For Polina

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Every effort has been made to contact all copyright holders. Any errors or omissions brought to my attention will be amended in future editions.

I would be remiss if this acknowledgement did not pay a special tribute to the very city of New York—for being an incessant harbor and powerful inspiration for the many creating in and outside the city.

Lastly, I would like to thank Polina Barskova for countless hours of flânerie and for our discussions of poets' turbulent worlds.

Ostap Kin

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Note on Transliteration

I use the conventional transliteration for names and locations in the body of the text. However, in the footnotes to my introduction, notes, and bibliographic information, I adhere to the Library of Congress system of transliteration.

In the introduction and notes, all translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

Introduction: Mapping the Ukrainian Poetry of New York

In the midst of ever-increasing quantity, anthologies enable individual voices to be heard above the collective noise.
—Czeslaw Milosz[1]

In the very city of New York literally every day poets read their work in dozens of different places: at museums, churches, universities, various institutions, libraries, theatres, galleries, cafes and private places. [. . .] Every place that has a roof is a place for poetry.
—Bohdan Boychuk[2]

This poetry is no hymn to the homeland; rather the gaze of the allegorist, as it falls on the city, is the gaze of alienated man. It is the gaze of the flaneur, whose way of life still conceals behind a mitigating nimbus the coming desolation of the big-city dweller.
—Walter Benjamin[3]

The Encounter

Legend has it that on a mid-fall day in 1966, while on an official trip to New York City as part of the Soviet-Ukrainian delegation to the annual convention of the United Nations, Ivan Drach—then a thirty-year-old aspiring poet and screenwriter—managed to escape the KGB personnel tailing the poet and headed into a district of the city totally unknown to him. After wandering around this strange neighborhood, the poet stopped before a cafeteria, entered it, and spotted a bearded, bespectacled man sitting in the corner as if waiting for someone. Drach approached him; the two men shook hands. The bearded man, believed to be the American poet Allen Ginsberg, lived nearby in an area known as the East Village. The Ukrainian poet did not know conversational English well, and Ginsberg did not know any Ukrainian. So the two sat for an hour in complete silence, just gazing at each other, and afterwards stood up and bid their farewell, noiselessly parting ways.

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1 Czeslaw Milosz, *Milosz's ABC*, trans. Madeline G. Levine (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), 39.

2 Bohdan Boychuk, "Tsikavyi lyst," *Suchasnist'* 6 (1979): 102.

3 Walter Benjamin, The Arcades Project, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2002), 10.

The legend is incredible enough to have actually taken place. (What happened for sure, though, is that Drach did read at the international literary festival in Sorrento, Italy, in July 1967, along with Allen Ginsberg and the Austrian poet Ingeborg Bachmann. Later, the whole group of poets set out to meet the great American literary expatriate, Ezra Pound.[4]) How could these two important poets of their generation—one American, one Ukrainian—relate to each other? How was their silent yet meaningful encounter influenced by their environment—a cafeteria in Manhattan, a locale designated for such chance encounters, these meetings and almost-meetings? The appeal of this anecdote—not unlike perhaps the most important urban poem of the modern age, "À une Passante" ("To a Passerby") by Charles Baudelaire—lies in its desire to find the ideal urban language.

This anthology is dedicated to such encounters between the poets and the city.

The anthology's title is inspired by two poems contained in the collection, which bear two vital thematic components: the city of New York and the genre of elegy. An elegy is a poem about distance (and, in its original meaning, about death and mourning). In his volume *A Poet's Glossary*, Edward Hirsch defines the elegy as "a poem of mortal loss and consolation" and suggests that "[t]he American elegist in particular seems to suffer from [...] a 'polar privacy,' a dark sense of isolation, of displacement from traditional settings of grief and the consolations of community."[5] It may be risky but worth trying to amend Hirsch's definition to substitute American elegists for Ukrainian elegists in America or simply for Ukrainian elegists, too. It helps us understand that periods of drastic life changes—such as immigration, escape, and exile—will have a serious impact on the author from which a new sense of lyrical optics emerges. I want to call this new sense an elegy.[6] Ukrainian poets kept in mind that the elegy is defined by distance. For these poets, the city of New York had never really been *their* city but that did not deter them. Their writing, in the end, suggests a loving elegy for a city (an urban object

4 Interview with Ivan Drach in Koncha-Ozerna, July 2017.

5 Edward Hirsch, *A Poet's Glossary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014), 196, 198.

6 It has been also suggested that "New York poems might be by nature elegiac, at least for the writing of native New Yorkers, in that so many of the places in them were the haunts of—and then became haunted by—the poet's childhood" (John Hollander, "Foreword," in *I Speak of the City: Poems of New York*, Stephen Wolf, ed. [New York: Columbia University Press, 2007], xxv).

of desire) that they cannot fully appropriate. This distance, or even lack, only sharpens their appreciation.

