościuszko claims that Losenko has responsibility before his *narod* (people). Tadeusz will fight for the liberation of the USA because the time to fight for Poland has not yet come. Interestingly, in Kosach’s last novel, *Regina Pontica* (a novel about his great grandfather, according to the author), Yurii Roslavets, the novel’s protagonist and author’s alter ego embarks on a fight for the freedom of America after his mission to save Princess Darahan has failed. Although the two friends from the Academy are total opposites, a synthesis of their characters is presented in Kosach’s last novel.

Kościuszko believes in both Poles and Ukrainians. Both live in turbulent times and their missions to gain states in political terms have failed. Kościuszko’s slogan “For your and our freedom” is underpinned by action. Losenko does not reflect on his origins, to the contrary, they become the subject of Kościuszko’s reflections. He believes that Losenko cannot live in St. Petersburg “with his Ukrainian heart” among the nobility, protected by Empress Catherine II.

17 Harold Bloom, “Cervantes: The Play of the World,” in *Cervantes’s Don Quixote*, ed. Harold Bloom (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 147.

18 Kosach, “Zaproszenia na Tsyteru,” 242.

19 Kosach, “Zaproszenia na Tsyteru,” 243.

The Polish artist reminds him of his responsibility before his people, and about the need for real action. Losenko promises that he will keep his contract with the people. In Kosach's earlier work, "Vechir u Rozumovskoho" (A Reception at Rozumovsky's, 1937), Beethoven asks Ambassador Rozumovsky, why he, a patriot of Ukraine, serves an Empire that has oppressed his homeland and taken away its freedom.

At the end of the story Losenko loses his identification with the imperial orientation, yet he hardly identifies with his national culture. The image of Ukraine remains unclear and unaccented, although it is implicitly present in the short story. In his later play, *The Sorrowful Symphony*, Kosach places a great accent on national culture, although the image of Ukraine remains vague. Both Losenko and Bortnianskyi, the protagonists of *The Sorrowful Symphony*, feel vague impulses and a desire to return home to Ukraine. Their illness can be diagnosed as nostalgia, like in Lesia Ukrainka's dramatic poem *Boiarynia* (The Boyar Woman, 1910). The myth of homecoming is actualized in both texts. Losenko confesses that his life is composed of a chain of failures, and a homecoming represents his only possibility of overcoming his apathy.

The Sorrowful Symphony: Towards the Image of the Artist in Exile

In *The Sorrowful Symphony* (Skorbna symfoniia), Yurii Kosach depicts the later years in Saint Petersburg of Dmytro Bortnianskyi (a prominent Ukrainian musician, 1751–1825).²⁰ After a brilliant debut in Italy in 1774, the musician intends to compose a great work, entitled *The Sorrowful Symphony*, but cannot realize his intention.

It is hardly possible to read Kosach's play and the rest of his works without considering his two prominent predecessors, Lesia Ukrainka and Mykola Khvylovyi, who accented the same theme — the possibility for an artist to create in a foreign environment and non-native culture.

Lesia Ukrainka: An Artist in a Hostile Environment

In *The Sorrowful Symphony*, Yurii Kosach addresses the artist's capacity to create in a hostile environment — a theme present in Lesia Ukrainka's dramatic poem *The Orgy*. The main question here concerns Antheus' capacity to create for foreigners. Ukrainian critic Vira Ageyeva asserts:

The Hellenic artist's glory, gained from the Romans, will only serve Roman might.
But the community does not realize its guilt. In this ruptured communicative space,
not heard and not esteemed by his people, Antheus makes up his mind to overcome

20 In his foreword to Kosach's text, Marko Robert Stech asserts that this play (which he found in the archives of the Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the US), was written during the last decade of Kosach's life. Marko Robert Stech, "Dmytro Bortnianskyi u nevidomii piesi Yuriiia Kosacha [Dmytro Bortnianskyi in Yurii Kosach's Unknown Play]," *Kurier Kryvbasu* 266–267 (2012): 275.

the rupture through death — this being the only possibility of a conscious individual choice and the only way to be heard...²¹

The artist Antheus finds himself forgotten by his compatriot Greeks, and at the same time he does not want to create for the Roman invaders. The mythical Antheus takes his power and inspiration from his native land. In both Lesia Ukrainka's and Yurii Kosach's works the artistic talent cannot be realized in a hostile environment. Also vital here is the theme of the responsibility of the community for the artist: should the community that cannot comprehend the artist be blamed? Who will Bortnianskyi create his masterpiece for? "This symphony is destined either for the motherland or for the whole world. But you are not the motherland."²² His servant claims that Bortnianskyi belongs to Ukraine. In Leonidas Donskis' terms the silence of the composer is the only way to survive, being a project of resistance, "a reserved political dissidence."²³ Like Lesia Ukrainka's Antheus, Bortnianskyi finds the solution in non-creation; he does not want to create in a hostile environment. Deprived of his homeland, the artistic nature cannot be realized — a meaningful dilemma for both Lesia Ukrainka's and Yurii Kosach's protagonists.

