

RE-PLACING ETHNICITY:
LITERATURE IN ENGLISH BY CANADA'S UKRAINIANS

by

LISA MICHELE GREKUL

B.A., The University of Alberta, 1997

M.A., The University of Alberta, 1999

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of English)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

June 2003

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Department of English

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date 12 August 2003

ABSTRACT

This study traces the development of prose, poetry, drama, and (creative) non-fiction written in English by Canadians of Ukrainian descent during the twentieth century. The thesis argues that, although Ukrainian Canadian literature has been under-represented in Canadian and Ukrainian Canadian studies, it makes a substantial contribution to ongoing debates about the ways in which individuals (re)define their sense of self, community, history, and home in the process of writing.

Chapter One provides an overview of Ukrainian Canadian history, and outlines the development of a Ukrainian Canadian literary tradition. Chapter Two examines the assimilationist rhetoric articulated by such non-Ukrainian Canadian writers as Ralph Connor, Sinclair Ross, and Margaret Laurence, as well as that of Vera Lysenko (author of *Yellow Boots*, 1954, the first English-language novel by a Ukrainian Canadian). Chapter Three focuses on Maara Haas's novel *The Street Where I Live* (1976), George Ryga's play *A Letter to My Son* (1981), and Andrew Suknaski's poetry (published in *Wood Mountain Poems*, 1976; *the ghosts call you poor*, 1978; and *In the Name of Narid*, 1981), and explores these writers' responses to the policies and practices of multiculturalism. Chapter Four identifies the shift toward transnational or transcultural discourses of individual- and group-identity formation in Janice Kulyk Keefer's and Myrna Kostash's writing, especially that which records their travels "back" to Ukraine.

The central argument of the thesis is that if Ukrainian Canadians are to maintain meaningful ties to their ethnic heritage, they must constantly—if paradoxically—re-invent themselves as Ukrainians and as Canadians. In examining this paradox, the study

draws parallels between Lysenko and Kulyk Keefer, both of whom rely on conventional narrative techniques in their writing and privilege nation-based models of identity that marginalize the experiences of ethnic minorities. Haas, Ryga, Suknaski, and Kostash, by contrast, experiment with multiple languages and genres: shaped, thematically and formally, by their experiences as hybrid subjects, their texts illustrate that ethnicity is less product than process; less fixed than fluid; constantly under construction and open to negotiation. The concluding chapter of the thesis, reflecting on the past and the present of Ukrainians in Canada, calls for the next generation of writers to continue *re*-imagining their communities by pushing the boundaries of existing language and forms.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank my good friends Jodie Sinnema, Tobi Kozakewich, Wendy Foster, and Laurie McNeill for their advice and encouragement. Special thanks to my professors Dr. Laurie Ricou and Dr. Glenn Deer who have devoted countless hours to my project, and who have given me invaluable guidance over the past four years. Dr. W.H. New has been teacher, mentor, and—above all—dear friend. Thank you, Bill.

For their love and support, I am deeply grateful to my family: Marshall, Gloria, Jana, and Chad Grekul, and Jacqueline Pollard. Only my husband Patrick, though, truly knows what has gone into this thesis. Pat, I could not have gotten through without you. Thank you for standing by—and sometimes carrying—me along the way.

I dedicate this thesis to Patrick's late *baba*, Lena O'Neill.

1. Ethnic Minority Writing in Canada and the Ukrainian Canadian Literary Tradition

Introduction

In 1977, when Myrna Kostash published her first book, everyone in my family bought a copy of it. While I was too young at the time to share my parents', aunts', and uncles' excitement about *All of Baba's Children*, I grew up listening to stories about how Kostash conducted her research; how she spent several months in Two Hills getting to know the residents and learning about their history; how she went on to write about the community and its people. A small, predominantly Ukrainian Canadian town in northeastern Alberta, Two Hills is the community around which my maternal and paternal great-grandparents settled after immigrating to Canada from Ukraine at the turn of the twentieth century. My family members (especially those who still live in the Two Hills area) were thrilled when *All of Baba's Children* came out because the book put their community on the map. They were proud. No one had ever published a book about Two Hills before. But *All of Baba's Children* was more than a book about Two Hills: it was a book about Ukrainians written by a fellow Ukrainian, one of their own.

They all bought copies. In my relatives' farmhouses, where literary books are far less common than the *Farmers' Almanac* and *Reader's Digest* magazine, my aunts and uncles kept their copies of *All of Baba's Children* in prominent places—on coffee tables and fireplace mantles. My parents (the first in their respective families to go to university) placed their copy in our living room bookshelf beside other important books—our set of encyclopedias; my dad's *Complete Works of Shakespeare*; the Bible.

That I grew up knowing few specific details about Kostash's book isn't altogether surprising: because no one in my family actually read *All of Baba's Children*, no one talked about the actual content of the book. I knew that it was a novel; one of my uncles, apparently, made an appearance in it as a minor character. Although I recall hearing that Kostash caused some controversy by making communists, or communism, part of her plot, I don't remember anyone in my family being particularly bothered by this. Kostash might not have gotten all of her facts quite right, but my relatives were willing to forgive her for it. What mattered is that she had written a story about us; about Ukrainians. For members of my family, *All of Baba's Children* became a cultural artifact, on a par in many ways with Ukrainian Easter eggs and embroidered tablecloths: something to be displayed as a symbol of their culture.

I didn't read *All of Baba's Children* either—at least not until I was approaching the end of my undergraduate degree. During my fourth year at the University of Alberta, in 1997, I signed up for two courses on Canadian literature, one a survey of the field, the other more specifically focused on “Alberta Writing.” Both classes were taught by instructors who encouraged their students to think critically about the inclusiveness of the Canadian literary tradition, and about issues of representation. Of all the texts we read in my Canadian literature classes, I most vividly remember a book that appeared on our reading list for “Alberta Writing.” The text was Marusya Bociurkiw's *The Woman Who Loved Airports* (1994), a collection of stories in which Bociurkiw writes about being a Ukrainian Canadian and a lesbian. I was stunned by it. In fact, while we weren't scheduled to study Bociurkiw's text until late in the term, I read it first. I read it in one

sitting. I went on, eventually, to write my term paper on it. And, in the process of writing that paper, *All of Baba's Children* came down from my parents' bookshelf.

Why did I finally decide to read Kostash's book?

In the first place, I didn't like *The Woman Who Loved Airports*. My feeling at the time was that Bociurkiw made her sexuality seem interesting, daring, and complex, but that she reduced her experiences of ethnicity to painted eggs and cabbage rolls. Her stories made Ukrainians out to be narrow-minded and intolerant, incapable of understanding (much less accepting) homosexuality. I disliked *The Woman Who Loved Airports* because I believed that Bociurkiw was representing all Ukrainians and she wasn't representing "us" properly. I wanted my classmates to read a text that would portray Ukrainian people in a better light; a text that would function in our class, as *All of Baba's Children* functioned in my family, as a positive symbol of Ukrainian Canadian culture. For my term paper, I decided to read *All of Baba's Children* and compare it to *The Woman Who Loved Airports* because I knew that Kostash had told a different story, one that spoke more directly to—or, rather, *of*—my own experiences as a Ukrainian Canadian. I had nowhere else to turn. I didn't know of a single other text written by a Ukrainian Canadian author. In my mind, I had two choices: Kostash or Bociurkiw; *All of Baba's Children* or *The Woman Who Loved Airports*.

I discovered, very quickly, that Kostash was no antidote to Bociurkiw. To set the record straight, *All of Baba's Children* is not a novel: it is, rather, a journalistic work of non-fiction about the history of Two Hills. This alone would have been enough to throw me into a tailspin—I expected a story—but Kostash's history was hard to follow; it wasn't chronological; it mixed historical facts with statements made by residents of the

town about their way of life and Kostash's own thoughts about her identity as a Ukrainian Canadian. I couldn't figure out what she was trying to say. The book might have been focused on Two Hills, but Kostash appeared to be commenting on all Ukrainians in Canada. On the one hand, she was critical of the ways in which Anglo-Canadians had discriminated against Ukrainians who, as a result, were forced to assimilate to Anglo-Canadian culture. At the same time, she suggested that assimilation was normal and natural—a good thing, basically, because it enabled Ukrainians to get ahead in their new country. At certain points in *All of Baba's Children*, Kostash gave the impression that Ukrainians were hard-working, God-fearing people with a rich and vibrant cultural heritage; at other points, she criticized them for fighting with each other about politics and religion, and for being sexist and anti-Semitic. *All of Baba's Children* wasn't much help to me. Ironically, the book that my family members had held up as a symbol of the beauty and endurance of their culture painted a highly ambivalent picture of Ukrainians in Canada. For my term paper, I ended up writing less about *The Woman Who Loved Airports* and *All of Baba's Children* than about my own—decidedly positive—experiences growing up as a fourth-generation Ukrainian Canadian.

I was fortunate. My professor could have dismissed the paper as unscholarly and, worse, uninformed; re-reading it now, I cringe. I made two particularly troubling assumptions: first, that when an ethnic minority writer publishes a literary work, she speaks on behalf of her entire ethnic community; second, that the job of the ethnic minority writer, as spokesperson of her community, is to sing praises of her people and their way of life. To her credit, I think, my professor—herself a creative writer from an ethnic minority background—chose not to castigate me for the assumptions that I'd

made. She suggested, instead, that I try my hand at writing creatively about my ethnic identity. In retrospect, I believe that she wanted me to learn first-hand about the kinds of challenges faced by ethnic minority writers: how to balance their sense of responsibility to themselves, to their ethnic groups, and to their writing itself. She must have guessed that I would rethink my ideas about the role of the ethnic writer by becoming (or trying to become) just such a writer.

I took the advice of my professor, at first, as a call-to-arms: where Kostash and Bociurkiw had failed (they were still the only Ukrainian Canadian writers I knew about and neither, to my mind, had accurately represented Ukrainian Canadians), I would succeed.

I set out to write the Great Ukrainian Canadian Novel.

At the end of my fourth year—as my then-boyfriend, now-husband can attest—I spent many late nights feverishly sketching out plot-lines, making notes on characters, and outlining themes. My intentions, in the beginning, were at best vague. I had no experience as a creative writer and, hence, no idea how to go about writing a novel. I envisioned a story that would capture the essence of Ukrainian Canadian-ness, and that would give Ukrainian Canadian and non-Ukrainian Canadian readers alike a sense of the inherent beauty and vitality of Ukrainian culture. By the time I entered the MA program at the University of Alberta, a few months after finishing my undergraduate degree, I was well into a first draft of my novel. In 1997, I enrolled in a year-long graduate seminar in creative writing, and brought chapters of my book to the class each week for feedback and guidance. *Sing For Me, Kalyna!* doubled, eventually, as my MA thesis.

But in the two years that it took me to write my thesis/novel, my attitude toward the project changed dramatically. Early on, in fact, I gave up my self-appointed task of speaking on behalf of all Ukrainian Canadians and glorifying Ukrainian Canadian culture.

Why did I abandon my early visions for the book, and my initial goals? In the first place, as I laid out the initial plans for my novel—a loosely autobiographical story of one young woman’s coming-of-age as a Ukrainian Canadian—I also began thinking very seriously, for the first time, about the meaning of my ethnicity; and, in doing so, I realized that my own experiences—growing up at a particular time and in a particular place—couldn’t possibly reflect the experiences of all Ukrainian Canadians. In fact, when I really thought about it, I started to wonder if I had enough Ukrainian-ness to write about. I took Ukrainian language classes in elementary school and, for ten years, I did Ukrainian dancing. At home, we ate Ukrainian food. But I didn’t (and still don’t) speak Ukrainian. My parents never took my sister and brother and me to the Greek Orthodox church in which they were raised. Why, I wondered, didn’t they try harder to make us Ukrainian? Because I grew up during the 1970s and 1980s, I learned from an early age about multiculturalism in Canada, and about the importance of promoting and preserving cultural diversity. But in 1997, multiculturalism started to look more and more like a sham. The Great Ukrainian Canadian Novel seemed out of reach. *All of Baba’s Children* and *The Woman Who Loved Airports* began to make sense to me.

I kept writing, though—encouraged, now, by Kostash and Bociurkiw who gave me permission, in a way, to confront my mixed feelings about being Ukrainian. I also began searching for other books written by Canadians of Ukrainian descent—something,

perhaps, that I should have done while I was working on my Bociurkiw paper. But when I was writing about *The Woman Who Loved Airports*, near the end of my undergraduate degree, I was still a relative newcomer to Canadian literature (having only recently discovered a world of writing beyond Margaret Atwood, Farley Mowat, and W.O. Mitchell), and I had yet to identify and pursue my own research interests (independent of course syllabi and class reading lists). As a graduate student, I was learning how to push beyond course material by taking my critical work in new directions.

I found not one but several novels—Illia Kiriak's *Sons of the Soil* (1939-45); Vera Lysenko's *Yellow Boots* (1954); Maara Haas's *The Street Where I Live* (1974); and Janice Kulyk Keefer's *The Green Library* (1996). I discovered Myrna Kostash's *Bloodlines: A Journey Into Eastern Europe* (1993), a work of non-fiction that included an account of her travels to Ukraine. I came upon numerous poets (Andrew Suknaski, Jars Balan, George Morrisette, Helen Potrebenko) and playwrights (George Ryga, Ted Galay, Michael Nimchuk, Larry Zacharko). Many Ukrainian Canadian writers, I learned, had produced work in multiple genres (Haas and Kulyk Keefer had written poetry and short fiction; Potrebenko and Ryga had written novels). When I read their work, moreover, I realized that none had attempted to speak on behalf of all Ukrainian Canadians; that few, if any, seemed concerned about glorifying their culture. They wrote, instead, about the challenges of maintaining their ethnic identity in Canada; about the benefits and drawbacks of being second- or third-generation Ukrainian Canadians; about their ambivalent attitudes toward history, language, and home.

Again and again, I encountered writers whose work reminded me of *All of Baba's Children* and *The Woman Who Loved Airports* and I began to appreciate what they were

all doing: they were writing literature. Their texts were focused on the specific experiences of Ukrainian Canadians but, in terms of their broad thematic concerns and formal structures, they were accessible and relevant to any reader. I decided that I wanted my novel to succeed in the same way—as a work of literature about the unique and complex experiences of Ukrainian Canadians, yet meant for a universal audience.

And so I wrote in the voice of, and on behalf of, a single character whose attitude toward her cultural heritage is decidedly ambivalent. *Sing For Me, Kalyna!* is narrated by Colleen Lutzak, a Ukrainian Canadian girl who grows up on the prairies. A comic *bildungsroman*, the novel takes place in northern Alberta and southern Africa. Colleen (Kalyna, in Ukrainian) is an aspiring musician who struggles to make sense of her identity as a woman, a Ukrainian Canadian, and an artist. Her story raises a number of questions about Ukrainian Canadian communities: it foregrounds the fact that not all Ukrainian Canadians experience and express their ethnicity in the same way; and it challenges idealized or romanticized conceptions of Ukrainian Canadian culture. But the novel also, more generally, explores the ways in which an individual's identity is shaped by her experiences of ethnicity and “race”; gender and sexuality; regionalism, nationalism, and transnationalism.

As I worked through the first draft of *Sing For Me, Kalyna!*, and as I shared portions of it with my classmates in our creative writing class, I came to see that my main character's Ukrainian-ness, while obviously an important aspect of her identity, wasn't the only one; and more importantly, perhaps, I realized that my own Ukrainian-ness, which provided the impetus for the novel, wasn't the only factor impelling me to continue writing it. I saw myself—and wanted to be seen—not as a Ukrainian Canadian

writer at work on a Ukrainian Canadian novel but simply as a writer, struggling with her first book.

My classmates were unconvinced. I was surprised, really, at how firmly the ethnic label stuck, and how my ethnicity influenced their perception of my writing. They believed that I was jumping on the multicultural bandwagon by writing one of those hackneyed “who-am-I” ethnic books. Such books, in one classmate’s opinion, might be popular with particular readers (Ukrainian Canadians, in the case of my novel) but they held no appeal for mainstream audiences. While I tried to argue for the broad literary merits of my “who-am-I” ethnic book (I pointed to my use of language and my experimentation with form), my classmate couldn’t get past the dominant theme of my work (Ukrainian Canadian identity). He insisted that, if it were published, the novel would never be read by more than a small group of readers (Ukrainian Canadians).

In 1999, shortly after I moved to Vancouver and entered the Ph.D. program at the University of British Columbia, I placed my novel with Coteau, a small press based in Regina, Saskatchewan. The excitement, though, of eventually seeing my first book in print (we decided that it required substantial revision and wouldn’t be published until 2003) was mitigated by my concerns about how, where, and by whom the novel would be received. Would it be marketed as a Ukrainian Canadian book or as a Canadian book? Would it be reviewed in Ukrainian Canadian magazines and newspapers or in mainstream Canadian media? Would it attract Ukrainian Canadian readers or Canadian readers? Readers from the prairies or from across the country? Coteau had previously published works by Ukrainian Canadian writers (Larry Warwaruk’s *The Ukrainian Wedding* and Janice Kulyk Keefer’s and Solomea Pavlychko’s *Two Lands, New Visions:*

Stories From Canada and Ukraine both came out in 1998), so the press was an obvious choice for me. I was, and am, grateful for the careful attention that my editors at Coteau have given to my manuscript, and for the encouragement that they have given me. I suspect that few other presses—and certainly no big publishing house—would have risked taking on my project, not only because of its Ukrainian Canadian content, but also because of my status as a first-time writer. Nonetheless, after I signed on with Coteau, I began worrying about the future of *Sing For Me, Kalyna!*.

From the perspective of my classmates in our creative writing class, only Ukrainian Canadians would be interested in my novel. But would Ukrainian Canadians actually read it? Or would they simply buy it (like my family members who had bought Kostash's book) and put it on display?

Ultimately, my concerns became the starting point of this project, my Ph.D. thesis. Troubled by the likelihood that my novel might never be read by Ukrainian Canadians, much less non-Ukrainian Canadians—troubled, too, by the possibility that it would never be studied by Canadian literary scholars or taught in their Canadian literature courses—I decided to undertake a book-length critical study of literature written in English by Canadians of Ukrainian descent that would draw attention to the contribution Ukrainian Canadian writers have made to Canadian literature. Over the course of my thesis, I intended to (1) trace the emergence of the Ukrainian Canadian literary tradition; and (2) illustrate, through close readings of select texts, the relevance of these texts to ongoing debates within Canadian literary studies (debates about ethnicity, “race,” and gender, for example; nationalism and transnationalism; multiculturalism and transculturalism). Combining postcolonial literary theories with formalist reading

strategies, I would argue for the inclusion of Ukrainian Canadian literature within Canadian literary studies. My thesis would begin to clear—or claim—a space, I thought, in Canadian literary studies for Ukrainian Canadian literature (including my own novel); I would convince scholars to study this literature, teachers to teach it, and readers to read it.

I had in mind, at first, an audience of Canadianists; my argument, initially, was going to hinge on the ways in which Canadian literary studies have marginalized ethnic minority writers and their works. For proof, I had an extensive body of Ukrainian Canadian texts that had received little—and in many cases no—attention in either Canadian literary journals or book-length critical studies on Canadian literature. But as I began to plan and research this project, and as I learned about the numerous Ukrainian Canadian studies programs that exist in this country, my sense of audience changed. I realized that I needed to address Ukrainian Canadian and non-Ukrainian Canadian scholars alike.

I discovered that, while Ukrainian Canadian scholars had developed an extensive network of institutes, centres, and programs of study, they had relegated Ukrainian Canadian literature (especially texts written in English) to the margins of their scholarly agenda. They had produced an impressive body of work related to Ukrainian Canadian history, politics, and culture (mainly folk culture) but had given considerably less attention to Ukrainian Canadian prose, poetry, drama, and non-fiction. In the smattering of essays on Ukrainian Canadian literature that had been published, moreover, I found scant evidence to suggest that scholars had critically engaged with this literature—with the language, for example, structure, style, and complex themes of the texts. Many

Ukrainian Canadian writers had explicitly or implicitly addressed the difficulties of maintaining their ethnic and national identity, or had drawn attention to fractures and fissures within the Ukrainian Canadian community, or had criticized dominant, often celebratory, discourses of multiculturalism; and they had done so in works that experimented in exciting ways with language and form. But Ukrainian Canadian literary scholars seemed interested only in those texts (Vera Lysenko's *Yellow Boots* comes to mind) that supported their own ideas about Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity—texts that affirmed their understanding of Ukrainian Canadians as a unified community of individuals who, despite physical hardship and intense social pressures to assimilate to Anglo-Canadian culture, had retained many aspects of their unique ethnic heritage while, at the same time, ascending the socioeconomic hierarchies of Canadian society. These scholars tended to focus on certain writers who perpetuated this narrative of progress while ignoring the many writers who too glaringly challenged it.

How could I blame Canadian literary scholars for overlooking Ukrainian Canadian literary texts if Ukrainian Canadian scholars—those who seemed to be in the perfect position to teach others (Ukrainian Canadians as well as non-Ukrainian Canadians) about the existence and value of Ukrainian Canadian literature—had made no attempts to make these texts visible through their own scholarly work?

With this book, then, I have taken a first step toward retrieving Ukrainian Canadian literature from the margins of Ukrainian Canadian studies programs and replacing it within the context of Canadian literary studies. I have done so both as a writer and a scholar who wants the large number and rich variety of English-language Ukrainian Canadian texts to be *read*. I want to see these texts written about, critically, in

mainstream literary journals and scholarly books, and I want them to be included on reading lists for courses in Canadian literature. The inclusion of Ukrainian Canadian literary texts in Canadian literary studies will not only provide readers with insight into Ukrainian Canadian history and culture: it will also give them an understanding of the exciting ways in which a particular group of writers have pushed, and continue to push, the boundaries of language and form; and, more generally, it will encourage scholars to continue exploring the literary traditions of various other ethnic minority groups.

But I confess, too, that as a fourth-generation Ukrainian Canadian, I have written this book with the future of my ethnic group in mind. My hope is that, as Ukrainian Canadian texts are increasingly drawn into current debates going on in Canadian literary circles, students from Ukrainian Canadian backgrounds will discover the valuable contribution that Ukrainian Canadian writers have made to Canadian literature. Maybe, if *All of Baba's Children* is on their parents' bookshelves, they will decide to read what Kostash actually has to say about being Ukrainian Canadian; maybe they will seek out other stories by Ukrainian Canadian writers; and maybe they will be inspired to write their own.

Critical Contexts

Literature in Canada is rich with texts by writers for whom the process of writing involves an active, and often highly troubled, negotiation between their cultural ethnicity and national identity. Since the early 1970s—as a result, in part, of Lester B. Pearson's Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1963), Pierre Trudeau's announcement of a "Policy of Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework" (1971),

and the passing of the Multiculturalism Act (1988) by Brian Mulroney's government—myriad changes in the publishing, reviewing, teaching, and critiquing of Canadian literary texts have increasingly reflected the relevance of so-called “racial” and “ethnic” minority writing to mainstream Canadian literary studies.¹ My thesis, broadly speaking, is a study of one ethnic minority literature: literature written in English by Canadians of Ukrainian descent. In addition to analyzing literary works by Ukrainian Canadians, I examine the extensive cultural studies network that has developed within the Ukrainian Canadian scholarly community; illustrate the limitations of current Ukrainian Canadian literary studies; and suggest alternative approaches to the study of Ukrainian Canadian literature. By emphasizing the importance of historicizing and contextualizing constructions and expressions of ethnicity, I argue against the conflation of ethnography and ethnicity. Ideas about ethnicity, I suggest, shift and change over time as they intersect with dominant discourses of (post)colonialism, assimilation, multiculturalism, and transnationalism, as well as issues of “race,” gender, sexuality, and class.

By undertaking a critical study of Ukrainian Canadian literature, I enter ongoing discussions about the treatment of ethnic minority literatures within mainstream Canadian literary studies: the ways in which multiculturalism has both facilitated and undermined the representation of ethnic minority literatures in mainstream literary discourse. Importantly, while I use the terms “ethnic minority” and “mainstream” literatures

¹ I distinguish between “racial” and “ethnic” minority writing because, as Winfried Siemerling suggests, “[e]thnicity has . . . been rejected sometimes as a serviceable category by those who feel that it might depoliticize issues by conflating them, for instance those concerning minorities in general with those concerning visible minorities” (11). My thesis focuses specifically on “ethnic” (not “visible” or “racial”) minorities.

throughout much of my thesis, I use them cautiously and provisionally.² Conscious of the possibility that such terms, by perpetuating a rigid division between centre and margin (Anglo-Canadian versus non-Anglo-Canadian cultural practices and institutions), fail to account for the heterogeneity and fluidity of both, I explore the extent to which ethnic minority literatures have been incorporated into the institutionalized structures of Canadian literary studies, particularly in the last decade. I take as my point of departure the assumption that, from the 1970s onward, studies of ethnic minority literatures are becoming more common, but that Ukrainian Canadian writing remains under-represented in Canadian literary scholarship.³

What defines an ethnic minority text, an ethnic minority writer, an ethnic minority critic? Can we distinguish between existing ethnic minority and mainstream literary traditions and textual practices? And, if so, how do we effectively include ethnic writing in mainstream Canadian literary studies? These questions foreground some of the key issues frequently addressed by scholars whose work centres on ethnic minority writing; the variety and the complexity of their perspectives on ethnic minority writing, however, illustrate the inherent difficulties of arriving at any simple answers.

² Because I focus on the English Canadian literary institution, I use the term “mainstream” Canadian literary studies to refer to literary scholars’ numerous activities including writing, publishing, editing, reviewing, and teaching within the context of English Departments in Canadian universities. I use the term “ethnic minority” literary studies to refer to similar scholarly activities undertaken in relation to ethnic minority texts within the context of either English Departments or other academic disciplines (for example, Ukrainian Canadian cultural studies programs).

³ In “Canadian Ethnic Minority Literature in English” (1994), Enoch Padolsky surveys a broad range of ethnic minority literatures (by writers, for example, of Czech, Hungarian, Dutch, Arab, West Indian, East Asian, and Ukrainian descent), paying particular attention to the scholarly reception of this writing. He suggests that “[i]n the post-Second World War period, and especially from the late 1970s onwards, the number of Canadian minority writers increased dramatically, along with the range of groups represented” (364). Although he questions the “inroads made by minority texts and writers into the Canadian canon” (375), Padolsky acknowledges that minority writers receive recognition within the literary institution through awards, conferences, anthologies, bibliographic projects, literary histories, journals, teaching, critical books and articles (366-73). As I will discuss at length later in this chapter, however, very little scholarly work exists in relation to the substantial body of Ukrainian Canadian literature in English.

Many would argue that Canadian culture—including Canadian literature—is marked by its diversity: “[t]o read Canadian literature attentively,” says W.H. New in *A History of Canadian Literature* (1989), “is to realise how diverse Canadian culture is It is the cultural plurality inside the country that most fundamentally shapes the way Canadians define their political character, draw the dimensions of their literature, and voice their commitment to causes, institutions and individuality” (1-2). Canada’s colonial legacies are British and French—Hugh McLennan’s “two solitudes” has become a sort of symbolic shorthand for describing Canada’s dominant anglophone and francophone cultures (Aponiuk 1)⁴—but Canada has always also comprised a vast array of cultural groups and, from its beginnings until the present day, Canadian literature has been shaped (at least in part) by writers whose backgrounds are neither British nor French.⁵ Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond, in the introduction to their controversial anthology *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions* (1990), suggest that “we are all immigrants” to this place (n.p.); that the Canadian literary canon has always been, by definition, multicultural, and that Canadian literary studies have always embraced ethnic minority writing (13).⁶ Indeed, some of the earliest Canadian writers to achieve

⁴ As W.H. New points out in *Borderlands: How we talk about Canada* (1998), Hugh MacLennan borrowed the term “two solitudes” from the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke. “In Rilke, and in MacLennan’s epigraph, the phrase in full reads: ‘Love consists in this, / that two solitudes protect, / and touch, and greet each other’” (26). In its original context, then, the phrase emphasizes the connection between “two solitudes” while in popular rhetoric the phrase is decontextualized and ironically “functions to reinscribe a self-congratulatory divisiveness” (26).

⁵ Furthermore, the terms “British” and “French” are themselves reductive, glossing over differences within these groups (for example, Irish, Scottish, and Welsh within the category of British; Breton, Norman, and Provençal within the category of French).

⁶ Hutcheon and Richmond anticipate Werner Sollors’s notion (as articulated in *Theories of Ethnicity* [1996]) that ethnicity is a trait shared by all people and not simply by minority groups. “We are all immigrants,” of course, is a quotation from Margaret Atwood’s *The Journals of Susanna Moodie* (1970).

