

CHRISTINA DIETL, KHRYSTYNA FOSTYAK,
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WAR IN UKRAINE

THEOLOGICAL, ETHICAL AND HISTORICAL REFLECTIONS

Aschendorff Verlag

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The Gender Aspect of Political Rhetoric and its Origins: The Case of Ukraine

Mariana Myrosh

This article examines the portrayal of Ukraine within the Russian Empire and contemporary Russian political discourse through a gendered metaphor, namely that of a woman. The hypothesis is that depicting Ukraine as a woman reflects its subordinate position within the imperial hierarchy. Contemporary examples, such as Vladimir Putin's rhetoric depicting Ukraine as a "krasavitsa" [beauty], highlight how this metaphor reinforces Ukraine's subordination. The study traces the historical origins of the term "Little Russia," from ecclesiastical roots to its influence on cultural and political identities in imperial discourse. Classic literary works, including Hryhoriy-Kvitka Osnovyanenko's "Marusya" and Taras Shevchenko's poetry, illustrate shifts in depicting Ukrainian women as symbols of national identity under imperial domination. Ukrainian Soviet-era literature, such as Valerian Pidmohylny's "A Little Drama," reflects the complex interplay between Ukrainian cultural identity and socio-political changes under Soviet rule. Mikhail Lermontov's "A Hero of Our Time" portrays Ukraine as an intriguing yet marginalised figure within colonial hierarchies. The research underscores the persistent metaphor of Ukraine as a feminine entity and highlights how Ukrainians have internalised and perpetuated this portrayal.

1. Introduction

Edward Said, the scholar who popularised one of the most well-known terms in colonial studies, *orientalism*, defined imperialism as the establishment of dominance over or the governing of territory that is remote, inhabited, and already owned by others[1]. Said proposed that, next to the intense attention given

1 Cf. Edward W. Said, Culture and Imperialism, New York 1994, 7. All internet links in this article were last accessed on 9 April 2024.

to the issue of the colonial economy, the cultural realm within the framework of imperialism is often overlooked. Moreover, he claimed that culture is one of the main reasons for the longevity of empires. It was not the militaristic or economic superiority that was detrimental to the metropolises' domination, rather, the acceptance of subordination by the colonised, which was fostered by the respective culture[2]. Herbert Schiller, who expanded upon some of Said's ideas, argued that while economic interests have historically played a central role in the politics of colonisation, they were veiled by the guise of cultural imperialism.[3]

Michel Foucault viewed every piece of culture as a battlefield. He offered a radical position on textual analysis, believing discourse, defined as the act of speaking, utilising words, and sharing words with others, is inherently an act of power. Therefore, within the framework of power dynamics, discourse is not just a performance of language features, e. g. syntax and lexicon, but is a dynamic force operating within the social realm[4]. Accordingly, text, in its widest definition, exerts power not only through the linguistic structures it uses but also through those which are absent. Similarly, Ferdinand de Saussure defined language as a closed system operating by binary oppositions[5]. This article delves into one of these binary oppositions, *male-female*, specifically within the framework of imperial discourse.

According to Gayatri Spivak, imperialistic ideology is highly gendered. Spivak defined imperialism as a continuation of the patriarchy, in which *female* is inherently perceived to be of lesser value than *male* and needs male guidance[6]. The alignment between the patriarchal representation of gender and the imperialist quest for legitimising dominance gave rise to the binary opposition of male-female that extended beyond the confines of gender discourse. The roots of the *female colony* trope can be traced back to the Enlightenment period. Although marked by significant geographical explorations, the Enlightenment period was also marred by violence and conquest, facilitated by major empires. The dynamics between the metropolis and the colony were notably one-sided, presupposing the subjugation of the latter. In the context of a patriarchal world,

2 Cf. ibidem, 11.

3 Cf. Herbert Schiller, Communication and Cultural Domination, New York 1976, 26.

4 Cf. Arnold I. Davidson, Introduction, in: Michel Foucault, Society Must Be Defended. Lectures at the Collège de France 1975–76, New York 2003, xv–xxiii, xx.

5 Cf. Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics, New York 2016, 86.

6 Cf. Gayatri C. Spivak, Can the Subaltern Speak?, in: Patrick Williams/Laura Chrisman (eds.), Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory. A Reader, Harlow et al. 1994, 66–111, 82.

this served as the foundation for metaphorically depicting their relationship as a man-woman partnership, with attributes ascribed to them during the Enlightenment. Typically, a woman was associated with emotionalism and, more broadly, with nature, while a man was linked to culture, rationality, and the distinct notions of humanity and civilisation.[7] Similar to a woman, the colony was perceived as helpless without the ruling empire, akin to a husband. A woman symbolised chaos, beckoning a man to instill order.[8] This metaphorical framework continues to influence contemporary geopolitical discourse.