In Yurii Kosach's literary works the discourse of insanity is similar to its presentation in Lesia Ukrainka's narratives. Lesia Ukrainka's first play, "Blakytna troianda" (The Azure Rose, 1896), deals with the issue of female insanity. The idea of mystic love, proclaimed by the protagonist, Liubov Hoshchynska, is not understood in society. In Lesia Ukrainka's sketch "Misto smutku" (The City of Sorrow, 1896) she compares herself to Dante, finding herself in a city of sorrow. The artists suffer not only for their own sins but for the sins of an imperfect world. In Lesia Ukrainka's story ailment is a marker for a tragic worldview, while in Kosach's version it is a marker for his state of uncertainty.

The critical element of Bortnianskyi's insanity (in Michel Foucault's terms of cosmic and critical aspects of insanity) is undoubtedly a constituent of his character's construction. It is vague and uncertain throughout the whole play, and Bortnianskyi has an inner feeling that he does not want to write his play for a St. Petersburg audience. The musician claims: "I am not a craftsman, not a shoemaker, not the creator of sugar water. I do not write just to write. My symphony is a challenge, a dare. It is a struggle."²⁴

Kosach was also greatly influenced by Lesia Ukrainka's *Boiarynia*. Roman Veretelnyk believes that this drama is unique among other literary works of the epoch because "it depicts the tragedy of a politically and nationally-aware woman."²⁵ Another Ukrainian critic, Oksana

21 Vira Ageyeva, *Poetesa zlamu stolit: Tvorchist Lesi Ukrainky v postmodernii interpretatsii* [*The Poet at the Turn of Centuries: Lesia Ukrainka's Writings in a Postmodern Interpretation*] (Kyiv: Lybid, 1999), 74.

22 Yurii Kosach, "Skorbna symfoniia [The Sorrowful Symphony]," *Kurier Kryvbasu* 266–267 (2012): 304.

23 See Leonidas Donskis, *Vlada i uiava: Doslidzhennia v oblasti polityky i literatury* [*Power and Imagination: Studies in Politics and Literature*], trans. Oleksandr Butsenko (Kyiv: Spadschchyna-Intehral, 2012).

24 Kosach, "Skorbna symfoniia," 298.

25 Roman Weretelnyk, "A Feminist Reading of Lesia Ukrainka's Dramas," (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 1989), 109.

Zabuzhko, defines the play as Oksana's and Stepan's "historical defeat." She claims that the main concern of the play is "the impossibility of chivalry in the situation of a lack of freedom."²⁶ While Lesia Ukrainka's protagonists choose their destiny from the very beginning, Kosach's protagonists' destinies seems to be more fluid.

The Tyranny of Doubt: Mykola Khvylovyi's Inspirations

Influenced by the literary works of Mykola Khvylovyi (1893–1933) in his early writings, Kosach leaves his protagonists in a state of uncertainty. Typically, Khvylovyi depicts life deprived of a nationally marked cultural aspect. His Ukrainian prose after the 1917 Revolution was marked by a condition of groundlessness, both in ideological and axiological terms. His protagonists are outsiders who find themselves on the margins of post-revolutionary reality. They are incapable of action after the passing of the glory of revolution. They are bystanders, and their position is "in-betweenness."

Kosach depicts Dmytro Bortnianskyi in St. Petersburg, where he finds himself in a situation of perpetual doubt, incapable of action. One of the play's characters is the Lady in Black, a symbolic figure who embodies the artist's doubts as to his intention to write a great symphony.²⁷ The Lady stresses that Bortnianskyi requires broader perspectives and a broader audience to demonstrate his genius. Bortnianskyi claims: "The artist has a homeland everywhere. But St. Petersburg is not my homeland. I am from Ukraine..."²⁸ The Lady in Black says that Russia lies in wait of Bortnianskyi — she wants him to be powerful rather than happy. This is the source of Bortnianskyi's doubts: the tension between reason and feeling.