The Roots of Ukrainian Poetry about New York

Ukrainian poetry written about and in New York developed more or less in parallel with the establishment of the Ukrainian community in the city. It might even be ventured that as soon as a community settles in an area, it works to establish some sort of printing press. Different diasporic waves produced different kinds of publications. With the first wave of Ukrainian immigration, which took place at the end of the nineteenth century predominantly from what is now known as Western Ukraine, came one of the first Ukrainian newspapers to be published on the East Coast; the New York-based *Svoboda* was established in 1893 and continues to be in print. The first wave of immigration had little cultural output but nonetheless managed to establish points that would later be transformed into a net of Ukrainian institutions in the city.[7] In addition, the twentieth century brought the poetic voice to the forefront of the Ukrainian diaspora. With each new wave and generation, Ukrainian diasporic poetry gained complexity, volume, and significance, culminating after World War II, with the appearance of the Third Wave.

New York City is powerfully associated with culture and literature at large, and poetry in particular. The city hosts a variety of *places of poetry* (such as publishing houses, reading venues, libraries, and even book clubs).[8] Newcomers to the city, belonging to differing backgrounds, interacted with the city's cultural aura to create both immigrant communities and literature about their experiences. Ukrainian literature in and about New York was no exception: it made its mark with the creation of journals, publishing houses, readings series, and, most importantly, ardent discussion, through which the city's writers were able to encounter their audiences.

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7 On the account of the development of Ukrainian literature in the United States, see George Grabowicz, "The Voices of Ukrainian Émigré Poetry," *Canadian Slavonic Papers* 28, no. 2 (June 1986): 157–173; George S. N. Luckyj, *Ukrainian Literature in the Twentieth Century: A Reader's Guide* (Toronto: Shevchenko Scientific Society; University of Toronto Press, 1992), esp. chap. 7, "The Second Emigration and Diaspora," 95–103; Bohdan Rubchak, "Literatura." *Entsyklopediia Ukrains'koi diaspory*, Vol. 1, *Spolucheni Shtaty Ameryky, A–K*, 39–46 (New York: Naukove Tovarystvo im. Shevchenka v Amerytsi, 2009).

8 For a useful attempt of history and periodization of literature written in New York City, see Susan Edmiston and Linda D. Cirino, *Literary New York: A History and Guide* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith Publishers, 1991).

So how was the city portrayed by these poets? What lenses did they use for their observations and expressions?[9] Those who came to stay and those who came to visit approached cities in different ways. Historically, the Ukrainian diaspora in the twentieth century gravitated around three major hubs—Warsaw, Prague, and New York—and a few less significant but nonetheless important cities such as Berlin, London, and Paris.[10] New York served as a crucial harbor for Ukrainians from the end of the nineteenth century to the present day—both for those who decided to immigrate and those who wanted to travel and encounter the "New World." Literati of various inclinations, poets included, were among those displaced. And each poet had a different story, a separate and intimate encounter with the city.

Outlining the Goals

New York Elegies: Ukrainian Poetry on the City, an anthology of Ukrainian poetry about New York City, includes poems written by Ukrainian poets between 1922 and 2016.[11] The anthology presents an almost century-long

9 For a source of scholarly discussions of various themes in regard to the city of New York, see Cyrus R. K. Patell and Bryan Waterman, eds. *The Cambridge Companion to Literature of New York* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

10 The cities of political, cultural, and other dominance outside of Ukraine are a topic yet to be researched. Here, we can only outline the possibilities suggested by scholars of the Ukrainian community in exile. George Luckyj lists the following North American cities: New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, Montreal, Toronto, and Winnipeg (George Luckyj, *Ukrainian Literature in Twentieth Century: A Reader's Guide* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992]); Maria Rewakowicz suggests another triangle of cities significant to the Ukrainian diaspora: New York, Warsaw, and Prague (Maria Rewakowicz, *Literature, Exile, Alterity: The New York Group of Poets* [Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014]).

11 A list of selected anthologies of American poetry about New York City may include (but does not limit itself to) the following publications: *The City That Never Sleeps: Poems of New York*, edited by Shawkat M. Toorawa, foreword by Anne Pierson Wiese (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2015); *Writing New York: A Literary Anthology*, edited by Philipp Lopate (New York: Library of America, 2008); *I Speak of the City: Poems of New York*, selected and edited by Stephen Wolf, foreword by John Hollander (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007); *Broken Lands: Poems of Brooklyn*, edited by Julia Spicher Kasdorf and Michael Tyrell, foreword by Hal Sirowitz (New York: New York University Press, 2007); *New York Poets II: An Anthology*: *From Edwin Denby to Bernadette Mayer*, edited by Mark and Trevor Winkfield (Manchester: Carcanet, 2006); *The New York Poets*: *Frank O'Hara, John Ashbery, Kenneth Koch, James Schuyler: An Anthology*, edited with an introduction by Mark Ford (Manchester: Carcanet, 2004); *Poetry After 9–11: An Anthology of New York Poets*, edited by Dennis Loy Johnson, introduction by Alicia Ostriker (New York: Melville House, 2002); *Poems of New York*, selected and edited by Elizabeth Schmidt (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002);

corpus of poetic text, including works by poets belonging to three distinct waves of Ukrainian immigration to the United States, visiting poets from Soviet Ukraine, and poets who moved or traveled to the United States after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, when Ukraine regained its independence.

