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Looking through the Post-Soviet (and the Post-Communist) Mirror

Ukraine vis-a-vis US presidential elections

Photography

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MINIMA UCRAINICA

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER ON UKRAINE AND EASTERN EUROPE

EDITED BY A. ACHILLI, M.G. BARTOLINI, M. PULERI

Through the Two-Way Mirror

Which side is Ukraine on?

MU (Issue 07-08/2016)

MU Editorial

As the last issue of the year, *Mimina ucrainica* #7-8 cannot help succumbing to the unavoidable temptation of looking back to and summing up the main highlights of 2016. As can be easily inferred even from a quick glance to both the outputs of professional journalism and that endless collective 'stream of consciousness' that haunts our daily life in the age of Facebook and Twitter, this year is being perceived as a threshold more than ever in the recent years. Trump's shocking Electoral College victory and the *longue durée* of the Brexit trauma seem to bespeak a deep global crisis in the self-perception of the Western world, which cannot but affect the way in which Ukraine and the post-Soviet space in its entirety view themselves and reassess their geopolitical orientations. In this context, peculiar attention has to be paid to Russia's renewed international ambitions and its unexpected role in reshaping political action and public opinion, in Eastern Europe and far beyond.

Profoundly torn between a struggle for renewal and an ever increasing tension towards an idealized, transfigured image of the past as a *locus amoenus*, the entangled destinies of the various actors of the globalized world we live in provide abundant space for gloomy speculation among international observers. About 100 years after the central phase of WWI and the beginning of the Russian Revolution(s), Adorno's critic of the Enlightenment's 'naïf' optimism seems not to have lost its interest. Among the consequences of an indisputable upsurge of nationalistic feelings and of the contempt for dissent and polyphony that they bring about,

In this issue, MU will host a selection of pictures from the project 'City 21' by the Ukrainian photographer Dimitri Bogachuk

indifference to human rights is one of the most hurting, as shown by the present-day state of affairs in both eastern Ukraine and Russia. Moreover, the case of Ukraine perfectly illustrates how often reforms and improvements in several domains of public life are hampered by private interests and social conservatism, putting at risk the precious and painful legacy of Euromaidan.

Faithful to our young but already solid tradition, we are proud to host once again the work of a renowned Ukrainian photographer, whose art manages to – paradoxically – catch the uncertainties and ambivalences of present-day Ukraine with enviable limpidity. Dimitri Bogachuk's fascination for foggy atmospheres, motion and the primordial attractiveness of the road perfectly conveys the lights and shadows of contemporary Ukrainian life.

One may want to ask: is there any light beyond the darkness of the "post-truth" era? Literature seems to offer a positive answer to this question. Natalya Domina's translations of three poems from Serhii Zhadan's 2015 collection *The Life of Mary* provide the English-speaking reader with a glimpse into the work of one of the most outstanding ambassadors of contemporary Ukrainian culture, whose commitment to dialogue both within Ukraine and between Ukraine and the world can only instill admiration and hope. Moreover, our last issue features an English translation of Maria Cristina Colombo's refined discussion of the French intertextual track in Mykola Khvylovy's *Ivan Ivanovych*, previously published in Italian in the #3 issue. Colombo's article represents an important contribution towards a global reappraisal of the work of a fundamental protagonist of Ukrainian 20th-century literature.

We wish you a pleasant and enlightening reading.

The Editors

MU - Newsletter

Looking through the Post-Soviet (and the Post-Communist) Mirror

- How did 'The State' Survive the Collapse of the Soviet Union?, asks W. E. Pomeranz.
- In "The Revenge of the Border", Thomas De Waal observes how nowadays "closed post-Soviet borders contaminate not just European peace, harmony and business, but language and the mind as well".
- Alexei Miller on the European divided memory/ies.
- Totalitarian Postmodernism. That's how Vadim Shtepa describes Russian state ideology in times of "hybrid politics".
- On 25 years of postmodernity in the South Caucasus.
- For years, Georgian society has been consolidated around the prospect of finding a "saviour", which, in turn, has undermined the role of parliament, but in this year's election there is no "Messiah" who "will save the country", reports Open Democracy.

- In "The Cold War is Over", Peter Hitchens argues that instead of fighting a new cold war, we should recognize the traumas the Russian people have been through and allow them to get on with restoring their "glorious" Christian and European heritage.

