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I am thrilled that legendary artist Vlodko Kaufman and his unique talents are part of this anthology project and am grateful to him for providing his original drawings for the book's design. Mr. Kaufman is a visual and performance artist, and is also Artistic Director of the Dzyga Art Association in Lviv, Ukraine. His work is tightly intertwined with many branches of the Ukrainian literary scene. Connected with Ukrainian literature since the 1970s when, as a student at the School for Applied Art in Lviv, Kaufman began associating with Hrytsko Chubai, he has designed many of the publications of post-Soviet Ukrainian writers. The writers featured in this anthology have regularly presented at Dzyga over the past twenty years.

Finally, I would like to thank all the authors who participated in the Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Series for trusting me, for agreeing to take part in the Series, and for making it so pleasurable and rewarding to present Ukrainian literature in the U.S. over the past nine years.

Mark Andryczyk

The Kennan Institute/ Harriman Institute Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Series

In 2008, the Kennan Institute and the Harriman Institute's Ukrainian Studies Program at Columbia University initiated a series showcasing contemporary Ukrainian literature through events with Ukrainian writers.

Since the launch of the series, Ukraine has frequently appeared in news headlines, but too often associated with stories about continuing challenges to Ukraine's sovereignty and stability, or about the country's ongoing struggles with corruption and divisive domestic politics. In addition, much of the analytical research and writing about Ukraine coming out of the think tank and university communities has also tended to focus primarily on negative stories about Ukraine's many challenges.

This context makes it all the more important for institutions like the Harriman and the Kennan to collaborate to support the Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Series. Those who have attended our lectures, either in Washington or in New York, have come away with a sense of Ukraine far deeper and more profound than what can be gleaned from discussions of gas pipelines, Little Green Men, or IMF lending packages.

The Kennan Institute supports this series because of our enduring commitment to the study of Ukraine and its region as a whole, which must include a strong foundation of culture, history, art, and literature. In the same spirit, the Kennan Institute in Ukraine has played a key role

in helping to develop the strategy for and promotion of Ukrainian cultural diplomacy in Europe, North America and beyond. In partnership with Ukraine's Foreign Ministry, the Kennan Institute's Kyiv Office held the second annual Cultural Diplomacy Forum in April 2016, with 300 participants. Over the summer of 2016, the Kennan Institute hosted a major art installation by renowned Ukrainian artist Victor Sydorenko. And President Petro Poroshenko specifically thanked the Kennan Institute for its efforts toward developing Ukraine's cultural diplomacy during his 2016 address to Ukraine's parliamentary body, the Verkhovna Rada.

The Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Series is likewise an important component of the Ukrainian Studies Program at the Harriman Institute, Columbia University. The Harriman's Ukrainian Studies Program organizes courses, lectures, and conferences in Ukrainian studies featuring an international array of specialists in Ukrainian history, politics, language, and literature. Recent conferences organized by the program have focused on non-conformity and dissent in the Soviet bloc, media in Ukraine, and the city of Kharkiv as an important center of Ukrainian culture. Events organized by the Ukrainian Film Club of Columbia University, together with the Literature Series, reflect the Program's emphasis on contemporary Ukraine. Both the Kennan and the Harriman recognize the importance in having an awareness of Ukraine's culture when analyzing the country today.

As political and economic upheavals persist in Ukraine, public life seems unimaginable without the cultural accomplishments that have continued to enliven Ukrainian society ever since the collapse of pervasive Soviet censorship on literary and artistic expression. Observing Ukraine through its literary landscape offers an opportunity to understand much of the transformation that has occurred since it gained its independence. The creative energy unleashed in Ukrainian literature in recent decades has displayed such a variety of styles, themes, and approaches that readers, many of them young, continue to be enthralled by literary depictions of Ukrainian life: the lingering vestiges of the old Soviet system, the new freedom of open borders, the unremitting turbulence of social and political life, and the individual search for meaning and fulfillment amidst these changing circumstances.

Introduction

quietly
the gloom
scuttles

deeper and deeper
evening digs a well

here geese
return from the meadow:
their procession walking through the evening
like a white
tunnel

it's as though the geese
are small bundles of the white chalk of days—
God's big bottles walking to the white[1]

Ivan Malkovych

In his poem "an evening (goose) pastoral," Ivan Malkovych sets white geese against the backdrop of the encroaching darkness of evening. The geese act as a connection to the fleeting day as a cycle of time runs its course, thus preserving the light of the day that has just passed.