In *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada* (2000), Smaro Kamboureli discusses at length the critical reception of Hutcheon and Richmond’s anthology (162-74) as well as Hutcheon’s response (in “Multicultural Furor: The Reception of *Other Solitudes*” [1996]) to the debate surrounding their anthology.

canonical recognition—Laura Salverson, Frederick Philip Grove, and A.M. Klein, for example—came from ethnic minority backgrounds (Padolsky, “Canadian Ethnic Minority” 373; Kamboureli, *Making a Difference* 1). And certainly Watson Kirkconnell’s substantial work on Canadian literature in languages other than English and French—including his annual review (1937-1965) in the *University of Toronto Quarterly*—provides evidence that the study of ethnic minority writing is not a recent phenomenon (Siemerling 5; Woodsworth 24). To some extent, then, the argument that Canadian literary studies have always reflected Canada’s cultural pluralism is a supportable one.

At the same time, a number of literary scholars have advanced rather less positive (though equally salient) arguments about the inclusion of ethnic minority literatures in Canadian literary studies. Following the advent of official multiculturalism in the 1960s—and particularly in the 1990s—scholars have criticized institutionalized multicultural ideology and its effects on the Canadian literary institution. In his introduction to *Writing Ethnicity: Cross-cultural Consciousness in Canadian and Québécois Literature* (1996), for example, Winfried Siemerling cautions that “demographics, settlement patterns, political representation, and official policies of multiculturalism do not find their direct equivalences in either literature or literary studies” (4). He argues that, at present, when ethnic minority texts are studied in the context of Canadian literature, they often are read for their ethnic particularities and, as such, their value is perceived as more sociological than literary or aesthetic (7). Similarly, Enoch Padolsky, in “Canadian Ethnic Minority Literature in English” (1994), suggests that while the production and study of ethnic minority has increased in recent years—in part bolstered by multicultural funding (366)—this writing has nonetheless made little impact on mainstream literary

studies. Ethnic minority texts, according to Padolsky, are too often published by small, minority-oriented presses; these texts are rarely reviewed, moreover, and studied primarily by minority critics (375).⁷ Natalia Aponiuk, too, remarks that “in an ironic commentary on Canada’s official policy of multiculturalism, the advent, the implementation, and the funding of multicultural policies have assisted in fixating literature produced in Canada in two distinct categories—that of the ‘first and founding nations’ and that of the ‘other solitudes’” (1). For scholars such as Siemerling, Padolsky, and Aponiuk, multiculturalism—far from encouraging the inclusion of ethnic minority literatures in Canadian literary studies—has contributed to the marginalization of these literatures within the mainstream Canadian literary institution.

In fact, these arguments foreground the fundamental concern in all debates about the relation between ethnic minority writing and mainstream Canadian literary studies: to what extent does multiculturalism actually promote ethnic diversity? Here again, in their evaluations of multicultural ideology, scholars are divided. Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka⁸ (working, respectively, in the disciplines of philosophy and political science) argue, for instance, that multiculturalism or liberal pluralism is a favourable model for

⁷ Certainly some minority writers are published by large presses (including, for example, Joy Kogawa, Rohinton Mistry, Wayson Choy, Rudy Wiebe, and Janice Kulyk Keefer). But Padolsky says that “many minority writers are still being published, individually or in anthologies, in group-specific journals or by group-run, small, or regional presses” (375). Indeed, the majority of Ukrainian Canadian writers (among them Andrew Suknaski, Maara Haas, Marusya Bociurkiw, Helen Potrebenko, George Morrisette and Larry Warwaruk) are published by small presses (such as Thistle-down, NeWest, Lilith, Lazara, Turnstone, and Coteau). “Further,” Padolsky writes, “production conditions on the margins, which is where much minority writing and criticism can be found, tend to entail ‘marginal’ problems: distribution of texts is often difficult, reviews are fewer and less prominent, libraries are less likely to carry texts, publishing houses are less able to reprint them, teachers less likely to teach them, students to write theses on them, critics less likely to find them, write on them, and be published” (375). In a related discussion of ethnic minority literary studies, Sneja Gunew calls for continued “intervention” in the “public cultural arena”: she identifies the need for scholars to publish, edit, and review in “mainstream contexts rather than always in special-interest journals” (*Framing Marginality* 15).

⁸ Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (1994); and Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (1995).

protecting minority rights. Other writers and intellectuals—most notably Neil Bissoondath—criticize multiculturalism for the way in which, in practice, it encourages the ghettoization of minority groups and, hence, discourages their full participation in the nation state.⁹ Still other minority critics and theorists, such as Himani Bannerji and Roy Miki,¹⁰ see multiculturalism as an ideology that pays superficial attention to difference: not unlike Bissoondath, they condemn the ways in which the practice of multiculturalism tends toward exoticism and stereotype.¹¹ But these critics' central argument is that multiculturalism overlooks the inherent material inequalities between cultural groups. Put another way, multiculturalism evokes difference in order to neutralize it (Bannerji 109).

In terms of literary studies, the token inclusion of ethnic minority texts in mainstream scholarly work is often cited as one way that multiculturalism, in practice, neutralizes difference. Padolsky suggests, for example, that although some ethnic minority writers have received critical—even canonical—attention in Canadian literary studies

[t]he list of established minority writers is relatively short, and an incommensurate percentage of criticism has addressed this short list. Furthermore, much of the criticism of canonized minority writers has treated them in relation to 'mainstream' categories: Grove and Wiebe as Prairie writers, Klein and Layton as modernist poets, Ondaatje and Cohen as post-modern writers. Other minority writers seem to function

⁹ Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada* (1994).

¹⁰ Bannerji, "On the Dark Side of the Nation" (1996); and Miki, *Broken Entries: Race Subjectivity Writing* (1998).

¹¹ See Maria Ng's "Chop Suey Writing: Sui Sin Far, Wayson Choy, and Judy Fong Bates" (1998) in which Ng critiques literary representations of Chinese Canadians that "maintain a set of stereotypical images . . . grounded in Chinatown" (172). Ng calls for a "wider and more inclusive representation of Chinese Canadian lives" (184), one that acknowledges the complex and heterogeneous experiences of Chinese Canadians. In "The Emergence of 'Asian Canadian Literature': Can Lit's Obscure Supplement?" (1999), Guy Beauregard suggests that, in their "fictionalized representations of localized spaces," Chinese Canadian writers such as SKY Lee and Fred Wah engage with cultural stereotypes in order to challenge readers' assumptions about stereotypical Chinese Canadian culture (72).

within the canon as 'token' immigrant or 'ethnic' writers (e.g. Laura Salverson, John Marlyn, Adele Wiseman). ("Canadian Ethnic Minority" 376)¹²

Not unlike Padolsky, Smaro Kamboureli also argues that the token inclusion of ethnic minority texts in mainstream literary studies fails to challenge fundamentally traditional understandings of Canadian literature.¹³ She cautions, however, not against the tendency to read ethnic minority texts in relation to "mainstream categories" but against the tendency to view ethnic minority writers merely as representatives of their ethnic groups: "[r]epresenting Canada's multiculturalism with a spattering of only one or two authors, making such writers visible only by viewing them as representative of their cultural groups, does virtually nothing to dispel the 'marginality' attributed to those authors" (*Making a Difference* 3).

But if ethnic minority texts should be approached neither "in relation to 'mainstream' categories" nor "as representative of cultural groups," then how should they be approached? Should literary scholars alter their aesthetic sensibilities to accommodate the cultural particularities of ethnic minority texts? Precisely what form should engagements with ethnic minority literature take? The underlying problem for scholars of ethnic minority literature, as articulated by Sneja Gunew in *Framing Marginality: Multicultural Literary Studies* (1994), "centre[s] upon the paradox of emphasising the difference of that which, eventually, you are seeking to incorporate within the

¹² Padolsky acknowledges the difficulties of making claims about canonicity: he admits that "there is not much published analysis in this area" but suggests nonetheless that "some generalizations could probably be made (with appropriate reservations)" (376). While he suggests that critics often examine the works of canonized ethnic writers (such as Grove, Wiebe, Klein, Layton, Ondaatje, and Cohen) in relation to mainstream categories, Padolsky could make a reverse argument: that these established ethnic writers initiate discussion of ethnicity within the mainstream literary institution.

¹³ Roy Miki reads the critical reception of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* as an instance of "token" inclusion in the Canadian literary canon (136).

mainstream” (3). Gunew suggests that various theoretical frameworks—psychoanalytical, feminist, and postcolonial, for example—can be effectively used to draw ethnic minority literatures into mainstream literary debates. Smaro Kamourelis, in *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada* (2000), similarly asserts that “ethnic literature defies a unified approach” (vii); scholars, rather, must attend to the “cultural, historical, and ideological” specificities of ethnic minority texts (viii).

Clearly the elaboration of critical and theoretical approaches to ethnic minority literatures requires that literary scholars undertake more projects focused on the multiple dimensions of ethnic minority texts. Interestingly, however, whereas mainstream scholars of Canadian literature have placed the concept of a Canadian canon under scrutiny—calling attention to regional, gendered, sexual, racial, and ethnic diversity in Canadian literary texts—scholars of ethnic minority literatures such as Joseph Pivato persist in affirming that these literatures are culturally unified and unique, impeding wide-ranging discussions and debates about the nature of ethnic minority writing. In “Representation of Ethnicity as Problem: Essence or Construction” (1996), Pivato argues that one must belong to the ethnic group one studies (some First Nations and feminist critics advance similar arguments about indigenous and women’s writing). According to Pivato, “[f]or a person from outside the minority group to presume to speak about the experience of (and for) persons from the marginalized group is not just a political problem but an aesthetic one as well” (51). But as long as ethnic minority literary scholars assume “insider” positions of authority as they implicitly assert their exclusive ability to speak for (or on behalf of) ethnic minority communities and their literatures, ethnic minority literary criticism will remain “outside” the mainstream. The study of

ethnic minority literatures may be increasing, but if these literatures are to become part of Canadian literary studies, much work remains to be done with regard to the comprehensive study of specific ethnic minority literatures and the engagement of these literatures in current theoretical debates that include and also—crucially—transcend ethnicity.

Project Overview

Nurtured by some three generations of Ukrainian Canadian writers, the Ukrainian Canadian literary tradition is an important component of Ukrainian Canadian cultural production; Ukrainian Canadian scholars, moreover, have given serious attention to the study of Ukrainian Canadian culture, particularly since 1970. The problem, however, is that Ukrainian Canadian studies programs rely on particularly limited—usually folkloric or ethnographic—notions of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity that impede wide-ranging discussions about the multiple dimensions of Ukrainian Canadian texts. This is not to say that folklore and ethnography provide inherently negative frameworks for articulating ethnic identity. Ukrainians in Canada have retained vibrant traditions related to song, dance, visual arts, and food, and these traditions have contributed to the maintenance of cohesive Ukrainian Canadian communities.¹⁴ Multiculturalism, moreover, has been instrumental in preserving Ukrainian Canadian folkways. For the Ukrainian Canadian scholarly community, too, multiculturalism has been ostensibly positive: multicultural

¹⁴ See Nataka Faryna's *Ukrainian Canadiana* (1976), Zonia Keywan's *Greater Than Kings: Ukrainian Pioneer Settlement in Canada* (1977), Jars Balan's *Salt and Braided Bread: Ukrainian Life in Canada* (1984), Manoly Lupul's *Continuity and Change: The Cultural Life of Alberta's First Ukrainians* (1988), and Ramon Hnatyshyn and Robert Klymasz's *Art and Ethnicity: The Ukrainian Tradition in Canada* (1991).

funding supports, for example, the centres, institutes, presses, and journals that have been established for the study and promotion of Ukrainian and Ukrainian Canadian culture.

Yet Ukrainian Canadian writers frequently criticize multicultural ideology and its repercussions for hyphenated Canadians; in their works, they often probe the relationships between ethnic and national identity, ethnic and “racial” identity, ethnic and gendered identity; and, perhaps most importantly, many Ukrainian Canadian writers experiment with narrative style and genre in their attempts to articulate the complex, uneasy realities of their hybrid subjectivities. So when Ukrainian Canadian literary texts are approached only through historical and ethnographic frameworks—when they are uncritically lauded as part of the enduring Ukrainian Canadian cultural legacy—their writers’ potential contribution to other debates is left unexplored. My feeling is that the Ukrainian Canadian scholarly community’s enduring commitment to the promotion of Ukrainian culture—in segregated Ukrainian Canadian studies programs, and under the rubric of multiculturalism—has paradoxically contributed to the under-representation of Ukrainian Canadian literature in mainstream Canadian literary discussion and debates.

But rather than simply critiquing the current state of Ukrainian Canadian literary studies, in the chapters that follow I conduct close readings of select Canadian and Ukrainian Canadian texts. I suggest that existing work on Ukrainian Canadian literature—insofar as it privileges moments of immigration and hence relies (implicitly or explicitly) on notions of ethnic “purity” or cultural “authenticity”—overlooks the inherently heterogeneous nature of ethnic subjectivity. By attending to the complex issues addressed in Ukrainian Canadian writing—and, specifically, in writing by second- and third-generation Ukrainian Canadians—I argue that pure or authentic constructions

of ethnicity exist more as imagined ideals than as practical realities. Eclipsed or eroded by dominant discourses of nationhood and nationality, ethnicity in Ukrainian Canadian texts is often experienced and expressed as an absence—something that exists in the past (but not the present), in the ancestral homeland (but not here). Unlike many immigrant ethnic minority writers who are able to retain more concrete ties to their countries of origin, Ukrainian Canadian writers must recreate or re-imagine those ties.

Divided into five chapters, my project follows a rough chronology of Ukrainian Canadian literary production (in English) during the twentieth century. In the present, introductory, chapter of the thesis, I provide a general overview of Ukrainian Canadian history, paying particular attention to the development of Ukrainian- and English-language literature, as well as the establishment of Ukrainian Canadian studies programs. Chapters Two, Three, and Four are structured around periods of time dominated by particular cultural and political discourses; in each of these chapters, I preface my readings of select Ukrainian Canadian texts (prose, poetry, drama, and non-fiction) with a brief overview of the social, cultural, and political realities of specific historical moments. My assumption is that Ukrainian Canadian works must be read for the ways in which their authors respond to (reject, resist, affirm, challenge) shifting public discourses of ethnicity and nationality. In Chapter Two (1900 to 1970), I examine the assimilationist rhetoric articulated by such non-Ukrainian Canadian writers as Ralph Connor (in *The Foreigner: A Tale of Saskatchewan*, 1909), Sinclair Ross (in *As For Me and My House*, 1941), and Margaret Laurence (in *A Jest of God*, 1966). I read Vera Lysenko's *Yellow Boots* (1954), the first English-language novel by a Ukrainian Canadian, as a text that reinforces discourses of assimilation even as it appears to

anticipate—and indeed embrace—multicultural models of nationhood and nationality. In Chapter Three (1970 to 1984), I focus on Maara Haas’s novel *The Street Where I Live* (1976), George Ryga’s play *A Letter to My Son* (1981), and Andrew Suknaski’s poetry (published in *Wood Mountain Poems*, 1976; *the ghosts call you poor*, 1978; and *In the Name of Narid*, 1981), and I explore these writers’ ambivalent responses to the policies of practices of multiculturalism. In Chapter Four (1985-2000), as I turn my attention to Janice Kulyk Keefer’s novel *The Green Library* (1996) and her family history *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family* (1998), as well as two works of non-fiction by Myrna Kostash (*Bloodlines: A Journey Into Eastern Europe*, 1993; and *The Doomed Bridegroom: A Memoir*, 1998), I identify a shift from multicultural to transnational or transcultural discourses of individual- and group-identity formation. My discussions of Kulyk Keefer’s and Kostash’s writing about their travels “back” to Ukraine centre on these writers’ attempts to (re)define their sense of self, community, history, and home by “returning” to their ethnic homeland.

The conclusion at which I arrive over the course of this project is that if Ukrainian Canadians are to maintain meaningful ties to their ethnic heritage, they must constantly—if paradoxically—re-invent themselves as Ukrainians and as Canadians. In Chapter Five, as I examine this paradox, I draw parallels between Lysenko and Kulyk Keefer, both of whom rely on conventional narrative techniques in their writing and privilege nation-based models of identity that marginalize the experiences of ethnic minorities. Haas, Ryga, Suknaski, and Kostash, by contrast, experiment with multiple languages and genres: shaped, thematically and formally, by their experiences as hybrid subjects, their texts illustrate that ethnicity is less product than process; less fixed than fluid; constantly

under construction and open to negotiation. The next generation of Ukrainian Canadians—to whom I turn my attention in the conclusion of the thesis—must continue to (re)invent themselves through new languages and forms in order not simply to preserve and pass on but to actively re-imagine their ethnic identities.

Ukrainians in Canada

Ukrainians represent one of the largest ethnic minorities in Canada, and their history is characterized by strong traditions of social organization, political activism, and cultural production. As numerous historians and demographers point out, Ukrainians immigrated to Canada in three distinct waves: from the 1870s until 1914, approximately 170,000 Ukrainians settled in Canada; in the late 1920s, some 68,000 Ukrainians immigrated; and, between 1947 and 1950, a further 32,000 arrived.¹⁵ As a result, Ukrainians became (and remain) one of the largest ethnic communities in Canada—a point frequently underscored by Ukrainian Canadian scholars.¹⁶ Scholars, too, in numerous (and sometimes romanticized) descriptions of Ukrainian immigration and

¹⁵ I cite figures provided by Frances Swyrypa in “From Sheepskin Coat to Blue Jeans: A Brief History of Ukrainians in Canada” (1991), but exact immigration figures, in fact, are difficult to determine (particularly in the early years) because, upon arriving in Canada, many ethnically Ukrainian immigrants were identified according to the state from which they came (i.e. Austria, Hungary, Russia, Poland). As Orest Subtley suggests, in *Ukrainians in North America* (1991), “if one glanced at a map of Europe in 1900, there was no country called ‘Ukraine’ to be found. Indeed, for many centuries there had been no Ukrainian state, no time when the Ukrainians had ruled themselves . . . Under the circumstances, at the turn of the century Ukrainians had difficulty defining their national identity” (3). Some Ukrainians identified themselves as “Galician” or “Bukovynian” (according to the provinces from which they came) and others used the term “Ruthenian,” the “old historic” name for Ukrainians (Marunchak 64). Immigration figures for the first wave of immigration vary from 100,000 (Gerus and Rea 7; Yuzyk 12) to 200,000 (Marunchak 64; Woycenko 15); for the second wave, from 45,000 (Yuzuk 12) to 70,000 (Marunchak 373); and, for the third wave, from 31,000 (Balan, *Salt and Braided Bread* 12) to 40,000 (Marunchak 571).

¹⁶ According to Swyrypa, by 1941, Ukrainian Canadians were the fourth largest ethnic group in Canada (behind British-, French-, and German-Canadians); by 1981, they had fallen to fifth place (supplanted by Italian-Canadians) (Swyrypa, “From Sheepskin Coat” 18). In *Creating a Landscape: A Geography of Ukrainians in Canada* (1989), Lubomyr Luciuk and Bohdan Kordan suggest that in 1989 Ukrainians (with a population of 529,615) still ranked fifth in size of all ethnic groups in Canada. Over time, however, ethnicity becomes increasingly complex and difficult to track with accuracy (given multiple “mixed” ethnic

settlement, emphasize the unity and cohesion of Ukrainians in Canada.¹⁷ But from the outset of immigration, the homogeneity of the Ukrainian community in Canada has been less real than constructed or imagined. Ukrainian Canadians have long been divided along religious and political lines, not only between but also *within* immigrant waves. Immigrants carried with them existing “Old Country” tensions between members of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church and the Ukrainian Greek-Orthodox Church, and between adherents of pro-Soviet and pro-nationalist ideologies. Mennonite and Jewish Ukrainians, though rarely mentioned in accounts of Ukrainian Canadian history, also immigrated to Canada.¹⁸ Descendants of Ukrainian immigrants differ, moreover, in terms of their ethnic and national allegiances: whereas some maintain strong ties with their Ukrainian heritage (in some cases constructed ties through the practice of culture, in other cases actual social, political, and economic ties with Ukraine), others identify themselves only nominally as “Ukrainian Canadian,” and still others see themselves as simply “Canadian.”

The first wave of immigration (1870s-1914) comprised largely uneducated, impoverished peasant farmers from the (then Austro-Hungarian) western provinces of Galicia, Bukovyna, and Transcarpathia: they were members of a “subjugated” (Swyripa,

origins). Statistics from the 1996 census regarding Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity, for example, are difficult to interpret because they include “single” and “multiple” responses. Statistics Canada states that in 1996 the population of Ukrainian Canadians was 1,026,475 (making Ukrainian Canadians the ninth largest ethnic group in Canadian). But a significant number of these Ukrainian Canadians (694,790) reported multiple (unspecified) ethnic ancestries as well (<http://www.statcan.ca>).

¹⁷ Lubomyr Luciuk and Bohdan Kordan, for example, write that, upon arrival in Canada, Ukrainians “no longer remained locked into the parochialism of village or regional loyalties and politics but became increasingly conscious of a national Ukrainian identity . . . Ukrainians, living in bloc settlements of the Prairies or in inner city ghettos like North End Winnipeg, came to think of themselves as a group, bound together by religious, cultural, socio-economic, and political ties” (np). See also Paul Yuzyk’s *Ukrainian Canadians: Their Place and Role in Canadian Life* (1967), Ol’ha Woycenko’s *The Ukrainians in Canada* (1968), and Michael Marunchak’s *The Ukrainian Canadians: A History* (1982).

“From Sheepskin Coat” 12) nation who sought a fresh start overseas.¹⁹ According to

Jars Balan:

[s]tatistics paint a grim picture of what life was like for peasants in the Austro-Hungarian empire in the latter half of the nineteenth century. And they show that while suffering was widespread throughout the lower classes, the most victimized group of all were the Ukrainians. They had not only the lowest standard of living (the per-capita income in Galicia was one-tenth that in the rest of Austria), but the highest mortality rate in the empire (hovering between forty and forty-eight deaths per thousand in the Ukrainian part of Galicia, compared to twenty-eight per thousand in the Polish part). In addition, Ukrainians had smaller landholdings and larger debts; were more afflicted with disease; and had less access to medical care than their peasant counterparts in other provinces. (*Salt and Braided Bread* 4)

Having heard stories about cheap, abundant land in Canada—“a quarter section of 160 acres for a \$10.00 fee” (Gerus and Rea 7)—many Ukrainians were enticed to immigrate²⁰ and the vast majority formed rural bloc settlements in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta.²¹ During the early years of settlement, it was not uncommon for immigrant women to clear and cultivate land while immigrant men left their homesteads to obtain ready cash through mining, lumber, or railway work (Marunchak 88-9). In historical scholarship, much is made about the early Ukrainian pioneers’ love of the land and their unshakeable faith in the new life that it promised them. Accounts of early homesteading experiences are rife with descriptions of the immigrants’ physical and spiritual endurance

¹⁸ According to Balan, most Ukrainian Jews and Mennonites claimed—and continue to claim—Russian roots (16-7). See Gerald Tulchinsky’s *Taking Root: The Origins of the Canadian Jewish Community* (1992) and Frank H. Epp’s *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People* (1974).

¹⁹ Ukrainians also immigrated to the United States and to South America (especially Brazil). See Orest Subtelny’s *Ukrainians in North America* (1991).

²⁰ Wasyl Eleniak and Ivan Pillipiw are generally acknowledged as the first Ukrainians who immigrated to Canada (1891) and their “news” apparently spread quickly, causing a “sensation at home” (Gerus and Rea 5). Dr. Joseph Oleskiw also visited Canada in 1895 and wrote a pamphlet (“About Free Lands”) that circulated widely among Ukrainians—Marunchak calls him “their Moses of a sort, leading them to a promised land” (29). Clifford Sifton’s immigration policy is also frequently cited as crucial to encouraging Ukrainian migration to Canada (Woycenko 11; Gerus and Rea 7; Marunchak 71).

²¹ According to Marunchak, 94% of Ukrainian immigrants settled in the western prairie provinces (67).

in the face of hardship. Ukrainian settlers rapidly adjusted to their new surroundings: they not only built homes but also schools, churches, and reading societies (*chytalny*).²² A number of Ukrainian-language newspapers were soon established in Canada (all in Winnipeg) by the relatively small number of educated individuals who immigrated in the first wave.²³

Unlike immigrants of the first wave, immigrants of the second wave (1919-1939) comprised two “categories” of people: “war-impooverished peasants” and members of the “persecuted nationalistic intelligentsia” (Gerus and Rea 12). Most came from eastern Galicia (which had fallen under Polish rule following the First World War) and were fleeing the economically and politically oppressive Polish state.²⁴ Historians suggest that immigrants of the second wave were, on the whole, more educated and nationally conscious than those of the first wave, and, while the majority settled in the prairie provinces, a significant number of “interwar” immigrants remained in southern Ontario (Gerus and Rea 13). These new immigrants threw their support behind existing (usually

²² *Chytalny* grew out of the *Prosvita* movement, established in Ukraine in 1868. *Prosvita*, according to Marunchak, “organized reading societies, co-operatives and credit unions” (161), and *chytalny* gave “even illiterate farmers access to a broad range of literature—technical, political, and creative—through the books, newspapers, and pamphlets that were read aloud for their benefit” (Balan, *Salt and Braided Bread* 7).

²³ Some of the most prominent newspapers of this period (all published in Winnipeg) included *Kanadiiskyi Farmer/Canadian Farmer* (1903), founded by the Liberal party, and *Robochyi Narod/Working People* (1909), which provided a voice for the Ukrainian Social Democratic Party. *Ranok/Dawn* (1905) served proselytizing purposes on behalf of the Presbyterian Church; *Ukrainskyi Holos/Ukrainian Voice* (1910) was a pro-nationalist newspaper that also advocated for an independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church; and *Kanadiiskyi Rusyn/Canadian Ruthenian* (1911) reflected the views of the Ukrainian Catholic Church (Gerus and Rea 10). A large number of other newspapers “appeared and collapsed with startling rapidity” (Gerus and Rea 10): Marunchak discusses these at length (238-96).

²⁴ In the early 1920s, the Polish government confiscated large Galician estates from wealthy individuals and the Orthodox Church. Although 91% of the region’s population consisted of Ukrainian peasants “engaged in subsistence farming,” 300,000 Polish farmers were brought into the region and the confiscated land was then redistributed among them. The Polish authorities simultaneously embarked on a “relentless programme of enforced assimilation,” closing down Ukrainian schools and arresting hundreds of Ukrainian students, soldiers, and political activists. In 1930, Marshal Pilsudski’s military government formally initiated the “pacification” of western Ukraine which resulted in widespread atrocities toward Ukrainians (Balan, *Salt and Braided Bread* 8-10).

pro-nationalist) Ukrainian political organizations, such as the Ukrainian Self Reliance League (1918), and they also established Canadian branches of associations founded in Ukraine, such as the “rather curious conservative-monarchist” United Hetman Organization (1918) (Gerus and Rea 14). Partly in response to the pro-communist Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Temple Association (1918), the Ukrainian National Federation (1932) was formed—strongly supported by militant nationalist immigrants of the second wave (Gerus and Rea 15). At the same time, a number of new church-related organizations were formed (most notably the Ukrainian Catholic Brotherhood [1932]), adding to the long list of existing organizations supported by the Ukrainian-Catholic and Ukrainian-Orthodox Churches.²⁵ In 1940, the Ukrainian Canadian Committee was formed, a “national committee, which spoke for all but the Communists who rejected it and were rejected by it,” and which has since played “an indispensable role in the encouragement and preservation of Ukrainian cultural life” (Gerus and Rea 15). During and after the Second World War, Ukrainians continued to publish numerous newspapers and became increasingly involved in Canadian politics (i.e. as elected representatives in provincial and federal governments).²⁶

Immigrants of the third and final wave²⁷ (1947-1952) were primarily political

²⁵ Again, see Marunchak for a detailed discussion of these and other groups (393-423). In *Creating a Landscape: A Geography of Ukrainians in Canada* (1991), Luciuk and Kordan provide a rather more concise overview of important Ukrainian Canadian political and religious organizations (17).

²⁶ Marunchak (434-40) discusses Ukrainian Canadians' involvement in provincial and federal governments during this period. He also discusses the emergence of new newspapers (*Canadian Sitch*, *Truth and Liberty*, *Veterans News*, and *The Truth*, for example, all published in Winnipeg) as well as the continuity of existing newspapers (especially *Ukrainian Voice* and *Canadian Ukrainian*) (470-98).

²⁷ For a detailed look at the third wave of immigration, see Lubomyr Luciuk's *Searching for Place: Ukrainian Displaced Persons, Canada, and the Migration of Memory* (2000).