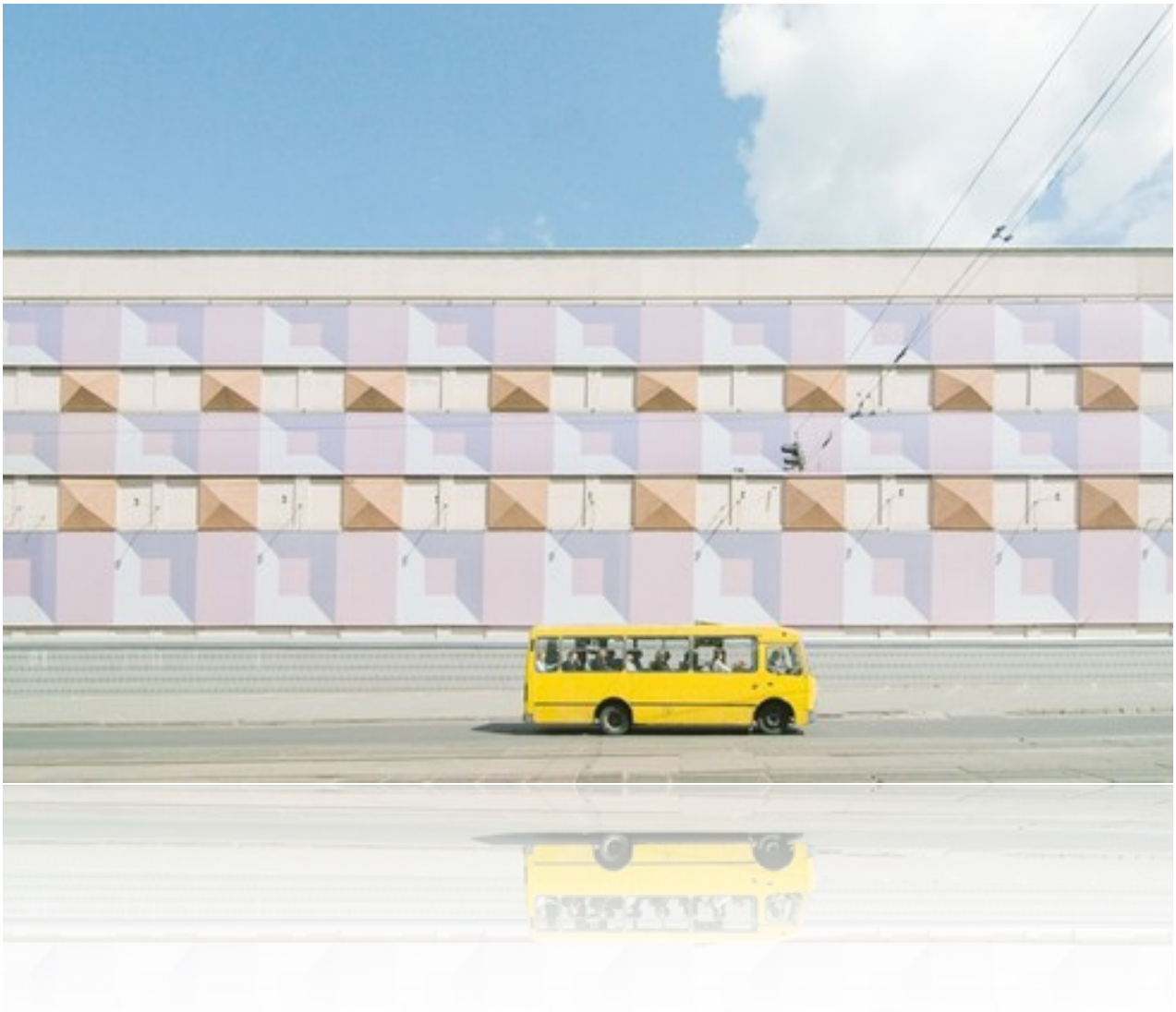
- Edward Lucas replies to Hitchens, arguing that "a new cold war" is fought on different fronts, for different aims. Russia uses money, propaganda, cyber-subversion, and other tactics to disrupt and weaken its neighbors and the West generally.

- Hungary's prime minister is creating a model for demagogic populism throughout Central Europe.

- A Bosnian referendum shows Russia's influence in the region, as well as its limits.

- Some reflections on the recent elections in both Romania and Macedonia from Open Democracy.

- Lana Estemirova remembers Anna Politkovskaia on the 10th anniversary of her death.



Ukraine vis-a-vis US presidential election

- Following Donald Trump's victory, Carnegie.ru asked three experts, one in Russia, one in Ukraine, and one in the United States, to comment on the question: "What impact will Trump's victory have on Ukraine?"
- Donald Trump's victory leaves Ukraine alone and afraid.
- Kyiv concerned US will cede 'sphere of influence' to Moscow in effort to improve ties.
- Reva Goujon, vice president of global analysis at Stratfor, on what a Trump victory means for the future of US-Russia relations.
- Maxim Trudolyubov on the paradox of Russia's support for Trump.
- A sum-up of Russia's role in electing Trump to the White House.

Ukraine

- Georgii Kas'ianov on Ukraine's controversial "memorial laws".

-David Marples on decommunization in Ukraine. Pros and cons.

-Balázs Jarábik, Mikhail Minakov on Ukraine's consolidation of power and what it means for the West.

-A report by RAND Corporation examines Ukraine's security sector, assessing what different institutions need to do and evaluating where gaps exist that preclude these institutions from being effective, efficient, transparent, and accountable.

-Ukraine is on the brink of media freedom, but oligarchs are set to put a stop to it, argues The Indipendent.

-After a string of brutal murders involving some of the most prominent separatist commanders, Donbas leaders are worried that Russia is behind these deaths.

-Italian newspaper La Stampa has a reportage on Ukraine's contested Eastern border.

-An important healthcare reform has been recently proposed by the Ukrainian government.

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Russia

- According to Michael Kofman's analysis of what went wrong in Syria, "Moscow wanted to play the role of great power in the Middle East, but it seems the crown is a size too big for its head. The Kremlin can deter U.S. intervention, but cannot yet resolve the conflict on its own terms".
- The New Yorker on Putin, Syria and why Moscow "has gone war-crazy".
- America's Russia policy has failed, argues Foreignpolicy.com.
- The strange sympathy of the far left for Putin.
- EU leaders are to discuss covert Russian funding of far-right and fringe parties in Europe in light of intelligence findings that show that Moscow is interfering in European domestic politics.
- The Financial Times on Russia's "Arctic obsession".

