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МОСКВА

MOSKOVIÁDA – JURIJ ANDRUCHOVYČ_REŽIE – DUŠAN D. PAŘÍZEK

THE MOSKOVIAD

YURI ANDRUKHOVYCH

“The empire flirted with the idea of freedom, of revival and survival. But when the old whore of an empire shed her original skin, it turned out she had nothing else to wear.”

The Ukrainian anabasis. A scary one.

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Yuri Andrukhovych

Ukrainian poet, prose writer, essayist and translator was born on 13 March 1960 in the Galician town of Stanislav (now Ivano-Frankivsk). He first studied journalism in Lviv, then entered compulsory military service in the Soviet army. He entered literature as a poet in 1985 with his collection The Sky and Squares. In the mid-1980s, he also founded the literary group Bu-Ba-Bu with his friends Oleksandr Irvants and Viktor Neborak, whose activity was characterized by the creation of poetry strips combined with performances and happenings. The group's name is derived from three words: the initial and final "Bu" refer to the words "burlesque" and "buffoonery". The middle "Ba" is derived from the Old Hebrew "balahan", which refers to chaos, and in the case of Ukrainian, also to a yoke as a venue for various entertaining skits and performances, or more simply, "brothel". In this playful, almost irreverent approach are encoded the basic features of Andrukhovych's subsequent work: mystification, recession, (self-)irony, overexposed posing, the constant conflation and inversion of the "high" and "low" so characteristic of carnival culture.

In the second half of the 1980s, Andrukhovych worked in a printing house that printed propaganda and conformist articles, but at the same time he was involved through his work and performance in a movement that sought to end the myth of the noble poet seen through the lens of an inviolable national canon or conservative nationalism. The work of this generation is influenced by European postmodernism and the perestroika experience of the collapsing Soviet empire (theorists and the authors themselves find similar features, for example, in Jáchym Topol's exceptional Czech novel *Sister*, a novel from the 1990s).

In the late 1980s, Andrukhovych came to Moscow, where he began studying at the Maxim Gorky Literary Institute. He published collections of poetry, *Downtown* (1989), *Exotic Birds and Plants (*1991), and others followed in later years (such as *Exotic Birds and Plants* with the appendix *"India"* and *Songs for the Dead Rooster*), but decided to devote himself primarily to prose. In the 1990s he published mainly the novels *Recreation* (1992), *The Moscoviad* (1993) and *Perverzion* (1996).

The decade closed with his fourth novel, *Twelve Circles* (2003), which was perceived by a section of the public as unacceptable in Ukraine's problematic journey to the West. As is typical of Andrukhovych, the protagonist is a poet. This time the poet is Bohdan Ihor Antony (1909–1937), a somewhat neglected author whom Andrukhovych also dealt with in his dissertation. In the novel, he offers a fictional biography of the poet, disrupting stereotypical perceptions and presenting the poet as "the Jim Morisson of the 1930s." The Lviv publishing house Ukrainian Books refused to sell the novel as anti-Ukrainian.

Andrukhovych is not the type of author who aesthetically separates himself from reality, entering and re-entering social discussions as a public figure. In the past, he has polemicised with the idea of preserving the Donbas as Ukrainian territory, as well as the possibility of Ukraine joining the EU and NATO, and called for a moratorium on the promotion of the controversial Ukrainian national leader Stepan Bandera, as well as the revivalists Taras Shevchenko, Hryhoriy Skovoroda and Ivan Franko. The ultra-nationalist Right Sector therefore branded him cynical, cosmopolitan, liberal, even a saboteur and Kremlin henchman.

Andrukhovych was involved in the pro-Western "Orange Revolution" and actively participated in the Maidan demonstrations. He reflects on the Ukrainian situation, Ukrainian-Russian relations or the dynamic space of Central Europe in his essays such as My Europe (with A. Stasiuk, 2004) or in a book-length interview with Andruchovych conducted by Polish journalist Paweł Smoleński, *Šče ne vmerla i ne vmre* (2014).

Among Andruchovych's other books are *The Secret* (2007), *Lexicon of Intimate Cities* (2011), *Lovers of Justice* (2018) and *Radio Night* (2020), and among his essays *Disorientation in Landscape* (1999), *The Devil Hides in Cheese* (2006) and *Here Lies Fantomas* (2015).