Ukrainians continued (and continue) to immigrate to Canada, though in much smaller numbers. As Swyripa points out, restrictions placed on emigration by the former Soviet Union resulted in a “trickle of newcomers.” She suggests that, by 1991, Ukrainian Canadians were “overwhelmingly Canadian born” (“From Sheepskin Coat” 18).

dissidents and intellectuals, refugees from all parts of Ukraine seeking asylum from Stalin's oppressive communist regime; "forcibly removed to western Europe as Nazi slave labor, they refused repatriation to the Soviet Union . . . at the war's end" (Swyripa, "From Sheepskin Coat" 17). These highly educated, politically active immigrants (referred to in derogatory terms as "DPs" or "Displaced Persons") settled almost exclusively in large southern Ontario and Quebec urban centres; most of them came from urban backgrounds in Ukraine and were therefore drawn to the "booming factories and business opportunities in the major cities of central Canada" (Balan, *Salt and Braided Bread* 12). Marunchak describes third-wave immigrants as "teachers, doctors, economists, engineers, lawyers, university lecturers . . . poets, writers, painters and journalists" (571). Although several Ukrainian organizations in Canada, including the Ukrainian Canadian Committee, provided assistance to the new immigrants, "acute tensions" quickly developed between the émigré community and the "established and overwhelmingly Canadian-born Ukrainian community" (Gerus and Rea 18). According to O.W. Gerus and J.E. Rea, the "reluctance and often outright refusal of the newcomers to join existing organizations, their nationalistic arrogance and elitism and their determination to convert the established organized life to their own political purpose (the liberation of Ukraine) was one source of difficulty" (18). Canadian-born Ukrainians, on the other hand, "considered themselves responsible for the good fortune of the newcomers" and "resented the seeming lack of gratitude on the part of the former DPs for the work of the pioneers in facilitating the resettlement of the refugees and for winning acceptance of the Ukrainian fact in Canada in the first place" (Gerus and Rea 18). Conflicts between new Ukrainian immigrants and Ukrainian Canadians are frequently—

but briefly—touched upon by historians. More often than not, in their discussions of Ukrainians in post-Second World War Canada, scholars choose to focus on the cohesive nature of the Ukrainian Canadian community, emphasizing the collective achievements of Ukrainian Canadians in professional and cultural spheres.²⁸

Ukrainian Canadian Literature

Beginning with the arrival of the first immigrants in Canada, Ukrainians developed and nurtured strong traditions of artistic expression—music, dance, folk and visual arts; and, not surprisingly, given Ukrainians' commitment to preserving and recording their way of life, literary arts have long occupied a central position in Ukrainian Canadian cultural production. In scholars' work on the history of Ukrainians in Canada, special attention is often given to the emergence of Ukrainian Canadian *belles lettres*—literature, that is, written in Ukrainian by Canadians of Ukrainian descent. Just as Ukrainian Canadian history is organized around the three waves of immigration, so too is Ukrainian Canadian literature discussed in terms of three distinct periods: “Pioneer,” “Interwar,” and “Refugee” (Balan, *Yarmarok* xvii). According to Balan, the “literature produced by each of these immigrations experienced a period of vigorous growth followed by gradual decline, with at least some authors finding a place for themselves in the history of Ukrainian Canadian letters” (*Yarmarok* xvii). The notion, however, that Ukrainian writing in Canada “encompasses three distinct phases of creativity”—that this writing is “almost exclusively immigrant” in character, having been produced by “natives

²⁸ See Paul Yuzyk's *Ukrainian Canadians: Their Place and Role in Canadian Life* (1967), Ol'ha Woycenko's *The Ukrainians in Canada* (1968), Michael Marunchak's *Ukrainian Canadians: A History* (1982), and Ramon Hnatyshyn and Robert Klymasz's *Art and Ethnicity: The Ukrainian Tradition in Canada* (1991). Marunchak's text includes numerous photographs of prominent Ukrainian Canadians.

of Ukraine, some emigrating as youths, others as adults” (Balan, *Yarmarok* xvii)—implicitly excludes the significant body of literature written in English by descendants of Ukrainian immigrants. In fact, Ukrainian Canadian literature includes a broad range of writing in Ukrainian and in English, in various genres, by émigré writers and by second- and third-generation Ukrainian Canadians.

The first literary works by Ukrainian Canadian writers (so-called “Pioneer” writers) were written in Ukrainian and appeared in North American Ukrainian newspapers: as early as 1898, in the American newspaper *Svoboda* (established in 1893, and published in Jersey City, New Jersey, with circulation in Canada as well as the United States), Canadian Ukrainians began to publish poetry. In their work, such poets as M. Gowda, Ivan Drohomeretsky, Dmytro Rarahowsky, Pawlo Krat, and Wasyl Holowatsky addressed “social problems, social injustices, and injustices done to the average human being” (Marunchak 300).²⁹ The first published books of poetry, such as Theodore Fedyk’s (1873-1941) anthology of poems *Songs of Canada and Austria* (1908) and Rarahowsky’s collection *Songs of the Laborers* (1908), explored the hardships of immigrants and the pioneers’ longing for their homeland. Other prominent poets of this early period include Sawa Chernetsky-Chaly (1873-1934), Wasyl Kudryk (1880-1963), and Semen Kowbel (1877-1965), all of whom published their work in *Svoboda* and *Canadian Farmer*. The first writers of prose were Reverend Nestor Dmytriw (nd), whose satiric short stories portrayed the tensions between Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian cultures, and Apolinariy Novak (1888-1961), whose stories thematized the exploitation of Ukrainian immigrant labourers. Many of the early prose writers, such as Zhymont

²⁹ Dates are not available for all of these writers, though Marunchak provides the following: Dmytro Rarahowsky (1878-1957) and Pawlo Krat (1882-1952) (299).

Bychynsky (1880-1947), Onufrey Hykawy (1886-1945), and Myroslav Stechishin (1883-1947), also wrote poetry, worked as editors of Ukrainian newspapers, and translated English literature into Ukrainian. Although most of these writers were men, some Ukrainian women—Mary Adamowska (1890-1963), Anna Pruska (1895-1947), and Catherine Novosad (1900-1975), for example—published during the “Pioneer” period. Other prominent writers of the time include John Pawchuk (1884-1966), John Novosad (1886-1956), Michael Kumka (1893-1967), Dmytro Hunkewyck (1893-1958), Dmytro Solanych (1876-1941), Panteleymon Bozyk (1878-1944), Peter Chaykowsky (1888-1938), Wasyl Chumer (1882-1963), and Illia Kiriak (1888-1955).³⁰ Kiriak’s three-volume, epic novel *Sons of the Soil* (1939-45; translated 1959) is widely recognized as the first Canadian novel written in Ukrainian.³¹

Between the two World Wars, Ukrainian literature in Canada developed in new directions as the Ukrainian Canadian literary landscape became more complex: not only did a number of new writers arrive in Canada, but existing writers, according to Michael Marunchak, “implant[ed] themselves deeper and deeper in the Canadian soil” (499). Marunchak provides a long list of writers—including Volodymyr Kupchenko (1897-1966), Alexander Lukowy (1904-1962), Hryhory Mazuryk (1898-1963), and Mykyta Mandryka (1886-1979)—who immigrated to Canada between the wars and whose Ukrainian-language literary works and political tracts reflected their aspirations for an independent Ukrainian state (530-533). Additionally, in the 1920s, a number of Marxist-oriented writers arrived in Canada and began working as a group called “The Overseas

³⁰ For a more detailed discussion of the “Literature of the Pioneers,” see Marunchak (297-311) and M.I. Mandryka’s *History of Ukrainian Literature in Canada* (1968) (29-62).

Hart,” led by Myroslav Irchan (1896-1937) and John Kulyk (1896-1941) (Marunchak 533-4). At the same time, many Ukrainian writers, some Canadian-born, began experimenting with English as well as writing in Ukrainian. Although still publishing (almost exclusively) in Ukrainian newspapers, such writers as Onufriy Iwach (1900-1964), Stephan Doroschuk (1894-1945), John Danylchuk (1900-1942), Joseph Wizniuk (1900-1975), and Hryhoriy Skehar (1891-1957) increasingly identified themselves as Ukrainian Canadians and articulated in their works the unique perspectives of hyphenated citizens.³²

In the decades following 1945, with the arrival of a relatively large number of Ukrainian dissident writers, the emergence of numerous second- and third-generation Ukrainian Canadian writers, and—crucially—the burgeoning of both Canadian and Ukrainian Canadian publishing houses,³³ Ukrainian Canadian literature continued to flourish. Although the “once-vibrant Ukrainian literature of the pioneer and interwar eras” had begun to wane as “the children and grandchildren of the first two immigrations overwhelmingly wrote in English,” the “third-wave immigrants became the bearers of the tradition of Ukrainian-language writing in Canada” (*Yarmarok* xv). And, from the substantial body of writing produced by émigré writers in the decade after the Second World War, it would appear that Ukrainian-language writing in Canada enjoyed one last creative period. In their poetry and prose, emigré writers of the third wave, such as

³¹ In her bibliography to *Men in Sheepskin Coats: A Study in Assimilation* (1947), Vera Lysenko lists the dates of publication for *Sons of the Soil* as 1928-1943. Mandryka, however, says that “only in 1939 was [Kiriak] able to publish the first volume; the last one in 1945” (73).

³² Again, see Marunchak (499-536) and Mandryka (63-147).

³³ Woycenko, in *The Ukrainians in Canada* (1968), lists the following (then) active publishers of Ukrainian Canadiana, all based in Winnipeg: National Publishers Limited (associated with *Canadian Farmer*), New Pathway Publishers, Trident Press (associated with *Ukrainian Voice*), the Ukrainian Book Club, the Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre, Nasha Kultura, and the Ukrainian National Home (140).

Volodymyr Skorupsky (1912-1985), Ulas Samchuk (1905-?), Ivan Bodnarchuk (1914-?), Svitlana Kuzmenko (1928-?), Borys Oleksandriv (1921-1979), and Yar Slavutych (1918-?), thematized “the longing for one’s native land and the unfulfilled yearning to return” as well as the experiences of immigrants in Canada (Balan, *Yarmarok* xvi).³⁴

As Jars Balan suggests, however, almost all Ukrainian-language authors in Canada have been immigrants from Ukraine: for the “progeny of Ukrainian immigrants, English has become not only the *lingua franca* but virtually the mother tongue, which is hardly surprising considering the intense and constant assimilatory pressures exerted on linguistic minorities in Canada” (Balan, *Yarmarok* xviii). By the 1970s, without “continued immigration from Europe”—without new authors and audiences whose mother tongue is Ukrainian—the Ukrainian-language literary legacy virtually came to an end. “It is, of course,” says Balan, “still possible that a Canadian-born author may yet make a contribution to the legacy of literature produced in Ukrainian . . . but so far, Ukrainian writing has had a difficult time rooting itself in Canadian soil” (*Yarmarok* xvii-xviii). Indeed, since 1970, roughly, the Ukrainian Canadian literary tradition has been sustained primarily by writing in English by Canadians of Ukrainian descent.

With the publication of Vera Lysenko’s *Men in Sheepskin Coats: A Study in Assimilation* in 1947, a new wave of writing—English-language literature by second- and third-generation Ukrainian Canadians—began to emerge. Lysenko, in fact, went on write two novels, *Yellow Boots* (1954) and *Westerly Wild* (1956). That all three of her works were written in English and were published not by a Ukrainian Canadian press but

³⁴. See Marunchak (664-670) and Mandryka (148-236). *Yarmarok: Ukrainian Writing in Canada Since the Second World War* (1987) includes selected works by émigré writers of the third wave as well as more detailed biographical information about these writers.

by a mainstream Canadian press (Ryerson) illustrates the movement of some Ukrainian Canadian writers from ethnic enclaves to more broadly “Canadian” contexts.³⁵

Lysenko’s exploration, moreover, of Ukrainian immigrants’ and their descendants’ assimilation to multicultural Canadian society anticipated both the official implementation of multicultural policy and subsequent writers’ interest in the effects of multiculturalism on Ukrainian Canadian communities.

In the multicultural milieu of the 1970s and 1980s a substantial body of Ukrainian Canadian literature began to develop, much (though not all) of it focused on ethnic experience, including tensions between ethnic and national identity.³⁶ A number of prose writers, such as Gloria Kupchenko Frolick (*The Green Tomato Years*, 1985; *The Chicken Man*, 1989; *Anna Veryna*, 1992), Yuri Kupchenko (*The Horseman of Shandro Crossing*, 1989), and Larry Warwaruk (*The Ukrainian Wedding*, 1998) depicted the rural pioneer experiences of early Ukrainian settlers in primarily realist works of fiction. Other fiction writers—Maara Haas (*The Street Where I Live*, 1976) and Ludmilla Bereshko (*The Parcel From Chicken Street and Other Stories*, 1989), for example—explored the experiences of immigrants in urban settings. In many of these works, as well as in some plays by Ted Galay (*After Baba’s Funeral*, 1981) and George Ryga (*A Letter to My Son*,

³⁵ This statement needs to be qualified. Nearly all Ukrainian-language texts published prior to 1947 were published by Ukrainian Canadian presses such as National Publishers Limited, New Pathway Publishers, Trident Press, the Ukrainian Book Club, the Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre, Nasha Kultura, and the Ukrainian National Home. Lysenko’s involvement, then, with a non-Ukrainian Canadian press is significant. But, while all of the English-language works that I go on to discuss were also published by non-Ukrainian Canadian publishers, the vast majority of works were published by small presses catering to specific audiences (prairie publishing houses such as Coteau, Thistledown, Tree Frog, NeWest, and Turnstone; feminist presses such as Press Gang and Lazara).

³⁶ Many Ukrainian Canadian texts published during the 1980s received direct financial assistance from Multiculturalism Canada, or the Office of Multiculturalism, Secretary of State, or Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism—for example, Andrew Suknaski’s *In the Name of Narid* (1981), Jars Balan and Yuri Klynovy’s *Yarmarok: Ukrainian Writing in Canada Since the Second World War* (1987), Ludmilla Bereshko’s *The Parcel From Chicken Street and Other Stories* (1989), Gloria Kupchenko Frolick’s *The Chicken Man* (1989), and Yuri Kupchenko’s *The Horseman of Shandro Crossing* (1989).

1981), conflicts between Ukrainian pioneers and their “Canadianized” children are thematized. Andrew Suknaski, one of the most prolific Ukrainian Canadian poets, published a prodigious number of poetry pamphlets and collections (including *Circles*, 1970; *This Shadow of Eden Once*, 1970; *In Mind Ov Xrossroads Ov Mythologies*, 1971; *Leaving*, 1974; *Leaving Wood Mountain*, 1975; *Blind Man’s House*, 1975; *Octomi*, 1976; *Wood Mountain Poems*, 1976; *Ghost Gun*, 1978; *The Ghosts Call You Poor*, 1978; *East of Myloona*, 1979; *In the Name of Narid*, 1981; and *The Land They Gave Away: New and Selected Poems*, 1982). For Suknaski, the similarities between Ukrainian and First Nations experience have been a primary concern. George Morrissette (*Finding Mom at Eaton’s*, 1981, *Prairie Howl*, 1977) and Brian Dedora (*White Light*, 1987) have used poetry to address aspects of their mixed ethnic backgrounds (Ukrainian and First Nations in Morrissette’s case, Ukrainian and Celtic in Dedora’s).

Beginning in the late 1970s, though, some of the most formally and thematically provocative Ukrainian Canadian literature was written by women writers of Ukrainian descent. In novels, short fiction, and poetry by Helen Potrebenko (*No Streets of Gold: A Social History of Ukrainians in Alberta*, 1977; *A Flight of Average Persons: Stories and Other Writings*, 1979; *Walking Slow*, 1985; *Taxi!*, 1986; *Life, Love and Unions*, 1987; *Hey Waitress and Other Stories*, 1989; *Riding Home*, 1995) and Marusya Bociurkiw (*The Woman Who Loved Airports*, 1994; *Halfway to the East*, 1999), the act of writing becomes an overtly political act as these writers explicitly criticize patriarchal and heterosexist social structures, as well as capitalist economic structures. Works of non-fiction, or creative non-fiction, by such writers as Myrna Kostash (*All of Baba’s Children*, 1977; *Bloodlines: A Journey Into Eastern Europe*, 1993; *The Doomed*

Bridegroom: A Memoir, 1998), and Janice Kulyk Keefer (*Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family*, 1998) challenge traditional literary genres as well as folkloric expressions of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity: their accounts of traveling “back” to Ukraine revisit familiar themes of history, home, and identity from new perspectives.

Ukrainian Canadian Studies

That Ukrainian Canadian literature in English developed alongside discourses of multiculturalism is no coincidence: nor is it coincidental that Ukrainian Canadian cultural studies programs (and scholarship related to Ukrainian Canadian history, culture, and politics) emerged with the introduction and institutionalization of multiculturalism. Although Professor Kost Andrusyshen established the “Chair of Ukrainian Language Studies” at the University of Saskatchewan in 1945 (Marunchak 732), and although some scholarly texts related to Ukrainians in Canada were published prior to the 1960s—Charles Young’s *The Ukrainian Canadians: A Study in Assimilation* (1931), for example, William Paluk’s *Canadian Cossacks: Essays, Articles and Stories on Ukrainian Canadian Life* (1943), Vera Lysenko’s *Men in Sheepskin Coats: A Study in Assimilation* (1947), and Paul Yuzyk’s *The Ukrainians in Manitoba: A Social History* (1953)—no concentrated unfolding of Ukrainian Canadian scholarship occurred until discussions about multiculturalism began to take place. Not surprisingly (given their history of political activism), Ukrainian Canadians—and, in particular, Ukrainian Canadian scholars—played an active, if not central, role in lobbying for the institutionalization of multiculturalism. In the decades before the Canadian Multiculturalism Act was formally passed (1988), the Ukrainian Canadian scholarly

community responded to growing public interest in the notion of a multicultural nation by mobilizing its resources and establishing the foundations for a complex network of Ukrainian Canadian cultural studies.

In 1963, when Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson launched the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Ukrainian Canadians, many of whom had experienced political oppression in the Old Country, balked at institutionalized anglophone and francophone cultural hegemony: “[a]mong the briefs submitted to the B&B Commission by various ethnocultural organizations, the largest share came from the Ukrainian Canadian community” (Bociurkiw 105).³⁷ According to Bohdan Bociurkiw, Ukrainian Canadians

undoubtedly played the leading role in the development and dissemination of the ideas and policy demands that eventually crystallized into the policy of multiculturalism. This role was rooted undoubtedly in their historical aversion to assimilation, as well as in political causes underlying much of Ukrainian emigration from the Old Country, a strong sense of collective responsibility for the preservation of the group’s ethnocultural values in Canada while these values were being suppressed by the alien rulers of Ukraine, the lasting commitment of Ukrainian churches to the preservation of the national cultural-linguistic heritage, the group’s highly developed capacity for grass-roots organization, and the nature of Ukrainian settlement in the Prairie provinces. (100-1)

³⁷ See *The Cultural Contribution of the Other Ethnic Groups* (1967), the fourth volume of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (edited by A. Davidson Dunton and André Laurendeau). Because it gives equal attention to multiple ethnic groups, this volume of the report does not reflect the overwhelming interest of Ukrainian Canadians in opposing bilingualism and biculturalism.

See, too, *The Muses, the Masses and the Massey Commission* (1992), Paul Litt’s study of the 1949 Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences. The Massey Commission, as it became known, was “specifically directed only to investigate broadcasting, federal cultural institutions, government relations with voluntary cultural associations, and federal university scholarships” but it “parlayed these instructions into a crusade for Canadian cultural nationalism” (3). Litt writes that ethnic groups (including Ukrainians) “were demanding recognition”; however, the “cultural lobby as a whole was too concerned about the survival of its own cultural tradition to get worked up about the plights of other minorities. Biculturalism was an accepted fact based on a historic and necessary accommodation, but there seemed to be no reason why new immigrant groups should not assimilate” (113).

Between 1963 and 1971, groups such as the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC), the Association of United Ukrainian Canadians (AUUC), the Ukrainian Canadian University Students' Union (SUSK), and the Ukrainian Professional and Business Federation, as well as prominent individuals and representatives from the Ukrainian Canadian press, voiced their staunch disapproval of a bipartite model of nationhood. At public forums and conferences, in newspaper articles and scholarly papers,³⁸ Ukrainian Canadians reiterated the argument that bilingualism and biculturalism would “[condemn] . . . other ethnic groups to an inferior, ‘non-founding’ status and their cultures to eventual submersion in one of two ‘official cultures’” (Bociurkiw 105). As an alternative to the proposed “B&B” framework, Ukrainian Canadians called for the federal government to “support the efforts of all ethnocultural groups to maintain and develop their cultural-linguistic heritage”; they suggested that a federal ministry of culture be established to “recognize and give unlimited support to all the cultures of the Canadian multicultural society” (Bociurkiw 105). Interestingly, when Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau eventually announced his new policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework, in October, 1971, he did so at a meeting of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress (Hryniuk and Luciuk 3).

Discussions among Ukrainian Canadians about multiculturalism, however, did not wane following Trudeau's announcement: now the work of consolidating multicultural policy—and Ukrainian Canadians' status within a multicultural state—began. Between 1971 and 1988, Ukrainian Canadian scholars convened on numerous occasions to

³⁸ For a fuller discussion of Ukrainian Canadians' participation in debates about multiculturalism, see Bohdan Bociurkiw's "The Federal Policy of Multiculturalism and the Ukrainian Canadian Community" (1978). See also Marunchak (725-31).

formulate strategies for preserving and promoting the Ukrainian way of life in Canada. The *All-Canadian Conference on Ukrainian Studies Courses*, for example, held in Winnipeg in 1974, brought together university professors from across the country (and across disciplines) to discuss the development and coordination of Ukrainian studies in Canadian universities (Marunchak 732). In 1977, at the University of Alberta, Ukrainian Canadian historians and political scientists gathered for a conference on *Ukrainian Canadians, Multiculturalism, and Separatism* where they evaluated the current political situation of Ukrainians vis-à-vis Quebec. *Identifications: Ethnicity and the Writer in Canada* (a conference held at the University of Alberta in 1979) brought debates about multiculturalism into the literary arena, giving both writers and literary scholars the opportunity to discuss the unique concerns surrounding ethnic minority writing.³⁹ (In fact, while the conference title suggests cross-cultural perspectives, the primary focus of the conference was Ukrainian literature in Canada. As Winfried Siemerling points out, this is hardly surprising given that the conference was organized by the Canadian Institute of Canadian Studies on the occasion of the seventy-fifth anniversary of Ukrainian publishing in Canada [26].)

But in the *Identifications* conference proceedings, statements made by Ukrainian Canadian writers such as Maara Haas and George Ryga illustrate that they felt ethnic labels segregated them from the Canadian writerly community: they refused, therefore, to identify themselves as “Ukrainian” Canadian writers, preferring instead to be seen as “Canadian” writers or simply as “writers.” As Maara Haas said, in a panel discussion,

³⁹ In 1988, the Research Institute for Comparative Literature at the University of Alberta hosted the *Literatures of Lesser Diffusion* conference in Edmonton. The conference proceedings, edited by Joseph Pivato, Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek, and Milan V. Dimic, include essays on a wide variety of ethnic minority literatures.

[i]t takes great discipline on my part not to vomit when I hear the word ethnic. My reflex action is to spit on the word that was spat on me in my formative years of the middle thirties. Dirty ethnic, rotten Slavic ethnic, ghetto freak ethnic. I was hyphenated, set apart by the English, Scottish, Irish factors outside the ghetto. Each time the word ethnic rears its hyphenated head, the odour of a clogged sewer smelling of racism poisons the air. (Balan, *Identifications* 136)

For Haas, the ethnic label was “alienating, segregating, hyphenating”: it “hyphenate[d] the writer off the scene” (136). Similarly, Ryga said,

[w]e’re discussing Canadian literature in a Canadian context and everything that implies. As a contributor to that literature, I find it difficult to see myself as a so-called hyphenated Canadian . . . When I wake up in the morning, I check myself out to see if I am still a man. Having determined that I am, I then face the world on its merits . . . I do not live in the past. I do not live in my father’s frame of reference. (140-2)

Ironically, while multiculturalism—the ideology so vigorously advocated by many Ukrainian Canadians—had given Ukrainian Canadian writers opportunities to write about their experiences as hyphenated Canadians, some of these writers were simultaneously critical of the ways in which multiculturalism relegated them and their work to the margins of Canadian literary discourse.

Of course, despite some Ukrainian Canadian writers’ uneasiness with identifying themselves, or being identified, as ethnically distinct from other Canadian writers, Ukrainian Canadian scholars, often capitalizing on multicultural funding opportunities, continued to work toward establishing distinct Ukrainian Canadian studies programs within Canadian universities. In 1976, the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies was established at the University of Alberta and the University of Toronto. Broadly focused on Ukrainian studies in Canada and internationally (especially in Ukraine), the CIUS supports a press that publishes the *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* as well as scholarly

books. In addition to running the Stasiuk Program for the Study of Contemporary Ukraine, the Ukrainian Canadian Program, the Ukrainian Church Studies Program, and the Kowalsky Program for the Study of Eastern Ukraine, the CIUS has also undertaken several large scholarly projects including the Encyclopedia of Ukraine, and the Canada Ukraine Legislative and Intergovernmental Project. In 1979, the Chair of Ukrainian Studies was founded at the University of Toronto and, in 1981, the Centre for Ukrainian Canadian Studies (which publishes the *Canadian Ethnic Studies* journal) was established at the University of Manitoba, providing courses in Ukrainian (and Ukrainian Canadian) literature, folklore, history, and arts. More recently, in 1989, the University of Alberta introduced its Ukrainian Folklore Program. Headed by the Huculak Chair of Ukrainian Culture and Ethnography, the Ukrainian Folklore Program offers students (at the undergraduate and graduate level) courses in folk song, dance, art, rites of passage, and calendar customs. The University of Saskatchewan, too, in 1999, reorganized its Ukrainian studies program: the Prairie Centre for the Study of Ukrainian Heritage and the newly founded Heritage Press are directed by the Lesya Ukrainka Chair of Ukrainian Studies.

Not surprisingly, as Ukrainian Canadian Studies were consolidated, a significant body of scholarly work on Ukrainians in Canada began to emerge. Many historians and ethnographers⁴⁰ have produced or edited studies of Ukrainian Canadians which broadly

⁴⁰ See Paul Yuzyk's *Ukrainian Canadians: Their Place and Role in Canadian Life* (1967); Ol'ha Woycenko's *The Ukrainians in Canada* (1968); Michael Marunchak's *The Ukrainian Canadians: A History* (first published in 1970 and revised in 1982); Manoly Lupul's *A Heritage in Transition: Essays in the History of Ukrainians in Canada* (1982); Jaroslav Rozumnyj's *New Soil—Old Roots: The Ukrainian Experience in Canada* (1983); Jars Balan's *Salt and Braided Bread: Ukrainian Life in Canada* (1984); O.W. Gerus and J.E. Rea's *The Ukrainians in Canada* (1985); Lubomyr Luciuk and Stella Hryniuk's *Canada's Ukrainians: Negotiating an Identity* (1991); Ramon Hnatyshyn and Robert Klymasz's *Art and Ethnicity: The Ukrainian Tradition in Canada* (1991); and Orest Subtelny's *Ukrainians in North America: An Illustrated History* (1991).

touch upon Ukrainian life in Canada, beginning with the arrival of the first pioneers; some historians⁴¹ have focused on specific aspects of the Ukrainian experience—settlement patterns and social trends, for example, in particular provinces and/or during specific time periods; and other scholars⁴² have recorded first-person accounts of settlement. Aside from works by Frances Swyripa and John-Paul Himka (*Loyalties in Conflict: Ukrainians During the Great War*, 1983), Vladimir Kaye (*Ukrainian Canadians in Canada's Wars*, 1983) and Lubomyr Luciuk (*Searching for Place: Ukrainian Displaced Persons, Canada, and the Migration of Memory*, 2000), the pioneer period has received more scholarly attention than the interwar or post-Second World War periods. Some studies of Ukrainian Canadian demographics have been assembled, including William Darcovich and Paul Yuzyk's *A Statistical Compendium on the Ukrainians in Canada, 1891-1976* (1981) and Lubomyr Luciuk and Bohdan Kordan's *Creating a Landscape: A Geography of Ukrainians in Canada* (1989). With Martha Bohachevsky-Chomiak's *Feminists Despite Themselves: Women in Ukrainian Community Life 1884-1939* (1988) and Frances Swyripa's *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity 1891-1991* (1993), feminist scholarship on Ukrainian Canadian women has begun to emerge.