Human rights and Post-Soviet Conflicts

- Elena Milashina's lengthy report for Novaya Gazeta on human rights in Chechnya and Ramzan Kadyrov's rethinking of his pact with Moscow.
- Human rights activist Volodymyr Chemerys denounces the totalitarian tendencies of post-Maidan Ukraine, where the state apparatus, far-right movements and patriotic citizens are working together to shut down debate and silence criticism.
- Memorial and *Kharkivs'ka Pravozakhysna Hrupa* carried out a joint monitoring of the situation with human rights in Donets'k and Luhans'k oblast'. The results have been published in both Russian and English.
- "Civilians Detained, Abused on Both sides of the conflict line": a report on the situation in Donbas by Human Rights Watch and OHCHR.

Culture and Visual Arts

- Krytyka polityczna's Ivan Balandin on "cynical ideology" in Ukraine.
- According to Mykola Ryabchuk, there can be no democracy without liberalism.
- On freedom, egalitarianism, gender and poverty in Ukraine in the time of Donald Trump.
- An interview with Andreas Kappeler on his mission: establishing Ukraine on the mental map of Europe.
- A contribution on identity, alterity, time and the body in modern and contemporary Ukrainian poetry by Iryna Borysiuk for Krytyka.

- Photographer Donald Weber explores Ukraine's decommunisation policy.

-"Tomorrow will be better" is a series of photographs by Tadeusz Rolke about Lviv in 1989–1991. Due to unknown circumstances, the materials had never been published. After 26 years, a photo exhibition at the Center for Urban History of East Central Europe will try to re-create contextual and visual narratives the author wanted to put across.

-Anti-Russian propaganda in military maps from the first half of the 20th century.

-Wojciech Smarzowski's new film Wołyń is an important step towards memory dialogue between Poland and Ukraine.

-However, the current state of affairs in Warsaw seems not to favour reconciliation between the two neighbours, argues Yaroslav Hrytsak.

New Publications, Reviews and Resources for Scholars

- Ukraine Conference Papers is a new report on contemporary Ukraine released by Columbia's Arnold A. Saltzman Institute for War and Peace Studies.
- *Na perekhresnkykh stezhkakh: Ivan Franko ta yevreis'ke pytannya u Halychyni* (eds. A. Woldan, O. Terpitz, Krytyka 2016) features nine articles on Ivan Franko's much-discussed stance towards Jews and Jewish Culture, "between filosemitism and antisemitism".
- A selection of open-access articles on the Soviet Union and Post-Soviet Russia is available on Taylor & Francis Online to commemorate 25 years of the dissolution of the Soviet Union.
- The Berlin-based Centre for East European and International Studies has begun its activity.

MU - *Photography*

‘City 21’

Dimitri Bogachuk

“City 21” is the result of eight years’ work. This experimental series explores the meaning of “city” in the 21st century. Possibly critical dystopian material, the pictures show that the city that evolved is not the same as what was once envisioned. The photographs capture ephemeral scenes incorporating elements that seem ordinary but that are used ironically. For example, the pictures include an advertising kiosk, an empty white billboard, and other typical urban artifacts. Although the unusual focus on such subjects creates a visually chaotic space, I want to reveal some kind of new harmony. The concept is similar to the use of objects as diorama collections for museum expositions. Photographs from this project uncover the character of the city through its details. What is most important is not the transient state but creating an atmosphere of fundamental feelings of the space. The photography is not only recording certain subjects but also transforming the subjects in a defining moment of their existence. My aim is to find the thin edge between these images of the city and ordinary pictures of the city that borders between reality and dreams. In this series of photographs, I explore the iconic but banal story of the city through the prism of an aesthetic narrative.

D.B.

MU - *Papers*

MU #7-8 - Papers
will be focused on literature.

Ivan Ivanovych by Mykola Khvylovy

A Case for Sherlock Holmes

Maria Cristina Colombo
(En. Tr. Susanna Plazzi)

'That still won't make me change my mind –
Why do you want me to think in clichés?'
(Ivan Ivanovych)

Published in 1929, *Ivan Ivanovych* is a satirical short story by Mykola Khvylovy. Written from the third person perspective by a participant narrator who talks to the reader, it describes Ivan Ivanovych's daily life in a fable tone that may sound ironic. Ivan is a revolutionary political party member during the full development of the *New Economic Policy,* he is married, has two children, lives in a comfortable house in a small town and spends time with his friends and party colleagues.

Two themes are embraced by Khvylovy: Ivan's life in its daily unfolding and the Soviet ideology that regulates his behaviour. The first theme has been parodically addressed, using the device of juxtaposition of the Soviet present side-by-side with the Tsarist past, so as to highlight the analogies. Satire is sustained by a tragic subtext - the real protagonist of this short story, which may be interpreted as a bitter consideration of a shattered dream ('the revolutionary masses have not won'). With regard to Soviet ideology, the second issue explored, the author underlines 'the misery and imperfection of life', by means of a narrative form, such as the *conte philosophique*.

Remarkable is the presence of a dense network of intertextual references to authors and works that, in addition to qualifying the text as an example of high literature, makes the real literary meaning stand out. In terms of literary macro genres, it can be said that Khvylovy's ideal reference library is primarily composed of three major satirical works: *The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel* by Rabelais, *Gulliver's Travels* by Swift and *Candide: or The Optimist* by Voltaire, a sort of spiritual triad that supports intertextuality in *Ivan Ivanovych*. In addition to these three masters, the humanist Thomas More, with

Utopia, and the writer and polemicist Thackeray are also echoed in Khvylovy's work.