He has received the Leipzig Book Prize for European Understanding (2006), the Angelus Literary Prize for Central Europe (2006), the Hannah Arendt Prize for Political Thought (2014) and the Václav Burian Prize for Contribution to Central European Dialogue (2019).

He translates from German (R. M. Rilke, Fritz von Herzmanovsky-Orlando), English (William Shakespeare), Russian (B. Pasternak, O. Mandelstam) and Polish (Cz. Miłosz, T. Konwiski, B. Schulz). His texts have been translated and published in Poland, Germany, Canada, Hungary, Finland, Russia, Serbia, USA, Italy, Slovakia, Sweden, Spain, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Croatia and Belarus.

After the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, he stayed in Ivano-Frankivsk and is mainly engaged in journalistic activities.

The Moscoviad

Moskoviad was written from February to April 1992. In the words of one of the translators into Czech, Alexei Sevruk, the novel is prophetic: "What never ceases to fascinate me about Moskoviad is the almost oracular feeling with which Andrukhovych was able to outline the possible threats that the world – and Ukraine in particular – will face in the near future."

The protagonist is the Ukrainian poet Otto Vilhelmovych von F. The narrator of the novel addresses him in the second person singular, as if he is constantly in dialogue with him, constantly talking to his stylized alter ego. In director Pařízek's stage adaptation, Otto appears in a dual (ambivalent?) form, played by Stanislav Majer and Martin Pechlát. Along a distinct vertical axis, he descends from the heights of the seventh floor of the Moscow Literary Institute's accommodation facility, through a profane space comprising a beer hall, his mistress's apartment, a cafeteria on the Arbat and the Children's World department store, and into Moscow's underworld. His journey evokes a shamanic journey along the axis mundi. But it is not a metaphysically noble journey, it is carnivalesque and postmodernly decadent, i.e., Roma people can be called "gypsies", homosexuals "faggots", women can be depicted primarily as sex objects, etc. It wanders between noble ideas and reckless behaviour. It is Sancho Panza and Don Quixote combined. He is a clown, a drunk, an egomaniac, a bankrupt and a KGB collaborator. And a Ukrainian poet, of course.

Given the author's biography, it seems that Andrukhovych is describing his own experiences during his Moscow stay at the Maxim Gorky Literary Institute. In his own words, he himself is no longer able to distinguish between what has happened, what is taken from urban folklore and what is fiction that has reciprocally entered urban folklore (e.g., the story about the lyrical young men Ruslan who died during his pilgrimage in search of vodka). Andrukhovych's biography should be treated with caution, given the author's penchant for irony and mystification. And besides, it is not important at all, we are at the carnival of history!

Evil from the Kremlin: Translator and Kiev native Alexei Sevruk quotes from the "fortune-telling" novel Moscoviadl Reflex.cz; 06-12-2022.

History's carnival: a dissident's autobiography is a comprehensive book of memoirs by another Ukrainian author and Soviet dissident Leonid Plyushch (1938–2015).

The purity of the carnival ceremony lies in breaking the ideological marble. The official authorities suddenly find themselves at the bottom of the social ladder and the fool (or poet) becomes a hero, with all his negative qualities, his drunkenness, vulgarity and perversions. All authorities can, even must, be ridiculed. What does Otto von F., the intrepid Orpheus singer, discover in the Moscow underground? Deposed Soviet top brass in masks of famous Russian greats babbling foolishly about a return to power. It's ridiculous, unbelievable, impossible! They're just shadows, ancient demons and goblins. But they are also the materialization of a bad conscience, fears and phobias hidden in the dark levels of his own soul. Our poet, like the shaman in the underworld, has no choice but death. But it is a symbolic death, because the carnival is only a temporary state. The next morning is sure to come, like another terrible hangover, in some other hostel, with some other Masha or Dasa. And our hero will again be totally unprepared for the fact that the declassed rulers and generals, seemingly long-dead idols, will rise with him to begin their next campaign through contemporary Europe.