Putin on multiple occasions emphasised that Ukraine left Russia with no choice while succinctly encapsulating the empire's mission.[9] He repeated over an extensive period that Ukraine's actions appeared so disordered that Russia found itself compelled to impose order through force. Metaphors depicting the relationship between Russia and Ukraine as that of a man/aggressor – female/victim dynamic have gained widespread recognition, with political experts and analysts increasingly adopting the illustration. For instance, in response to Oleksiy Arestovych, an adviser to the Office of the President of Ukraine from 2020 to 2023, who attributed the invasion primarily to Ukraine's constitutional development toward a Euro-Atlantic orientation, political analyst Vitaly Portnykov offered a compelling rebuttal. Portnykov asserted, "Perhaps she [referring to Ukraine] was dressed inappropriately, perhaps she smiled too much at him [referring to Russia as the maniac], or, conversely, was she too assertive? The truth remains that the aggressor attacked not due to the victim's attire or demeanour but rather out of a desire to inflict harm and destruction."[10]

7 Cf. Ewa M. Thompson, Imperial Knowledge. Russian Literature and Colonialism (Contributions to the Study of World Literature 99), Westport/CT – London 2000, 11.

8 Cf. Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, London 1956, 104.

9 Cf. Olena Roshchina, Putin Reiterates That Ukraine Never Existed and He Was Forced to Start War (3 November 2023). URL: https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2023/11/3/7427096. See also kremlin.ru, Владимир Путин ответил на вопросы журналистов [Vladimir Putin Answered Questions from Journalists] (22 December 2022). URL: http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70170.

10 Natalya Dulyaba, Віталій Портников: "Путін не стільки закінчує цю війну, скільки готується до наступної" [Vitaly Portnikov: "Putin Is Not So Much Ending This War as Preparing for the Next One"] (18 March 2022). URL: https://portal.lviv.ua/news/2022/03/18/vitalij-portnykov-putin-ne-stilky-zakinchuie-tsiu-vijnu-skilky-hotuietsia-do-nastupnoi. Own translation.

2. Contemporary Example

During a conference held on February 8, 2022, less than 20 days before the official Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin employed a striking metaphor in his discussion with French President Emmanuel Macron. The primary focus of their meeting was the Minsk agreements and the alleged inconsistency of Ukraine to implement them. When a journalist inquired whether Putin believed a diplomatic resolution to the escalating situation was possible, the Russian President responded with the following lines: "In Kyiv, they sometimes say that they will adhere to it [ed. the Minsk agreements], and then they say that it will destroy their country […], but: Like it or not – bear with it, my *beauty*![11] The imperative to fulfil [ed. the terms of the agreement] is undeniable."[12] These remarks by Putin obtained significant attention from many political leaders. Notably, White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki – reacting to a question of an interviewer who framed Putin's statement as something that "Russian speakers interpreted as a rape joke" – emphasised that any reference to rape is deeply concerning and unacceptable to the US government[13]. Also, Lithuanian Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė called Putin's rhetoric no less than "disgusting"[14]. Subsequently, Putin attempted to clarify his position, asserting that it was merely a saying from Russian folklore and "no personal dimension" was intended[15].

11 Originally in Russian: "Нравится, не нравится – терпи, моя красавица" (Nravitsa, ne nravitsa – terpi, moya krasavitsa). The closest English notions to the verb "терпеть" (terpeť) are "tolerance" and "endurance", and according to the scholar Andrey N. Kokhichko these were always an essential concept in domestic Russian folklore. Within the context of the latter, it could be interpreted as an ability to: "persistently and resignedly bear anything (pain, suffering, deprivation, distress, trouble, etc.) without opposing it or complaining" [Andrey N. Kokhichko, Endurance and Patience in Russian Mentality (On the Question of Tolerance), in: Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods 8/11 (2018) 974–981, 976].

12 Denys Karlovsky, Путін Зеленському про Мінські угоди: Подобається, не подобається – терпи, моя красуне! [Putin to Zelenskyi on the Minsk Agreements: Like It or Not – Bear With It, My Beauty!] (7 February 2022). URL: https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/02/7/7323164. Own translation.

13 Cf. whitehouse.gov, Press Briefing by Press Secretary Jen Psaki (9 February 2022). URL: https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/press-briefings/2022/02/09/press-briefing-by-press-secretary-jen-psaki-february-9-2022.

14 Radio Svoboda, Суботнє інтерв'ю. Інґріда Шимоніте, прем'єр-міністерка Литви [Saturday Interview. Ingrid Šimonite, Prime Minister of Lithuania] (12 February 2022), 16:00–16:11. URL: https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/31676754.html. Own translation.

15 Alyona Mazurenko, "Подобається, не подобається": Путін пояснив свої слова ["Like It or Not": Putin Explained His Words] (10 February 2022). URL: https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/02/10/7323531. Own translation.

Aside from political shortsightedness, Putin's statement revealed his perspective of Ukraine's position on Russia. In spite of the subsequent justifications offered by Putin, the prominence of the word "krasavitsa" [beauty] in his expression expressed more about his own imagination rather than the subject under discussion. "Like it or not – bear with it, my beauty" hailed from the lyrics of the Russian band "Krasnaya Plesen" ["Red Mold"][16]. In spite of the confidence with which the phrase was spoken, the speaker misquoted it. Instead of the verb "bear" (russ. терпи, "terpi"), it should have been "sleep" (russ. спи, "spi"). The song revolves around a slumbering beauty who falls victim to the protagonist's actions. While the majority of the Ukrainian media was firmly convinced of the inauthenticity of Peskov's statements, who is Putin's spokesman, regarding the phrase's origin, some Russian media outlets leaned toward the idea of the phrase having roots in folklore. Media sources like *Dozhd* and *Meduza* cited the leader of the band "Krasnaya Plesen," and Russian anthropologist Alexandra Arkhipova, both of whom pointed to the phrase's folkloric origins[17]. Considering the 1980s "Krasnaya Plesen" song shared substantial thematic similarities of necrophilic undertones, the various theories about the phrase's origins do not significantly alter the broader perspective on the situation. By comparing the original lyrics of the composition and the conversational context in which the phrase was employed, it becomes apparent that the Russian president envisioned Ukraine as a dormant, beautiful maiden whose passive state could be exploited. Such an interpretation might seem contrived were it not for Putin's aides offering an unusual defence. Perhaps excuses were prompted by the Kremlin's apprehension that the concealed truth from February 2022 might come to light. The discussion could be extended indefinitely, but it is prudent to momentarily set it aside and delve into the heart of the matter. Why did Putin opt for these words, and not other descriptors? Why did he depict Ukraine as a "krasavitsa", a beautiful woman? Answers to these inquiries are located in history.