In comparison to the significant body of existing scholarly work on Ukrainian Canadian (and, importantly, Ukrainian) history and ethnography, much less work on

⁴¹ See Vladimir Kaye's *Early Ukrainian Settlement in Canada 1895-1900* (1964); J.G. MacGregor's *Vilni Zemli [Free Lands]: The Ukrainian Settlement of Alberta* (1969); Helen Potrebenco's *No Streets of Gold: A Social History of Ukrainians in Alberta* (1977); Zonia Keywan's *Greater Than Kings: Ukrainian Pioneer Settlement in Canada* (1977); Jaroslav Petryshyn's *Peasants in the Promised Land: Canada and the Ukrainians, 1891-1914* (1985); and Manoly Lupul's *Continuity and Change: The Cultural Life of Alberta's First Ukrainians* (1988).

⁴² See Harry Piniuta's *Land of Pain, Land of Promise: First Person Accounts by Ukrainian Pioneers 1891-1914* (1978); William Czumer's *Recollections About the Life of the First Ukrainian Settlers in Canada* (1981); and Zonia Keywan's *Greater Than Kings: Ukrainian Pioneer Settlement in Canada* (1977).

Ukrainian Canadian literature (in Ukrainian or in English) has been undertaken by Ukrainian Canadian scholars. Although most historical overviews of Ukrainian Canadians include discussions of Ukrainian Canadian literature, these discussions are often brief and primarily comprise biographical sketches of Ukrainian Canadian (predominantly Ukrainian-language) writers. Generally speaking, when Ukrainian Canadian scholars turn their attention to literature, they study or translate the works of Ukrainian-language authors from Ukraine (such as Tara Shevchenko and Ivan Franko). Considerably less work is done on Ukrainian-language authors in Canada, and still less on English-language Ukrainian Canadian writers.⁴³ M.I. Mandryka's *History of Ukrainian Literature in Canada* (1968) stands out as the first book-length study of Ukrainian Canadian literature by a Ukrainian Canadian scholar.⁴⁴ Mandryka's book, however, focuses almost exclusively on Ukrainian-language writers: it is a compilation of biographical information accompanied by some summary of selected texts but virtually no textual analysis.

In the 1990s, scholars began to publish papers on English-language Ukrainian Canadian texts in essay collections and academic periodicals such as the *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* and *Canadian Ethnic Studies*. Because the study of English-language Ukrainian Canadian literature is relatively new, and because the production of Ukrainian

⁴³ Marta Tarnawsky's bibliographies *Ukrainian Literature in English: Books and Pamphlets, 1890-1965* (1988) and *Ukrainian Literature in English: Articles in Journals and Collections, 1840-1965* (1991) offer comprehensive (though not up-to-date) information on Ukrainian Canadian literary scholarship. The vast majority of works assembled by Tarnawsky relate to English studies of Ukrainian (as opposed to Ukrainian Canadian) authors and their texts.

⁴⁴ Watson Kirkconnell, a "scholar, university administrator and prodigious translator of verse from dozens of languages" (Woodsworth 13), is often cited as one of the first scholars, translators, and promoters of Ukrainian Canadian literature. His *Twilight of Liberty* (1941) examines Ukrainian pioneer literature (in Ukrainian). Kirkconnell's other work on Ukrainian Canadians include: *The Ukrainian Canadians and the War* (1940), *Our Ukrainian Loyalists* (1943), and *Seven Pillars of Freedom* (1944). See Judith

Canadian literary criticism is relatively sporadic, generalizations about the nature of existing Ukrainian Canadian literary scholarship are difficult to make. But, as with all literary studies, works of fiction—especially novels—seem to receive more attention than poetry, drama, or non-fiction (there exists a disproportionate body of work related to Lysenko's *Yellow Boots*⁴⁵). Just as many Ukrainian Canadian historians concentrate on the first wave of Ukrainian immigration, so too do Ukrainian Canadian literary scholars show particular interest in literature related thematically to early Ukrainian settlement. Not unlike current trends in Ukrainian Canadian historical scholarship, feminist studies of Ukrainian Canadian pioneer literature are becoming increasingly common (Sonia Mycak's⁴⁶ "A Different Story by Helen Potrebko: The Pioneer Myth Re-Visited" [1996] and Tamara Palmer Seiler's "Including the Female Immigrant Story: A Comparative Look at Narrative Strategies" [1996] are two examples). At the same time, in other scholars' essays (Carolyn Redl's "Neither Here nor There: Canadian Fiction by the Multicultural Generation" [1996], for instance, and Mary Kirtz's "Old World Traditions, New World Inventions: Bilingualism, Multiculturalism, and the Transformation of Ethnicity" [1996]), Ukrainian Canadian texts are included in broader discussions of multicultural themes in Canadian writing. In "Multi-vocality and National Literature: Toward a Post-colonial and Multicultural Aesthetic" (1996), Palmer Seiler discusses the ways in which multicultural texts (including Ukrainian Canadian texts) can be approached through postcolonial theoretical frameworks. Occasionally, Ukrainian

Woodsworth's "Watson Kirkconnell and the 'Undoing of Babel': A Little-Known Case in Canadian Translation History" (2000).

⁴⁵ With the republication of Vera Lysenko's novel *Yellow Boots*, in 1992 (by NeWest Press and the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies), a number of feminist readings of Lysenko and her work have been published, including Beverly Rasporich's "Retelling Vera Lysenko: A Feminist and Ethnic Writer" (1989) and "Vera Lysenko's Fictions: Engendering Prairie Spaces" (1991), as well as Alexandra Kruchka Glynn's "Reintroducing Vera Lysenko—Ukrainian Canadian Author" (1990).

Canadian scholars touch upon the formal aspects of Ukrainian Canadian texts: Robert Klymasz, for example, examines the use of Ukrainian words in English-language texts in “Art of Intrusion: Macaronicism in Ukrainian Canadian Literature” (1989), and Tatiana Nazarenko explores the distinctly Ukrainian features of Ukrainian Canadian visual poetry in “Ukrainian Canadian Visual Poetry: Traditions and Innovations” (1996). Others seek to establish and articulate the thematically unique aspects of Ukrainian Canadian texts: Mycak (in “Simple Sentimentality or Specific Narrative Strategy?: The Functions and Use of Nostalgia in the Ukrainian Canadian Text” [1998]) focuses on the role of nostalgia for the ethnic homeland in Ukrainian Canadian literature and film, and Maxim Tarnawsky (in “What is Told in The Green Library: History, Institutions, Language” [1999]) compares Ukrainian Canadian and Ukrainian American texts (he looks, specifically, at Janice Kulyk Keefer’s *The Green Library*, 1996, in relation to Askold Melnyczuk’s *What is Told*, 1994).

In *Canuke Literature: Critical Essays on Canadian Ukrainian Writing* (2001)—noteworthy as the first book-length study of English-language Ukrainian Canadian literature—Australian Ukrainian literary scholar Sonia Mycak sets out to provide a chronological overview of Ukrainian Canadian literature as well as detailed analyses of select texts by Ukrainian Canadian writers, but her book offers limited insight into its subject matter. A collection of five essays (two of which were published previously in *Canadian Ethnic Studies*⁴⁶), prefaced by a brief introduction, *Canuke Literature* fails to contextualize or historicize the development of the Ukrainian Canadian literary tradition.

⁴⁶ Mycak is an Australian Ukrainian literary scholar.

⁴⁷ Mycak’s “A Different Story by Helen Potrebenco: The Pioneer Myth Re-Visited” and “Simple Sentimentality or Specific Narrative Strategy?: The Functions and Use of Nostalgia in the Ukrainian-Canadian Text” appeared in *Canadian Ethnic Studies* in 1996 and 1998, respectively.

Mycak primarily focuses on prose fiction and drama, with no discussion of poetry or (creative) non-fiction by Ukrainian Canadian writers, and her study centres less on issues of language, style, and genre than on the ways in which cultural preservation is thematized through folkloric expressions of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity.

After reading through the relatively small corpus of scholarly work on English-language Ukrainian Canadian literature, my feeling is that the gaps in Ukrainian Canadian literary criticism are more telling than the existing body of scholarship. With few exceptions, Ukrainian Canadian scholars concentrate on texts that follow traditional generic conventions (realist fiction, most commonly) but they overlook texts that challenge generic boundaries. So, for example, Andrew Suknaski's and Brian Dedora's long poems and experimental visual poetry have received no critical attention from Ukrainian Canadian scholars; nor have these scholars studied the works of creative non-fiction by Myrna Kostash or Janice Kulyk Keefer.⁴⁸ Similarly, Ukrainian Canadian scholars tend to focus on texts (such as Lysenko's *Yellow Boots*) that portray Ukrainian characters actively preserving Ukrainian traditions and customs rather than on texts that explore Ukrainians' difficulties in maintaining their ethnic identity within Canadian society. Hence, nothing has been written on numerous works by Ted Galay, Maara Haas, and George Morrissette. Although feminist scholars appear to foreground the role of women within Ukrainian Canadian texts, they approach select texts (again, like *Yellow Boots*) that fail to challenge pervasive patriarchal social structures within Ukrainian Canadian communities and that implicitly affirm the cohesive nature of Ukrainian

⁴⁸ Maxim Tarnawsky's "What is Told in The Green Library: History, Institutions, Language" (1999) discusses Kulyk Keefer's novel *The Green Library* (1996).

Canadian communities. Texts by Marusya Bociurkiw that explicitly criticize patriarchal and heterosexist discourses within Ukrainian Canadian communities remain unexamined.

The problem, in a sense, is that Ukrainian Canadian literary scholars' hands are tied: since the 1970s (initially in response to the threat of assimilation to dominant anglophone and francophone cultures, and then in the interest of supporting multiculturalism), the Ukrainian Canadian academic community as a whole has focused its scholarly energy on promoting and preserving traditional folkloric aspects of Ukrainian Canadian culture. The development of Ukrainian studies programs and the concomitant production of scholarly work related to Ukrainian Canadian history and ethnography reflect scholars' common goal of maintaining a distinct and unified academic institution. To voice dissent openly—to advance arguments related to the fissures and fractures within Ukrainian Canadian communities, as articulated by Ukrainian Canadian writers—would be perceived as a disloyal challenge to the established institutionalized structures and discourses of the Ukrainian Canadian scholarly community.⁴⁹ Literary texts that explore the complex and uneasy realities of Ukrainian Canadian experience receive little or no critical attention from Ukrainian Canadian scholars precisely because they challenge the celebratory rhetoric of multiculturalism espoused by the Ukrainian Canadian academic institution.

Currently, the institutionalized structures of Ukrainian Canadian studies programs represent a “safe” space for the study of Ukrainian Canadian literature: here, Ukrainian

⁴⁹ Ukrainian Canadian writer and critic Janice Kulyk Keefer makes this point in “‘Coming Across Bones’: Historiographic Ethnofiction” (1995). She says, “I know that in the eyes of the Ukrainian Canadian community, my emphasis on a history that cuts both ways, showing Ukrainians as both oppressed and oppressors, may be perceived as the attitude of someone so alienated from her ancestry that she has taken to fouling her own nest” (99).

Canadian literary texts circulate as evidence of a vibrant Ukrainian Canadian cultural tradition—and rightly so. But rather than promote the value of Ukrainian Canadian literature beyond the borders of the Ukrainian Canadian academic institution, Ukrainian Canadian scholars seem to guard these borders against non-Ukrainian Canadian critical audiences. Insofar as Ukrainian Canadian texts can contribute to the lively exchange of wide-ranging ideas and arguments, and insofar as the Ukrainian Canadian academic institution is resistant to such exchange, mainstream Canadian literary studies represent a promising alternative—a space where the relation between ethnic minority literatures, multicultural ideology, and mainstream literary culture is already hotly debated, and where more scholarly work on Ukrainian Canadian literary texts can take place. My project—less a celebratory literary history than a critical literary study—proposes and puts into practice concrete strategies for reading Ukrainian Canadian literature *as literature*.

2. (Un)settling the West: Postcolonial Representations of Ukrainian Canadians, 1900 – 1970

Postcolonial Theories of the Settler Subject

In “Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World” (1990),⁵⁰ Stephen Slemon critically examines postcolonial literary scholars’ treatment of Second-World literature—literature, that is, from the ex-colonial settler colonies of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. According to Slemon, postcolonial theory is grounded in three separate and competing critical assumptions: first, the assumption that postcolonial literary studies, as “an outgrowth of what formerly were ‘Commonwealth’ literary studies,” encompass national literatures produced within former British colonies; second, that postcolonial literary scholars more specifically address the experiences of colonized peoples within “Third- and Fourth-World cultures, and within black, and ethnic, and First-Nation constituencies dispersed within First-World terrain”; and, third, that postcolonial theory seeks to identify “the kinds of anti-colonialist resistance that can take place in literary writing” (105). Slemon’s concern is that postcolonial literary scholars often mistake the third critical assumption for the second, so that the “idea of anti-colonial resistance becomes *synonymous* with Third- and Fourth-World literary writing” (106): as a result, “*all* literary writing which emerges from these cultural locations [is] understood as carrying a radical and contestatory content” and “the idea [is] discarded that important anti-colonialist literary writing can take place outside the ambit

⁵⁰ Slemon’s essay was first published in *World Literature Written in English* 30:2 (1990) and then republished in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*, edited by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995). I quote from the latter.

of Third- and Fourth-World literary writing” (106). In effect, postcolonial literary scholars, Slemon argues, by conflating literary resistance with Third- and Fourth-World writing, perpetuate a “centre/ periphery” model of postcolonialism, ironically reaffirming the very binarisms (of “Europe and its Others, of colonizer and colonized, of the West and the Rest, of the vocal and the silent” [106-7]) that they seek to displace. Second-World writing is “in danger of disappearing” from “the ambit of colonialism” because it is often perceived as “not sufficiently pure in its anti-colonialism, because it does not offer up an experiential grounding in a common ‘Third World’ aesthetics, because its modalities of post-coloniality are too ambivalent, too occasional and uncommon, for inclusion within the field” (107). Yet Slemon (building on the work of theorists such as Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha, Abdul JanMohamed, Benita Parry, and Jenny Sharpe) suggests that sites of anti-colonial resistance are never easy to locate; that resistance itself is “never *purely* resistance . . . but is always necessarily complicit in the apparatus it seeks to transgress” (108). Because, moreover, the “*illusion* of a stable self/other, here/there binary division has *never* been available to Second-World writers” (109), these writers are ideally equipped to articulate the “figural contestation between oppressor and oppressed, colonizer and colonizer” (109).

Alan Lawson, in “Postcolonial Theory and the ‘Settler’ Subject” (1995), corroborates and elaborates Slemon’s refusal of the “agonistic, static, disjunctive, and apparently overdetermining binaries that have inscribed and reinscribed the cultural condition of postcolonial communities” (21). Settler colonies, according to Lawson, are the places “where the operations of colonial power as *negotiation* are most intensely

visible” (24) because settlers themselves are “suspended between ‘mother’ and ‘other,’ simultaneously colonized and colonizing” (25). By participating in the imperial enterprise of settling the colony, settler subjects represent the British imperial “mother”; at the same time, by permanently settling in the colony, settlers become separate from the imperium as they seek to take on the indigenous status of the First Nations or aboriginal “other.” Mimicry, Lawson writes, is “a necessary and unavoidable part of the repertoire of the settler”: the settler subject “represents, but also mimics, the authentic imperial culture from which he—and more problematically, she—is separated” while he simultaneously “mimics, appropriates, and desires the authority of the Indigene” (26). Because the settler is “caught between two First Worlds, two origins of authority and authenticity”—because he “has colonized and has been colonized”—he “must speak of and against both [his] own oppressiveness and [his] own oppression” (28-9). As such, the settler subject “emerges from the material and textual enactments and enunciations of imperial power as a central site of investigation of the actual operations of colonial power” (32).

Slemon and Lawson begin to challenge the “agonistic, static, disjunctive, and apparently overdetermining binaries” (Lawson 21) of “Europe and its Others, of colonizer and colonized, of the West and the Rest, of the vocal and the silent” (Slemon 106-7), but their theorizations of the settler subject still rely on several problematically homogenizing assumptions about the settler subject’s ethnic and gender status. Lawson’s theory, in particular, clearly imagines the settler subject as British and male: he briefly mentions—but never addresses the specificities of—the female settler’s unique situation

in the patriarchal social structure of British colonial settler societies,⁵¹ and he fails to address the ways in which the term “British” belies the ethnic heterogeneity of settlers from the British Isles. Because they come from varied linguistic, religious, and class backgrounds and because their ethnic communities’ historical relations with Britain are often fraught, English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish settlers complicate the category of “British.”⁵² Indeed, by virtue of their unique cultural and political histories, these settlers are ambivalently situated vis-à-vis *three* “First World” cultures: British imperial culture (from which they benefit but to which they do not fully belong); the culture of their ethnic homeland (aspects of which they bring with them when they immigrate but from which they are necessarily separated), and First Nations culture (the culture that they displace even as—or precisely because—they desire its indigenous status). Settlers who immigrate to Second-World colonies from countries other than Britain—Ukrainians, for example, who immigrate to Canada—are similarly caught between three “origins” of cultural “authority and authenticity” (Lawson 28). Women settlers, moreover, must

⁵¹ Critics who do address the situation of women within postcolonial settler societies include Sneja Gunew, Anna Yeatman, Anna Rutherford, and Kirsten Holst Petersen. See Gunew’s and Yeatman’s *Feminism and The Politics of Difference* (1993) and Rutherford’s and Petersen’s *A Double Colonization: Colonial and Post-colonial Women’s Writing* (1986).

⁵² Differences of religion and class further complicate the ethnic categories of English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish (for example, Scottish Lowlanders versus Scottish Highlanders; Irish Protestants versus Irish Catholics). And, as Mark Zuehlke points out in *Scoundrels, Dreamers, and Second Sons: British Remittance Men in the Canadian West* (1994), even some immigrants from seemingly privileged strata of British society (for example, young men from upper class families) were ambivalently positioned in relation to British society. Traditionally, as Zuehlke explains, first-born sons in upper-class British families would inherit their father’s estate and second-born sons would be guaranteed careers as clergyman, doctors, or solicitors. But with the partial breakdown of the class system in Britain at the close of the nineteenth century, second-born sons could no longer be assured (or bought) a living in the church, medicine, or law. Frequently, then, second-sons of upper class British families were sent to the colonies: most were “well educated, of aristocratic or upper-middle-class background, cultured, and supported by regular allowances sent to them by family back in Britain” (v); they were sent away to spare their families the “embarrassment or shame” of having a son with no future prospects. These “remittance men,” however, had no *raison d’être* in the colonies: most passed their time by playing sports, hunting, and engaging in various other leisure activities. (Interestingly, some—like Malcolm Lowry—wrote.)

contend with the patriarchal aspects of colonial society as well as the patriarchal social structures of their ethnic communities.

Postcolonial theories of the settler subject are useful because they identify the operation of imperial ideology in the context of the Second-World—they identify the ways in which British imperialism makes possible the settlement of countries such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa. If these theories are to be workable, however, they must address not only the heterogeneity of settler subjects (the ethnic differences between settler groups, as well as the gender and class differences within settler groups) but also the tensions between this heterogeneity and emerging definitions of a homogeneous, unifying national culture. In fact, the differences between the national histories of the ex-settler colonies (i.e. the different ways in which discourses of colonialism give way to discourses of nationhood in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa) illustrate the conceptual limitations of postcolonial settler subject theories. Because these theories broadly address the operation of colonialism in the Second-World, they cannot account for the unique ways in which each Second-World colony comes to imagine (and constantly re-imagine) itself as a nation. In Canada, for example, the settler subject cannot be defined straightforwardly as the “colonizer” or the “colonized” because, for settlers, Canadian society promises a specific “new” world alternative to the “old”: Canada offers a radically new model of nationhood that ostensibly rejects (rather than replicates) the imperialism(s) of Britain and Europe. In many cases, settlers leave their homelands in order to leave *behind* the rigid social and economic hierarchies that characterize these countries, placing their faith in an idea of Canadian nationhood and nationality that offers freedom from imperial ideology, political

tyranny, and economic oppression. Ideally, the colony-cum-nation of Canada provides peoples from diverse ethnic, religious, and class backgrounds the opportunity to reinvent themselves (as they participate in and contribute to the invention of a new society) by abandoning the worst—but retaining and synthesizing the best—aspects of their old societies.

Canadian Nation(s) and Narration

What constitutes the “best” and the “worst” aspects of settlers’ homelands? Do newcomers to Canada entirely leave behind the latter and to what extent are the former actually incorporated into dominant constructions of Canadian culture and society? Does Canada become a nation in which social and economic inequalities no longer exist, in which discourses of imperialism cease to operate, and in which settlers’ diverse cultural backgrounds are equally represented in the unifying national culture? How are dominant constructions and definitions of the nation and national culture decided upon? How—and why—do they change over time?

This study, in general—and this chapter, specifically—grapples with all of these questions. By looking at literary texts that both reflect and challenge dominant national definitions, I examine some ways in which Canadian writers (primarily Canadian writers of Ukrainian descent) explore the intersections (and gaps) between “imagined” definitions of their national community and individuals’ experiences of social realities within this community. As Homi Bhabha argues in his introduction to *Nation and Narration* (1990), a “particular ambivalence . . . haunts the idea of the nation, and the language of those who write of it and the lives of those who live it”; “despite the certainty

with which historians speak of the ‘origins’ of nation as a sign of the ‘modernity’ of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality” (1). According to Bhabha, “[i]n the production of the nation as narration there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative” (“DissemiNation” 297). The conceptual space between nationalist pedagogy and the performance of national culture—between the collective ideals of nationhood and the lived experiences of national subjects—becomes the “site of *writing the nation*” (297). Importantly, moreover, both the pedagogical and performative aspects of the nation undergo constant revision: “counter-narratives” of the nation “*continually* evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries,” disturbing the “ideological manoeuvres through which ‘imagined communities’ are given essentialist identities” (300, my emphasis); in its “ambivalent and vacillating representation,” the nation “opens up the possibility of other narratives of the people and their difference” (300).

Many scholars of Canadian history suggest that the history of Canada is marked by shifting notions of what Canada (and being Canadian) means; and many literary scholars argue that Canadian literature reflects not only the ways in which national definitions change over time but also the frequent contradictions between these definitions (in Bhabha’s terms the “pedagogical” aspects of the nation) and individuals’ actual experiences of social reality in Canada (the “performative” aspects). In *A History of Canadian Literature*, W.H. New outlines some of the dominant models of Canadian nationhood that emerged following Canada’s independence in 1867 (because, he says, a history of literature in Canada is a record “not only of specific literary accomplishments

over space and through time, but also an account of the ways in which the shaping contexts also changed” [2]). New characterizes, for example, the period between 1867 and the First World War as an “age of expansion” and “definition” in which the “prevalent idea of nationalism declared a fundamental belief in cultural uniformity”: nationalist sentiment at this time was “anglocentric, male-dominated, and justified by appeals to God and Natural Law” (81). Between the First World War and 1959, social contexts in Canada became “less British” and “more American”; as Canada “proclaimed its ‘maturity,’” Canadians “began to think of their cultural identity in political terms, replacing the racial and religious definition of culture that had so governed the latter years of the nineteenth century” (137). And, from 1960 until 1985—decades in which Native and Québécois peoples began to assert their own claims to “nationhood,” and in which discourses of multiculturalism and feminism emerged—national definitions of Canadian culture began to acknowledge the ethnic, regional, and gendered diversity of its citizens (214). As New argues, however, in the introduction to (and indeed throughout) his book, no single “imagining” of the nation successfully defines its complex reality. The illusions of “fierce uniformity” that characterize national definitions during roughly the first century of Canadian history belie the (ethnic, religious, linguistic, political, and geographical) diversity of the nation (1), and the illusions of “unity in diversity” that characterize these definitions during the latter-half of the twentieth century under-emphasize the extent to which social and cultural uniformity was achieved (in terms of language and government, Canada was “established on the British model” and, outside of Quebec, many aspects of Anglo-Canadian culture are still dominant).

Indeed, a central concern to me in examining the shifting definitions of Canadian nationhood is the matter of cultural uniformity—how to evaluate the success or failure of ideologies and practices of assimilation, which I see as both necessary and necessarily ambivalent aspects of nation-formation. To some extent, after all, national unity requires linguistic, social, and cultural uniformity; it demands that *all* immigrants (British and non-British) make certain cultural compromises in order establish and participate in a common national culture. But are all ethnic groups expected to make the same compromises? Do they do so willingly? What is the nature of their gains and losses? And do the former ultimately outweigh the latter? How are changing definitions of the nation affected by ethnic groups' willingness (or unwillingness) to assimilate to the dominant national culture?

Ukrainian Canadians: A Study in Assimilation

In *Ukrainian Canadians: A Survey of Their Portrayal in English-language Works* (1978), Frances Swyripa examines Anglo-Canadians' representations of Ukrainian Canadians—and Ukrainian Canadians' self-representations—in English-language texts (government and church documents; newspaper and magazine articles; sociological and historical studies) published between 1896 and 1970. She argues that portrayals of Ukrainian Canadians in these works reflect an “evolving concept of the role, contribution, and status of Ukrainian Canadians against the background of changing views of Canada's national identity” (ix). Because, moreover, Ukrainians represent “one of the more visible and vocal minority groups in Canada,” the literature about them broadly reflects changing attitudes in Canada toward ethnic minorities (xi). According to Swyripa, from the “original emphasis on Anglo-conformity” (during the period beginning roughly in 1896

and ending in 1918) through the “continuation of assimilative pressures and the germination of a mosaic concept” (from 1919 to 1945) to the “recent acceptance of a multicultural expression of Canadian identity” (consolidated between 1946 and 1970) (ix), shifting perspectives on Ukrainian Canadians demonstrate the “progress towards eventual acceptance of the concept of diversity” (xi):

Swyripa argues that between 1896 and 1918 writing about Ukrainian Canadians by prominent Anglo-Canadians (government officials, educationalists, and missionaries) revealed Anglo-Canadians’ “concern for the British character of Canada and her national prosperity” (1).⁵³ These writers—most notably, the Methodist minister James S. Woodsworth (*Strangers Within Our Gates or Coming Canadians*, 1909)—traveled through Ukrainian bloc settlements on the prairies, observing the Ukrainian immigrants’ “clothing, church and cottage architecture, food, living conditions, customs, and religious observations” (5). They complained that “a lack of hygiene, general untidiness and overcrowding, a plain and unappetizing diet, and the presence of animals close to or in the house” were typical among Ukrainians (2). For these commentators, the immigrants’ churches (the Ukrainian Greek Catholic and the Greek Orthodox churches) were “authoritarian” and “ritualistic” (3), and Ukrainians themselves were superstitious, avaricious, and dishonest. Referring to Ukrainians as “Foreigners,” “Galicians,” “Sifton’s Sheepskins,” and “bohunks,” some Anglo-Canadian observers—such as A.R. Ford and George F. Chipman—went so far as to suggest that Ukrainians were racially inclined toward drunkenness, crime, and mental illness (8-9; 18). During the first two decades of the twentieth century, in fact, many Anglo-Canadians believed that Ukrainian

⁵³ See Swyripa’s extensively annotated bibliography of newspaper and magazine articles, government and church reports, and book-length scholarly texts.

immigrants would almost certainly corrupt Canadian society: assimilation was not seen as a two-way process of cultural exchange and compromise (i.e. Anglo-Canadians had little to learn from Ukrainian immigrants). The fate of respectable Anglo-Canadian society required the intervention of the state—the mobilization of “the church, the school, political clubs and organizations, the labour union, and both the English and native-language press” (19)—in acquainting Ukrainians with the “superiority of British-Canadian ideals, institutions, and way of life” (3). Departments of Education in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta introduced the “teaching of the English language, British ideals, and Canadian ways” to Ukrainian students in public schools; Methodist and Presbyterian evangelists established missions among Ukrainian communities; and government officials from the Department of the Interior frequently visited Ukrainian communities, monitoring their progress along the path of assimilation.