Libor Svoboda: From the History of Ukraine in the 20th Century

Location and formation

Ukraine is located at the boundary of vast steppes stretching far beyond the Caspian Sea, deep into Central Asia, the forested plains, the Carpathian Mountains, the Balkans, and the northern coasts of the Black and Azov Seas. While the west, centre and north of present-day Ukraine have been predominantly inhabited by Slavic populations since the first millennium, the steppe areas to the south and east have been dominated by nomadic tribes, mostly of Turkic origin, since antiquity. The strategic location, fertile land and mineral resources were the reasons why Tatars, Lithuanians, Poles, Russians and Turks fought over this territory from the early Middle Ages.

The formation of the Ukrainian nation and the territories that make up the Ukrainian Republic was a long and complex process that lasted nearly 1,000 years. For centuries, the present-day Ukrainian territory was divided among several state formations (Kievan Rus, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, the Ottoman Empire, the Urs, Austria-Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the USSR). Ukraine was not finally formed within its present borders until 1954, when Crimea was annexed to it.

Ukraine is a typical multi-ethnic state. Its distinctive feature has always been and still is its national, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. In addition to Ukrainians, there have been and are Ruthenians, Russians, Poles, Tatars, Jews, Greeks, Armenians, Romanians, Roma, as well as Czechs and Germans. The complicated history and the alternation and clash of different ethnic and cultural influences have been reflected in the language, culture and social and religious life of Ukraine and its people.

Battlefield of the First World War

The First World War was a significant turning point in modern Ukrainian history. Thanks to the profound changes that began in 1914–1918, Ukraine became part of the great geopolitical changes that shook Central and Eastern Europe and ended with the collapse of the USSR. The reverberations of these events, however, continue to affect Eastern Europe, and Ukraine in particular, to this day.

Between 1914 and 1918, Ukraine was one of the main European battlefields. After the outbreak of the revolution in Russia, there was a civil war at the same time, and after its end, new struggles broke out, this time for control of the Ukrainian lands. The war did not finally end here until 1921.

In 1917–1921, Ukrainians made several attempts to create their own independent state, centred in Kiev and Lviv. But they were unlucky, unlike the Poles and the Czechoslovaks, they bet on the powers that lost the war, Germany and Austria-Hungary. On Ukrainian territory, the supporters of Ukrainian independence, the Poles, the Bolsheviks, the White Guards, the anarchist-socialist troops of Nestor Makhno, rural rebels, various militias and, by the end of the war, regular troops of the Austro-Hungarian and German armies were fighting among themselves. The fighting in 1917–1921 was accompanied by brutal violence against the civilian population. Jews were killed en masse, with at least 30,000 estimated to have perished in 1918–1920 alone. Pogroms were perpetrated by all warring parties. The symbol of the War of Independence was Semyon Petliura. For others, however, it also became a symbol of the anarchy and violence that swept across Ukraine on several occasions.

Most of Ukrainian territory became part of the USSR and Poland after 1921.

Collectivisation and famine

In 1921/22, a famine broke out in the USSR that was unparalleled in European history, with an estimated death toll of more than 5 million people. Central Volga and Ukraine were the worst affected. Crowds of starving peasants roamed the country. People fed on animals, leaves, tree bark, grass, rodents. According to contemporary testimonies, dogs and cats disappeared from the city streets in Donbas, cannibals were arrested and tried. The number of victims of wars and famine in Ukraine is reported to be between 1.5–2, according to some estimates up to 3 million.

In 1929, the first Five-Year Plan (1928–1932) was adopted to completely transform Soviet society, and one of its basic goals was collectivisation. At Stalin's instigation, it was decided in November 1929 that the liquidation of individual farming would be total and would be carried out in a short time. The forced collectivisation provoked strong opposition from the rural population. Resistance often grew into insurrection and affected entire regions. The army and air force were deployed in some parts of Ukraine and the North Caucasus. In Ukraine, the number of insurgents in 1930 was estimated at 40,000. Draconian punishments for fighting collectivisation were enacted. The undoubted symbol and finale of the bloody Soviet collectivisation were the events in Ukraine, southern Russia and Central Asia in 1932–1933, where, as a result of the failure of collectivisation, combined with the deliberate starvation of opponents of the changes being made, famine broke out, killing millions. In Ukraine alone, the number of victims is estimated at 3 million, sometimes as many as 4–5 million. The famine was followed in 1935–1937 by the so-called "Great Terror". According to approximate estimates, at least 4.4 million people died in Soviet Ukraine between 1927 and 1938.