The research methodology for this article adopts a multidisciplinary approach to investigate the gender aspect of political rhetoric, particularly within the context of Ukraine. It integrates insights from postcolonial studies, literary

16 "Krasnaya Plesen" was established in 1989, and according to their official site, in the depths of the band's humour lies "a hidden subtext ridiculing the shortcomings and vices of society" [Krasnaya Plesen. URL: plesen.net. Own translation].

17 Cf. Meduza.io, "Терпи, моя красавица" Все решили, что Путин слушает "Красную плесень". На самом деле президент цитировал частушки (но все равно матерные) ["Bear With It, My Beauty" Everyone Thought That Putin Listens to "Red Mold". In Fact, the President Quoted Ditties (But Still Obscene Ones)] (9 February 2022) URL: https://meduza.io/shapito/2022/02/09/terpi-moya-krasavitsa. Own translation.

analysis, historical perspectives, and contemporary political discourse analysis. Employing a case study approach, the methodology centres on Ukraine to explore the gendered dimensions of political discourse. It delves into historical portrayals of Ukraine depicted as a woman which are found in both Ukrainian and Russian literature, alongside analysing contemporary political rhetoric, notably amid the ongoing war of Russia against Ukraine. The chosen literary works contain the socio-political motives revealed through the prism of the gendered metaphor of Ukraine. These selections were made with focus on contemporary political discourse, ensuring that they hold influence in the present context. By examining literary works from both Ukrainian and Russian perspectives, the study highlights differences and similarities in the portrayal of Ukraine as a woman. This comparative analysis can shed light on how the association between national identity and gender roles is constructed and contested by opposing perspectives on Ukraine within one imperial context.

3. Literary-Historical Perspectives from the Opposite Sides of an Imperial Situation

a) "Little Russia" Perception

The term *Little Russia* originated in the late 13th century within ecclesiastical circles to differentiate between the two metropolitans of Russia: Galicia (referred to as *Minor Russia*) and Suzdal (*Major Russia*). One proposed theory claims that this conceptual distinction does not reflect the metropolitans' political or economic significance or geographical size, but rather the number of parishioners under each diocese. A widely accepted view in historiography argues that this naming convention might be linked to the Greek tradition of referring to their homeland as *minor* and colonies as *major* (like *Magna Graecia*). However, by the 15th century, both minor and major fell out of common use when the Russian Church definitively split into distinct western and eastern branches. By the 18th century, the term entered into Muscovite political discourse, referring to the southwestern territories of the empire: the Right Bank, Slobozhanshchyna, Southern Ukraine, and the Left Bank, which was associated with the former Hetmanate. This region was the inheritor of the privileges initially granted by the Tsar to the Zaporozhian army, which later extended to the rest of the population of the area.[18] While under the rule of

18 Cf. Yaroslav Hrytsak, Нариси історії України: формування модерної української нації XIX–XX ст [Essays on the History of Ukraine: The Formation of the Modern Ukrainian Nation of the 19th–20th Centuries], Kyiv 1996, 16.

the Russian Empire, the distinct identity of the Little Russian lands became increasingly apparent. This identity was notably expressed through the cultural activities of the Little Russian elite, leading to repeated efforts by the imperial system to exert control over it.[19] It is crucial to acknowledge that while *Little Russianness* existed as a distinct identity separate from *Great Russianness*, it didn't always oppose it. More than that, around the turn of the 19th century, it started to be perceived as a subcategory of the latter.[20]

The plot of one of the earliest literary works published in the Ukrainian language revolves around a young, melancholic girl.[21] In 1832, Hryhoriy-Kvitka Osnovyanenko wrote "Marusya," a novel named after its main heroine, that explored the love between a young man and a girl whose deep affection was interrupted by the tragic demise of the heroine. Notably, "Marusya" does not serve as an embodiment of Ukraine, primarily due to the absence of overt national concerns in the novel. Osnovyanenko's female character, marked by profound emotional depth and a certain degree of one-dimensionality, was predominantly a product of the sentimentalism prevalent in 18th century European literature. Although "Marusya" did not directly correspond to the metaphor of Ukraine as a woman, Dmytro Dontsov, a leading theorist of Ukrainian integral nationalism in the early 20th century, perceived it as such. Dontsov referred to Marusya as a "Little Russian" woman and criticised her for what he perceived as weakness and susceptibility to external influences. He identified elements of Ukraine in Marusya and deemed the traits he ascribed to her unworthy of the "Ukrainian nation", which, in his view, should have been primarily driven by an innate desire to resist external influences.[22] Dontsov's ideology centred on the concept of transcending the "bifurcation of the soul," a goal that could only be achieved by renouncing ambivalent emotional sentiments and rejecting rationality.[23] Acknowledging the social connotations associated with emotionality, Dontsov's concept of "fanatic nationalism" was intertwined

19 Cf. Zenon Kohut, The Development of a Little Russian Identity and Ukrainian Nation-building, in: Harvard Ukrainian Studies 10/3–4 (1986) 559–576, 563 f.