1 This is a fragment of the Ivan Malkovych poem "an evening (goose) pastoral." It can be found in its entirety on page 241. The poem was translated by Michael M. Naydan. Unless otherwise indicated, all comments on figures, places, and cultural and social contexts in the translations contained in this volume are mine.

This book, *The White Chalk of Days: The Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Series Anthology,* also marks the completion of a cycle, as it captures the days during which thirteen Ukrainian authors shared their words with audiences in the United States, illuminating dark spots in the existence and the culture of their country. This volume is a collection of translations of literary works written by many of the leading authors that shape the landscape of today's contemporary Ukrainian literature. The poems and prose works were presented at forums in New York City and Washington, D.C. as part of a series co-organized by the Ukrainian Studies Program at the Harriman Institute, Columbia University, and the Kennan Institute at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. The Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Series (2008-2016) hosted today's Ukrainian literati, who read and discussed their writings and also shared their views on the cultural and political developments taking place in post-Soviet Ukraine. The year 2016 marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of Ukrainian political independence. This era of independence also corresponds to a new era in the history of Ukrainian literature, which is characterized by vigor, experimentation and upheaval. The texts in this volume are vibrant examples of this period and demonstrate many of the key dynamics prevalent in the Ukrainian cultural movements that marked it.

* * *

A greater degree of freedom for artistic expression in Ukrainian literature began just before the country's political independence, in the final half-decade of the Soviet Union's existence. The policies of perestroika and glasnost led to a general loosening of the restrictions that had shackled art in the Soviet Union since the early 1930s, when Socialist Realism was established as the only officially sanctioned style of art. The Communist Party, through the Union of Soviet Writers, assigned which subjects should be treated in art (and which should not) throughout the USSR and often imposed additional restrictions on the artistic expressions of the various ethnic groups in the Soviet Union. Such curtailing allowed the colonial center to maintain stereotypical

and condescending depictions of peripheral national groups in Soviet art.[2] Thus, a Ukrainian hero in a novel did not merely have to be shown working toward the proletariat's emancipation and espousing the ideals of communism, as Soviet Russian protagonists did, but he also needed to be depicted with his national traits reduced to condescending clichés and quirky peculiarities. Ukrainian writers who attempted to create outside these confines of Soviet Socialist Realism were ignored, marginalized and repressed. Some writers, of course, were able to carve out a measure of creative freedom within this system by using Aesopian language and engaging the reader to "read between the lines." It was not until the second half of the 1980s, however, that there emerged a growing aesthetic freedom in Soviet cultural policy; also at this time, much Soviet Ukrainian literature that had previously been hidden or written "for the drawer" began to be published in the open.

Alongside the widening breadth of what could be published as Soviet Ukrainian literature during glasnost came the rehabilitation of many—but not all—Ukrainian authors that had officially been branded bourgeois nationalists and thus, enemies of the Soviet people. These writers, as well as émigré authors that had been publishing freely outside of Ukraine, had been erased from the pages of Ukrainian cultural history, and their books were absent from the shelves of libraries and bookstores in Ukraine. Additionally, a new generation of Ukrainian writers would emerge in the late 1980s, a generation that would be the first to enjoy complete creative freedom following Ukraine's independence in 1991. These writers often are referred to as the *visimdesiatnyky*—the 80s generation of writers. Although the term *visimdesiatnyky* is often used in discussions of late Soviet and post-Soviet Ukrainian culture and there are several publications that group authors under that label, it is important to understand that it is not a formal group with strict allegiance or membership. Rather, it is a term that, like other generational terms, groups individuals who are varied and rather loosely linked. The murkiness and fluidity of the boundaries between these generations

2 For a thorough analysis of cultural imperialism, Russia, and Ukraine, see Myroslav Shkandrij, *Russia and Ukraine: Literature and the Discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to Postcolonial Times* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001).

notwithstanding, such terms help to explain general developments in Ukrainian culture at this time.

In the first decade of Ukraine's independence, the *visimdesiatnyky* focused their talents and energies on leading Ukrainian culture out of the restrictions that had been imposed on it by its colonizers. However, these writers also worked to free themselves from many of the frameworks that had been placed on Ukrainian culture by the inherited Ukrainian national tradition, which curtailed Ukrainian artists' aesthetic freedom by requiring that their art serve the ongoing cause of Ukrainian emancipation. These artists were expected to express their patriotism and to adhere to themes that were largely established by Ukrainian populist culture of the nineteenth century. Post-Soviet Ukrainian literature thus (1) experienced an onrush of creative openness while (2) being reconnected to the substantial Ukrainian cultural achievements in the twentieth century that had been banned, and (3) simultaneously explored the world outside the Soviet Union, one that had been closed off from for many decades. All three of these exciting developments provided the 80s generation of writers with particular zeal to dismantle the colonial and national frameworks that had been placed on Ukrainian art in the past.