The artist Dema (Mykola Khvylovyi's "Syluety" (Silhouettes, 1923)) draws and paints not on canvas but in his dreams and fantasies. He tries to create a great painting, but fails. This is also the case with Kosach's Bortnianskyi. The status of the poet Andre (Mykola Khvylovyi's "Chumakivska komuna" (The Salt Vendors' Commune, 1923)) is parodical and whimsical, as he cannot create anything in new circumstances. The impossibility of creating in new circumstances has unbearable consequences in both Khvylovyi's and Kosach's narratives.

A significant influence on Kosach was exerted by Mykola Khvylovyi's novel *Valdshnepy* (The Woodcocks, 1927), in which Dmytrii Karamazov, the main character, is marginal in the sense that he has partial identification with both communist and nationalist ideologies, but does not belong to either of them. In this sense, Kosach's Bortnianskyi identifies himself with both the imperial and national projects. Paraphrasing Khvylovyi's phrase from the landmark short story "I, Romanticism": "I'm a *chekist*, but at the same time I'm a human being," Kosach's character could announce: "I'm an artist, but at the same time I'm a human being."

26 Oksana Zabuzhko, *Notre Dame d'Ukraine: Ukrainka v konflikti mifolohiy* [*Notre Dame d'Ukraine: Ukrainka in the Conflicts of Mythologies*] (Kyiv: Fakt, 2007), 366–67.

27 This character appears in his collection of historical novellas and short stories "Chorna pani" (The Lady in Black, 1931), in which the influence of Khvylovyi is especially evident.

28 Kosach, "Skorbna symfoniia," 287.

In Search of the Genuine Self

In *The Sorrowful Symphony* Kosach tries to determine who Princess Darahan really is. On the one hand, Princess Darahan is an adventuress and impostor; on the other hand, she is a genuine patriot. Reflections here can hardly be justified without considering Bortnianskyi's hesitations. Princess Darahan stresses that Bortnianskyi is a Cossack from Ukraine, that he could be a Cossack bard. But Bortnianskyi is characterized as "a kind of imposing vague symbol of Ukraine, its steppes, and of Cossack and Haidamak freedom, which he did not know."²⁹

Kosach's play is about a search for the genuine self. From the point of view of the play's structure, the appearance of the serf (*kripatchka*) Sanka in the last act of the play is hardly motivated. But her appearance gives Bortnianskyi salvation and provides a link to his people. And Bortnianskyi goes to Ukraine with her. In previous acts, nothing pointed to such an ending. But the serf Sanka provides Bortnianskyi with the genuine hope that he can rid himself of his *ennui*. Bortnianskyi interprets Sanka as a dream he was looking for, a metaphor for enserfed Ukraine, which is striving for its freedom. The following dialogue sheds light on the nature of the artist's *ennui*:

Dmytro Bortnianskyi. Poor you are. We are all poor, we are unfortunate... I'm the poorest, because I am powerless, I am bad. I am as fragile as an autumn leaf. I have carried chains for so many years, and I know that I am a serf. I am a prisoner, but I cannot release myself for I do not have the power...

Sanka. There is a power, master...

Dmytro Bortnianskyi. Where is the power?

Sanka. The power is in the heart. When the heart is peaceful, we can bear everything, we can endure...³⁰

Here Cassandra's sentiments are strongly present — the truth is in the appeal of the heart. The impossibility of cooperation with the culture of the invader is the subject of Lesia Ukrainka's works *Cassandra*, *The Orgy*, and *The Boyar Woman*, among others. Death is the better alternative to being enserfed (*Cassandra*, *The Boyar Woman*) or to creating for enemies (*The Orgy*). The possibility of survival in a hostile environment is impossible.

At the end of the play Bortnianskyi and Sanka choose their approach — revenge! The form of revenge is unknown, and they do not know how to deal with their irrational impulses. This can be interpreted as a will for action, to draw a boundary between "us" and "them," between colonizer and colonized. The protagonists are headed into a dark night to reach Ukraine. The darkest nights occur before lucid dawns, this symbolic act of a return home designating the beginning of the path.

²⁹ Kosach, "Skorbna symfoniia," 248–49.

³⁰ Kosach, "Skorbna symfoniia," 319–20.