20 Cf. Serhii Plokhy, Ukraine & Russia: Representations of the Past, Toronto et al. 2008, 45, 391. See also in: Hrytsak, Нариси, 27.

21 Cf. Nina Butorina, Національні мотиви у творчості Григорія Квітки-Основ'яненка [National Motifs in the Work of Hryhoriy Kvitka-Osnovyanenko], in: Slovo I Chas 6 (2005) 76–79, 76.

22 Cf. Dmytro Dontsov, Незримі Скрижалі Кобзаря: Містика Лицірства Запорожського [Invisible Tablets of Kobzar: The Mysticism of the Zaporizhzhya Knighthood], Toronto 1961, 150 f. Own translation.

23 Cf. Dmytro Dontsov, Націоналізм [Nationalism], London 1966, 313.

with a certain kind of femininity. Nevertheless, despite the seemingly clear-cut nature of the concepts expounded upon in "Nacionalizm," contemporaries who reached further than the abovementioned work viewed his perspectives as debatable. For instance, Lypynsky, an ideologue of Ukrainian Conservatism, voiced criticism against Dontsov in his "Lysty do Khliborobiv": "In one month he [ed. Dontsov] writes that Ukrainians 'have a womanly psychology' [because they are guided in the first place by feeling instead of logic] *(Pidstavy nashoï polityky)*; in another, that they are rationalists, that is, dominated by logic and not feeling *(Nacionalizm)*."[24] Dontsov favoured Taras Shevchenko's portrayal of women, whose resolute ambitions were more conspicuous. Unlike Osnovyanenko, Taras Shevchenko deliberately imposed metaphorical attributes of Ukraine onto his female characters.

Taras Shevchenko, a prominent member of the Guild of Cyril and Methodius[25] in the mid-19th century, played a pivotal role in redefining the portrayal of women in literature. The organisation he was a part of created a cultural-political program, demanding social equality and freedom of speech within the Russian empire. According to Mykhailo Hrushevsky, a key figure in the resurgence of Ukrainian national identity[26] during the early 20th century, the position of the Guild emerged among everything "thanks to the ideas imported from Western Europe"[27]. Despite the greater role of some of his co-members in the Guild activity, Shevchenko remains the canonical figure for the Ukrainian national culture to this day. His rise as a national hero is attributed to the distinctly Romantic nature of his work, which places him within the broader European process of "canonization of cultural saints"[28].

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24 Vyacheslav Lypynsky, Листи до Хліборобів про Ідею і Організацію Українського Монархізму [Letters to the Farmers on the Idea and Organisation of Ukrainian Monarchism], Vienna 1926, xxi. Translation taken from: Trevor Erlacher, Ukrainian Nationalism in the Age of Extremes: An Intellectual Biography of Dmytro Dontsov, Cambridge 2021, 261.

25 In Ukrainian: Кирило-Мефодіївське братство (Kyrylo-Mefodiivske bratstvo). Translated by Mykhailo Hrushevsky (see fn. 26).

26 Or how he was called in an article for "The New York Times" in 1918: "President of Ukrainian Rada" and "Leader in Nationalistic Movement". See in: Mykhailo Hrushevsky, Ukraine's Struggle for Self-Government, in: The New York Times (17 February 1918), 68.

27 Ibidem.

28 Christian Noack, The Riddles of the Shevchenko Cult, in: Marijan Dović/Jón K. Helgason (eds.), Great Immortality. Studies on European Cultural Sainthood (National Cultivation of Culture 18), Leiden – Boston 2019, 75–103, 75 f.

Shevchenko elevated the depth and complexity of his female characters, presenting them in three distinct archetypes: the *solitary mother-woman* (an unsuccessful mother), the *mother-woman* (a successful mother), and the *pure, beautiful girl*. Among his motives for emphasising the image of the pure girl was his opposition to the caricatured and corrupt landlord figure. Maksym Rylsky identified the contrasting depiction of the male landowner and the peasant girl as a poetic tool to underscore social injustice.[29] In the context of the mid-19th century, when Ukrainians were predominantly associated with the peasantry, class and national interests were intricately intertwined. The pure girl in Shevchenko's works served as a symbol not only of the peasant class but also of the Ukrainian people. In his poem "Kateryna", he narrated the tragic tale of a young woman who fell in love with a Moscow man and, after his eventual leave, found herself pregnant, embodying the archetype of the solitary mother. Moreover, Shevchenko's 1840 poem "O My Thoughts" exemplified the intricate portrayal of Ukraine as a feminine symbol:

Go then to Ukraine, my children,
To Ukraine, so dear,
Wander on like homeless orphans,
I shall perish here […]
Bid them welcome, then, my mother,
My Ukraine, and smile
On these, my children, still unwise,
As on thy own true child[30]

В Україну ідіть, діти!
В нашу Україну,
Попідтинню, сиротами,
А я – тут загину […]
Привітай же, моя ненько!
Моя Україно!
Моїх діток нерозумних,
Як свою дитину[31]