And dismantle these systems they did. Several writers found postmodernism to be an attractive concept and employed many of its characteristic stylistic features in this deconstruction.[3] Having been dictated certain official Soviet truths for many years, which they knew themselves to be false, Ukrainian intellectuals found postmodern doubt in absolute truth to be quite attractive while taking on issues of their colonized past in their art. Meanwhile, other writers of various generations protested that an engagement with fashionable Western postmodernism was inauthentic, and that independent Ukrainian literature

3 One leading Ukrainian scholar uses the term "post-Chernobyl literature" to describe Ukrainian Postmodernism. See Tamara Hundorova, *Pisliachornobyl's'ka biblioteka: ukraïns'kyi literaturnyi postmodern* (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2005). Hundorova treats the Chernobyl explosion as a watershed, the catastrophic effects of which thrust Ukraine's *visimdesiatnyky* to aggressively challenge existing paradigms in Ukraine's cultural sphere.

should instead look inward to produce something uniquely Ukrainian. What resulted in the 1990s was a healthy, though often cantankerous, open debate on the face of new Ukrainian culture and the publication of works written on many themes and styles—particularly significant achievements when compared with literature published in Ukraine just a decade earlier.

The *visimdesiatnyky* were able to deconstruct the role of the author in a literary work in general and the Ukrainian author in the Ukrainian literary tradition in particular. The potency of language, especially the Ukrainian language, were scrutinized in their writings. These writers exposed clichéd, colonial depictions of Ukrainians and shattered the restrictions that had limited the themes that could be treated in Ukrainian literature.[4] The writers deliberately engaged with many taboo subjects, such as sex, slang, and substance abuse, and they also experimented in form and narration. The previously-closed off world, especially the West and its lofty culture, as well as its pop culture, were often referenced in this post-Soviet Ukrainian literature. This was a literature that searched through Ukrainian and world history and culture to begin assembling the fragile new post-Soviet Ukrainian identity. It was an art that also reflected the disarray and disappointment of this period as corruption and dysfunction steered the post-Soviet country. Ukrainian culture was discarded by the government, and largely left on its own to survive with minimal financial and structural support from the new Ukrainian state. The experiences of the previous generation of Ukrainian writers, sometimes called the 70s generation of Ukrainian writers (*simdesiatnyky*), were a particularly important point of reference for the *visimdesiatnyky* when they experienced such difficulties.

The *simdesiatnyky* generation came on the heels of the 60s generation (*shistdesiatnyky*), who had revitalized Soviet Ukrainian culture during the Khrushchev thaw. Closely intertwined with the Ukrainian dissident movement, the *shistdesiatnyky* organized protests

4 I have published a monograph that addresses these phenomena, and others, in post-Soviet Ukrainian literature. See Mark Andryczyk, *The Intellectual as Hero in 1990s Ukrainian Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

against systemic russification and sought to protect and develop Ukrainian culture within the paradigms of Soviet cultural ideology. Their successes in invigorating literature in the late 1950s and early 1960s, however, were met with a vicious crackdown from the state between 1965-72, including repression and arrests. Inspired by the rebirth and defiance that the *shistdesiatnyky* had initiated, but frightened by the brutal response of the authorities to their successes, the *simdesiatnyky* maneuvered their cultural activity underground. Circulating banned books, including the *shistdesiatnyky*'s *samvydav* (samizdat) writings, these artists developed Ukrainian culture outside official Soviet cultural policy. In Kyiv this cultural development was led by writers of the *Kyivska Shkola* (Kyiv School), which included Vasyl Holoborodko, Viktor Kordun, Mykola Vorobiov, and Mykhailo Hryhoriv. In Lviv, its main figures were Ihor and Iryna Kalynets and a creative group centered around Hrytsko Chubai.

Hrytsko Chubai's circle also included, among others, Oleh Lysheha, Mykola Riabchuk, Victor Morozov, and later, Yuri Vynnychuk. The group would gather at one another's homes to share their new poems, songs, and paintings. In 1971, they released a *samvydav* almanac entitled *Skrynia* (The Chest), which featured original poems, translations, and an apolitical call for creative non-conformity. The authorities confiscated the journal: its contributors were repressed and their creative activity was halted. The literary works of the *simdesiatnyky* could not be published until the late 1980s. However, the *simdesiatnyky* were very influential on the subsequent generation of Ukrainian artists. Inspired by the quality of their art and by their ability to create freely outside the official Soviet centralized system of culture, the *visimdesiatnyky* absorbed many lessons that proved to be useful during the disorder that engulfed post-Soviet Ukraine.