With regard to Thackeray, the author of *The Luck of Barry Lyndon*, Khvylovy particularly refers to an essay about English humourists of the 18th century and, as will be subsequently explained, he uses this as a spark for an original meta-satirical digression. Other important sources are the French novel, especially *Bel Ami* by Maupassant and *The Charterhouse of Parma* by Stendhal. Russian literature is evident with Gogol and Saltykov-Shchedrin, with regard to the Tsarist era, along with two novels by Ehrenburg, relating to the author's contemporary Soviet age. A particular reference, also retraceable in other pieces by Khvylovy, is made to some works by the Marquise de Sade.

Such a highly cultured use of intertextuality, as well as the intellectual complexity of the various political and cultural references, make *Ivan Ivanovych* an undeniable example of *high literature*. But then, the concept of creating high literature was the mission of Ukrainian Modernism and the road (*Quo vadis?)* paved by Khvylovy himself during the literary debate in the 1920s, which was realised in full contrast with the tendency towards the masses and utilitarianism that was adopted by the realist school. The modernist path, developed for an urban audience, could have enabled the overturning of a low cultural *status* that imperial narration had always attributed to Ukrainian literature.

The short story *Ivan Ivanovych* is to be deservedly considered as a full *modernist text*.

It provides its readers with several prompts for further personal literary research, together with the possibility of pinpointing an intertextual plot, which may be used as a *cue* to identify the message of the short story – its real literary meaning. To use an investigative metaphor, the short story *Ivan Ivanovych* by Khvylovy turns out to be a 'case for Sherlock Holmes'.

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During the tsar's time, Ivan Ivanovych – 'My hero, a nice fellow', as Khvylovy refers to him – was a revolutionary: he used to like Rabelais and *Gulliver's Travels* and was expelled from the Department of Law due to his Voltairianism. However, Ivan has changed in the meantime; he has become Comrade Jean, and an outstanding member both of the party and of the 'new communist lifestyle'.

In a cultured and amusing manner, Khvylovy opens a window onto the tsarist and aristocratic past and highlights its displacement in the present time ('This damned heritage of tsardom!'). The description of Comrade Jean's family circle, which Khvylovy provides by depicting its language and its behaviour, as well as less significant gestures ('Comrade Jean wipes his forehead with a snow-white handkerchief'), evokes a 19th century bourgeois novel portrait of a marriage. We find the 'hostess', his partner, Halakta-Marfa Halaktionivna, who 'straightens her bodice and with half-closed eyes that are so wise' and his common friend, Metodii Kyrylovych, with the most appropriate hand-kiss.

Between the two there is a not-so-veiled *liaison,* implicitly accepted by Ivan, and its intertwining recalls the so-called *ménage à trois* of Georges Duroy, *aka* Bel Ami in the novel of the same name by Maupassant. This Maupassant hero is, in fact, a frequent visitor to his lovers' houses, and a friend of their husbands who, like our Ivan, implicitly put up with the situation, or simply do not care.
Our couple have two children, who also have 'revolutionary' names: May, enrolled as an 'Octobrist', and Violet, a name of Romantic memory, still a candidate for that title. To complete the picture, there is a governess, French of course, and a female cook who sleeps on a mattress in the hallway.
Ivan's salary consists of 'only' 250 rubles, 'but one can speak of this amount only when one does not count various small items as overtime pay and the regular honorarium [...] for writing articles that are not exactly original'. It is not difficult to understand that Ivan earns a lot of money. He wears horn-rimmed glasses, he does not wear cheap clothes, he spends his holidays at the seaside in Crimea or at the spa in the Caucasus, he lives in an elegantly fitted bourgeois apartment of large dimensions ('of only - only! - four rooms, not counting the kitchen and the bathroom'), saved from the national inventory of areas that should have affected all Soviet citizens. Even the street where he lives is no longer the same. Once 'Governor Street', it is now 'Thomas More Street', a reference to the author of *Utopia*. And in town, 'taxis race gingerly', *à la* Marinetti, and no longer do 'antediluvian hansom cabs trail slowly and sadly'.

The target of Khvylovy's satire is also the 'monumental-realist' paradigm of the 'new communist lifestyle', analysed in detailed features and well described by the author in lively gags. Charity organisations are included in this short story, poured out by Ivan with a proud sense of belonging, as well as *NEP* (*Nepmanky* often have a manicure done) and the programme of economising. Such a programme is introduced to an astonished audience by a party official as 'one of the latest slogans of our proletarian Party' and is explained by the exhilarating example of the pencil and the holder: 'the pencil should not have been thrown away. A holder should have been purchased at the price of two kopeks and then it should have been used until the very end'. Furthermore, the text also addresses the housing crisis, which 'has made itself felt here and [...] my hero has faced it courageously', together with the confiscations. References to electric light and technological inventions are also presented in the text as metaphors of communism (*à la* Zoshchenko: 'What is the word of the day, comrades? It is electrification'), and the comments on the difference between socialism and communism are also highlighted ('Communism is a higher stage'). There are also complex, and, at the time, deeply debated questions, such as party-line self-criticism, Plekhanov's aesthetics and the theory of Socialism in One Country, in addition to some refined psychological aspects, such as the party officials' pervasive sense of fear of falling into the scheming trap and then being purged.