In "O My Thoughts", Taras Shevchenko boldly bestowed the title of "mother" upon Ukraine, a nurturing figure compelled to care for her "foolish" and wayward Ukrainian children, not through subtle insinuations, but with direct clarity. But where have these children gone astray? The answer lies within the line "I shall perish here." Where was "here"? Given the backdrop of Ukraine's subjugation under the Russian Empire and Shevchenko's own presence in imperial St. Petersburg at the time, these Ukrainian children had wandered off

29 Cf. Volodymyr Kolomiets/Olga Ivanova, Художня Трансформація Фольклорних Мотивів у Ранній Романтичній Творчості Тараса Шевченка (Шевченкознавчі студії 13) [Artistic Transformation of Folkloristic Motifs in the Early Romantic Work of Taras Shevchenko (Shevchenko Studies 13)], Kyiv 2011, 68.

30 Taras Shevchenko, O my Thoughts, my Heartfelt Thoughts, in: idem, Song out of Darkness. Selected Poems, translated by Vera Rich, London 1961, 10.

31 Taras Shevchenko, Кобзар [The Bard], Kyiv 1985, 48 f.

into the vast expanse of the empire's cultural dominion. Shevchenko was an ardent advocate for Ukrainian folk culture and tirelessly endeavoured to propel it into modernity. Much like the European romantics, he embarked on journeys across Ukraine to collect knowledge of its rich folkloric heritage. In his poem "O My Thoughts", he passionately urged for a cultural reconnection with mother Ukraine, all the while acknowledging his own sense of lostness. Shevchenko symbolically entrusted the Ukrainians to their true mother's embrace, recognising his own incapacity to liberate himself from the constraints imposed by the empire's mental framework before their ultimate emancipation.[32]

Given that the woman served as the embodiment of nature, she inherently possessed a duality that made her mysterious and inscrutable. To Taras Shevchenko, a woman could embody both the single mother, deprived of her wreath, and the accomplished mother. In his examination of archetypes in Shevchenko's works, Grabovych observed the inherent diversity of feminine figures. He correlated the ambiguity in Shevchenko's portrayal of women with Carl Jung's concepts of *anima* and *shadow*, wherein the former embodies a positive projection of the author's feminine nature, while the latter represents a negative one. According to Grabovich's analysis, the triptych "Dolya", "Slava", and "Muza"[33] exemplifies the articulation of the anima "in a crypto-pejorative way – as a whore, who gives herself to all comers, but remains attractive and lovable nonetheless"[34]. The feminine conceptually encapsulates aspects of both Eve and Mary, representing the greatest sinner and the greatest righteous figure of the human race. Owing to these inherent contradictions within the female psyche, in his 1883 comedic play "Chasing Two Hares", Mykhailo Starytskyi cleverly personified Ukraine through two female characters: Pronya and Galya. The former character belongs to the affluent Russified Ukrainian bourgeoisie, while the latter is a poor beauty. The comedic genre allowed Starytskyi to underscore the caricature of Pronya, a character he playfully ridiculed alongside the other figures in his work. The visual contrast between Pronya and Galya is also starkly evident. The main male character, in praising Galya, remarks: "My soul is simple; it clings to simplicity! And you, Galya … are the beauty of all of

32 Cf. Kolomiets/Ivanova, Трансформація, 65.

33 English: "Fate", "Glory", "Muse". Own translation. See in: Taras Shevchenko, Зібрання творів: Поезія 1847–1861 [Collection of Works: Poetry From 1847–1861], vol. 2, Kyiv 2003.

34 George G. Grabowicz, Shevchenko's Archetypes, in: Papers of the Shevchenko Scientific Society in the US, vol. 1, ed. by Oles Fedoruk, New York 2017, 29–92, 72.

Kyiv!"[35] On the other hand, no one dares to describe Pronya in any similar way. Starytskyi's aim was to illustrate the paradoxical nature of Ukraine, a condition that was not inherent but rather a consequence of the Russification imposed by the empire. In other words, the Ukrainian identity possessed an intrinsic femininity that, due to the absence of adequate masculinity enforced by the Russian Empire, became distorted and, to some extent, pathological.

The metaphor of Ukraine personified as a woman has remained a persistent and enduring motif in Ukrainian literature, transforming over time in response to shifting socio-political circumstances, yet never truly fading away. In 1926, in "Diva-Obyda", the emigré poet Yevhen Malaniuk portrayed Ukraine not as a young woman without a wreath but as a prostitute. The circumstances for women had evolved, and consequently, "Shevchenko's" image, once stigmatised by conventional society, had become somewhat antiquated. Malaniuk, while romanticising the Ukrainian woman, also harboured a disdain for her perceived weakness and susceptibility. In his poem "Diva-Obyda", Malaniuk encapsulated the contradictions of his sentiments toward Ukraine, employing the juxtaposition of Saint Mary and sinful Eve as a literary tool. The very title of the poem alluded to a pre-Christian goddess, who, as indicated by the epigraph in the 1954 edition of "Diva-Obyda", was responsible for the harmonious flow of life. By drawing a connection between the given goddess and Ukraine, Malaniuk marked her decline, a decline which he believed should have come to an end:

Who raped you? Powerless,	Хто ґвалтував тебе?
Powerless, drunk and mute	Безсила, Безвладна, п'яна і німа
Barren flesh, poor body	Неплодну плоть, убоге тіло
You gave it to everyone yourself […]	Давала кожному сама […]
Get up like you used to!	Повстань, як древле!
Armor made of copper	Панцир з міди
Will replace dirt and rags, –	Замінить лахи й ганчірки, –
And again the girlish figure of Obyda	І знов дівоча стать Обиди
Looks victoriously into the ages.	Звитяжно гляне у віки.[36]

35 Cf. Mykhailo Starytsky, За Двома Зайцями. Твори у шести томах [Chasing Two Hares. Works in Six Volumes], vol. 2, Dnipro 1989, 392.