Towards the Problem of Madness in Kosach's Works

Kosach's protagonists experience isolation and the insanity of daily existence. This is not pure madness but a journey into self; a response to the strange situation of the impossibility for full self-realization in one's native culture. Shoshana Felman stresses that "madness can only occur in a world within a conflict, within a conflict of thoughts."³¹ A conflict of identities causes Kosach's artists' madness and insanity (as others see them) and is associated with the creative process and the problem of choice between temptations of recognition within empire and the national culture. Trying to obtain a sense of an integral selfhood, the artist loses the meaning of a strong personal identity.

"Both Laing and Szasz argue that 'mental illness' is a term manufactured by a society seeking scapegoats; Foucault, in *Madness and Civilization*, believes the mad became threats in the Age of Reason, when asylums were first built, resulting in the erection of walls between the 'insane' and the rest of humanity."³² Thus their "madness" is a logical response to the situation, and is a means of resistance and survival.

Michel Foucault asserts:

This epitaph, and the entire ending of *Don Quixote*, demonstrate one thing: that madness and the awareness of madness are now like life and death. One destroys the other. Wisdom may very well speak of madness, but it will speak of it as a corpse. As for madness, it will remain silent, the pure object of an amused gaze.³³

Ronald David Laing maintains: "Madness need not be all breakdown. It may also be breakthrough. It is potentially liberation and renewal as well as enslavement and existential death."³⁴ Allen Thiher also writes that madness is connected to the impossibility of obtaining the desired:

Madness is the state of absence in which a male longs for something other than what is — and wants to possess something beyond possession. Desire cannot be described, only shown to be a disaster, and so drama is the most fitting rhetorical mode for madness.³⁵

31 Shoshana Felman, *Literature and Madness* (Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), 35.

32 Quoted in Branimir M. Rieger, ed., *Dionysus in Literature: Essays on Literary Madness* (Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1994), 5.

33 Michel Foucault, *Language, Madness, and Desire: On Literature*, trans. Robert Bononno, ed. Philippe Artières et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 13.

34 Ronald David Laing, *The Politics of Experience and the Bird of Paradise* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 110.

35 Allen Thiher, *Revels in Madness: Insanity in Medicine and Literature* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999), 306.

In *The Sorrowful Symphony*, Bortnianskyi does not perceive himself as mad, it is the gaze of the Other that provides such a definition of the artist. These are the politics of exclusion, the artist being rejected wherever he goes.

Hohol's Double Identity (Yurii Kosach's *Signore Nikolo*)

Kosach's unfinished novel *Signore Nikolo* (published in 1954 in *Ukrainian Prometheus*, a weekly newspaper that appeared in the US) depicts Mykola Hohol (Nikolai Gogol) in Rome. Several chapters of this novel are extant, and it remains unknown whether the full version of the narrative exists. The novel is based on the memoirs of Hohol's acquaintances. Kosach plays upon Hohol's identity and presents the complexity of Hohol's phenomenon. He chooses a European landscape for his background, more precisely — an Italian landscape.

The novel has several narrators — the artist Shapovalenko, the author's counterpart, and Hohol himself, among them. The narrative is fragmented, which indicates the rupture in the consciousness of Hohol, who tries to solve the question of his cultural and national belongings.

Hohol's room is long, like a coffin, and he is a hypochondriac. For Hohol, his prison is everywhere, as he cannot realize his talent in his native country, enslaved by the Russian Empire. Apart from the image of the Russian Empire depicted in Hohol's works, the myth of Rome is vital for Kosach.³⁶ In *Signore Nikolo* Rome is depicted as an eternity. On the other hand, it presents a background for constant reflections on cultural selfhood. For Hohol, Rome resembles Ukraine. He sees his Ukraine as an anesthetized concept and has nothing to do with the enslaved Ukraine. Hohol posits his cultural belonging to another Ukraine, and for him Rome resembles his homeland. He has not lived in Ukraine for a long time, and according to the writer's confession, "only his thoughts lived there [...] not his real homeland, but the homeland of his spirit."³⁷ He feels *ennui* in each European city that has an intensive political life. He alienates himself from politics. He does not know what he is looking for, and the European cities irritate him with their vanity fair.

In this situation he tries to find the meaning of his cultural and national belonging in the future. He claims that in the future his name will be much happier than he himself will be. Rome is a special city for him, he likes it to the extreme. Underlying everything here is Kosach's myth of Rome as a city of possibilities, as a chance to lead a new life on the ruins of the past. According to Hohol's confession, Rome is the love of his life. The artist Shapovalenko says that Italy has been removed from the memory of Europe, but even in their amnesia its people retain their pride — an attitude that very much resembles the Ukrainian situation of that time. Continuing his orientation to the future, Hohol confesses: "That is my fate — to be at odds with my counterparts. I know that my name will be much happier than I myself will be..."³⁸ Uncompromisingly, he perceives his fate as future-oriented.