Khvylovy's satire is high and follows one style throughout the entire text. In this respect, Umberto Eco's words appear to be suitable when he describes high satire as a service rendered to the thing derided or as a moment of civilisation in his famous work *Elogio a Franti* (*In Praise of Franti*), or when he goes on to describe its prerequisites as being created by a situation, being accepted completely, almost loved and then mocked infamously. It is definitely true that Khvylovy *laughs on the inside*, with empathy (his hero's life is 'touching', his inventions are 'good expedients', his end is 'tragic') and, in his disillusionment, he is able to be confident ('everything is possible', 'his nice youngster is growing rapidly').

In addition to being high, Khvylovy's satire is cultured and deeply intertextual; what is striking in the text is the peculiar openness, found in the use of different forms of intertextuality: from simple references and direct quotations, to a refined pastiche that celebrates several literary works, up to concatenated cross-references to a homogenous group of texts. Khvylovy's intertextuality may fulfil a double purpose: on the one hand, it suggests to readers its literary and spiritual collocation and, on the other, it provides them with a collection of standardised languages appropriate to his satirical aim.

Various are the pastiches on *The Charterhouse of Parma* by Stendhal, which imitate the chancellery jargon ('*à la* Stendhal'). The characters of Stendhal's novel, set in a fictionalised Parma court after Waterloo, behave like courtesans and speak a bureaucratic and stilted language against the background of surroundings built on intrigue and stamped paper. The chancellery style is dense and spread throughout the pages of the novel, so much so that it gradually clouds and replaces the plot, such that it becomes the real protagonist. The events described in Stendhal's text are constantly repeated, modulated by a bureaucratic and rigid court paradigm, until they cease to be meaningful and become nothing more than an indefinite and ineffective beating around the bush.

Khvylovy opts for the language of the *Charterhouse* when he Aesopically speaks of what we could define as the 'giant Soviet chancellery', which demands subordination and consistency from its members, by means of theories and key words that will eventually turn out to be a replacement for free thought and spontaneity. Indeed, Khvylovy's narrator says: '[...] the petty bourgeois soul is overcome by anguish [...] telling man to rebel against the fact that in our society there is no room for satire' and he uses a comment about that feeling of sadness produced by the light autumn drizzle as an excuse. Numerous and sophisticated are the pastiches from Maupassant: if Stendhal represents the *chancellery jargon* of the narration, the author of *Bel Ami* becomes one with the *bourgeois speech* of the text which, once in the hands of Khvylovy, is developed into a useful tool that is required to highlight the feebleness of the 'new communist lifestyle'. The scene when Marfa Halaktionivna and Metodii Kyrylovych are sitting together in the parlour recalls a 19th century depiction of bourgeois interiors, with Metodii Kyrylovych as Bel Ami and Marfa Halaktionivna as the coquette who 'sits down to read Lenin and Marx, her hand stretches out involuntarily for a volume of de Maupassant. This usually happens when a fresh vernal breeze, so lovely, and yet so unsubordinated to the monumental-realistic theory, steals into the room, even into her bosom'.

Moreover, the Ukraine party newspaper, *Visti*, is described using words similar to those uttered by the Maupassant hero when describing the Parisian daily newspaper *Vie Française*. Khvylovy imitated not only the French author's style – with great results, incidentally – but also one of his titles (deliberately?), in *Val'dshnepy* (*The Woodcocks*) a novel written in 1927, following *Tales of the Woodcock,* a collection of short stories produced by Maupassant in 1883. If Maupassant reflects the bourgeois spirit of Khvylovy's speech, Ehrenburg represents the *major key language* ('Comrade Halakta manages to keep herself in hand. At such times, she finds escape in novels like *Julio Jurenito* with a preface by Bukharin or *The Love Story of Jeanne Ney*').

Crucial in underlining the real meaning of the short story is a cross-reference to a group of texts with several features in common, which is what Genette refers to as 'architextuality'. In Ivan Ivanovych, the architextual element is provided by free thought, the cognitive and spiritual trait that belongs to the three great minds, and recalled in this short story with a meaningful mystic intonation: Rabelais, acting as the father; Swift as the son on the right of the father, and Voltaire, as a 'tendency', the spirit – or better, the *esprit* – of such an ideal trinity. *The Life of Gargantua and Pantagruel, Gulliver's Travels* and *Candide: or The Optimist* are at the heart of what we can call Khvylovy's 'libertine library' and they also represent an unmistakable clue to his literary and, above all, his spiritual position. All metaphors spread throughout the text to recall the three authors have, in fact, a spiritual nature, and represent such a literary triad as the Holy Trinity. For Ivan Ivanovych's author, free thought appears to assume the importance and strength of a faith, in addition to being one of the high literature sources to which to refer. Outlining Ivan's literary past and his bewilderment ('he promised, in the event of the victory of the revolutionary masses, to display Gulliver's Travels as one of his favourite books and to place it on the right hand of Rabelais'), the author has introduced the real topic from the very beginning: the disillusionment towards *his* communist dream, towards *his Ivan*. The loss of what Khvylovy calls the 'Voltairian tendency', the impossibility of placing *Gulliver's Travels* on the right of Rabelais, show us a shattered dream that will result in the normalisation of the Revolution and the end of the strength of free thought. Khvylovy turns to a double, the writer Thackeray, Aesopically adapting a comment about the greatness of Swift's genius: 'An immense genius: an awful downfall and ruin. So great a man he seems to me, that thinking of him is like thinking of an empire falling'. Khvylovy agrees with Thackeray and in his Aesopic version, Swift is replaced by Saltykov-Shchedrin and the Great Empire becomes the Russian Empire.