36 Yevhen Malaniuk, Поезії в одному томі [All the Poetry in One Volume], ed. by Taras Shevchenko Scientific Society in America/Independent Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, New York 1954, 80 f. Own translation on the left side.

Malaniuk was a writer with a specific set of life values. As a combatant for the Ukrainian People's Republic, he was detained in Europe and later moved to North America. Throughout the interwar period, he found inspiration in the nationalist writings of fellow emigrant Dontsov, penning essays wherein he viewed Shevchenko's mythmaking as a tangible political reality. Moreover, a distinctive aspect of his understanding of nationalism was its portrayal as a metaphorical expression or creative force, in contrast to rigid concepts.[37]

In the context of 1920s Soviet Ukraine, two significant socio-political processes unfolded concurrently, far from Malaniuk: the emergence of women in the public sphere and *Ukrainization*, which involved the deliberate promotion of national culture and the official adoption of the Ukrainian language at the state level. The positive changes in the lives of women, both as individuals and as symbolic representations of Ukraine, became evident during the same time. This transformation was exemplified by Valerian Pidmohylny in his novel "A Little Drama".[38] Pidmohylny's work stood out for its ability to transcend immediate circumstances and instead, it mirrored trends in Western thought. Moreover, he is recognised as one of the pioneers of the intellectual-psychological novel movement. Central to his writings is the internal struggle reminiscent of Maupassant's characters – a conflict faced by rational individual striving to overcome his innate instincts and desires.[39] This motif portrays a caricature of a socialist reality, wherein attempts to liberate individuals from emotional constraints resulted in denying both men and women the freedom to choose. Specifically, Soviet theorists argued that relationships should be based on mutual feelings, which they believed could only emerge if a woman displayed interest or involvement in cultural pursuits.[40] In other words, the obligation to be separated from the public sphere was replaced by an obligation to join it.

"A Little Drama" features a central character named Marta, a former peasant who has become an employed, independent woman. Her unfortunate love affair with Yuriy Slavenko, a man who epitomises Soviet socialist ideology, highlights the temporary embrace of Ukrainianism by the Soviet authorities. Slavenko's loss of romantic interest in Marta and his abrupt breaking of their

37 Cf. George G. Grabowicz, Shevchenko in the Critical Essays of Ievhen Malaniuk, in: Harvard Ukrainian Studies 28/1–4 (2006) 441–459, 456 f.

38 Cf. Valerian Pidmohylny, Невеличка драма: Роман на Одну Частину [A Little Drama: One-Part Novel], Kharkiv 2014.

39 Cf. Maxim Tarnawsky, Between Reason and Irrationality. The Prose of Valerijan Pidmohyl'nyj, Toronto 1994, 5.

40 Cf. Wendy Z. Goldman, Women, the State and Revolution: Soviet Family Policy and Social Life, 1917–1936, Cambridge 1993, 7.

relationship, mirrors the shifting fortunes of Ukrainian identity. The story's climax, marked by the end of their relationship and a deep slumber Marta falls into, symbolises the decline of Ukrainian culture and serves as a metaphor for the onset of mass repressions. In the 1930s, Valerian Pidmohylny along with a whole generation of artists was wiped off the face of the earth.

b) The Perception of the Empire

It is essential to emphasise that the personification of Ukraine as a woman did not originate from within the Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood or the Ukrainian literary circles themselves. Instead, it was an external influence, specifically the impact of Romanticism, that gave rise to this metaphor. The mentors in Ukrainian literary organisations were prominent figures in imperial literature, nurtured in an environment of allegiance to the tsar. The metropolitan fascination with the spirituality of the colonies, a distinctive trait of Romanticism, never intended to alter the hierarchy between the conqueror and the subjugated. Even in cases where the metaphors employed by imperial writers seemed to visually suggest the colonies' superiority in certain aspects, upon closer examination they never challenged the imperial structure of subordination. The narratives of the empire were designed to create the illusion of the colonies' subjectivity, demonstrating that they complemented the empire. Through its connection to the colony, the empire legitimised its historical and cultural influence, while the colony gained a mixed sense of belonging to something larger than itself.[41]

The foundation for representing Ukraine as a woman was intricately tied to Ukraine's role within the empire or, more precisely, the role imposed upon her. As Simone de Beauvoir eloquently articulated, "He [ed. man] exploits her [ed. Nature], but she defies him; he is born from her and dies within her; she is the source of his existence and the realm he subjugates to his will."[42] The association between the concepts of *woman* and *land* can be traced back to the emergence of agriculture, which essentially gave birth to the patriarchy. In the 19th century, it was openly acknowledged that Little Russia had become a breadbasket for the region. In his travelogue "Slavny bubny za gorami ili

41 Cf. Vadym Adadurov/Volodymyr Sklokin, Імперські ідентичності в українській історії XVIII-першої половини XIX ст. [Imperial Identities in Ukrainian History (The Eighteenth and the First Half of the Nineteenth Century); translation by the publisher], Lviv 2020, 8.