36 Rome as a plurality of opportunities is depicted in his novel *Aeneas and the Lives of Others*.

37 Yurii Kosach, *Senior Nikolo* [*Signore Nikolo*], accessed May 15, 2014, http://fs139.www.ex.ua/get/87fce6175f6324ae8871f31840a07450/13250381/Kosach_-_Senior_Nikolo.txt.

38 Kosach, *Senior Nikolo*.

Hohol, as many of Kosach's protagonists do, feels himself comfortable in European culture. Like Bortnianskyi, he feels *ennui*. The artist Shapovalenko claims that the Ukraine depicted in Hohol's works is not the real Ukraine. Hohol answers: "Do I not know my poor, my unfortunate Ukraine?" Shapovalenko answers that the clichéd descriptions "poor" and "unfortunate" irritate him.

At first, Hohol considers Russia as a punishment for the Slavic world. Then he says that the Slavic world is the salvation for the whole of Europe. At the end of Kosach's unfinished novel Hohol realizes that this is only rhetoric, and has nothing to do with the real world. The author's mention of pan-Slavism was prudent in terms of averting censorship. However, the myth of Ukrainians and Russians as two brotherly people is totally destroyed by Kosach. His Hohol cannot live with this thought, regardless of expectations. The myth of the common Slavic world as a place is totally ruined. On the other hand, Hohol claims that the Slavic world is not a homogeneous entity: "Russia is a rude force, it is a burden which oppresses us. There is nothing inside it — it is a wasteland."³⁹ George Luckyj asserts that in Soviet times Hohol's ideology was constructed as further "evidence" of Russian-Ukrainian friendship.⁴⁰ Interestingly, the novel was published in a pro-Soviet diaspora newspaper. Yurii Kosach uses an elegant scheme to deceive censorship. In his unfinished novel he uses the word *proletariat*, which connotes a hatred of everything outdated and traditional.

Following this logic, a pathos-rich rhetoric of a common Slavic world is proclaimed. Hohol asks why Taras Shevchenko did not write in the "language of the great Pushkin, our language." He believes all Slavic nations should have a common language. On the other hand, he interprets Russia as a punishment for the Slavic world. According to Hohol, Russia teaches resignation (*smyrennia*), love, and all-forgiveness. The Slavic world is a salvation for Europe, a much accented ideological assertion. Then he changes his mind and steps into the "terrain of truth," which is formed under an outer gaze. His friends remind him of the enslaved Ukraine.

In the first part of the unfinished novel the author uses the word *maloros* to designate the cultural belonging of Hohol, taking into account those Ukrainians who forged brilliant careers in St. Petersburg (Oleksii Rozumovskyi among many others). In the end, Kosach uses the term Ukrainian to designate Hohol's authentic cultural origin. The ambiguity of Hohol's soul exists not only in Ukrainian and Russian terms, but also in Ukrainian and *malorosian* terms.

Hohol strives to broader horizons: the Empire can provide them, and he does not want to write *v shukhliadu* (not to be published). The Empire offers tremendous space for self-realization, and his relationship with the Russian Empire has a very definite pragmatic grounding — to survive. He simply needs money to support his existence. In the end, Mykola Hohol writes and reads his *Revizor* (The Government Inspector) for a Russian audience in St. Petersburg.

Kosach diminishes the myth of the poet as a Messiah, as a leader and savior, as later does Yurii Andrukhovych in his *Rekreatsii* (Recreations, 1992), *Moskoviada* (The Moskoviad, 1993), and *Dvanadtsiat obruchiv* (Twelve Rings, 2003). Paradoxically, Hohol realizes his talent in the empire, mocking it. He admits: "No one understood my *Revizor*: The inspector represents

39 Kosach, *Senior Nikolo*.

40 George Luckyj, *The Anguish of Mykola Hohol, a.k.a. Nikolai Gogol* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1998), 15.

conscience; and the town he goes to is the hell of our soul..."⁴¹ In this narrative Kosach poses a question on the status of the artist in turbulent times. One of Hohol's counterparts says that in a country of despotism and tyranny the writer is "the only guardian, the only leader, the only savior."⁴² Can the artist stand aside and create his works or should he be with his people despite all odds? Is it his moral duty to uphold the people's spirit in turbulent times? Hohol tries to stand aside of politics. Does he have the right to do so? Hohol realizes that he can do nothing for his people in the present and claims that he belongs to the future, his present life being unbearable.