Therefore, the resulting metasatirical digression refers to the positioning of satire in Russian history. The author of the masterpiece *The Golovlyov Family* (1880) – as Khvylovy states between the lines - was able to express his thought during the Russian tsardom and was even appointed Vice-Governor, while in the Soviet Republic, where free thought should have been a Bible, he had to write a 'short story pitched in a major key' so as to have it 'read by all the citizens of our republic'. From such a perspective, the dense intertextual plot helps reveal the nature of Khvylovy's short story, that is authentically in a *minor key* and is, therefore, elitist.

The Swiftian and Voltairian approach is evoked by Khvylovy with a parody of the technological spirit of the 'new communist lifestyle' (electrification, amazing inventions), which involves Ivan's soul and body in the creation of a fly-killer - an electric one, of course. The extract about the fly-killer is a brilliant caricature, and it leads us into the unbridled empiricism of the Age of Enlightenment, by reviewing the scientific laboratory experiments (electric wind, Leyden jar, Franklin's wheel and Galvani frog test) that Ivan can conduct at home, since he owns an entire scientific library, confiscated from some landowner. Ivan engages in the study of several subjects, and his excessive commitment compared to the results, together with his spirit of service ('he studied hard with self-denial all winter long'), recall the 18th-century myth of experimental physics mocked by Swift and Voltaire. With his 'research work conducted for the purpose of scientific invention', Ivan recalls the instrument manufacturers who used to operate in the 18th-century Dutch workshops, as well as the 'officers' and the 'Mateotechny' (idle science) of the Kingdom of Quintessence of Rabelais. Engaged in activities of this idle science, the officers waste their labours: 'for four livelong days [...] they had been disputing on high, more than metaphysical preposition [...] of goat's hair, whether it were wool or no' or 'Others out of nothing made great things, and made great things return to nothing'.

The scene featuring Ivan 'the inventor' leads us to think of an ideal 'Soviet Academy for the Inventions', echoing not only the Grand Academy of Lagado from *Gulliver's Travels,* a parody of the Royal Society, but also the Academy of Science at Bordeaux, parodied in *Candide.* The so-called 'universal artist' of the Swiftian Academy, a building of five hundred rooms, each one occupied by one or more Projectors, informs Gulliver that 'he had been thirty years employing his thoughts for the improvement of human life'. With such a goal in mind, some of his fifty assistants were 'softening marbles for pillows and pin-cushions' while others were 'petrifying the hoofs of a living horse to preserve them from foundering'. Let us also mention Voltaire's hero arriving in Bordeaux and parting 'with his sheep, which he left at the Academy of Science', which - the narrator goes on in an ironic tone – 'proposed as the theme of that year's prize contest, the discovery of why the wool of the sheep was red'. The form of Khvylovy's narration is Voltairian, too, recalling the *conte philosophique.* His pastiche is positive, as meant by Marmontel, Voltaire's friend, the Enlightenment thinker, that is, a *pastiche admiratif* on authors who, being considered prominent, consequently inspire other authors as guides.

Khvylovy's libertine library also includes de Sade, albeit in a less explicit manner. A reference to the author of *La Nouvelle Justine* can be found in the scene where Halakta and Metodii Kyrylovych are discussing sexual education. This discussion occurs on the sofa, a piece of furniture that reminds us of an 18th-century *boudoir*, where Halakta and the family friend (the Bel Ami character) 'sit down and begin to discuss the problem of sex'. After reluctantly approaching each other, they eventually transform words into actions. The linguistic expressions introducing such a passage evoke those used by Maupassant, who usually goes above and beyond, while Khvylovy creates fade-out, as in films: 'At this point the author walks with decision to the door'.

Such an exit from the scene is also a pretext for a very effective polemic game that sheds light on the issue of Soviet censorship. Evoking de Sade is a fine artifice to stress the expression 'sexual education'. By means of an allusive that is entirely of premises and consequences, of details and meaningful juxtapositions, 'sexual education' (a topic for conversations) becomes sexual 'education' (training). The tone and the spirit appear to be those of *Philosophie dans le boudoir ou Les instituteurs immoraux* - but ours is a mere hypothesis - a 1795 work by de Sade, the subheading of which is *Dialogues destinés à l'éducation des jeunes demoiselles*, a series of dialogues that address the education of young girls. 'But then, you know, there are those exceptional individuals to whom sex remains a riddle', says Marfa Halaktionivna to Metodii Kyrylovych. And she adds: 'I tell you frankly and without any petty bourgeois prejudices. You cannot image what a great desire I have at times to caress strange men'. This scene also echoes Voltaire's *Candide*, when, after seeing Doctor Pangloss, who 'was giving a lesson in experimental physics to her mother's maid', Cunégonde, who 'had a natural bent for the sciences [...] yearning for knowledge', found herself together with Candide in a secluded space (a sort of *boudoir*), behind a screen, where 'their lips met, their eyes lit up, their knees trembled, their hands wandered'. Therefore, we don't think it is accidental that *Philosophie dans le boudoir* emerges as a powerful presence in the novel *The Woodcocks*, where the reflection on 'ethics as a permanent crime' evokes the pamphlet *Français, encore un effort pour être républicains (Yet Another Effort, Frenchmen, If You Would Become Republicans*) at the end of the *Philosophie dans le boudoir.* A Sadian subtext may also be observed in the tale *Myself (Romantica)*, 1923, a tragic consideration of the effects of revolutionary violence on the psyche of the individual. Sadian – or allusively Sadian – is the idea of going beyond the limit, which may even reach the final act of matricide, or that of serial shootings practised as 'Bacchanals'. The presence of a Sadian-Voltairian subtext highlights the literary and spiritual collocation of the author within an ideal libertine current, in the way paved by the French and English *esprit forts* and by the *last* Russian Saltykov-Shchedrin. The bridge created by the *polemicist free thinkers* – to whom Thomas More will also be added, quoted in the form of a new name for a street – provides *Ivan Ivanovych* with a new meaning, that is, indeed, that of a libertine satirical work.