During and after the interwar period, between 1919 and 1945, “[v]ariety acquired value in some of the commentary on identity” (xii): as Anglo-Canadians became more familiar with Ukrainian Canadians, some began to consider the benefits of ethnic diversity. Swyripa suggests that

[a]lthough the vision of the Canadian nation continued to be essentially British in character—largely to counteract American pressures—greater maturity and faith in herself permitted Anglo-Canada to evaluate seriously the potential contribution of ethnically conscious non-British nationalities to Canadian development. Gradually, the idea of a ‘mosaic’ acquired shape and depth [. . .]. (26)

In part, Swyripa attributes Anglo-Canadians’ increasing familiarity with (and acceptance of) Ukrainian Canadians during the interwar period to the fact that Ukrainian Canadians at this time were becoming more politicized (influenced by the interwar influx of nationalistic Ukrainian immigrants). The “discussion of the Ukrainian question on the

world stage . . . enabled interested Anglo-Canadians to acquire knowledge of Ukrainian history hitherto unobtainable” (26-7). Furthermore, many first-wave Ukrainian immigrant families (who had had two decades or more to adjust to Anglo-Canadian culture) proved that Ukrainian Canadians posed no threat to Anglo-Canadian society. Writers, then, such as Miriam Elston and F. Heap (who published magazine articles in 1919 editions of *Graphic*, *Onward*, and the *Canadian Magazine of Politics, Science, Art, and Literature*), praised Ukrainian Canadians’ “educational, material, and spiritual progress, and their adaptation to Canadian ways” (Swyripa 27). Additionally, in reports presented to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Canada between 1918 and 1925, Presbyterian missionaries emphasized that Ukrainians “should be allowed to come in as partners in this great community of races in Canada and to make their contribution in blood and in character and endowment to the new nation that shall arise in our great land”; that “[a]ll racial groups,” moreover, must come to see nationality as “the sum of the qualities of more than 60 different nations in their representatives who share in common the inheritance of this land” (Swyripa 29). Anglo-Canadians, in other words, began to see assimilation as a two-way process of cultural exchange in which all groups contribute to the nation, and in which all are changed. While many Anglo-Canadian commentators on Ukrainian Canadians continued to advocate the continuing work of the government, school, and (Protestant) church in assimilating Ukrainian Canadians to Canadian society (implicitly affirming the dominance and superiority of Anglo-Canadian culture), some argued for a concept of Canada that would acknowledge its ethnically diverse citizens. In such works as William G. Smith’s *A Study in Canadian Immigration* (1920) and *Building the Nation: A Study of Some Problems Concerning the Churches’*

Relation to the Immigrants (1922), Robert England's *The Central European Immigrant in Canada* (1929), Charles H. Young's *Ukrainian Canadians: A Study in Assimilation* (1931), and Watson Kirkconnell's *Canadians All: A Primer of Canadian National Unity* (1941), Anglo-Canadian writers no longer stressed the need to Anglicize the foreigner; rather, they expressed the "urgent need to create a Canadian national spirit" that would reflect the different cultural contributions of the nation's citizens (31).

But Ukrainian Canadian culture, Swyrypa argues, was not recognized as a valuable component of Canadian society until Ukrainian Canadians themselves "refined the 'mosaic' concept to stress their integration into Canadian political, economic, and social life while retaining their historical and cultural heritage within a Ukrainian-Canadian collectivity" (xiii). After 1945, she argues, "Ukrainian Canadians themselves began to assume the function of English-language spokesmen for their group" (64) (bolstered in part by the predominantly intellectual third wave of Ukrainian immigration). Between 1946 and 1970, as Ukrainian Canadian scholars undertook historical and ethnographic studies of their own ethnic group, they assumed a leading role in debates about multiculturalism. Beginning with Vera Lysenko's *Men in Sheepskin Coats: A Study in Assimilation* (1947)—the first English-language history of Ukrainians in Canada—works by other Ukrainian Canadian scholars such as Paul Yuzyk, Vladimir Kaye, Olha Woycenko, and Michael Marunchak emphasized the tenacity of Ukrainian Canadian culture in Canada. These and other scholars, to whom I referred in Chapter One, articulated somewhat romanticized narratives of national progress in which Ukrainian Canadians heroically resist wholesale assimilation to Anglo-Canadian society; in which dominant models of nationhood initially (and wrongly) exclude but eventually

(and rightly) embrace ethnic minority groups. Placing their faith in Lysenko's notion that "assimilation is not uniformity" (4), many Ukrainian Canadian scholars suggested that Ukrainian Canadians had never compromised their cultural heritage. Multiculturalism would serve to sanction officially the acts of cultural preservation that Ukrainian Canadians had always practiced.

Yet, as Swyripa points out, by choosing to focus on the early history of Ukrainians in Canada or on the *organized* Ukrainian Canadian community (often "predicated on European-Ukrainian association and movements"), many Ukrainian Canadian scholars (writing between 1945 and 1970) overlooked the diminishing number of Ukrainian Canadians who "actively propagate[d] Ukrainian cultural traditions and instill[ed] in their children a concern for the fate of the Ukrainian nation in Europe" (118-9). These scholars failed to address the reasons for which many Ukrainian Canadians rejected their cultural heritage and actively embraced Anglo-Canadian culture. In order to fulfil their parents' dream of a better life, many Ukrainians—in particular, the children of first-wave Ukrainian homesteaders—learned to speak English, Anglicized their surnames, left their parents' farms, pursued higher education, and established professional careers for themselves in urban settings. Their decision to give up aspects of their Ukrainian culture was a conscious strategy for gaining social and economic status. According to Swyripa, scholars who insisted that Ukrainian Canadians were able to have it both ways—were able to retain their culture *and* participate in Anglo-Canadian society; were able to resist wholesale assimilation *and* benefit from membership in the unified national community—spoke on behalf of an "ever-shrinking minority generally identified with the organized Ukrainian-Canadian community" (Swyripa 119). (In fact, the

“promotion and preservation of the Ukrainian language and culture in Canada,” she writes, “is slowly becoming the task” of this minority and “[p]resent trends would suggest that Ukrainian-Canadian historiography in the future will focus on this minority as both the guardian and visible manifestation of a Ukrainian-Canadian subculture within Canadian society” [119]). My understanding of Ukrainian Canadians’ experiences of assimilation involves an acknowledgement that many Ukrainian Canadians *did* relinquish many aspects of their culture, often by choice, and that they did so in order to gain social and economic status. Whether or not this cultural loss was too high a price to pay for social and economic advancement is the question that remains to be addressed in my discussion of select literary works by and about Ukrainian Canadians during the seventy-year period Swyripa examines.

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I look closely at four prairie novels published roughly between 1900 and 1970 by writers who, through their depictions of Ukrainian Canadians, articulate different models of Canadian nationhood and Canadian identity. Central to all four writers’ portrayals of Ukrainian Canadians is the operation of assimilationist ideology: each text examines whether or not a uniform, homogeneous national culture is desirable; and each text questions whether or not this culture is attainable through processes of assimilation. I begin with Ralph Connor’s *The Foreigner: A Tale of Saskatchewan* (1909), the first Anglo-Canadian novel about Ukrainian Canadians, written some forty years after the establishment of the Dominion, in the midst of Canada’s transition from colony to nation—during what W.H. New calls the “age of expansion”

and “definition” (*History* 81). Connor’s representations of Ukrainian Canadians, I argue, reflect the ways in which early constructions of Canada and Canadian-ness privilege Anglo-Canadian social, cultural, and religious values. In fact, *The Foreigner* unambiguously advocates the assimilation of all, and especially Slavic, immigrants to early twentieth century anglocentric Canadian culture. In his novel, Connor demonstrates that assimilation is a necessary and ultimately successful strategy for Canadianizing peoples from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Next, I discuss Sinclair Ross’s *As For Me and My House* (1941), a novel set in the depression era, at a time when Canada’s political status as an independent nation was consolidated, resulting in the breakdown of racial and religious definitions of Canadian culture; and I also analyze Margaret Laurence’s Manawaka texts—*A Jest of God* (1966), in particular—which anticipate multicultural and feminist challenges to existing models of Canadian nationhood and nationality. I suggest that Ross’s and Laurence’s texts reflect the tenacity of dominant Anglo-Canadian social values and cultural practices and the ways in which Ukrainian Canadians, from the 1930s to the 1960s, were persistently marginalized within Canadian society, despite their attempts to assimilate into Canadian society. Both novelists illustrate that assimilationist practices failed to eradicate the “otherness” of Canadians of non-British ethnic ancestry. Significantly, Ross and Laurence also draw attention to the ways in which some Anglo-Canadians were also marginalized within Canadian society by virtue of their gender, sexuality, and/or class. And Laurence, while acknowledging the enduring social hierarchies of Manawaka, also narrates her Anglo-Canadian characters’ gradual recognition, over time, of the contributions that various “others” have made to the construction of the national “self.” The problem with Connor’s, Ross’s, and Laurence’s

perspectives on ethnic diversity is that all three (re)affirm the binary opposition between the (Anglo-Canadian) “self” and the (ethnic or racialized) “other” because they cannot escape the assimilationist rhetoric of their historical moments.

Following my discussions of *The Foreigner*, *As For Me and My House*, and *A Jest of God*—three novels by Anglo-Canadian writers—I turn my attention to Vera Lysenko’s *Yellow Boots* (1954), the first, and, until 1970, virtually the only, English-language novel about Ukrainian Canadians written by a Ukrainian Canadian author.⁵⁴ According to some scholars of Ukrainian Canadian literature, Lysenko’s proto-feminist and -multicultural politics subvert patriarchal, anglocentric constructions of the nation that were dominant during the first half of the twentieth century. But while my reading of Lysenko’s novel assumes that, not unlike Laurence, Lysenko attempts a re-vision of the nation—one that explicitly recognizes the value of peoples from diverse ethnic backgrounds (such as Ukrainian Canadians)—I argue that *Yellow Boots* implicitly reinforces the very social structures it seeks to challenge. Processes of assimilation, for Lysenko, enable Ukrainian Canadians to take on aspects of Anglo-Canadian culture while simultaneously retaining aspects of their ethnic heritage. She depicts Canada as a country in which “assimilation is not uniformity” (*Men in Sheepskin Coats* 4), and in which all citizens contribute equally to the unifying national culture. A close reading of her novel, however—a reading that attends to her deeply ambivalent representations of Ukrainian Canadians and that traces the negotiations and compromises her heroine makes in order

⁵⁴ Other book-length English-language literary works published by Ukrainian Canadian writers prior to 1970 include Gus Romaniuk’s *Taking Root in Canada: An Autobiography* (1954), Michael Luchkovich’s *A Ukrainian Canadian in Parliament: Memoirs of Michael Luchkovich* (1965), and Olivia Rose Fry’s *My Heritage from the Builders of Canada* (1967)—all autobiographical works. Illia Kiriak’s novel *Sons of the Soil* (1939-45) was originally written in Ukrainian, and translated into English in 1959. Although some (minor) Ukrainian characters appear in Lysenko’s second novel, *Westerly Wild* (1956), this text is not centrally concerned with Ukrainian Canadians.

to become Canadian—reveals that Lysenko actually re-places the female ethnic subject in the margins of Canadian society. By assimilating to Anglo-Canadian culture, Lysenko's heroine is able to gain social and economic status, but in the process she happily gives up virtually all aspects of her Ukrainian cultural heritage with the exception of Ukrainian folk songs. (Problematically, too, although Lysenko's heroine rejects her Ukrainian ethnicity in order to escape her patriarchal family structure, she subsequently falls under the control of several Anglo-Canadian men.) *Yellow Boots* ultimately calls into question the very assumptions upon which it relies: that, by assimilating to Anglo-Canadian society, Ukrainian Canadians—and, in particular, Ukrainian Canadian women—can retain ties to their cultural heritage while participating in and advancing through the social and economic hierarchies of Anglo-Canadian society.

Representations of Ukrainian Canadians in Anglo-Canadian Literature

The Foreigner: A Tale of Saskatchewan

Ralph Connor's *The Foreigner: A Tale of Saskatchewan* (1909), a frontier romance with unmistakably nationalistic and proselytizing undertones, is also the first novelistic portrayal of Ukrainian immigrants in Canada. Connor—the pen name of Presbyterian clergyman Charles W. Gordon (better known for his earlier romance novels *The Sky Pilot: A Tale of the Foothills*, 1899, and *The Man from Glengarry: A Tale of the Ottawa*, 1901)⁵⁵—brings together characters of Slavic (Galician, Bukovynian, Russian)⁵⁶

⁵⁵ In "Ralph Connor's *The Foreigner: A Tale of Saskatchewan* and Paradigm Shifts" (1999), Walter Swayze argues that *The Foreigner* is "almost unknown" to readers, with the exception of "those who read it as outdated sociology and attack and ridicule it as racist, imperialist, and patronizing" (42).

⁵⁶ Prior to the emergence of Ukrainian nationalism during the interwar period, many Ukrainians identified themselves (and were identified by others) according to the provinces from which they came. So Connor's use of the terms "Galician" and "Bukovynian" is historically accurate.

and Anglo-Celtic (English, Scottish, Irish) origins to depict the large influx of Slavic foreigners to Canada at the close of the nineteenth century and to dramatize their potentially harmful impact on the nascent nation.⁵⁷ At the start of the novel, he paints a decidedly grim picture of Slavic groups in Canada—so grim, in fact, that the very fate of the nation hinges on the success or failure of Anglo-Canadians in assimilating Slavic foreigners to Anglo-Canadian society. *The Foreigner* is rife with the stuff of romance—noble heroes questing for the side of good; shifty villains plotting murder and mayhem; and even the occasional damsel-in-distress—but the binary opposition of good-versus-evil that shapes the romance structure of the novel is crucial to Connor’s understanding of the postcolonial nation. As Frances Swyripa argues, in the “confrontation between the manly, virtuous, Christian Anglo-Saxon and the ignorant, emotional, and frequently immoral Galician” (*Ukrainian Canadians: A Survey* 12), Anglo-Saxons become the naturally superior agents of British colonialism, and Slavs become utterly foreign, innately inferior objects of colonization. Not surprisingly, *The Foreigner* reads like a sort of postcolonial morality tale in which good (Anglo-Canada) ultimately triumphs over evil (Slavic immigrants). Throughout the novel, moreover, as Connor narrates the transition of Canada from colony to nation, Connor carefully outlines the methodologies as well as the benefits of assimilation.

⁵⁷ Throughout my discussions of *The Foreigner*, *As For Me and My House*, and *A Jest of God*, I use the term “Anglo-Canadian” to refer generally to (western) Canadian society because the term emphasizes the dominance of British culture. But I also use the term “Anglo-Celtic” in my discussions of *The Foreigner* and *A Jest of God* to specifically refer to English, Scottish, and Irish characters whose ethnicities are delineated in these novels. In using the term “Anglo-Celtic” (rather the more general term “Anglo-Canadian” or the term “Anglo-Saxon”—which Connor uses throughout his novel), I mean to foreground these characters’ different ethnicities within the category of “British.” I choose not to refer to the characters in *As For Me and My House* as “Anglo-Celtic” because their ethnicities are never delineated in the novel.

In my discussion of *The Foreigner*, I use the term “Slavic,” too, as shorthand for Canadians of Galician, Bukovynian, and Russian descent. This is a term Connor uses throughout his novel. Similarly, I use the term “Slavic” to refer to Steve Kulanich because Ross is never more specific in outlining Steve’s origins.

Oddly enough, given the book's title, the major portion of *The Foreigner* takes place in Winnipeg. In the opening paragraphs of the novel, Connor describes Winnipeg as the "cosmopolitan capital of the last of the Anglo-Saxon Empires" (11), a city "[n]ot far from the centre of the American continent, midway between the oceans east and west, midway between the Gulf and the Arctic Sea, on the rim of a plain, snow swept in winter, flower decked in summer, but, whether in winter or in summer, beautiful in its sunlit glory" (11). This idyllic conception of the "City of the Plain," however, is almost immediately disrupted by Connor's introduction of the "more unfashionable northern section of the little city," the immigrant quarter peopled with newcomers "strange in costume and speech" (13). "With a sprinkling of Germans, Italian and Swiss," he writes, "it was almost solidly Slav."

Slavs of all varieties from all provinces and speaking all dialects were there to be found: Slavs from Little Russia and from Great Russia, the alert Polak, the heavy Croatian, the haughty Magyar, and occasionally the stalwart Dalmatian from the Adriatic, in speech mostly Ruthenian, in religion orthodox Greek Catholic or Uniat and Roman Catholic. By their non-discriminating Anglo-Saxon fellow-citizens, they are called Galicians. (14)

Connor goes on to describe the Galicians' overcrowded living conditions (a result of their "traditionary social instincts"), their unusual foods ("with the inevitable seasoning of garlic"), and their general uncleanness (they are a people "devoid of hygienic scruples and disdainful of city sanitary laws") (15). In the introduction to the novel, then—before announcing either character or plot—Connor establishes the binary oppositions upon which his narrative is constructed: the "sunlit glory" of "Anglo-Saxon" Winnipeg versus the "huddling cluster of little black shacks" of the city's immigrant underbelly; the civilized, progressive "Anglo-Saxons" versus the primitive, backward Slavic hordes.

While Connor romanticizes the way in which Canada draws together “peoples of all tribes and tongues” (12)—he foretells that the “blood strains of great races will mingle in the blood of a race greater than the greatest of them all” (n.p.)—he nonetheless conceives the relation between these races in Canada as strictly hierarchical, privileging Anglo-Celtic settlers over foreign immigrants.

Indeed, *The Foreigner* is a story of “the East meets the West” (24)—aptly set in a city situated geographically between the “oceans east and west”—in which ethnically inflected notions of good and evil are absolute. Paulina Koval, second wife to Michael Kalmar and caretaker of his two children (Irma and Kalman), is a “slow-witted” (15), “undoubtedly slovenly” (23) and morally reprehensible Galician woman; Kalmar is a crafty and cunning Russian nihilist, capable of assuming many disguises, an “object of terror and of horror to many” (105); and Rosenblatt, Kalmar’s archenemy, is an “unscrupulous” (61) Bukovynian opportunist, a wealthy entrepreneur who exploits his countrymen in the New World. Juxtaposed against these Galician, Russian, and Bukovynian characters—each manifesting different characteristics of the Slavic “other”—are the Anglo-Celtic characters of the story, superior by virtue of their British culture and values. Margaret French is a selfless Methodist missionary who works tirelessly among the Galicians, acknowledging that, though they are “poor ignorant creatures,” they “really have kind hearts” (195-8). Her brother-in-law, Jack French, is one of the “hardy souls” in the “daring vanguard of an advancing civilization” (189), a tough but sensitive Saskatchewan rancher of “good old English stock” (190). And Jack’s friend, Dr. Brown, is a Presbyterian reverend who bravely forsakes the conveniences of civilization to establish a mission among the Galicians. He will “teach them English,”

“doctor them,” and “teach them some of the elements of domestic science”—“in short, do anything to make them good Christians and good Canadians, which is the same thing” (253).⁵⁸

Connor’s complex and convoluted plot situates these characters in two separate, though not unrelated, narrative strands: the first focuses on Kalmar’s attempts to murder his archenemy Rosenblatt (responsible for Kalmar’s imprisonment in Russia and for the murder of Kalmar’s first wife); the second centres on Kalman’s coming-of-age under the guidance of Jack French and Dr. Brown. The question of whether or not Kalman can be fully assimilated into Anglo-Canadian society unites the two plots. Near the beginning of the novel—before he is introduced to either French or Brown—Kalman visits his father, who is in prison for attempting to murder Rosenblatt (and for accidentally killing another man in the process). Listening to Kalmar swear his oath of revenge, Kalman’s passions are aroused: he vows that, should his father fail, he will kill Rosenblatt himself. But will Kalman fulfil his father’s wishes? Will he be ruled by the “hereditary instincts” of his “Slavic blood” that “[cry] out for vengeance” (343)? Or is it possible that, through “those greatest of all Canadianising influences, the school and the mission” (158), he will shed his semi-barbaric bloodlust and embrace the civilized, Christian virtue of forgiveness?

⁵⁸ Although the main Anglo-Canadian characters in *The Foreigner* are established Canadian citizens, Connor introduces several minor Anglo-Canadian characters who are new to the country and who therefore still retain aspects of their Anglo-Celtic ethnic heritages. For example, Mrs. Fitzpatrick (the Irish neighbour of Paulina Koval) speaks with a thick Irish accent and frequently includes Irish colloquialisms and idiomatic expressions in conversation: she introduces herself as “Mishtress Timothy Fitzpatrick, Monaghan that was, the Monaghans o’ Ballinghalereen, an owld family, poor as Job’s turkey, but proud as the divil, an’ wance the glory o’ Mayo” (69). Similarly, Connor describes Sergeant Cameron of the Winnipeg City Police as “diligently endeavouring to shed his Highland accent and to take on the colloquialisms of the country” (85). But these characters’ assimilation to Canadian society is not an urgent concern to Connor—in fact, Mrs. Fitzpatrick functions as a comic figure whose Irishness marks her as different from but not threatening to Anglo-Canadian society, and Cameron clearly functions as a upstanding citizen despite his Scottish heritage.

Sent by Margaret French to live in Saskatchewan with Jack French, Kalman is tutored by both French and Brown in the English language and the Presbyterian religion; he is taught, moreover, to dress, eat, and work like a morally upstanding Anglo-Canadian. In the latter half of the novel, as he carefully outlines Kalman's transformation from a wild and ignorant little Slavic boy to a civilized and educated young Canadian man, Connor also articulates—through conversations between French and Brown—the ideological foundations of assimilation. (Swyripa rather convincingly argues that this portion of the novel reads like “a fictional supplement to the annual reports on work among Galicians and Ruthenians to the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Canada” [*Ukrainian Canadians: A Survey* 12].) French, who believes that the Slavs are a “hopeless business,” is skeptical of Brown's missionary activities. He says to Brown,

[d]on't be an ass and throw yourself away. I know these people well. In a generation or two something may be done with them. You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. Give it up. Take up a ranch and go cattle raising. That is my advice. I know them. You can't undo in your lifetime the results of three centuries. (253-4)

Brown, who is determined to establish a school, a (Presbyterian) church, and a hospital in the nearby Galician colony, counters French's laissez-faire attitude with a pragmatic (and patriotic) analysis of the nation's fate. “These people here,” he explains to French, “exist as an undigested foreign mass. They must be digested and absorbed into the body politic. They must be taught our ways of thinking and living, or it will be a mighty bad thing for us in Western Canada” (255). Given French's own moral flaws, his low opinion of the Galicians is somewhat ironic. Though a man of rugged strength and forceful courage—in temper and spirit a true gentleman—French (heavily influenced by his half breed hired man Mackenzie) periodically drinks himself into oblivion, fights, swears, and neglects

both his farm and his young charge. But through the character of French, Connor illustrates that, in teaching the foreigner the language, religion and customs which characterize Anglo-Canadian culture, the Anglo-Canadian is himself reminded of his role as society's cultural and moral paragon. Just as Brown ministers to Kalman, so too does he minister to French, advising him that he has "that boy's life"—and, simultaneously, the fate of the nation—"in [his] hands" (281). That French takes seriously his role in shaping the future of the boy—and the country—is evidenced not only by Kalman's successful assimilation but also by the "new order" of French's ranch at the close of the narrative. (Furthermore, after five years of "steady application to duty," French achieves success "not in wealth along, but in character and in influence" [373].) In the process of postcolonial nation-building, Anglo-Canadian moral and cultural ideals are at once imparted to immigrants and strengthened in established citizens.

But it is the final scene of the novel that finally confirms—as it boldly dramatizes—the success of Kalman's assimilation. At the coal mine that Kalman has discovered—and that, of course, the villainous Rosenblatt seeks to claim for his own—all of the central characters meet in a violently grandiose finale (Kalmar kills Rosenblatt; Rosenblatt kills Kalmar; and Paulina dies defending Kalman from Rosenblatt). Importantly, though Kalmar fatally wounds Rosenblatt, he does so without the aid of his son. Kalman, in fact, struggles to *stop* his father from committing the murder: "[m]y father!" he begs, while physically restraining Kalmar. "Don't commit this crime! For my sake, for Christ's dear sake!" (365). So, while the narrative ends in a veritable bloodbath, the tragic nature of its conclusion is mitigated by Kalman's decision not to perpetuate in Canada his people's violent Old Country feuds. Whereas the novel's morally

reprehensible Slavic characters all conveniently meet their end, Kalman—the newly assimilated Canadian—sees the error of their ways and survives.⁵⁹ What Connor seems to suggest is that the unassimilated foreigner has no future in Canada. Indeed, throughout *The Foreigner*, Connor makes explicit the fact that, though Slavic immigrants pose a threat to Anglo-Canadian society (“they’ll run your country,” warns Jack French in conversation with Brown), they *can* be taught, through the institutions of school and church, Anglo-Canadian customs, values and morals (“they’ll run your country anyhow you put it,” replies Brown, “therefore, you had better fit them for the job. You have got to make them Canadian” [256]). In the novel’s epilogue, Kalman goes on to attend Business College, run the Night Hawk Mining Company, and marry Marjorie Menzies, illustrating that the assimilated Slavic immigrant’s future is a happy one.

Yet if Kalman becomes a symbolic figure of the future nation⁶⁰—the Slavic foreigner-cum-model citizen who unites with the Anglo-Celtic lass to produce “a race greater than the greatest of them all”(np)—it is less his generally Slavic than his specifically *Russian* inheritance that makes him particularly well-suited for the role; and it is, more specifically, his embrace of Presbyterian religion and his union with a Scottish woman that make him (from Connor’s perspective) the ideal Canadian. (Crucially, his gender, too, marks him as an ideal participant in future nation-building. With the exception of Margaret French, who plays a minor role in the novel by sending Kalman away, Kalman’s mentors are all male. And Irma, Kalmar’s daughter, is hardly mentioned

⁵⁹ In *Racial Attitudes in English-Canadian Fiction 1905-1980*, Terrence Craig discusses the character of Rosenblatt. Craig says that “Rosenblatt is identifiable as a Jew by appearance, behaviour, and name. He is beyond redemption, Gordon [Connor] apparently not considering it credible to extend the idea of conversion to Presbyterianism to include a Jew. His death is not mourned and provides a convenient climax as well as a moral lesson. There is no place for the old oppressive European ways in Gordon’s Canada. It would seem, too, at this time at least, that there is no place for Jews” (34).

in the novel. So Connor's notion of the ideal Canadian privileges Scottish ethnicity and the Presbyterian religion as well as maleness.) Certainly, as I have already argued, many of the Slavic characters in *The Foreigner* are depicted in derogatory terms. But whereas the Galician and Bukovynian characters in the novel represent absolute poverty, ignorance, and barbarity,⁶¹ Kalmar's—and, by extension, Kalman's—status in the narrative is more ambiguous. While violent and vengeful, Kalmar is also vaguely aristocratic in bearing, an educated gentleman whose political machinations are noble insofar as they embrace the “cause of freedom” against a tyrannical government (150).⁶² Not unlike his father, Kalman is at his most heroic when taking up the fight for freedom:

[t]he song [he sang] was in the Ruthenian tongue, but was the heart cry of a Russian exile, a cry for freedom for his native land, for death to the tyrant, for vengeance on the traitor. Nowhere in all the Czar's dominions dared any man sing that song. As the boy's strong, clear voice rang out in the last cry for vengeance, there thrilled in his tones an intensity of passion that gripped hard the hearts of those who had known all their lives long the bitterness of tyranny unspeakable. (181)

When Kalman finally unites with Marjorie, she calls him “[t]he son of a hero, who paid out his life for a great cause” (382). Though he fears that she “could never love a foreigner,” Marjorie cries (“with a sob”), “Oh, Kalman, I have been there. I have seen the people, your father's people . . . Were I Russian, I should be like your father!” (382-3). Kalman, then, becomes the perfect hero for Connor's novel because, on the one hand,

⁶⁰ In “Immigration, Nation, and the Canadian Allegory of Manly Maturation” (84), Daniel Coleman argues that Kalman becomes an allegorical “test case of Canadian national maturity” (93).

⁶¹ Connor's absolute construction of Galician and Bukovynian characters is, in a sense, a rhetorical trope necessary to the sentimentalist genre in which he writes. His romance requires a backdrop of good and evil.