To conclude, the tension resulting from Ukraine's in-betweenness enables Hohol's works. Hohol claims that his people combine contradictory features: "European cautiousness and Asian carelessness, unsophisticatedness and cunning, activity and laziness, [...] they strive for development and improvement, and at the same time desire to seem to be indifferent to any progress."⁴³

Hohol challenges empire by mocking it and through carnival (folk) discourse. Whereas Hohol's friend emphasizes past suffering, Hohol heavily emphasizes an idealized element. Ukraine as a concept — looking back into its roots, is what makes Ukraine special and alive. Hohol's memory of Ukraine is selective, he wants to remember *another* Ukraine. When Hohol's friend raises the questions of past national suffering and the artist as leader of the nation, Hohol appeals to idealized images of Ukrainians. Hohol becomes a target of criticism on the basis of a narrative grounded in the common memory of a shared experience of suffering and victimhood. A burlesque carnival tradition existed from Ivan Kotliarevskyi on to defeat the enemy with laughter. The Ukrainian critic Rostyslav Semkiv defines burlesque as a phenomenon that does not necessarily need a subject: it is a "playful and joyful reversion (distortion) of an original phenomenon, which does not anticipate satirical mockery as its principal aim."⁴⁴

For her literary works Assia Djebar, an Algerian writer, chooses French, the language of yesterday's enemy. Trudy Agar admits that "French introduces Djebar to the language of desire."⁴⁵ Thus, writing in the colonizer's language grants a public space. While Losenko and Bortnianskyi use the universal languages of art, i.e., image and sound, Hohol uses language itself, which presupposes additional ideological implications. The choice of language dictated survival and income in the empire. On the other hand, he (like the protagonist of Lesia Ukrainka's *The Orgy*) wanted fame and fortune, which could be realized only through and due to empire. He wanted the successful career of a prominent writer and was greatly attached to the implications of empire, which included his choice of language.

41 Kosach, *Senior Nikolo*.

42 Kosach, *Senior Nikolo*.

43 Kosach, *Senior Nikolo*.

44 Rostyslav Semkiv, "The Return of Burlesque: Comic Forms in Contemporary Ukrainian Literature, 1985–2010," *Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal* 2 (2015): 113, accessed December 27, 2015, doi: 10.18523/kmhj51041.2015-2.109-120.

45 Trudy Agar, "Annexing the Land of Exile: Language and History in the Work of Assia Djebar," in *Creativity in Exile*, ed. Michael Hanne (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 189.

Conclusion

The discourse of dual identity is applicable to Kosach himself. Kosach's counterparts mostly underlined only the Sovietophile aspect of his identity, thus establishing the myth of him as a pro-Soviet writer. The aspect accenting his "Ukraineness" was ignored. The prominent Ukrainian scholar Yurii Shevelov stressed the necessity to review Kosach's heritage. Certainly, the Sovietophile aspect of his identity should not be ignored, but his literary works provide other impulses. Undoubtedly, "contests over the meaning of the past are also contests over the meaning of the present and over ways of taking the past forward."⁴⁶

Kosach cooperated with the Soviet authorities because they promised to publish his literary works in Soviet Ukraine, thus providing him with the only means of contributing to his native culture. But, in his literary works dedicated to the theme of the artist, he showed other tendencies. Readers of his works are lead to grasp that the artist deprived of a native land and its respective audience cannot create (Dmytro Bortnianskyi, *The Sorrowful Symphony*); that such an artist feels an uncertain mourning and longing for the homeland (Antin Losenko, "An Invitation to Cythera"); and will feel an attachment to the culture of the oppressor while mocking it due to a burlesque impulse (*Signore Nikolo*).

Thus, art as a universal practice and its possibility for realization in a stateless nation become the subjects of Kosach's works. In turbulent times, the issue of cultural and national belonging accents the existential choice both of the person and the artist. Following Lesia Ukrainka's narrative strategy, Kosach depicts the tension between action and reflection, resulting in a revelation of the national aspect, which is connected with the protagonist's existential choice. In a stateless nation, an artist's dubious identity results in madness as a critical state of mind, as he cannot be included in a dominant meta-narrative, due to his longing for a real homeland. A search for the "terrain of truth" becomes a question of existential choice, and correlates with the artist's personal desires and impulses.

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