42 De Beauvoir, The Second Sex, 163.

putishestvie moe koe-kuda v 1810 godu"[43], Prince Ivan Dolgoruky not only presented the facts but – inspired by the romantic spirit and political acumen of Catherine II and Grigory Potemkin – expressed the notion that the value of "Nature", referring to the land of Ukraine, is not just within itself, but also in the hands of "its wise Master". The concept of a woman's virginity carried significance only when she surrendered it to a man who could use it in the correct manner. This comparison exemplified the imperial inclination to rationalise colonisation by feminising the colony and portraying it as a docile, untouched woman, thereby exploiting the land.[44]

Another common aspect of the feminisation of colonised lands was the portrayal of the male population as weak, insufficiently masculine, or even non-existent. Mikhail Lermontov, a Russian writer of the early 19th century, was known for what Said termed *orientalisation* in the Northern Caucasus and the Asian parts of the empire. Furthermore, a central theme in his work was not only the demonstration of moral dominance of the imperial titular ethnic group over all others but also the recreation of their relationships in the form of heteronormative bonds. Examples of this can be found in characters like Tamara from "Demon", Clara from "Litvinka" ["The Lithuanian Woman"] and an unnamed nymph from the cognominal chapter "Taman" of the novel "A Hero of Our Time".[45] The story of the latter revolves around Grigory Pechorin, an officer in the imperial army, who finds himself in the town of Taman, historically part of the Kuban region populated by the Kuban Cossacks during Lermontov's time. Similar to the Zaporizhian Cossacks, the Kuban Cossacks were a thorn in the side of imperial authority, which continually attempted to subdue the region. At the beginning of the 19th century, the use of the title *Zaporozhian* in the Kuban region was prohibited.

The events in "Taman" unfold against the backdrop of the beauty of the Sea of Azov and the political marginalisation of the territory. Upon arriving in Taman, Officer Pechorin discovers a house where a mysterious and uniquely attractive Ukrainian girl lives. Suspecting her involvement in smuggling, the protagonist sails with her on a boat. Due to her awareness of his distrust, the girl attempts to drown him by making use of her allure. Obviously surprised,

43 Cf. Ivan Dolgoruky, Славны бубны за горами, или Путешествие мое кое-куда 1810 года [Glorious Drums beyond the Hills, or My Travels to Various Places in 1810], Moscow 1870.

44 Cf. Myroslav Shkandrij, Russia and Ukraine. Literature and the Discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to Postcolonial Times, Montreal et al. 2001, 80 f. See the similar example in: Dolgoruky, Славны бубны, 57.

45 Cf. ibidem, 46, 56.

Pechorin manages to regain control of the situation by throwing her overboard. In the end, the girl reaches the shore and, together with her beloved Tatar man, leaves Taman forever. Lermontov describes the girl as "far from beautiful", yet he emphasises her intriguing mystique several times. Notably, he refers to her as a "devil"[46], underscoring her cunning nature in contrast to her seemingly meek demeanour. Her natural allure confers the nymph an air of mystery as the ultimate determinant in resolving the situation is Pechorin's physical advantage. On the one hand, in the "Taman" chapter, Lermontov paid due respect to the Kuban Cossacks, which he limited to affirming their desirability to the empire. On the other hand, the text could also be interpreted as anti-colonial[47], as in the end of the story, Pechorin regrets intruding into the lives of the people. Interpretations of this episode in "A Hero of Our Time" vary significantly due to the challenge of clearly identifying characters based solely on the information provided by Lermontov. The interplay between the concepts of *self* and *other* in the novel's ethnographic depiction, combined with the ambiguity surrounding imperial boundaries – both literal and symbolic – challenges the traditional perception of the Russian empire as a cohesive and clearly delineated entity.[48] However, despite all of the counterarguments, the text reinforced the universal, imperialistic idea that, despite any resistance, a colony will never be able to prevail over the metropolis. Recent scholarship explores these themes, with some researchers emphasising the novel's subtle critique of imperialism and its complex portrayal of ethnic and cultural identities[49]. Others argue that Lermontov's work ultimately upholds imperial ideologies by presenting the colony as subordinate[50]. This reinforces the broader understanding that variations in imperialist expressions do not negate their inherent imperialistic nature.

The trope of the colony as *a dangerous beauty* was confined to neither Lermontov's works nor to the era in which he wrote. In his insightful examination of gender dynamics in the context of colonisation, Frantz Fanon shed light on the complex issue of representing women's involvement in the broader struggle against colonial and imperial oppression. He keenly observed that the colonial narrative did not limit women to passive victimhood but also portrayed them

46 Mikhail Lermontov, Герой нашего времени [A Hero of Our Time], Moscow 1951, 76.

47 Cf. Shkandrij, Russia, 53 f.

48 Cf. Valeria Sobol, The Uncanny Frontier of Russian Identity: Travel, Ethnography, and Empire in Lermontov's "Taman"', in: The Russian Review 70 (2011) 65–79, 79.

49 Cf. Stephen M. Norris, "The East Is a Delicate Matter": Russian Culture and Eurasianism, in: The Russian Review 74 (2015) 187–190, 187.