New York Elegies aims to shed light on the previously unexamined space of Ukrainian literature by providing examples of poetic works in both the Ukrainian original and the English translation for scholars of Slavic literatures, urban studies, and diaspora studies, and for those with a interest in poetry. This anthology highlights how, despite and/or due to a number of historical and political obstacles, Ukrainian literature over the course of past century proved reactive to contemporary international literary tendencies. This collection of poems about the Ukrainian New York offers a multi-layered panorama of fresh urban visions, comprised of texts composed by poets who had (or continue to have) diverse fates. *New York Elegies* attempts to demonstrate how descriptions and evocations of New York City are connected to various stylistic modes and topical questions urgent to Ukrainian poetry throughout its development. The collection thus gives readers the opportunity to view New York through various poetic and stylistic lenses.[12]

The texts are grouped into three sections: (a) interwar poetry from the early 1920s through the late 1930s, written by visiting poets from Soviet Ukraine and émigré poets based in the United States, as well as by poets who never visited New York, such as Mykhail Semenko and Oleksa Slisarenko; (b) post-World War II poetry, written predominantly by newly emigrated poets from Ukraine who left during the war, as well as by visiting Soviet Ukrainian poets between the mid-1940s and mid-1970s; and (c) post-1991

New York: Poems, edited by Howard Moss (New York: Avon, 1980); *An Anthology of New York Poets*, edited by Ron Padgett and David Shapiro (New York: Random House, 1970). Of particular interest are early individual collections and anthologies dedicated to New York that date back to the late 1900s and 1920s, such as *Ballads of Old New York*, ed. Arthur Guiterman (New York: Harper & Bros., 1920); *City Tides*: Archie Austin Coates (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1918); *Cobblestones*: David Sentner (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1921); *Manhattan*, ed. John Myers O'Hara (Portland, ME: Smith & Sale, 1915); Charles Hanson Towne *Manhattan* (New York: M. Kennerley, 1909).

12 A useful approach might be a comparison between how American writers and those who arrived to New York viewed and depicted the city; see Stephen Miller, *Walking New York: Reflections of American Writers from Walt Whitman to Teju Cole* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015).

poetry written by both visiting and immigrating poets from a newly independent Ukraine.

The poems belonging to the first period are characterized by their close connection to the Futurist tradition emerging at that time in Ukraine and cultivated among Ukrainian authors residing in the United States. For example, one of the most prolific Ukrainian New York-based poets of the time, Mykola Tarnovsky, described in detail his Leftist views on the city's turbulent nature. Tarnovsky was employed by Ukrainian leftist organizations and edited several magazines, some of which were dedicated to literature. In the texts by these left-leaning authors, the city serves as a place for the political and social to manifest itself. Futurist aesthetics and socialist politics become intertwined. Although these poets were enthralled with the city's flashing lights, they also opposed what they believe to be a sharp division between the city's rich and poor, the privileged and the outcast.

The second section contains a significant number of poets, both established and emerging, who fled Ukraine during World War II. The established poets include authors such as Yuri Kosach, Yevhen Malanyuk, and Vadym Lesych, to name a few. These poets published their first books during the interwar period of the 1920s and 1930s.[13] Their move west was crucial for their actual survival and, no less significant, for the survival of their creative oeuvre. Those who belong to the group of emerging poets (for example, the New York Group of poets, which I will turn to later) are those who left Ukraine as teenagers, received their education in the West, and thus had different perspective toward literature, Ukrainian or otherwise.

These two groups disagreed on several questions: Which direction should the poetic gaze look to in the situation of exile? And what is to be done with the constructed feeling of nostalgia? According to Svetlana Boym, nostalgia is "an affective yearning for a community with a collective memory, a longing for a continuity in a fragmented world. Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals."[14] In other words, should Ukrainian diasporic poetry be nostalgic, fueled by the memories of the Past, yearning for the abandoned realm of Ukrainian territory and culture? Or should it be urgent, directed at the poet's new environment, that of

13 For a take on Iurii Kosach's life in the immigration and the writer's adaptation to a new world, see Askold Melnyczuk, "Remembering and Forgetting," *Boston Globe*, April 4, 2015. https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books/2015/04/04/remembering-and-forgetting/XqrhKryvRSCUxi7xqmWMLK/story.html (accessed: November 30, 2017).

14 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books), xiv.