Unfortunately, the events in the USSR did not receive much attention from the Western countries, which concentrated on the events in Germany. At a time of economic crisis and the rise of Hitler, criticism of the USSR was seen as a fabrication of Nazi propaganda. Above all, Western intellectuals, among whom the USSR was immensely popular, failed. The writer G. B. Shaw and former French Prime Minister Herriot visited Ukraine at the height of the famine. On their return they told stories of well-fed Ukrainian peasants. Shaw even boasted that he had never eaten as well as during his trip to the USSR. There were those who were well informed, but kept silent out of sheer opportunism. The most glaring example was The New York Times correspondent Walter Duranty, who knew well what was happening in the East, but kept quiet about it in his reporting. He even won a Pulitzer Prize in 1932 for his "impartial" reporting from the USSR.

The Bandera Movement

Western Ukraine, which was part of Poland, became the centre of Ukrainian nationalism. The leading political force was the OUN (Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists), which became increasingly radicalised. Between 1921 and 1939 it carried out almost 70 terrorist attacks. OUN leader Stepan Bandera was sentenced to life imprisonment for organising two assassinations.

After the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, western Ukraine became part of the USSR and after the invasion of German troops into the USSR in 1941, the whole of it was occupied by the Germans. The German policy towards Ukraine was aimed at the full subjugation of the occupied lands and the exploitation of natural and human resources. The tool of the occupying German administration was mass terror. Hundreds of thousands of Jews and Roma (Babi Yar) and Ukrainians were slaughtered. By the end of the war, 2.5 million people had been deported from here in search of work.

At the same time, however, there were also people who more or less cooperated with the occupiers. Ukrainian nationalists had the most ambitious plans in this respect. They took advantage of the situation and publicly declared Ukrainian independence in Lviv on 30 June 1941. The German response was swift and unequivocal. At the beginning of July 1941, the main initiators of the action, including S. Bandera, were arrested and sent to a concentration camp, where they remained until 1944. In 1942, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), abbreviated as the Banderovtsy, was formed from the Bandera wing of the OUN. Its main rivals were the Soviets and the Poles, and from 1943 it also fought against the Germans.

In 1942–1944, Ukraine became a battleground between various factions of the OUN, including the UPA, Soviet and Polish partisans, and the German occupiers. Paradoxically, the feuding parties entered into various short-term coalitions against each other. The war between the Ukrainians (UPA) and the Poles in 1942–1943 was fierce. It culminated in the so-called Volhynia massacre in 1943. The number of victims is very difficult to determine. Polish historians state about 400–600 thousand, Ukrainians 60–100 thousand.

The UPA fought against Soviet power even after the end of the war. Some of them tried to emigrate, especially through Czechoslovakia, but most of them were liquidated by the Soviets. The rest went underground in 1946–1947. Some smaller units survived until the early 1960s. In 1959, the leader of the UPA, S. Bandera, was assassinated by a KGB agent in Munich.

On the collapse of the USSR

Between 1945 and 1991, Ukraine was again part of the USSR. However, thoughts of Ukrainian independence still persisted. The Soviet authorities acted against these tendencies as they were accustomed to. Although the repression did not reach the scale of the Stalinist era, it was not without significance. They were directed mainly against the intelligentsia and opposition groups. They peaked in the 1960s and 1970s.

A landmark in Ukrainian history was the nuclear disaster at Chernobyl on 26 April 1986. Apart from the enormous economic and ecological losses, it was of fundamental and irreplaceable importance for the future political development of Ukraine, as it triggered a wave of civic activity unprecedented until then. The term 'Chernobyl' increasingly came to be used as a synonym for certain aspects of contemporary Ukrainian society (spiritual, linguistic, etc. Chernobyl). On 1 December 1991, a referendum was held in which 90.3 % of voters expressed support for the idea of an independent Ukraine. The referendum was the last blow struck by the USSR. On 8 December 1991, the leaders of the three most important Soviet republics, Boris Yeltsin (Russia), Leonid Kravchuk (Ukraine) and Stanislav Shushkevich (Belarus) met in Belarus and announced the dissolution of the USSR on 31 December 1991. New independent states appeared on the map of Europe instead of the Eastern powers. Ukraine was one of them.

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