50 Cf. Shkandrij, Russia, 273.

as supporters of the revolution, filled with the spirit of rebellion and engaged in the struggle. These women, according to Fanon, were not independent actors in the traditional sense; their actions were driven not by conscious choice but by an instinctual determination. They covertly concealed firearms, explosives, and rifles beneath their clothing, infiltrated hostile environments, and carried out subversive and terrorist acts to undermine the oppressive colonial regime. However, even as these women bravely resisted the colonisers, they remained shrouded in an aura of allure, mystery, and menace from the perspective of the imperial power[51]. In an article published a day before the start of the full-scale invasion, Ukrainian historian Yaroslav Hrytsak quoted the memoirs of a Bolshevik officer from 1919 that perfectly illustrate Fanon's concept: "It [Ukraine] reminded me of a peaceful cherry orchard, peasant grace, silence and sleep among peaceful houses, girls behind wicker baskets […] All this was a masquerade – no more […] A saw and a hand grenade were hidden under the skirt of a Ukrainian beautiful girl."[52]

4. Conclusion

Imperialism's antipode nationalism is a complex ideology that encompasses a spectrum of principles, embodying both masculine and feminine qualities. The endeavour to associate nationality solely with the feminine aspect signifies more than a mere linguistic or symbolic choice; it carries significant implications for both how a nation is portrayed and perceived. Such a characterisation can be viewed as an act of both underestimation and compromise. By emphasising the feminine aspect, there may be a subtle inclination to downplay or compromise the classically masculine characteristics that are often associated with nationalism, such as rationality, civility, strength etc.

Throughout the history of the literature of the past two centuries, the representation of Ukraine has predominantly been feminised. Furthermore, the perception of Ukraine as a woman was not solely imposed from the outside but also emerged from within. To varying degrees, Ukrainian writers from the 19th to the early 20th century felt their own powerlessness in the face of Ukraine's

51 Cf. Frantz Fanon, A Dying Colonialism, New York 1965, 4. See also: Vadym Vasylenko, Вихід із тіні, або "Імперський чоловік" – "колоніальна жінка" [Out of the Shadows, or "Imperial Man" – "Colonial Woman"], in: Slovo I Chas 4 (2017) 41–53, 46. Own translation.

52 Yaroslav Hrytsak, Ленін, Путін та Україна [Lenin, Putin and Ukraine] (23 February 2022). URL: https://nv.ua/ukr/opinion/rosiya-ukrajina-lenin-u-chomu-pomilivsya-putin-gricak-novini-ukrajini-50204426.html. Own translation.

secondary position in the imperial hierarchy. The depiction of Ukraine as a woman was influenced by changes in cultural and social eras. During the Romantic period, Ukraine was represented as a peasant who had either failed, not yet fulfilled, or accomplished her motherhood. Her identity reflected the intersection of class and national interests experienced by the Ukrainians of that time. The female Ukraine had little influence on the circumstances she found herself in, and thus, most of her choices were not voluntary. The early 20th century allowed women to gain agency, and, as a result, the literary portrayal of Ukraine's role gained significance. Additionally, the events of the short-lived "Ukrainization" of the 1920s showed Ukrainians how cultural freedom could feel like, but this changed with the terror of the 1930s.

On the other side of the imperial situation, the feminine representation of Ukraine was also present, but in a much more simplified form. The Russian external perspective could not perceive the complexities and inner self-doubt inherent to Ukraine. In a way akin to a man desiring a woman, the Russian Empire viewed Little Russia as an attractive yet simultaneously enigmatic woman of dual nature, who conceals her cunningness only because, lacking sufficient strength, she is afraid to confront her opponent directly. To Russia, Ukraine embodied an object of desire, always requiring caution and vigilance when dealing with her. She commands respect, but not of herself, but only in the presence of a Master over her.

Putin's contemporary political rhetoric, notably his statement "Bear with it, my beauty," illustrates the Russian political elite's unpreparedness for Ukrainian resistance. Subsequent events made it evident that the military operation was built around the same assumption. In March 2022, as Russian forces continued their attempts to advance on Kyiv, the locals in the town of Irpin discovered heaps of Russian military parade uniforms adorned with medals in a burning warehouse[53]. Hoping for a swift victory, Putin prepared his troops for a triumphant march into Kyiv. Unexpectedly, the beauty turned out to be not sleeping. Perhaps Ukraine was never a beauty or not even a woman at all? In any case, the right to answer this question belongs solely to Ukraine. On the same day that Putin referred to Ukraine as a beauty, Zelensky responded by saying, "There are certainly things you won't argue with the president of the

53 Cf. Ukrainska Pravda, ЗСУ: Росіяни взяли з собою в Україну парадну військову форму [Armed Forces: The Russians Brought Their Military Uniforms with Them to Ukraine] (7 March 2022) URL: https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/03/7/7329017. Own translation.

Russian Federation about. Ukraine is indeed a beauty."[54] This was before the full-scale war began, and the question of how the perspective of both sides has changed shall remain open.

54 Cf. hromadske, "Це вже перебір" – Зеленський відповів Путіну на заяву "терпи, моя красуне" ["This Is Too Much" – Zelensky Responded to Putin's Statement "Bear with It, My Beauty"] (8 February 2022). URL: https://hromadske.radio/news/2022/02/08/tse-vzhe-perebir-zelens-kyy-vidpoviv-putinu-na-zaiavu-terpy-moia-krasune. Own translation.