It is interesting to read the text by placing it on the shelf of Khvylovy's enlarged library, which he builds up in the short story by naming, or indirectly suggesting, authors and books. We may analyse such a library as a *map*, according to space-time coordinates, which lead us into three countries and three ages. Khvylovy draws from Humanism and the Enlightenment in France and England and from 19th century satire in France and Russia. Of all the European literary sources, Germany appears to be missing, and not because of lack of consideration – we know from his polemicist pamphlets how relevant Goethe's *Faust* was for Khvylovy – but rather because it was not relevant to his aim of giving his work a satirical meaning. The same can also be said of those authors who, according to Khvylovy, make European culture so decadent (Byron, Darwin, Marx and Newton).

Let us not forget that Ivan's wife, Marfa Halaktionivna, 'sits down to read Lenin and Marx, her hand stretches out involuntarily for a volume of de Maupassant'. Also missing is the Russian literature between Gogol and Saltykov-Shchedrin, whose peculiarity, according to Khvylovy, is a passive pessimism that produced the literary types of the 'superfluous man', the 'grey little man', the 'whimperer' and the 'dreamer' who, as written on the pages of the polemicist essay *Ukraine or Little Russia?*, are opposed to Khvylovy's cultural-historical type of the 'courageous conquistador'.

We have already mentioned the importance of references to Maupassant, and these aimed to decode the profound meaning of the text. A large part of this small library is composed of texts belonging to the Age of Enlightenment, in particular, works by Voltaire, 'responsible' for the expulsion of Ivan from the Department of Law due to his Voltairianism and for that 'Voltairian tendency'.

What then has Voltaire to do with Khvylovy? In our opinion, with the conservation of optimism in the practice of clear-headed thought, with vitality, the courage of competition and with the faith in the aesthetic – more than utilitarian - value of culture. In addition, as with Khvylovy and Gogol, when reading the *contes philosophiques* by Voltaire, we get the impression that the author must have enjoyed writing them. Despite everything, a sober optimism shines through Khvylovy's short stories as part of his concept of the world (daring, fighting, being brave and loving life), as well as of literature. One need only consider the vitality of the Khvylovyan literary type of the 'courageous conquistador', in which we can recognise the Myth of the Frontier, or the definition of *Romantic Life-ism*, as Khvylovy labelled his style.

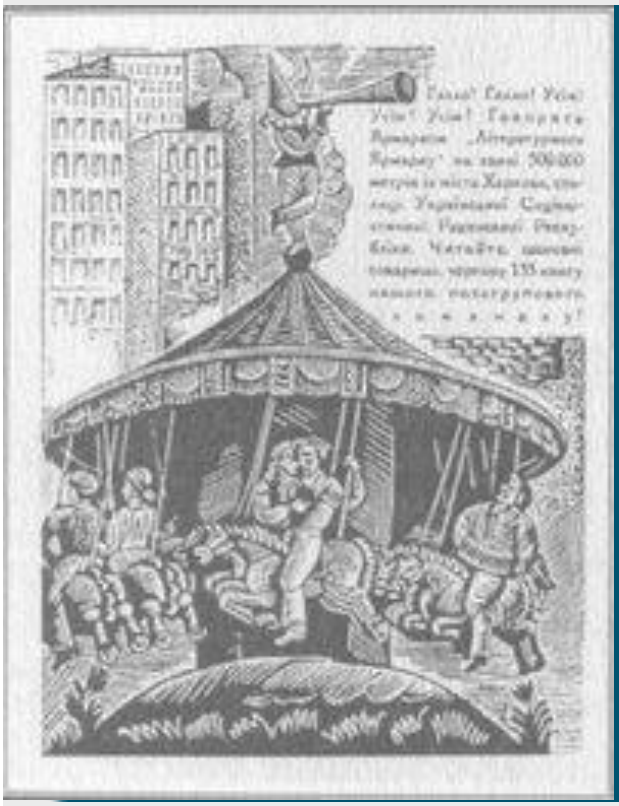
'A hundred times I wanted to kill myself, but always I loved life more', Voltaire writes in *Candide.* 'Today is a wonderful sunny day. I love life, you can't imagine how much', Khvylovy writes in his notes before committing suicide on 13th May, 1933.

The fight, that of the polemicist, is part of Khvylovy's life, as it is for Voltaire, two great 'fighters', who could not help practising the critical thinking of intellectually independent minds. In *Candide,* Voltaire has one of his characters, Senator Pococurante, say the following words: 'For the matter of that I say what I think, and I care very little whether others think as I do.' 'That still won't make me change my mind', and 'Why do you want me to think in clichés?' says Ivan Ivanovych, 'unwaveringly'.