Thus, as it turns out, during late Soviet times a generation of young Ukrainian artists—the *visimdesiatnyky*—was, in essence, being prepared for the opportunity for free creative expression that had been craved by Ukrainian intellectuals for many years. When that chance finally emerged during glasnost and then expanded with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the 80ers, together with survivors among the

shistdesiatnyky and *simdesiatnyky*, guided the development of Ukrainian culture in post-Soviet Ukraine.[5]

* * *

The Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Series featured writers of various generations, whose literary works have helped form the face of post-Soviet Ukrainian literature. Representatives from the *visimdesiatnyky* include Vasyl Gabor (b. 1959), Yuri Andrukhovych (b. 1960), Ivan Malkovych (b. 1961), Andrey Kurkov (b. 1961), and Viktor Neborak (b. 1961). Younger writers in the series, such as Taras Prokhasko (b. 1968), Oleksandr Boichenko (b. 1970), Marjana Savka (b. 1973), Andriy Bondar (b. 1974), and Serhiy Zhadan (b. 1974) have often presented their work together with the *visimdesiatnyky,* and have been published alongside them in various almanacs and anthologies. Sophia Andrukhovych (b. 1982) and Lyuba Yakimchuk (b. 1985) are among the most prominent young writers to have made a significant impact on the Ukrainian literary scene. Works of the *simdesiatnyky* were also featured in the Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Series. Yuri Vynnychuk (b. 1952) was a guest of the series in 2010, and the poetry of two other 70ers writers, Hrytsko Chubai (1949-1982) and Oleh Lysheha (1949-2014), was present in the series though the music of Taras Chubai. Taras Chubai is Hrytsko's son, who, along with Yuri Vynnychuk and Andriy Panchyshyn, co-founded the *Ne Zhurys!* (Don't Worry!) cabaret ensemble in the late 1980s. *Ne Zhurys!* combined satire with traditional and modern Ukrainian culture throughout the late 1980s and 1990s and celebrated Ukraine's growing freedom on numerous stages, both in Ukraine and abroad. Taras Chubai wrote, recorded

5 For informative, in-depth investigations of this period in Ukrainian literature, see Marko Pavlyshyn, "Post-Colonial Features in Contemporary Ukrainian Culture," *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies* 6 (1992), no. 2: 41-55; Solomea Pavlychko, "Facing Freedom: The New Ukrainian Literature," translated by Askold Melnyczuk, in *From Three Worlds: New Writing from Ukraine*, ed. Ed Hogan (Boston: Zephyr Press, 1996); and Vitaly Chernetsky, *Mapping Postcommunist Cultures: Russia and Ukraine in the Context of Globalization* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).

and performed many songs using his father's poetry, the poetry of Lysheha, and the poetry of the *visimdesiatnyky* writers as lyrics. His popularity as a rock musician greatly spread the reach of this new and previously underground poetry in post-Soviet Ukraine. As part of the Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Series, Taras Chubai performed these songs, including ones based on the poems of Hrytsko Chubai and Oleh Lysheha, at the Harriman and Kennan institutes in April 2008.

One of the goals of the Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Series was to introduce today's leading Ukrainian authors to as wide a U.S. public as possible. To that end, all of its twenty-seven events were conducted in English. With the exception Taras Chubai's concerts, all Contemporary Ukrainian Series events consisted of a Ukrainian author reading their work and answering questions posed by the event's moderator between their readings, and a question and answer period with the audience. A handout with English-language translations of the texts was provided for the audience and, if necessary, an English-language interpreter was provided for the discussion. Sometimes existing translations were used for this purpose, but often new translations had to be made so that the writers could present their selected texts. As a result, a large body of new translations accumulated over the course of the series. It is these translations that make up the bulk of the contents of this anthology. In certain cases, translations that had appeared in previous publications and were utilized at series events have also been included. For Andrey Kurkov, who already had a great deal of his work translated into English, a translation of one as-yet untranslated work was made especially for the anthology. A goal was to have the anthology include as many texts that were featured at series events as possible and also to have it debut new translations that were inspired by the series and had never been published before. In other words, *The White Chalk of Days* is both a collection of literary works that initially comprised and now commemorates the Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Series and a volume collecting mostly new translations of the works of many leading Ukrainian writers.

As mentioned above, in addition to the reading of literary texts, the Contemporary Ukrainian Literature Series allowed audiences in New York and Washington, D.C. to hear the thoughts and opinions of