⁶² Connor foregrounds the noble aspects of Kalmar's political activities early in the novel. When Kalmar meets Mrs. Fitzpatrick's husband, an immediate kinship develops between the two men: upon hearing that Kalmar fights for the freedom of his country, “[r]ed with the blood of [his] countrymen,” Mr. Fitzpatrick declares that “[w]e're all the same kind here,” and Kalmar cries, “Aha, you are of Ireland. You, too, are fighting the tyrant” (72). The two men then exchange tragic tales of their oppression and heroic stories of their resistance to this oppression.

as a successfully “Canadianized” Slavic foreigner, he fulfills the assimilationist theme of the narrative; on the other hand, as the son of a Russian exile, he embodies the narrative’s romance. Bereft of a similarly glorified political cause, the Galician and Bukovynian characters, in contrast to the Russians, play minor roles within the text.⁶³

Interestingly, while Connor devotes the first half of his novel to derogatory portrayals of the Galician immigrants in Winnipeg, their assimilation to Anglo-Canadian society is mentioned only briefly in the conclusion. In a single—albeit lengthy—paragraph describing Brown’s work in the Galician colony, Connor notes that

[t]he changes apparent in the colony, largely as a result of Dr. Brown’s labours, were truly remarkable. The creating of a market for their produce by the advent of the railway, and for their labour by the development of the mine, brought the Galician people wealth, but the influence of Dr. Brown himself, and of his Home, and of his Hospital, was apparent in the life and character of the people, and especially of the younger generation. The old mud-plastered cabins were giving place to neat frame houses, each surrounded by its garden of vegetables and flowers. In dress, the sheep skin and the shawl were being exchanged for the ready-made suit and the hat of latest style. The Hospital, with its staff of trained nurses under the direction of the young matron, the charming Miss Irma, by its ministrations to the sick, and more by the spirit that breathed through its whole service, wrought in the Galician a new temper and a new ideal. In the Training Home fifty Galician girls were being indoctrinated into that most noble of all science, the science of home-making, and were gaining practical experience in all the cognate sciences and arts. (372)

Connor’s emphasis here on Dr. Brown (“*Dr. Brown’s labours,*” “*his Home,*” “*his Hospital*”), as well as his use of the passive voice (“[t]he old mud-plastered cabins *were*

⁶³ As Swyripa points out in *Ukrainian Canadians: A Survey of Their Portrayal in English-language Works*, historical inaccuracies “abound” in *The Foreigner*: first, “it is highly improbable that a Russian nobleman would have married a Galician peasant woman, especially since they were separated geographically and politically into two empires”; secondly, “it is illogical that Rosenblatt, being a Bukovynian, would have been employed in the Russian Secret Service”; and, thirdly, “the names of Kalmar’s children—‘Irma’ and ‘Kalman’—were themselves typically Hungarian and most uncommon among both Ukrainians and Russians” (13-4). Swyripa points out these errors in order to argue that Connor knew little about Eastern Europe. I think, however, that—regardless of Connor’s factual errors—his hierarchical delineation of Slavic characters (Paulina as Galician, Rosenblatt as Bukovynian, and Kalmar, Irma, and Kalman as Russian) serves a deliberate narrative function.

giving place,” “the sheep skin and the shawl *were being exchanged*,” “fifty Galician girls *were being indoctrinated*”) reveal the extent to which Galicians are passive objects of Brown’s Canadianizing acts. In other words, Galicians function in *The Foreigner* less as an illustration of the ways in which assimilation unites “peoples of all tribes and tongues” (12) than as an affirmation of the ways in which Anglo-Canadians remain separate from and superior to ethnic immigrants. Through Kalman’s coming-of-age narrative, *The Foreigner* may well dramatize the success of assimilationist ideology in marrying East and West, “self” and “other”: Kalman, by choosing to embrace Canadian culture (an Anglo-Canadian culture that Connor sees, ideally, as male-dominated and Presbyterian), illustrates that processes of assimilation can create the ideal Canadian. But by relegating Galicians to the margins of the story—the very place where they began—Connor reveals that the work of national unification remains to be done.

As For Me and My House

Chronologically, following the publication of *The Foreigner*, Slavic characters appear in a number of Canadian novels: in Martha Ostenso’s novel *Wild Geese* (1925), for example, a Hungarian character appears (Anton Klovacz); the narrator in Frederick Philip Grove’s *A Search for America* (1927) meets briefly with a Russian man (Ivan); and the heroine of Morley Callaghan’s *They Shall Inherit the Earth* (1935) (Anna Prychoda) is Ukrainian (293). But Slavic characters play very minor roles in Ostenso’s and Grove’s texts, and, in *They Shall Inherit the Earth*, the main character’s ethnicity is incidental. In Sinclair Ross’s *As For Me and My House* (1941), by contrast, Steve Kulanich’s role in the narrative is more significant, and his Slavic ethnicity, moreover, is an important

aspect of his characterization. Furthermore, Ross's novel, though written three decades after *The Foreigner*, invites comparison with Connor's novel: not unlike Kalman, who is taken into the Anglo-Canadian "family" of French and Ross, Steve is brought into the home of Mr. and Mrs. Philip Bentley. These two texts, through the figure of the Slavic boy, reflect Anglo-Canadian attitudes toward Slavic minorities at two different, though connected, historical moments. In fact, the portrayal of Steve Kulanich in *As For Me and My House* illustrates the extent to which Anglo-Canadian definitions of national culture, established during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, continued to pervade Canadian society well after the First World War.

In many ways, *As For Me and My House* requires less introduction than *The Foreigner*. Ross's novel (unlike *The Foreigner*) has long occupied a prominent position in the Canadian literary canon. Over the years since its publication, numerous Canadian literary critics have analyzed the novel's narrative structure, its realist genre, gender and sexual politics, and, more generally, its contribution to the prairie literary tradition.⁶⁴ Importantly, too, the plot of Ross's novel is far less convoluted than Connor's. Set during the depression and narrated by the wife of Protestant minister Philip Bentley, *As For Me and My House* takes the form of Mrs. Bentley's diary entries written during the couple's brief stay in the small town of Horizon, Saskatchewan. After twelve years of marriage, the Bentleys' relationship is, in modern terms, dysfunctional: miserable about the direction their lives have taken but unable to discuss, much less change, their situation, they are imprisoned by both the social expectations of the "false-fronted" little town in

⁶⁴ See, for example, *From the Heart of the Heartland: The Fiction of Sinclair Ross*, edited by John Moss (1992), and *Sinclair Ross's As For Me and My House: Five Decades of Criticism*, edited by David Stouck (1991). Moss's text includes a bibliography of Ross criticism. Stouck's text republishes 1941 reviews of

which they live and the marital obligations of their “false-fronted” relationship. For Mrs. Bentley, their small and dark home becomes a metaphor not only for the claustrophobic, provincial atmosphere of Horizon (and, in fact, of all the small towns in which the Bentleys have lived) but also for the suffocating nature of the patriarchal marriage institution. That Philip always uses the same text for his first Sunday sermon in a new town—“As For Me and My House We Will Serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15)—underscores the symbolic function of the house in the narrative and the irony of the Bentleys’ unhappiness, for neither the minister nor his wife is even remotely content in “serving the Lord.” One of the central concerns in the novel is the couple’s childlessness. Mrs. Bentley brings the twelve-year-old foster boy Steve Kulanich into their home in an attempt to fulfill Philip’s parental longings. Steve, however, is taken away from the Bentleys—and it is Philip’s affair with Judith West, rather, that ultimately produces a son for the couple. After Judith’s death, the Bentleys adopt the baby, and it is in baby Philip’s (not Steve’s) eyes that Mrs. Bentley sees “a freshness,” a “vacancy of beginning” (216), hope for the future.⁶⁵

As For Me and My House; various writers’ and critics’ opinions of the novel (originally published between 1952 and 1981); and critical essays on the novel spanning a period of fifty years.

⁶⁵ The assumption that Philip is the father of Judith’s son is not one that all critics make. In “The ‘Scarlet’ Rompers: Toward a New Perspective on *As For Me and My House*” (1984), David Williams argues that Paul (the local schoolteacher) is the father of Judith’s child, and in “Who’s the Father of Mrs. Bentley’s Child?: *As For Me and My House* and the Conventions of Dramatic Monologue” (1986), Evelyn Hinz and John Teunissen argue that Mr. Finley (Chairman of the Church Board) is the father. Valerie Raoul, in “Straight or Bent: Textual/Sexual T(ri)angles in *As For Me and My House*” (1998), is reluctant to pinpoint the father of Judith’s child as Paul or Mr. Finley, but she believes that “there is certainly some room for doubt as to whether it is in fact Philip” (23). Raoul’s doubt about the possibility that Philip is the father of Judith’s child is grounded in her reading of Philip as gay. (This reading is largely informed by Keath Fraser’s memoir of Ross, *As For Me and My Body*, 1997, in which Fraser speaks “openly and directly for the first time about Ross’s homosexuality and its bearing on his most famous novel” [13]). “That Philip is attracted to young men rather than to women,” Raoul writes, “is mutely trumpeted by a copious trail of clues throughout the text” (19). “If Philip does not like women and definitely prefers adolescent boys,” she asks, “why does he have an affair with Judith?” (21)

Of course, as Wilfred Cude suggests in “Beyond Mrs. Bentley: A Study of *As For Me and My House*” (1973), and as David Stouck argues in “The Mirror and the Lamp in Sinclair Ross’s *As For Me and My*

Interestingly, unlike Kalman Kalmar in *The Foreigner*, who is of Russian origin, Steve Kulanich's ancestry is more ambiguous. In Mrs. Bentley's first description of the boy, she writes, "Steve was the first name, Rumanian or Hungarian" (48). "At first glance," she says of his eyes, "you would take them for Oriental" (54). He speaks "good English" but the "force and inflection" in his voice "in contrast to [native English speakers'] monotonous sounds a little impetuous" (55). Later, she reiterates that he is "Hungarian, or Rumanian, or Russian—we don't even know that" (66-7). What Mrs. Bentley assumes is that, as a Slav, Steve has "[b]lood behind him that's different" from hers and Philip's (66). Steve's mother is dead, and his father is a railway labourer who lives in a little shack by the station with some woman ("the only case of open immorality in the town" [48]). Steve, like his father, is an outsider in the town. He is "sensitive," "high-strung," "hot-blooded," and "quick-fisted" (48)—a devout Roman Catholic, moreover, whose most precious belongings are a crucifix and a Sacred Heart picture of the Virgin. Mary Kirtz, in "'I am become a name': The Representation of Ukrainians in Ross, Laurence, Ryga and Atwood" (1992), makes the claim that, although Steve is "not named as a Ukrainian, those who know the history of Ukrainian Canadians during this

House" (1974), the novel's ending can be read ironically: because Judith's child, "a bastard like Philip, is being introduced into the same world as its father," the Bentleys' adoption of the baby can be seen less as evidence of a fresh beginning than as proof that "the progress from one generation to the next is hopelessly repetitive and circular" (Stouck 97). According to Cude, the Bentleys' relationship is "doomed to failure" (94), for the baby is not a redemptive presence in the Bentleys' lives but, rather, "another tainted member of the Bentley house" (93). In "Sinclair Ross's Ambivalent World" (1972), W.H. New acknowledges that the ending of *As For Me and My House* (specifically, Mrs. Bentley's final words, "I want it so" [216]—her response to Philip's concern that naming the baby will cause confusion in the future) can be read as either hopeful or bleak. But New also suggests that the ambivalence of the conclusion "seems ultimately part of [Ross's] plan" (67). "Absolutes," says New, "do not exist" in this novel (65). Although "Mrs. Bentley herself is all too prone to approve or condemn . . . Ross would have his readers avoid this" (66).

period would likely identify him as such” (37). She goes on, then, to suggest that, in Mrs. Bentley’s descriptions of Steve, he becomes “the Ukrainian as inscrutable oriental”; “the Ukrainian as spontaneous, loud-mouthed peasant”; “the Ukrainian as gypsy rover”; and “the Ukrainian as blasphemous idolater” (37). Yet, in the absence of any descriptions that specifically link him to Ukrainian ethnicity, the argument that Steve is Ukrainian seems to me difficult to make—and somewhat beside the point. Ross may well have imagined Steve as Ukrainian, but insofar as the novel constructs (some⁶⁶) Protestant Anglo-Canadians as “self,” and non-Anglo-Canadians as “other,” Steve’s characterization requires only the vaguest of Slavic qualities to fulfill the function of “other” in the narrative. That he has Oriental features, speaks with an accent, and espouses the Roman Catholic faith is enough to mark him as different from—and threatening to—the community.

Indeed, while Kalman’s specifically Russian heritage in *The Foreigner* is essential to both the romantic and the ideological aspects of the novel (he is the ideal candidate for assimilation because he at once belongs and does not belong to the Slavic immigrant community; he is a distinctly superior foreigner), the details of Steve Kulanich’s ancestry are less important: he functions in *As For Me and My House* solely as “other.” And whereas, in *The Foreigner*, prominent Anglo-Canadian citizens such as

⁶⁶ Importantly—and this is a point to which I will return at the conclusion to my discussion of Ross’s novel—Steve Kulanich is not the only outsider in the town of Horizon. Indeed, Mrs. Bentley is drawn to Steve precisely because she, like him, does not belong in the town. David Stouck argues, moreover, that “like Philip, Steve is of doubtful birth and an outcast in the town”; and that “Steve, as the town’s reprobate, provides Philip with a replica of his own youth” (“The Mirror and the Lamp” 99-100). In “Sinclair Ross’s ‘Foreigners’” (1992), Marilyn Rose suggests that “it is possible to see parallels between Ross’s foreigners and other kinds of marginalized figures in his fiction” (98): the “figure of the ‘other woman’” (Judith West) is one such marginalized figure, as is the “homosexual presence” in Horizon (Philip). Ross’s “foreigners,” Rose writes, “could be seen as representing, or even standing in for, marginalized groups whom, for one reason or another, Ross has chosen not to foreground” (98).

Margaret French and Dr. Brown know the importance of (and actively engage in) assimilating Slavic immigrants to Anglo-Canadian society, the prominent citizens of Horizon reject the notion that the Slavic “other” can or even should be included in their society. The Twills, the Pratts, the Finleys, and the Wenderbys are outspoken in their belief that Steve cannot be changed, and they are equally outspoken in their disapproval of the Bentleys’ decision to try. When Mrs. Bentley announces to a group of ladies that she has taken Steve into her home, she is met with a barrage of comments: “[y]ou mean, of course,” says one lady, “just till other arrangements can be made. Naturally you wouldn’t think of keeping him.” Another says, “[t]he Roman Catholics have so many places of their own that he could go to. If you really want a boy to adopt there are surely enough good Protestants.” And a third warns of the dangers involved: “[y]ou’ve heard, I suppose, what the blood behind him his?” (73). At a church board meeting, too, a month later, the Bentleys are chastised for their imprudent decision to care for Steve. As Mrs. Bentley recalls,

[s]omeone said we would remember our position in the community, the example we are setting. Someone else, more kindly, said we might be given time to train the boy . . . still someone else reminded us that bad blood was bad blood and always would be. As Steve Kulanich he had been recognized for what he was and treated accordingly. As the minister’s son there was the danger of his vicious habits being overlooked and tolerated. It was to be hoped we realized our responsibilities, and were prepared to measure up to them. Someone else had caught a glimpse of the crucifix above his bed, and thumped on a pew, “No popery.” (95)

The Bentleys may appear to have good Christian intentions in taking Steve under their wing, but their parishioners are openly hostile toward him: they see Steve—and any benevolence toward him—as a threat to their community. Though never explicitly articulated as such, Steve’s potential for assimilation to Anglo-Canadian society is at the

crux of the debate about him that takes place during the church board meeting. While the Bentleys are ostensibly willing to give Steve a chance to prove himself, the townspeople are unwilling to so much as entertain the possibility.

On the surface, at least, the Bentleys do try to help Steve fit into Horizon. They take him to the barber, buy him new clothes, give him a horse, and take him on family outings. They are liberal-minded enough to allow Steve his crucifix and Virgin Mary lithography and even to speak on his behalf before school and church officials after he has bloodied another child's nose. Mrs. Bentley brings Steve into their home, however, not out of concern for his welfare but in the hope that he can fill the couple's childless void and, hence, help solve their marital problems. She is drawn to Steve because, like the Bentleys, he is an outsider in the community and because she believes that, in siding with him against the less tolerant citizens of Horizon, she and Philip might regain the closeness that they have lost over the years—they might at last come together against the small towns that have driven them apart. Not surprisingly, then, when Mrs. Bentley discovers that Steve's presence in the family effectively widens the distance between husband and wife (Philip enjoys spending time alone with the boy, lavishing him with the sort of love and affection that he has never shown her), her interest in the child wanes, and she finds herself caught in several contradictory roles vis-à-vis Steve. At times a nurturing mother to him ("getting out a clean shirt for Steve, brushing his hair at the kitchen sink and putting on soap to make it stay in place" [85]), at times a fellow outcast in the community (in playing one of his Slavic folk songs on the piano, she stumbles upon a common interest with the boy, and their secretly shared passion for this music

becomes a kind of symbolic “conspiracy” [95]), she is nonetheless unable to shake her feeling of rivalry⁶⁷ (“I like Steve, and at the same time I resent him. I grudge every minute he and Philip are alone together” [69]). So, when Steve is taken away to an orphanage by two Catholic priests, Mrs. Bentley is nothing short of relieved—it was “good,” she writes, “to have [Philip] to [herself] again” (155). (Importantly, too, the good citizens of Horizon are pleased with his departure. In their first show of warmth toward the boy, a small crowd gathers at the train station to say their farewells.) Mrs. Bentley can—and does—write Steve out of her diary in a single entry because her marriage has always taken precedence over his well-being.⁶⁸

In the end, given her experience with Steve, Mrs. Bentley’s ultimate embrace of Judith West’s (and Philip’s) baby seems all the more ironic: if Steve exacerbated tensions between husband and wife, how will the baby (a baby conceived, no less, through an adulterous relationship between Philip and another woman) affect the couple’s relationship? Whether the baby functions as a genuine symbol of hope for the Bentleys’ marriage (i.e. unlike Steve, the new child will bring the couple together at last) or as an ironic symbol of hope (i.e. in embracing the child, Mrs. Bentley naively repeats the mistake she made with Steve because she is unable to accept the couple’s irreconcilable differences), the fact remains that Steve is written out of the narrative whereas the baby remains central to the Bentleys’ story. Steve is, in Kirtz’s words,

⁶⁷ As Raoul argues, Mrs. Bentley sees Steve as a rival for Philip’s affections because Philip is sexually attracted to Steve (20). Timothy Cramer makes a similar argument in “Questioning Sexuality in Sinclair Ross’s *As For Me and My House*” (1999).

⁶⁸ According to Rose, the “established families of Horizon . . . subject the foreigner to a kind of cultural ‘gaze’ which fixes him as the ‘barbaric other.’” The Anglo-Canadian establishment, then, can respond in one of two ways. “One possibility,” says Rose, “is that the establishment attempt[s] to assimilate the foreigner.” Mrs. Bentley makes this attempt when she and her husband take in Steve. But when she “fails in her efforts to civilize him, Mrs. Bentley falls back on the alternate response (which much of Horizon has favoured all along), rigorous gatekeeping: Steve Kulanich is summarily banished from Horizon” (94).

“expendable” and a “throwaway” because “[a]pparently even a bastard is better than the son of unknown parents if the former has the appropriate patriarchal lineage” (38). Steve cannot be accepted as a permanent member of either the Bentley family or the town of Horizon because he is ethnically “other” to both the Bentleys and the Anglo-Canadian townspeople. Judith’s baby, on the other hand, though born of an unwed mother, can become a figure of hope—however misguided, however ironic—because he is legitimized by his biological (or adoptive?) Anglo-Canadian father, Philip.

Reading *As For Me and My House* alongside *The Foreigner*, what becomes obvious is that Ross does not as explicitly rely on the Slavic character’s ethnicity to carry forward his narrative. Unlike *The Foreigner*, in which the “Canadianization” of the Slavic “other” is overtly thematized, *As For Me and My House* is only peripherally, if at all, concerned with the assimilation of Slavic characters to Anglo-Canadian society. But as a work of realist fiction—one that, by definition, “mirrors the attitudes of the dominant culture through its inscription of a particular set of norms validated by that culture” (Kirtz 38)—*As For Me and My House* does rely on Steve’s ethnicity (and the Anglo-Canadian characters’ attitudes toward his ethnicity) to depict the realities of its time and place. Insofar as Ross’s novel is a reflection of the social, cultural, and political milieus of small town Saskatchewan during the depression, its portrayal of Steve as “other” illustrates the persistence of Anglo-Canadian culture in shaping dominant definitions of the Canadian “self.” The assimilationist ideology so explicitly and urgently articulated in *The Foreigner* may be absent from *As For Me and My House*, but through the character of Steve Kulanich—the perpetual foreigner, the irrevocable “other”—Ross’s novel

nonetheless illustrates that, thirty-odd years after the publication of Connor's novel, notions of Anglo-Canadian social and cultural superiority still persist.

And yet, as recent criticism on *As For Me and My House* suggests, Ross is clearly aware that ethnicity is only one marker of difference from the dominant norms of national culture. Critics such as Helen Buss and Anne Compton who focus on Mrs. Bentley's and Judith West's gender, and critics such as Valerie Raoul and Timothy Cramer who focus on Philip's latent homosexuality, argue convincingly that Ross addresses the marginalization of these characters within the patriarchal and heterosexist Canadian society of the 1930s. From these critics' perspectives, Ross portrays a society in which individuals whose ethnicity, gender, and sexuality do not conform with dominant social norms and mores are perceived as outcasts and outsiders. He does not, moreover, "merely describe" but "actively interrogate[s]" the power structures that construct individuals as outcasts and outsiders. According to Rose, "[i]n attending to those who are marginalized in, or indeed absent from, other accounts of a particular historical moment, and in documenting significant shifts in social power that are evidenced over time with respect to these 'others,' Ross raises questions about hegemonic power and its abuse" (98). Rather than "offering a monolithic, static view of a particular cultural moment, Ross constantly undercuts the unitary, the univocal, and produces instead a dynamic field of unresolved social conflict wherein one can 'affirm' nothing within qualification" (98). So Ross draws attention to but ultimately fails to reconcile the "competing elements, the conflicted voices, the unresolved strains" (Rose 92) that characterize the historical moment of his novel. In a sense, the ambivalent realism of Ross's conclusion proves that reconciliation is impossible. In dramatizing the tensions between individuals and the

society in which they live, Ross identifies—without offering solutions to—the inherent fissures in the illusion of a unified national culture.

A Jest of God

Published twenty-five years after *As For Me and My House* and set in a small prairie town roughly two decades after the depression, Margaret Laurence's *A Jest of God* (1966) picks up the story of the second-generation Slavic male through its portrayal of Nick Kazlik. Nick, unambiguously Ukrainian, belongs to the same generation as Steve Kulanich: both are sons of immigrants and both are marked as ethnically different from the other members of their predominantly Anglo-Canadian communities. Of course, like *As For Me and My House*, *A Jest of God* is a work of realist fiction narrated in the first person by an Anglo-Canadian woman, and, as in Ross's novel, the Slavic character in Laurence's novel serves a particular function in a narrative that includes but crucially is not about him. Just as Ross's novel focuses on Mrs. Bentley, Laurence's novel focuses on Rachel Cameron; just as Mrs. Bentley relies on Steve Kulanich to help solve her marital problems, so is Rachel drawn to Nick as a means to reinvent herself (and help her through her personal crisis of identity). In these novels, the concerns and experiences of Steve and Nick are subordinate to those of Mrs. Bentley and Rachel. Yet, while neither *As For Me and My House* nor *A Jest of God* focuses centrally on the Slavic/Ukrainian character, and while neither is (like *The Foreigner*) explicitly concerned with the situation of ethnic immigrants vis-à-vis Anglo-Canadian society, these novelistic portrayals of Slavic/Ukrainian characters nonetheless reveal Anglo-Canadians' attitudes

toward ethnic minority groups. Indeed, together, Ross's and Laurence's texts illustrate Anglo-Canadians' perspectives on Ukrainian Canadians from the mid-1930s to the 1960s.

A Jest of God is the second novel in Laurence's Manawaka cycle which comprises five texts in total, all set at least partly in Manawaka, a fictional town in Manitoba (not unlike Laurence's hometown of Neepawa), and each centred on a strong female character (Hagar Shipley in *The Stone Angel*, 1962; Rachel Cameron in *A Jest of God*, 1966; Stacey MacAindra in *The Fire-Dwellers*, 1969; Vanessa MacLeod in *A Bird in the House*, 1970; and Morag Gunn in *The Diviners*, 1974). As these women grow up (and in Hagar's case grow old) in and sometimes beyond Manawaka, they all grapple with the town's complex hierarchy of social relations, trying to find their place within it. Many of Laurence's heroines strive to escape the restrictive patriarchal social structures upheld by their domineering fathers and husbands. Hagar, for example, struggles against her father, Jason Currie; Stacey against her husband, Mac; Vanessa against her grandfather, Timothy Connor; and Morag against her husband, Brooke Skelton. Not a few heroines in Laurence's novels are drawn to men who openly defy the values and expectations of Manawaka's upright Anglo-Scots elite. Hagar marries Bram Shipley, Morag falls in love with Jules "Skinner" Tonnerre, and Rachel has an affair with Nick Kazlik. In *A Jest of God*, specifically, Rachel finds herself trapped by the social expectations of her family and community: at thirty-four, she is a spinster schoolmarm who shares a home with her controlling elderly mother, May Cameron. Not unlike Mrs. Bentley in *As For Me and My House*, Rachel craves a new start, a new life, and a new identity. Unlike Mrs. Bentley, however, whose future at the close of Ross's novel is

uncertain, Rachel is transformed over the course of *A Jest of God*: at the end of the text, she quits her job, stands up to her mother, and prepares to move to Vancouver. And Nick is the unmistakable catalyst for Rachel's positive transformation (unlike Steve, whose impact on Mrs. Bentley and the Bentley marriage is debatable). After her affair with Nick—after she mistakenly assumes that she is pregnant, and the imagined pregnancy is discovered to be a tumor, and the tumor (the “non-life” [187]) is removed—Rachel is figuratively reborn.

In her discussion of *A Jest of God*, Mary Kirtz outlines the ways in which Laurence, like Ross, constructs the Ukrainian as “other”: in both novels, she says, “the emphasis on the ‘oriental’ cast of Steve and Nick’s faces, particularly their black hair and slanted eyes, make the Ukrainians ‘not quite white’ and therefore even more suspect as ‘Other,’ representing the dark and dangerous side of life” (39). Indeed, in her descriptions of Nick, Rachel frequently focuses on his physical appearance, his physical “otherness.” Nick’s eyes are “rather Slavic, slightly slanted” (68); he has “[p]rominent cheekbones,” “slightly slanted eyes,” “black straight hair” (92); and his “hidden Caucasian face” is like the faces of the “hawkish and long-ago riders of the Steppes” (92). Rachel’s descriptions of Nick are strikingly similar to Hagar’s descriptions of Bram’s “hawk-faced” farm hands (*Stone Angel* 114); to Vanessa’s descriptions of Piquette Tonnerre’s “dark and slightly slanted eyes” (*Bird* 116); and to Morag’s descriptions of Skinner Tonnerre’s “dark dark slanted eyes” (*Diviners* 69), “brown hawkish face” (126), and “[l]ank black hair” (263). Because Bram’s farm hands and the Tonnerres are Manawaka’s “half-breeds”—because they are racially “other” to the “white” residents of Manawaka—their strong physical resemblance to Nick (and not just

to Nick but also to Nick's father, Nestor) suggests that Ukrainians, too, function in Laurence's fiction as racialized "others" to the Anglo-Celtic "self." Rachel, in fact, directly links Nick's father to the Native people who live in and around Manawaka: Nestor's "wide hard bony face," she says, is "high-cheekboned as a Cree's" (194).

Of course, as Kirtz also points out, the "otherness" physically embodied by Laurence's Ukrainian characters is presented as "something to be embraced, not obliterated" (39). If, in *As For Me and My House*, Steve's ethnic difference marks him as inferior and undesirable to Horizon's Anglo-Canadian community, Nick's ethnic difference is valued—at least by Rachel—for its romantic appeal.⁶⁹ Shortly after she begins seeing Nick, Rachel discusses with him her perceptions of Ukrainian culture. Recalling her childhood experiences with Nick's father, the town milkman, she says, "I used to get rides in winter on your dad's sleigh, and I remember the great bellowing voice he had, and how emotional he used to get—cursing at the horses, or else almost crooning to them" (94). In her own family, Rachel explains, "you didn't get emotional. It was frowned upon" (94). She views Ukrainians as "more resistant . . . more free" (93) than her own Scots family. "I don't know how to express it," she says. "Not so boxed-in, maybe. More outspoken. More able to speak out. More allowed to—both by your family and by yourself. Something like that" (94). Attracted to the emotional expressiveness and freedom of Nick's family, Rachel is no less drawn to the Ukrainian folk arts and family photos on display in the Kazlik home:

a gilt-bordered ikon, and an embroidered tablecloth with some mythical

⁶⁹ In her discussion of *As For Me and My House*, Rose suggests that Steve elicits an erotic response from Mrs. Bentley who seems to "enjo[y] a covert rivalry with Philip for Steve's affections" as she "repeatedly attempts to seduce the boy to her side through her music" (95).

tree nestled in by a fantasy of birds, and on the wall a framed photograph of long-dead relatives in the old country, the heavily moustached men sitting with hands on knees, wearing their serge suits and rigid smiles, the

women aproned elaborately and wearing on their head black-fringed *babushkas* patterned with poppies or roses. (108-9)

Nick's colourful family dynamics and equally colourful family home are attractive—if not seductive—to Rachel because they fulfill her desire for exoticism, romance, and adventure. Nick's cultural heritage represents, in Kirtz's words, the “submerged,” “passionate,” and “unrestrained” qualities that Rachel seeks to unleash within herself (39). Rachel's idealization of Nick's Ukrainian heritage—a legacy of the “hawkish and long-ago riders of the Steppes” (92)—provides an alternative to her emotionally restrained, morally upright Scots background.