Even high literature, with universal, classical and humanist sources, belongs to both polemicists, together with the concept of a literature that is valiant because it is aesthetical. An interesting comparison can be made between Khvylovy's library and that of the Voltairian Senator Pococurante. The Senator loves Ariosto and Tasso, Horace and Seneca, plus some English books 'written with a spirit of freedom' (this might be a reference to More's *Utopia* and to Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*); he does not like Homer, Virgil and Cicero, and he certainly does not appreciate Milton's *Paradise Lost,* or the 'four-score volumes of the Academy of Sciences', defined as 'rakers of rubbish' and full of 'chimerical systems, and not a single useful thing'.

In both libraries, we can find Swift's satire; Horace and Seneca would be a choice for the neoclassical Mykola Zerov (1893–1937), and Khvylovy likes them because they blend satire with stoicism. Those idle scientific volumes must be removed from the shelves of both libraries. Gogol, Maupassant, Saltykov-Shchedrin, would Voltaire have liked them?

If these are the classics for Khvylovy, the Ukraine author himself is a classic for Yuri Andrukhovych, who, in his *Bad Company,* calls him dearly 'Fitil'ov: a Russian'. After listing the 'crazy' protagonists of Ukrainian literature, he concluded by saying: 'Literature could not be different [...] a dark and silent cellar [...] Good night, classics, we'll meet tomorrow'. When Khvylovy's polemicist pamphlets were published, some critics reviewed them as 'a sudden breath of fresh air in a room whose windows had been closed for ages', because of their ironic, lively and brilliant style (actual literary texts). Ironic, lively and brilliant is also the style of Khvylovy's 'major key short story', which we consider a great journey through culture, riding a *carousel*, the same one that the author selected to illustrate the cover of the first issue of his *Literaturnyi Yarmarok (Literary Fair)*, a cheerful magazine – and Gogolian – right from its title. It brings joy to think that, despite it all, Mykola Khvylovy made it.



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A selection of poems from "The Life of the Virgin Mary" (2015)

Serhii Zhadan

Translated by Natalya Domina

Psycho

Too bad, says he, They'll level the city.
Like Sodom and Gomorrah.
His brother is in asylum.
A few days ago the facility had been seized.
They put mortars in the yard.
He visits his brother.
They sit on the bench under the apple trees.
They look similar – both wearing track suits.
Both have short haircuts.
But only one has a cell-phone,
Even though there is no coverage in the city.
They ignore the soldiers.
The soldiers ignore them back.
When they were children, he was ashamed of his brother.
He never talked about him.
He never took him anywhere.
You know what it's like to have a psycho in your family?
Dad is normal, mom is normal, you are normal too, but there is one psycho.
In your family. It means you might be crazy, too.
When he grew up, he just stopped paying attention to him.
As if he never existed.
The way it is when you walk down the street and notice something unpleasant,
Something that evokes fear and rejection. For instance, an animal that's been torn apart.

But you know if you don't look at it, then it's as if there is nothing there, as if all is well.
That's how it is now – they silently sit together and no one notices them.
As if they were not there.
You think there are just a few of them who didn't manage to get out.
The ones who lie there like that animal torn apart.
The asylum stuff fled long ago.
There are a few cleaning ladies who take care of the patients.
Old women who worked there all their lives.
Six or seven.
Not bad for a city of a million people.

Marauder

Bad biography. The kind that makes the morning news.
His dad froze to death in an empty trolley in December.
Mom has diabetes.
Trade schooling, incomplete; two years under surveillance.
His throat is burnt by iodine.
His ear destroyed by heavy weapons blast.
What did you dream about all these years?
What did you want?
Everything he ever wanted was in the local shopping mall.
To break in, though, would be like breaking the seal on a Papal missive.
I never had enough money, he wrote, to get the things I wanted.
I kept putting them off until better times come along.
But now I realize better times will never come.
You, too, were born here. You know how it is.
Repeat after me:
Life is cruel and unfair,
Life is short and hopeless,

Life is joyless and vile.

The one who has nothing,

Will never have anything.

The one who has nothing to lose,

Won't lose anything.

Here no one is waiting for better times.

No one distinguishes quiet death from the rest of the women.

Good heart, bad lungs.

You live with her because you love her.

You die because you live with her.

'Thanks for writing to me,' he says. 'Thanks for writing.'

'It's nothing.' I reply.

'Seriously. It's nothing.'

S. Zhadan (b. 1974)

The Chaplain

Ihor is a chaplain. He is thirty.

But to look older he does not shave.

Everyone wants to look older,

especially at 30.

An age easy to get lost in.

It's a dangerous age. Even for a chaplain.

How strange it is to listen to the confessions of people

who willingly and consistently break all God's rules.

They burn their skin on hot metal,

Burn their lips with tobacco. They smoke in the wind.

They are deafened and angry.

Cigarette buts end up in the damp grass.

Cross, icons, oil under the nails. They switch their cell-phones off and head on to confess.

They tell him all their secrets, share their misfortunes.

He would not listen to all that, but what can he do.

Every sin is like a stone on the seashore.

Angry men put those stones in his hand – every warm stone that had been carried in a pocket for so long.

His bags are already full of those stones.

He barely drags them.

But the men are coming and coming, bringing their stones.

They give them to him as their biggest treasure.

Consistently and for so many days.

They finish smoking. They joke. They get in line being afraid not to make it.

Everyone will make it.

No one will be late.

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