The seeds of Rachel's rebellion against her old way of life are planted, then, when she initially meets Nick as an adult and when she begins for the first time to question some of the values and assumptions that she has inherited from her mother.⁷⁰ Upon meeting Nick, she recalls her mother's poor opinion of the town's Ukrainians (as well as her own uncritical acceptance of this opinion): “Mother used to say, ‘Don't play with those Galician youngsters.’ How odd that seems now. They weren't Galicians—they were Ukrainian, but that didn't trouble my mother. She said Galician or Bohunk. So did I, I suppose” (69). Later, as Rachel discusses Nick with her mother, May Cameron's pointed remarks about Nick again bring Rachel back to her childhood in Manawaka.

⁷⁰ May Cameron's inflexible discriminatory attitudes towards Ukrainian Canadians are, in part, a product of her time, and Rachel is able to reject her mother's notions of Anglo-Scots cultural superiority partly because she belongs to a new generation of Canadians that is open to emerging discourses of multiculturalism. Neither mother nor daughter is free from the cultural biases of her historical moment. Karin Beeler makes this point in “Ethnic Dominance and Difference: The Post-Colonial Condition in Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*, *A Jest of God*, and *The Diviners*” when she says that “Hagar's historical time and values are less distant from an entrenched colonial mindset than those of Rachel Cameron and Morag Gunn” (26).

After Rachel tells her mother that Nick is a high school teacher—and after May asks, “Really? How did he manage that?” (71)—Rachel reminds herself that “[h]alf the town is Scots descent and the other half is Ukrainian. Oil, as they say, and water. Both came for the same reasons, because they had nothing where they were before. That was a long way away and a long time ago. The Ukrainians knew how to be the better grain farmers, but the Scots knew how to be almightier than anyone but God” (71). According to Kirtz, through Rachel’s new-found sympathy for and interest in the town’s Ukrainians, “the Ukrainian experience is given greater validity”—greater, that is, than in *As For Me and My House*—“but only as a counterweight by which one can criticize the dominant culture’s mores rather than as a legitimate center of power itself” (38). In other words, Rachel’s relationship with Nick and her romanticization of Ukrainian culture reveal her desire to react against her Scots upbringing rather than her genuine interest in understanding Ukrainians’ experiences in Canada. Nick, as a Ukrainian Canadian, is important to the narrative only insofar as he helps Rachel redefine herself within Anglo-Canadian society. As Kirtz rightly points out, “this story is not Nick’s but Rachel’s”; like Steve Kulanich, Nick “simply disappears” (40) from the narrative when he has fulfilled his function. So while Rachel’s attitudes toward Ukrainian Canadians seem to suggest that she is more open to and accepting of ethnic difference than her mother (and Mrs. Bentley), her idealized notions of Ukrainian Canadian culture are no less essentialist than her mother’s negative stereotypes of Ukrainians: Rachel, too, is fundamentally complicit in perpetuating Ukrainian Canadians’ construction as “other” to the Anglo-Canadian “self.”

Importantly, though—and this is a point overlooked by Kirtz—in *A Jest of God*, unlike *As For Me and My House* (and *The Foreigner*), the Ukrainian Canadian is given the opportunity to tell his own story. Nick's story may be subordinate to Rachel's narrative (just as Steve's story is subordinate to that of Mrs. Bentley), but he nonetheless articulates his own perceptions of Ukrainian Canadians and, hence, provides an "insider" point of view (however brief) of his ethnic group that is absent from Ross's novel. When Rachel explains to Nick that she is envious of Ukrainian Canadians' emotional freedom—they "always seemed . . . more free" (93) to her—Nick challenges her romanticized assumptions about his culture. "More free?" he asks, "How did you think we spent our time? Laying girls and doing gay Slavic dances?" (94). Nick proceeds then to outline the uneasy, politically charged dynamics of his family. While his uncle "was never actually a Communist . . . he was pretty far left . . . and the chief tenet of his belief was that it was a good thing for the Ukraine to be part of the USSR" (94). His father Nestor, on the other hand, "held the opposite view" and "still believes the Ukraine should be a separate country" (94). And Nick himself recalls telling his father that he "couldn't care less what the Ukraine did" (95). Indeed, as he discusses his troubled relationship with his father, Nick draws attention to the effects of Anglo-Canadian assimilationist ideologies and practices on Ukrainian immigrants and their children. Tensions between father and son stem from Nestor's fervent desire to pass on his Ukrainian heritage to Nick and Nick's staunch resistance to this inheritance. That Nick as a young boy internalized Anglo-Canadians' derogatory attitudes toward Ukrainian Canadians is evidenced by his desire to slough all signs of ethnic difference in order to "pass" as an Anglo-Canadian. He only speaks English (his father "couldn't ever accept the fact that [he] never learned

to speak Ukrainian” [95]); and he has little interest in his father’s stories of immigration from Ukraine (112). When Rachel asks Nick if he ever liked his family home, he replies, “I guess before I started school I did. Not after that. Historical irony—it took my father fifteen years to build up that herd of his, and I used to wish every goddamn cow would drop dead” (108). In school—the “greatest of all Canadianising influences,” according to Connor (158)—Nick learned to loathe his father’s attempts to perpetuate the Ukrainian cultural and political heritage in Canada. That he eventually became an English teacher underscores the distance he has sought to establish between himself and his Ukrainian roots, as well as the extent to which he is willing to embrace Anglo-Canadian culture. Fittingly, while Rachel seems distressed by the fact that Nick’s parents “have an icon” but “no samovar,” he is flippant about the loss of the artifact. His grandmother, Nick explains, “traded it to somebody on the boat, and no one knows what she got for it. She used to claim it went for medicine for my dad . . . Personally, I think it probably went for vodka to make the trip endurable” (111-2). His indifference toward the lost samovar becomes symbolic of his indifference toward his lost ethnic culture.

In other words, even as Rachel projects onto Nick romanticized aspects of physical and cultural “otherness,” Nick’s willingness to assimilate to Anglo-Canadian society—and, more importantly, his success in advancing socially and economically within Anglo-Canadian society—illustrate that Ukrainian Canadians’ actual status as “other” to the Anglo-Canadian “self” is neither fixed nor absolute. In fact, over the course of the five Manawaka texts, as Laurence narrates the town’s history from the arrival of its founding fathers in the late nineteenth century to the departure of its sons and daughters in the 1960s and 1970s, Ukrainian Canadians’ ability to escape

categorization as “other”—through assimilation to Anglo-Canadian society—becomes increasingly apparent. Unlike Laurence’s Métis characters, who, by virtue of their racial difference, cannot escape the social and economic margins of Manawaka society, her Ukrainian Canadian characters can—and indeed do—transcend the category of “other.” Although Hagar, as a young married woman, feeds a “bunch of breeds and ne’er-do-wells and Galicians” (*Stone Angel* 114), over the course of several decades and three generations, the Galicians rise above their half-breed brethren and find themselves, like the Kazliks, living in a “big house with real lace curtains and piles of delicious food” (*Diviners* 120). As Laurence follows the Tonnerres over three generations, their family history is marked by a pattern of persistent poverty and recurrent tragedy: Lazarus, the patriarch, can find only “christawful” jobs in which his employers treat him “like shit,” and he is often forced to feed his children by “snaring or shooting jackrabbits” (*Diviners* 142). At one point, welfare takes Lazarus’s son Jules away from him (128). Jules’s sister Pique and her two children die in a fire that burns the main Tonnerre shack to the ground (158); his other sister Valentine dies of “booze and speed, on the streets of Vancouver” (430); his brother, Paul, disappears under suspicious circumstances while guiding tourists up north (430); and Jules himself commits suicide in Toronto after being diagnosed with throat cancer (447). So, while Nick—once chastised in the community as a Galician and a Bohunk—is able to go to university and establish a successful career as a high school English teacher, the Tonnerres are unable to enter the ranks of white middle-class society. But Ukrainian Canadians’ assimilation to Anglo-Canadian society—their shift from “other” to “self”—is nowhere more clearly dramatized than in *The Diviners*, when Nick’s sister Julie meets Morag in Vancouver. Morag has recently given birth to

Pique, Jules's child, and Pique has, apparently, inherited her father's racial attributes because, upon seeing the baby, Julie says, "[m]y gosh." A moment later, having collected herself, she adds, "[i]t's okay . . . I was only a little surprised, is all" (305). Ironically, only a generation ago Julie's people were discriminated against; now, having made the transition to Anglo-Canadian society, Julie herself takes on its discriminatory attitudes.⁷¹

In Laurence's fiction, the town of Manawaka becomes a world in which the complex intersection of ethnicity, gender, and religion—not to mention work ethic, occupation, and sheer willpower—determine the residents' social status. Put another way, Anglo-Celtic ethnicity does not in itself guarantee high social status so the binary opposition of (Anglo-Canadian) "self" and (non-Anglo-Canadian) "other" is at least partially deconstructed. Jason Currie and Timothy Connor, two of Manawaka's founding Anglo-Celtic fathers (Currie is Scots, Connor is Irish), both begin their lives in Manawaka with nothing: Currie comes to the town "without a hope or a ha'penny" (*Stone Angel* 15) and Connor "walk[s] the hundred miles from Winnipeg to Manawaka with hardly a cent in his pockets" (*Bird* 190). Both, by espousing the Protestant work ethic, become veritable pillars of Manawaka society. But Christie and Prin Logan—of

⁷¹ Many critics argue that in *The Diviners*—and, specifically, in the figure of Pique (daughter of Morag Gunn and Jules Tonnerre)—Laurence retrieves her Métis characters from the margins of Canadian society. According to Colin Nicholson, "Pique's genealogy signifies an alternative and distinctly Canadian historical consciousness" (173). Jules's pocket knife and Morag's plaid pin—both of which are passed on to Pique—become symbols of the dual (Métis and Scottish) heritage that Pique inherits. She herself then becomes a symbol of cultural hybridity that, according to Beeler, "offset[s] antagonistic binary oppositions between superior/inferior, white/native categories of experience" (32). Through Pique, Laurence "stresses ethnic diversity and mutual appreciation instead of the politics of exclusion"; she seeks to dismantle "cultural hegemony by affirming cross-cultural interaction within Canadian society" (33). While I agree that Pique functions as symbol of hope for her Métis people (she returns to Galloping Mountain to help her Uncle Jacques who is becoming active in Métis politics), I think that Leslie Monkman's more cautious reading of Pique better describes her function in the novel. In "The Tonnerre Family: Mirrors of Suffering" (1980), Monkman argues that Pique's "mixed racial inheritance . . . finally emerges less as an image of cultural fusion than as a physical correlative for the conflicts and dichotomies that will force her, like each of Laurence's protagonists, to divine freedom out of suffering" (150). In other words, the business of dismantling cultural hegemony has just begun.

Scots and English origins, respectively—occupy one of the lowest positions in the community’s social hierarchy as keepers of the nuisance grounds. Their home on Hill Street in the North End of the town is more similar to the Tonnerre place on the outskirts of town than it is to the South End of Manawaka (the Logans’ home is surrounded by “old car axles, a decrepit black buggy with one wheel missing, pieces of iron and battered saucepans . . . a broken baby carriage and two ruined armchairs with the springs hanging out” [*Diviners* 28-9] and the Tonnerre place is a “collection of shacks” around which lie “old tires, a roll of chickenwire, the chassis of a rusted car, and an assortment of discarded farm machinery” [136-7]).⁷² Similarly, Hagar Shipley’s husband Bram, though of English ancestry, bears more resemblance—both in his physical appearance and in his behavior—to the Métis people of the town; that Hagar (daughter of Jason Currie) descends the social ladder by marrying Bram is further evidence that one’s membership to the town’s Anglo-Celtic elite is not immutable. Manawaka’s social hierarchy is as fluid as it is complex, allowing for upward and downward movement.⁷³

In a sense, then, because Laurence’s Ukrainian Canadians in *A Jest of God* are one ethnic group in a multi-ethnic community that grapples over four generations (and five texts) with the business of living together and making sense of their interwoven

⁷² Jules and Morag, despite the differences in their cultural backgrounds, share a common class background. As Beeler suggests, in Laurence’s fiction, “[c]lass similarities . . . seem to facilitate the interaction between members of ethnic groups, despite a history of conflict” (31). Just as the Bentleys are drawn to Steve Kulanich because he, like them, is an outsider in Horizon, so too is Rachel drawn to Nick (Hagar to Bram, Morag to Jules) because she identifies with his “outsider” status in Manawaka.

⁷³ Race, though, remains an absolute signifier of difference in Manawaka. Whereas the white residents of the town (whether Anglo-Celtic or Ukrainian) are able to traverse the social spectrum, the Tonnerres are denied the ability to ascend or descend the social hierarchy because they are (despite their French heritage) considered non-white. Pique (part Scots, part Métis) might be seen as disrupting the binary opposition of self/other based on racial difference—but this argument is difficult to sustain given that her father (and, indeed, all of the Tonnerres) are themselves of mixed-race ancestry and cannot ascend the town’s social hierarchy. Pique’s success in transcending racial categories relies less on her hybrid genealogy than on the ways in which society will view this genealogy.

lives, *A Jest of God* is best read in the broader context of her Manawaka cycle. Certainly, as Mary Kirtz argues, Rachel Cameron's narrative relegates Nick to the margins of her story, just as Mrs. Bentley relegates Steve to the margins of her story. Rachel's relationship with Nick is more important to her self-development than it is to his: her attitude toward his ethnicity (though more positive than Mrs. Bentley's attitude toward Steve's culture or any of the Anglo-Saxon characters' attitudes toward Ukrainians in *The Foreigner*) has little to do with her genuine desire to understand his unique experiences as a Ukrainian Canadian; rather, Nick becomes an opportunity for Rachel to redefine her own identity. Yet, as W.H. New argues in "The Stone Angel and the Manawaka Cycle" (1981), when Rachel's involvement with Nick is seen as part of the broader narrative of social change articulated over the course of the Manawaka texts, her attitude toward him represents a step—however tentative—toward genuine understanding of cultural difference. New says that

Hagar's need to connect with the Shipleys and the Driesers, Rachel's to connect with the Kazliks, Morag's to connect with the Tonnerres all reiterate a pattern of social change. It does not exactly constitute an integration of the different levels . . . rather, it attempts to articulate the process through time which has allowed the *recognition* that each of these different cultural strains has been part of the shaping of the whole society. (26)

Rachel's relationship with Nick (like Hagar's with Bram, and Morag's with Jules) reflects a shift toward "a kind of core understanding about the shaping elements within a culture" (New 26). Laurence's fiction comes to reject the notion that a national culture requires non-Anglo-Canadians to assimilate to Anglo-Canadian culture: rather, both Anglo-Canadians and non-Anglo-Canadians contribute to Canadian culture.⁷⁴ In

⁷⁴ Monkman argues that "Jules Tonnerre emerges not only as a character whose suffering serves as a standard by which Morag Gunn can measure her own pain, but also as an embodiment of the values of

illustrating that her Anglo-Celtic characters have much to learn from her “other” (Ukrainian, for example, and Métis) characters, she begins to articulate a nascent discourse of multiculturalism.⁷⁵

Ultimately, *The Foreigner*, *As For Me and My House*, and Laurence’s Manawaka fiction form a broad narrative of social change in which cultural diversity is acknowledged, eventually, as a positive aspect of Canadian culture. The assimilationist ideology so forcefully directed at ethnic “foreigners” in Connor’s novel gives way in *As For Me and My House* to the notion that difference is defined by gender and sexuality as well as ethnicity; and Ross’s implicit illustration that the dominant cultural discourses of depression-era Anglo-Canadian society cannot accommodate difference gives way to Laurence’s suggestion that definitions of national culture can—and indeed must—recognize the contributions of all its citizens. If these texts, however, collectively succeed in articulating a narrative of national progress that reflects Anglo-Canadians’ increasingly inclusive attitudes toward (among others) Ukrainian Canadians over a period of some fifty years, they fail nonetheless to articulate Ukrainian Canadians’ varied and shifting perceptions of their own experiences during this time. They leave largely unexplored the extent to which Ukrainian immigrants are complicit with and/or resistant to Anglo-Canadians’ cultural hegemony; the precise ways in which immigrants’ children

acceptance and freedom that serve as goals for each of Laurence’s protagonists” (143). In “The Métis in the Fiction of Margaret Laurence: From Outcast to Consort” (1987), Angelika Maeser-Lemieux makes a similar point: symbolically identified with “nature, instinct, primitiveness, [and] sexuality,” Laurence’s Métis characters (and, I would add, some of her Ukrainian characters) “hold up to the dominant society a mirror of its own repressions and unconscious dynamisms. In Laurence’s work, they mediate a union with the lost and alienated portion of self and society, and thereby counterbalance or compensate for the one-sidedness of our own culture’s perception of reality” (129).

⁷⁵ Indeed, as New argues in “The Other and I: Laurence’s African Stories” (1983), “through the multicultural world of Manawaka, Laurence traces an historical shift from a generation of ‘discriminators’ (whether Irish, Scots, Protestant, or merely middle class) to the subsequent generations of women (writers, teachers, housewives) who have rejected the old definitions of themselves and who find their dignity and freedom after they extend themselves to contact others” (134).

(second-generation Ukrainian Canadians) negotiate their identity (re)formation through the process of assimilation; what they lose and what they gain (willingly or not) in the process of becoming “Canadianized”; and whether their gains are ultimately worth their losses. How do the Galicians perceive Dr. Brown’s colonizing work in *The Foreigner*? Do they welcome the presence of his church and school in their community? How does Steve Kulanich in *As For Me and My House* feel about being taken away from his father? Is he happy to live with the Bentleys? With the exception of Nick Kazlik, who briefly mentions the conflicts between his father’s and his own attitudes toward Anglo-Canadian society, the Ukrainian Canadians in these novels are never given the opportunity to voice their unique perspectives on assimilationist ideologies and practices, specifically, or on their role in Anglo-Canadian society, more generally. So, while Connor’s, Ross’s, and Laurence’s novels are undoubtedly insightful as reflections of Anglo-Canadians’ changing attitudes toward Ukrainian Canadians in the decades preceding multiculturalism, their stories are, in the end, one-sided.

(Re)reading the (Female) Ethnic Subject: Vera Lysenko's Yellow Boots

In the concluding chapter of *Men in Sheepskin Coats: A Study in Assimilation*, published in 1947 (the first English-language history of Ukrainians in Canada written by a Ukrainian Canadian⁷⁶), Vera Lysenko remarks that

⁷⁶ According to Swyripa, the scholarly value of Lysenko’s study is undermined by her decidedly romanticized portrayal of Ukrainian Canadians, not to mention her “deliberate misinterpretation of certain phenomena” in Ukrainian Canadian history (*Ukrainian Canadians: A Survey* 66). Swyripa concurs with Watson Kirkconnell who criticized Lysenko for her communist sympathies in *Men in Sheepskin Coats* but she also identifies a number of other biases in Lysenko’s text. Lysenko, for instance, devotes “considerable space to East Ukrainian Stundists or Baptists, a group who emigrated to Canada in small numbers” (tellingly the religious group to which she belonged) and considerably less space (i.e. one paragraph) to the growth of the Greek Catholic Church in Canada. She ignores, moreover, the establishment of the Ukrainian Greek Orthodox Church of Canada “altogether” (67). And Lysenko’s “emphasis on the Cossack

[i]n the writings of our novelists and short story writers little or no cognizance has been taken of the fact that one-quarter of Canada's entire population is of non-Anglo-Saxon, non-French descent. Seldom indeed does one encounter a character of, let us say, Slavic origin, in Canadian fiction, except in the role of an illiterate, a clown, a villain or a domestic servant . . . The magnificent drama of migration and assimilation to Canada's western lands of a polyglot population has not appealed to Canadian writers, mainly for the reason that consciously or unconsciously they still prefer to think of the non-Anglo-Saxon as a comic or uncouth personage, unworthy of elevation to the dignity of literary subject-material. (293-4)

While Lysenko provides neither examples nor detailed discussion of Slavic characters' derogatory portrayals in Canadian literature (she makes no mention of Connor's *The Foreigner*, or Ross's *As For Me and My House*, both of which were published well before *Men in Sheepskin Coats*) she does cite Morley Callaghan's *They Shall Inherit the Earth* (1935) as an example of a novel that features a heroine of Ukrainian origin, Anna Prychoda. Regrettably though, for Lysenko, Callaghan's heroine "possesses no distinctively Ukrainian traits"; she "might as well have been of French, Irish or Icelandic ancestry" (293). Lysenko explicitly states that Canadian literature should represent the "particular characteristics and problems" of the multiple ethnic groups that it comprises (293). "Canadian culture," she warns, "will not come of age until it embraces in its entirety the manifold life of all the national groups which constitute its entity" (294). Calling for portrayals of Ukrainians that acknowledge their unique contributions to Canadian culture and that celebrate their vital role in the building of the Canadian nation, Lysenko says, "there is much that was noble in the lives of the common folk who did the arduous work of pioneering in our western lands; beneath the rough exterior and foreign tongue were concealed worthy motives" (294). Not surprisingly, she suggests too that

heritage," according to Swyripa, is "rather misleading, as the majority of the Ukrainians in the first two immigrations were not the 'descendants of Cossacks' but from Western Ukraine, historically peripheral to

Ukrainian Canadian writers—in particular, Ukrainian Canadian writers of the second- and third-generation—are ideal candidates for recording Ukrainians’ role in Canada’s “magnificent drama of migration and assimilation” because they can “seize upon the opportunities for fresh and original expression in literary and artistic forms by exploiting their lives and the lives of their parents and grandparents as subject material” (294). Nor is it surprising that, in 1954, Lysenko herself published the first English-language novel by a Ukrainian Canadian and about Ukrainian Canadians.

In *Yellow Boots*, Vera Lysenko tells the other (and the “other’s”) side of the Ukrainian Canadian assimilation story: her novel explores Ukrainian Canadians’ experiences during their first decades in Canada from an “insider’s” perspective. Over the past decade or so (following the novel’s re-release in 1992 by the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies and NeWest Press), revived scholarly interest in Lysenko’s writing has resulted in numerous discussions of *Yellow Boots*, all focused on the ways in which Lysenko radically challenges Anglo-Canadian writers’ depictions of Ukrainian Canadians as “other” within dominant Anglo-Canadian society by placing a Ukrainian Canadian woman at the centre of her text.⁷⁷ Although I acknowledge Lysenko’s attempts to articulate resistance to the dominant cultural and social discourses of her time, my sense is that the novel reflects a particular historical moment in which the social constraints placed on the female ethnic subject (heroine and author alike) are neither escapable nor surmountable. Lysenko’s representations of Ukrainian Canadians are more similar to

Cossackdom” (69).

⁷⁷ See Beverly Rasporich’s “Retelling Vera Lysenko: A Feminist and Ethnic Writer” (1989) and “Vera Lysenko’s Fictions: Engendering Prairie Spaces” (1991); Alexandra Kruchka Glynn’s “Reintroducing Vera Lysenko—Ukrainian Canadian Author” (1990); Carolyn Redl’s “Neither Here nor There: Canadian Fiction by the Multicultural Generation” (1996); Tamara Palmer Seiler’s “Including the Female Immigrant Story: A Comparative Look at Narrative Strategies” (1996); and Sonia Mycak’s “Simple Sentimentality or Specific Narrative Strategy? The Functions and Use of Nostalgia in the Ukrainian-Canadian Text” (1998).

those of her Anglo-Canadian contemporaries than some readers might hope; as such, *Yellow Boots* reveals the difficulty of displacing ethnic and gender hierarchies during the decades preceding the advent of multiculturalism.

Set in the small Manitoba town of Prairie Dawn, and in Winnipeg, between 1929 and 1941, *Yellow Boots* tells the story of Lilli Landash, a young girl whose parents immigrated to Canada from Ukraine⁷⁸ in order to escape the oppression of their Austrian overlords. Lilli's childhood in rural Manitoba is a dismal one: at the age of six, she is "lent out" to her uncle by her abusive father, Anton; after five years of hard physical labour on her uncle's farm, she becomes frail and weak. At the outset of the novel, Lilli, deathly ill, is returned to her father. But her father is indifferent to his ailing daughter. Nothing is more precious to Anton than land and sons, so Lilli's imminent death means little to him. In fact, as Lilli lies on her deathbed, neither her father *nor* her mother grieves for the dying child. Although Lilli's sisters (and certainly her brother Petey) are treated lovingly by their parents, Lilli herself is—for reasons never explicitly outlined in the narrative—treated as an outcast. (Tellingly, if somewhat unbelievably, during her five-year absence from the family, all have forgotten her real name—they refer to her pejoratively as "Gypsy.") When Lilli miraculously survives her illness, no one rejoices. Indeed, throughout Lilli's childhood and adolescence, local schoolmaster Ian MacTavish is the only person who sees that she is an exceptional girl, that she has been given the gift of song. When Lilli turns sixteen and her father arranges her marriage to a loathsome brute, it is MacTavish who helps her escape to the city. In Winnipeg, then, Lilli meets a number of other men who help her establish her new identity (the pianist Sam, the choir singer Tim, and the choirmaster Matthew Reiner). She joins a multi-ethnic choir, goes to

night school, and eventually embarks upon a successful career as a concert singer. Ultimately, Lilli rejects a concert career but she continues to express her artistic passion by singing the folk songs of her people and by establishing her own dressmaking shop. She also becomes engaged to her choirmaster. The novel concludes with Lilli's visit home to the Landash farm after a seven-year absence where she is dismayed to find that her family has embraced all-things-Anglo-Canadian and rejected all-things-Ukrainian. At the close of the novel, Lilli alone is left to preserve the traditions of her people through her gift of song—and there is little doubt that she will succeed in doing so, for, near the novel's conclusion, her mother gives Lilli her yellow boots, potent symbols of Ukrainian culture.

In their readings of *Yellow Boots*, literary critics Alexandra Kruchka Glynn, Beverly Rasporich, and Tamara Palmer Seiler argue that Lysenko explicitly challenges Anglo-Canadians'—and, more specifically, Anglo-Canadian writers'—attitudes toward and perceptions of Ukrainian Canadians.⁷⁹ In her introduction to the 1992 edition of the novel, Kruchka Glynn says that *Yellow Boots* “[does] not conform to the attitudes and images of the dominant Anglo presence in Canadian literature” (xi); in “Retelling Vera Lysenko: A Feminist and Ethnic Writers” (1989), Rasporich refers to Lysenko's text as “a tribute to Ukrainian settlement on the prairies,” and “a progressive challenge to official Anglo-Canadian history” (40); and Palmer Seiler, in “Including the Female Immigrant

⁷⁸ Lysenko doesn't mention precisely when the Landashes immigrated to Canada.

⁷⁹ Lysenko's novel is also briefly mentioned in several book-length studies of Canadian literature. In *Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction* (1973), Laurie Ricou criticizes *Yellow Boots* for its “glib, excessive emotions which are Lysenko's staple in fiction” (112). Dick Harrison, in *Unnamed Country: The Struggle for a Canadian Prairie Fiction* (1977), finds the ending of the novel unbelievable: he says that the “purpose of [Lilli's] success” is “so obvious we cannot believe in it” (147). But in *Configurations: Essays in the Canadian Literatures* (1982), E.D. Blodgett reads *Yellow Boots* more positively: he accepts that Lilli is “the synecdoche of ethnicity” (94). At the end of the novel,

Story: A Comparative Look at Narrative Strategies" (1996), goes so far as to suggest that Lysenko, "as if quite consciously deconstructing Ralph Connor's version of Ukrainian culture in his novel *The Foreigner* . . . asserts the beauty and value of Ukrainian culture" (55). Certainly *Yellow Boots* stands out in Canadian literature as the first novel to focus centrally on a Ukrainian Canadian character; and, unlike Connor's, Ross's, and Laurence's novels, Lysenko places a Ukrainian Canadian—a Ukrainian Canadian woman, moreover—at the centre of her narrative. Not surprisingly, critics emphasize the notion that *Yellow Boots* celebrates both the "beauty and value of Ukrainian culture" and the Ukrainian Canadian woman's crucial role in preserving Ukrainian culture. According to Kruchka Glynn, the novel underscores the fact that "the retention of Ukrainian culture is carried out by the women" ("Introduction" xx-xxi). Importantly, too, many critics read *Yellow Boots* as a novel in which the Ukrainian Canadian woman becomes a champion of her own ethnic group and other ethnic minority groups. "By having Lilli sing not only Ukrainian folk songs, but also songs produced by a variety of immigrants," Palmer Seiler argues, "Lysenko subverts the imperial insistence on a unitary vision of Canadian culture and nationality" (56). Some critics, pointing to the text's mythologization of the prairie landscape, describe Lysenko's heroine as "a new world embodiment of the ancient female earth goddess, a female creator who can link old and new and synthesize diversity through the power of a nurturing and holistic female vision" (Palmer Seiler 56). Rasporich argues that the novel is a "fertility myth" in which Lilli "replants" herself in the "New World" and "with feminine accommodation, assimilat[es] into the new mother culture, accepting all of its hybrid children in all of their ethnic diversity, and becoming

says Blodgett, "she is symbolically invested with the signs of her new role as preserver, cherisher, and mediator" (95).

their female artist” (“Engendering” 257). Generally speaking, recent critics’ readings of *Yellow Boots* rely on three rather tenuous assumptions: first, that in leaving her father’s home, Lilli successfully challenges patriarchal social structures; second, that in becoming a singer of Ukrainian songs, she retains her Ukrainian culture; and, third, that by singing the songs of numerous ethnic groups, she preserves the cultures of multiple ethnic minority groups.

Yet Lysenko’s attempts to “asser[t] the beauty and value of Ukrainian culture” (Palmer Seiler 55) are thwarted by her decidedly negative depictions of Ukrainian Canadians in *Yellow Boots*. In the first paragraphs of the novel, as Lilli is being transported home to her father by railway worker Mike O’Donovan and schoolteacher Ian MacTavish, these two Anglo-Canadian characters (Irish and Scottish, respectively) establish the binary opposition upon which the narrative relies. Not unlike the opening paragraphs of *The Foreigner*, the first chapter of *Yellow Boots* establishes a dramatic contrast between modern, civilized Anglo-Canadian society and backward, primitive Ukrainian culture. As O’Donovan and MacTavish talk, they attempt to “reconcile the evidences of modern civilization—telephone wires, grain elevators, railways—with the primitive character of the [Ukrainian] people” (12⁸⁰). Approaching the Landash farm, O’Donovan and MacTavish witness a group of Ukrainians on their way to church—four or five wagons “filled with men in sheepskin coats and women in leather boleros, long coloured skirts and white turbans” (10). MacTavish, who is new to the community, is intrigued by the Ukrainians’ ethnic clothing and their old-fashioned mode of transportation: to him, they are “like something out of a history book” (10). And O’Donovan, who has spent many years in Prairie Dawn, agrees with MacTavish,

explaining that the Ukrainians are “still pioneering, when pioneering days are over for most of the other settlers” (13). O’Donovan, in fact, says that he has seen the Ukrainians “plough the land as people used to in England in the time of Alfred the Great” (13). Neither O’Donovan nor MacTavish can “believe that this [is] the year 1929 in the new world” (11).⁸¹

The conversation between O’Donovan and MacTavish, of course, reflects (then dominant) Anglo-Canadians’ attitudes toward ethnic minority groups: members of dominant Anglo-Canadian society, they see Ukrainian Canadians as strange and inferior—as “other.” Certainly, as the narrative unfolds, Lysenko balances their negative perceptions of the Ukrainian settler community with positive descriptions of the Landash family’s customs and traditions.⁸² Divided into six parts (the first five of which focus on Lilli’s years at home), *Yellow Boots* offers countless detailed depictions of Ukrainians’ cultural and religious practices. In “Rites of Spring,” the first part of the novel, Lysenko

⁸⁰ I quote from the 1992 edition of *Yellow Boots*.

⁸¹ The discrepancy between the Ukrainians’ primitive way of life and the Anglo-Canadians’ modern way of life is one of the historical inaccuracies of Lysenko’s novel. By 1929, Ukrainian immigrants of the first wave had been in Canada for over thirty years: the farming practices and dress that Lysenko describes belong to turn-of-the-century Ukrainian pioneers, not to established, depression-era farmers. Interestingly, while I refer to the Ukrainian Canadian characters in *Yellow Boots* as Ukrainian Canadians, Lysenko refers to them as Bukovynians. Again, by 1929, with the rise of Ukrainian nationalism and the influx of nationally conscious second-wave Ukrainian immigrants, terms such as “Bukovynian,” “Galician,” and “Ruthenian” were being replaced by “Ukrainian.” See my overview of Ukrainian Canadian history in Chapter One.

⁸² Lysenko’s *Yellow Boots* and Illia Kiriak’s *Sons of the Soil* are very similar. In *Sons of the Soil*, Kiriak tells the story of Hrehory Workun, a young man who immigrates to Canada from Ukraine with his family (and with several other families from his village). The novel is told in a third-person omniscient narrative voice and, while the protagonist and hero is clearly Workun, the novel constructs a portrait of the entire pioneering community. All of the families in *Sons of the Soil* begin with nothing but, together, as a community, they build homes, a church, and a school; they break land, seed crops, and reap bountiful harvests. The novel is less about hardship than it is about the triumph of community over hardship, and Ukrainian traditions and customs play a central role in the sustenance of community morale. Kiriak’s description of Ukrainian religious holidays and feast days reaches encyclopedic proportions. In addition to Christmas and Easter, the pioneers celebrate the Assumption of the Holy Virgin, St. Dimitri Day, *Pokrova* Day, St. Yuri Day, St. Uvedenya Day, Stritenya Day, Jordan Day, and St. Peter Day. Detailed descriptions of Ukrainian food, songs, clothing, and customs form a significant part of the story. The novel (only partially concerned with assimilation) concludes with Workun’s death, but his “return to the soil” becomes an occasion for his children and grandchildren to celebrate his achievements.

dramatizes Ukrainians' funeral rites (when Lilli is ill, her parents prepare for her funeral), folk stories and arts (her grandmother spins tapestries and tales), and folk dances (the children frolic and play en route to school). In "Songs of the Seasons," Lysenko traces a full year in the lives of the Landash family, drawing attention to the ways in which they worship the soil and the seasons; and in "The Wreath Plaiting," she focuses on birth, matchmaking, and marriage rituals. "Dancing Boots, Peasant Boots," moreover, centres on Easter rites and Midsummer celebrations, and "The Grandparents" explores the rich Ukrainian musical heritage passed on from grandfather and grandmother to Lilli. Really, until Lilli faces the crisis of her arranged marriage—until she leaves her family home in the sixth and final part of the novel ("In Search of a Lost Legend")—the narrative meanders along with no apparent purpose, save to highlight the complexity and vitality of Ukrainian Canadian culture. Frances Swyripa's notion that *Yellow Boots* is a "valuable . . . record of Ukrainian peasant customs and beliefs as they were practiced by first-generation Ukrainians in Canada" (83), and Rasporich's notion that it is a "celebratory record of customs" ("Retelling" 43), are certainly grounded in the first five parts of the novel.

At the same time, however, the sorts of negative perceptions of Ukrainian Canadians articulated by O'Donovan and MacTavish in the first paragraphs of the novel are not absent from Lysenko's later depictions of Ukrainian Canadians. Stereotypes of the Ukrainian community as barbaric and ignorant resonate throughout the text undermining the novel's positive representation of Ukrainian Canadian culture. O'Donovan and MacTavish—and eventually Matthew Reiner—explicitly state that Ukrainians are "primitive" (12; 30), that their social and cultural practices spring from the

“childhood of the human race” (282), and Lysenko implicitly affirms the accuracy of these observations. From the outset of the text, primarily through the character of Anton Landash, Lysenko foregrounds Ukrainian Canadians’ inhumanity: Anton sends Lilli to work at the tender age of six; and, when Lilli is sent home (too ill to be of use to her uncle), her father chooses to use an old tool box for her coffin (rather than wasting good lumber on building a new coffin for the child). Once Lilli recovers, he forces her to perform the work of a man, beating her after she has collapsed from exhaustion. Importantly, too, Anton’s wife Zenobia fails to defend Lilli against her husband’s cruelty, and she similarly fails to intervene when Anton arranges Lilli’s marriage to Simon Zachary in exchange for land. Both Anton and Zenobia are indifferent to the fact that Zachary “beat his last wife when she was carrying a child” (“as a result, the girl died in childbirth” [220]); neither her father nor her mother listens to Lilli as she pleads for her life (“[t]hat’s my life you’re trading for your fields,” she says. “As long as I live, I’ll be paying for those acres. That’s too high a price” [219]). Tellingly, after a family photograph has been taken—after Anton cuts Lilli out of the picture with a pair of scissors and her “tiny piece” falls to the ground—his cruelty is “*not noticed by anyone except Lilli*” (76, my emphasis). In fact, the novel illustrates that not only Anton but Zenobia—not only the Landashes but the entire Ukrainian Canadian community—view women as subordinate to men. That the Ukrainian Canadians of Prairie Dawn clearly disapprove of unmarried, independent women is evidenced by their treatment of the old eccentric widow Tamara. Tamara is a strong-willed woman who lives alone and is irrationally accused of casting evil spells on members of the community. One evening, as members of the Ukrainian Canadian community gather to discuss Tamara’s witchcraft,

their “voices swell in a crescendo of fury” (176). Acting on their superstitious suspicions (that she has caused cows to stop giving milk and tomato plants to shrivel), they undertake a veritable witch-hunt and drive Tamara to her death.

Indeed, Ukrainian Canadians’ barbarity in *Yellow Boots* is particularly evident in their treatment of women. Lilli’s escape from her father (and hence from the unhappy marriage he has arranged) is as much an act of survival as it is an act of independence: she leaves home in order to emancipate and save herself from her father. Given that she leaves one patriarchal social structure only to enter into another, however, Lilli’s status as a “practical feminist heroine” (Rasporich, “Engendering” 250) is questionable. Her transition from the farm to the city—from an abused farm girl to an independent city woman—is made possible less through her own actions than through the interventions of a series of men: her schoolteacher, Ian MacTavish; her pianist friend, Sam; her suitor, Tim; and her choirmaster-cum-fiancé, Matthew Reiner. With the “new” men in her life, Lilli is safe from the brutality of her father, but she is never free from domination by male figures. That many of the men (MacTavish, Tim, Reiner) who meet Lilli are sexually attracted to her points rather unambiguously to their ulterior motives in helping Lilli and invalidates a feminist reading of her movement into the world.

Certainly Ian MacTavish’s initial interest in Lilli (when she is still a child) grows out of both his personal and professional ambitions. MacTavish originally comes to the country school in order to fulfill his aspirations as an anthropologist: he seeks to observe and record the transformation of primitive Ukrainian culture to modern Canadian culture, and Lilli becomes his prime specimen. “Without her,” he wonders, “how many months it would have taken [me] to understand the [Ukrainians]!” (233). On Lilli’s first day of

school, MacTavish bestows upon her a new name, “Lilli” (41), then proceeds to teach her to speak proper English (56) and to sing British songs (43), all the while filling notebooks with ethnographic data regarding the state of Ukrainian culture in transition. Indeed, near the conclusion of *Yellow Boots*, schoolteacher Ian MacTavish is re-introduced as “Dr. Ian MacTavish, eminent anthropologist” (351). The diaries that he keeps during his stint in Prairie Dawn become the “basis of his lifetime work” (351). As MacTavish studies Lilli, moreover, he becomes emotionally and physically attracted to her:

as she stood in the brilliant sunshine, dressed shabbily in men's clothing too large for her, defensive yet secret, she had a feminine allure, the beginning of womanhood. MacTavish could not look at her without a stirring of emotion, compounded of pity and something akin to excitement, a consciousness that here was something rare and undeveloped. (59)

At once an object of “pity” and a source of “excitement,” Lilli becomes MacTavish’s project—something (not someone) “rare” that he can “develop” according to his own blueprints and designs. Instrumental in ensuring her escape from her father, he instructs her “in the business of leaving the village and obtaining employment in the city” (228). And while years later he marvels at her progress, MacTavish nonetheless regrets that he has had to “share [her] with so many others!” (353). He pines for his early days as a schoolteacher in Prairie Dawn when, as he says, “she was mine—my discovery” (353).

Tim (the young man who courts Lilli when she first arrives in the city) shares MacTavish's interest in Lilli: like MacTavish, Tim is drawn to Lilli's innocence and naiveté; like MacTavish, he helps to facilitate Lilli's integration into Anglo-Canadian society. Though both men are attracted by Lilli's wild, untamed nature, they seek to educate her in the ways of the modern world by playing the part of father/lover. For Lilli, each meeting with Tim becomes a “voyage of discovery, a step forward in life” (274).

After Tim discovers that Lilli knows neither her birthday nor her real name, he makes inquiries with the Manitoba Government and eventually produces her birth certificate: “you see,” he explains to Lilli, condescendingly, “everybody is born, that is how we get into the world” (275). Not unlike MacTavish, who transformed “Gypsy” into “Lilli,” Tim, too, endeavours to rename her. “Oksana” is, according to Tim, Lilli’s “real” name. In the act of renaming, Tim (like MacTavish before him) becomes a sort of father figure to Lilli—indeed, Tim’s tendency is to treat Lilli less like a woman than a child. After he renames Lilli, Tim throws a birthday party for her, lavishing her with gifts—seventeen presents, one for each year of her life. Childlike, Lilli opens the gifts, treasuring the knickknacks that Tim has given her. Not surprisingly, his final gift is a diamond ring, which effectively introduces the topic of marriage into their conversation. And while Lilli turns down his marriage proposal, Tim’s sexual attraction to Lilli and his desire to make her his wife are never absent from his interactions with her.

Much like MacTavish and Tim, Matthew Reiner (Lilli’s choirmaster) bases his relationship with Lilli on his double-edged desire to transform her (in dress, mannerism, and speech) and to possess her (physically and sexually). Reiner, a classically trained musician from Austria,⁸³ directs a multicultural choir that comprises ethnic immigrant factory workers. Like MacTavish, Reiner is interested in studying the assimilation of working class ethnic immigrants to Anglo-Canadian society. In fact, with unmistakable parallels to MacTavish, Reiner harbours a secret dream to conduct an experiment: “what could be done to develop a human being of great ability,” he wonders, “but of almost

⁸³ Lysenko mentions several times that Reiner is Austrian (she hints, too, near the novel’s conclusion, that he is Jewish)—suggesting that, through the union of Lilli and Reiner, Old Country tensions between Ukrainians and Austrians (as well as Ukrainians and Jews) are resolved. But this aspect of Reiner’s and Lilli’s relationship is left almost entirely undeveloped.

absolute ignorance?" (273). In Lilli, Reiner finds the ideal specimen. She is "young," "naïve" (267), "wild" (305), and filled with "primitive passion" (305). Upon meeting Lilli, Reiner immediately recognizes that the perfect experimental subject stands before him—"here she is. What she may become depends on us" (280). As with MacTavish and Tim, Lilli's role in her own coming-of-age is muted by Reiner's domineering role in her life. He removes her from her position as a domestic servant and finds her a job in a factory, arranging for her to go to night school in the evenings. For her calluses, he suggests hand lotion, and exercises to give her hands "grace and pliability" (271). Interestingly, when Lilli makes her own decisions—when she, for example, appears at choir practice in elegant evening attire—Reiner steps in, criticizing her choices. "We can wait a few years for this suit," he says, "next time, wear the green angora dress" (280). Lilli thrives, of course, under Reiner's tutelage: she establishes herself as a successful concert singer, then opens her own dressmaking shop. And she freely admits her debt to Reiner ("I studied hard to please you, to speak well, to dress properly . . . All for you" [347]). Only after Lilli's transformation, though, from naïve country girl to mature modern woman does Reiner decide to make her his wife. Near the close of the novel, he announces that he has "waited long enough for [Lilli] to grow up" (347). Reiner has waited, yes, but not passively. He has actively directed her "growing up," molding her according to the precise specifications that he always has had in mind for her. For Reiner, the experiment is a success.

But is Reiner's experiment a success for Lilli? In *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (1996), Simon Gikandi theorizes the position of women in postcolonial societies. Writing specifically about nineteenth-century women

travelers like Mary Seacole (*Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands*, 1857) and Mary Kingsley (*Travels in West Africa*, 1897), women for whom the British imperial enterprise provided “an opportunity for freedom and advancement” but who found it “impossible, given their own subordinate positions in the domestic economy to unconditionally valorize the imperial voice” (123), Gikandi suggests that women are caught at the intersection between patriarchal and imperial discourses. The colonial expansion of the British empire enables them to resist oppressive patriarchal social structures, as they are able to travel independently within the colonies. But their freedom to travel requires their simultaneous complicity with the imperial enterprise. While Lilli Landash’s situation is not entirely parallel to the situations of the women about which Gikandi writes, the “complicity/ resistance” dialectic becomes a productive critical tool for reading *Yellow Boots* because it acknowledges the “loss” inherent in each of Lilli’s “gains.” Lilli’s circumstances are rather more complicated than those of a British woman traveler because, while the British woman must negotiate her way through one culture and one patriarchal system, Lilli must negotiate her way through two cultures and two patriarchal systems. When she escapes from her parents’ farm to the city, Lilli leaves both her abusive father *and* her traditional Ukrainian way of life. But she is only able to leave her abusive father with the help of MacTavish, an Anglo-Canadian man with decidedly imperial interests; she is only able to make a new life for herself by assimilating to Anglo-Canadian society under the insidiously controlling guidance of Tim and, especially, Reiner. To resist Ukrainian patriarchy, Lilli must become complicit with both Anglo-Canadian cultural imperialism *and* Anglo-Canadian patriarchy. In the end, hers is a lose-lose situation.

Although *Yellow Boots* suggests that Lilli's movement to the city does not result in the total loss of her culture (moving to the city, after all, enables Lilli to take her Ukrainian part in the city's festive multicultural hubbub) one of the most curious aspects of the text is its insistence that, unlike the other members of the Landash family, Lilli alone has the potential to preserve their Ukrainian heritage. Upon returning to her home near the conclusion of the novel, she observes the changes that have taken place in the Landash household: "the phone, the radio and refrigerator. Everything [is] hygienic. One could not imagine any spirits, evil or benign living here" (329). In her first act of kindness toward Lilli, Zenobia laments the loss of the old ways:

if I could tell you, how shameful what the girls did with those carpets, embroideries, dress up and laugh! Costumes wear out and new ones not made. Girl will not spend time to embroider when she can order from mail order catalogue, so cheap, so fine! . . . No more kilims on wall, all, all, taken off and instead put on wallpaper, curtains from mail order, range where was old stove, so good to bake bread! (331)

Apparently—and this seems to me a somewhat unbelievable development in the novel—seven years after Lilli leaves home, all Ukrainian customs and traditions have entirely disappeared, giving way to the modern, Anglo-Canadian way of life. (Another inexplicable twist in the narrative is the Landash family's sudden loving embrace of Lilli, to whom they never before have showed kindness or affection.) Somehow, Lilli—who no longer lives in her ethnic community; who no longer speaks Ukrainian or eats Ukrainian food; who dresses in modern "Canadian" clothing—somehow *Lilli* becomes the symbol of her community's cultural preservation and is therefore able to comfort her mother by telling her that she "has one daughter still who loves the old" (331). Lysenko's logic here is distinctly pre-multicultural in the sense that she presents ethnic performance, the performance of song, as a valid means for maintaining and transmitting

cultural traditions. This, at least, is Kruchka Glynn's and Palmer Seiler's reading of the novel: that *Yellow Boots* is the "first piece of Canadian fiction to advance the vision of a multicultural Canadian society" (Kruchka Glynn xi) and that, "[b]y having Lilli champion the vanishing folk culture of her people, particularly music, Lysenko works to de-colonize Ukrainian ethnicity" (Palmer Seiler 56).

But a positive reading of *Yellow Boots* and its multicultural politics requires a leap of faith on the part of the reader: to accept that multiculturalism resolves the tensions between Lilli's status as a Ukrainian and as a Canadian, readers must overlook the irony of the pat conclusion. Near the end of the novel, Zenobia gives her yellow boots to Lilli. These boots are rich in symbolic meaning because they are the very boots Zenobia wore as a girl in the Old Country; when mother passes them on to daughter, she passes on the matrilineal responsibility to protect and preserve the family's traditional way of life. While the boots carry the symbolic weight of the Ukrainian cultural legacy, however, they also figure centrally in a final scene of the novel, the scene in which Lilli and Reiner at last unite. When Reiner sees Lilli pull on her yellow dancing boots before her last performance in the novel—when he has proof that her Ukrainian heritage is now simply a costume she will wear on stage—only then is he ready to claim her as his wife. The price that Lilli pays for escaping her father's patriarchal home is the reduction of her ethnic heritage to fetishized performance. Over the course of the novel, Lilli negotiates herself into a corner: she escapes from under her father's patriarchal thumb (and compromises her ethnicity to do so) only to find herself under another man's thumb and isolated from her ethnic community. Regardless of where she turns, Lilli remains oppressed. While Lilli's father, Anton, is able to flee from his Austrian master in the Old Country, and

while his son Petey is able to find freedom and opportunity in Canada, Lilli is never without a master. Lilli's husband-to-be, after all, is Austrian. So readers are left to wonder how far Lilli's yellow boots really take her.

Yellow Boots is a novel rife with unresolved contradictions. Characterized by barbarity, Ukrainian Canadian culture is also characterized by beauty. While Lilli embraces the modern, urban world of Anglo-Canadian society (she even learns to mimic the mechanical sounds of the factory floor in her improvised songs), she views her family's embrace of Anglo-Canadian modernity and their rejection of Ukrainian Canadian culture with dismay. Although she successfully challenges her father's domineering presence in her life, she willingly acquiesces to the control of other men. As a narrative of Ukrainian Canadians' assimilation to Anglo-Canadian society, Lysenko's novel provides decidedly ambivalent resolutions to the dilemma of second-generation Ukrainian Canadians'—and especially second-generation Ukrainian Canadian women's—status in Anglo-Canadian society. Her text may anticipate the emergence of multicultural discourses of ethnicity—it may suggest that these discourses represent a viable alternative to Anglo-Canadian cultural hegemony—but in doing so it simultaneously reveals the ways in which multiculturalism is grounded in discourses of British imperialism.

Ultimately, Lysenko's treatment of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity—like that of Connor, Ross, and Laurence—reveals that her novel is complicit with (even as it ostensibly seeks to resist) dominant Anglo-Canadian notions of Canadian nationhood. Connor sees Canada as distinct from Britain—as a country in which the “blood strains of great races will mingle in the blood of a race greater than the greatest of them all” (np)—

but he nonetheless asserts the superiority and centrality of Anglo-Canadian (more specifically, Scots-Presbyterian) culture in shaping the new nation. Whereas Ross draws attention to the self-righteousness and hypocrisy of “false-fronted” small town Canada, he offers no alternative to the hierarchical binarisms of self/other, Anglo-Canadian/non-Anglo-Canadian. And while Laurence gestures toward the value of cultural heterogeneity in Canadian society—while her Manawaka fiction begins to articulate discourses of multiculturalism—she leaves unexplored the question of whether or not dominant Anglo-Canadian culture will acknowledge and embrace difference (Pique’s future in multicultural Canada lies beyond the textual and temporal space of *The Diviners*). Readers might expect a text such as *Yellow Boots*—because it is written by a Ukrainian Canadian author—to articulate a politics of resistance to the dominance of Anglo-Canadian culture. But as a text that depicts the actual operation of assimilationist ideologies, *Yellow Boots* instead reveals first-wave Ukrainian Canadians’ (and their children’s) complicity in the perpetuation of Anglo-Canadian hegemony during the period following the first-wave of immigration and preceding the advent of multiculturalism. Not unlike Nick Kazlik, Lysenko’s heroine actively chooses to forsake most aspects of her Ukrainian Canadian heritage in order to become Canadian and, crucially, to advance within the social and economic hierarchies of Canadian society. Culturally, however, Lilli Landash’s assimilation requires her almost complete rejection of her ethnic heritage. In spite of the fact that Lysenko argues “assimilation is not uniformity” (*Men in Sheepskin* 4), *Yellow Boots* fails to illustrate how Anglo-Canadian society is in turn influenced by the aspects of Lilli’s ethnicity that she retains. In continuing to perform the folk songs of her people, Lilli enables Lysenko and her

Canadian readers to congratulate themselves on striking a balance between unity and diversity, but Lilli's performances become a superficial mimicry of the rich and complex Old World culture to which she once belonged. Readers must ask what the future holds in multicultural Canada for subsequent generations of Ukrainian Canadians whose only legacies are folk songs and dancing boots.

3. **Developing a Tradition: Ukrainian Canadian Literature and Multiculturalism, 1971-1984**

Coming to Voice

In his introduction to *Yarmarok: Ukrainian Writing in Canada Since the Second World War* (1987), an anthology of English- and Ukrainian-language literature by Canadian-born and émigré Ukrainian Canadian authors, Jars Balan declares that “it was not until the Second World War that the Ukrainian Canadian community produced its first successful writer in English” (xviii). The writer to whom Balan refers, of course, is Vera Lysenko. “After Lysenko,” he continues, “a growing number of Ukrainian Canadian writers won recognition for books written in English” (xviii). The English-language selections in *Yarmarok* represent literary works by “nationally known” Ukrainian Canadian writers (such as George Ryga, Maara Haas, Myrna Kostash, and Andrew Suknaski); authors who are “firmly established in their careers but are just starting to win wider recognition for their work” (Dennis Gruending, Michael John Nimchuk, Ray Serwylo, Larry Zacharko, and Helen Potrebenko, for example); and “a few beginners with little or no publishing experience” (among them, Ruth Andrishak and Bob Wakulich) (xviii). *Yarmarok* provides a useful cross-section of Ukrainian Canadian literature in English and in Ukrainian, as well as extensive biographical and bibliographical information about the contributing authors. By not contextualizing the emergence of Ukrainian Canadian writing in English, however, Balan’s introduction to *Yarmarok* leaves several questions unasked and unanswered.

Without a doubt, “after Lysenko,” a large number of second- and third-generation Ukrainian Canadians began writing and publishing in a variety of genres. But following the publication of Lysenko’s *Yellow Boots* (1954) and *Westerly Wild* (1956), almost two

decades passed before other English-language literature by Ukrainian Canadian writers began to appear on publishers' lists. Why the lengthy hiatus in English-language Ukrainian Canadian literary production, followed by the sudden increase in its production during the 1970s and 1980s? What cultural, ideological, and material changes in Canadian society made possible this burst in literary writing by and about Ukrainian Canadians? And how did Ukrainian Canadian writers of this period—some of whom Balan describes as “quite distant from their immigrant forbears [sic]” (xix)—explore their experiences of ethnicity in prose, poetry, drama, and non-fiction?

Certainly, as I argue in Chapter One, official discourses of multiculturalism contributed to the development of Ukrainian Canadian and other ethnic minority writing. Mary Kirtz suggests that “[s]ince adopting in 1972 its official policy of pursuing ‘multiculturalism within a bilingual framework,’ Canada has witnessed a great proliferation of work—literary, dramatic, artistic, communal—by and about the various immigrant groups which have shaped its demographic profile” (“Old World Traditions” 8). In the decades preceding the advent of official multiculturalism, few English-language Ukrainian Canadian authors wrote about their experiences as members of an ethnic minority group because they experienced intense pressure to reject their ethnic heritage and assimilate to Anglo-Canadian society. But as ideologies and practices of assimilation gave way to general public awareness and increasing acceptance of a “mosaic” model of Canadian nationhood⁸⁴—as Anglo-Canadian society began to

⁸⁴ The term “mosaic,” according to Frances Swyripa, was introduced by Kate A. Foster in *Our Canadian Mosaic* (1926), a study of ethnic immigrants that focuses on their assimilation to Canadian society (*Ukrainian Canadians: A Survey* 42-3). In *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada* (1965), John Porter criticizes the mosaic model of nationhood by examining the ethnically-inflected economic stratification of Canadian society.

recognize the value of ethnic minority groups within the new multicultural model of nationhood—second- and third-generation Ukrainian Canadians began to take pride in Ukrainian folk music, dance, and art. As Frances Swyrypa points out, moreover, “[m]ulticulturalism grants to Ukrainian community organizations and the activities they sponsor . . . facilitated the expression of a Ukrainian element and identity in Canada” (“From Sheepskin Coat” 24). Ukrainian Canadian writers benefited both directly and indirectly from Anglo-Canadian society’s openness to cultural diversity.⁸⁵ According to Kirtz,

[h]ad Canada not adopted a completely new approach to the heterogeneous makeup of its people, it is even doubtful that many of the works presently enjoying considerable acclaim would have been produced: much of the impetus for the production has come in the form of monetary grants and other kinds of official support provided by both federal and provincial governments. (9)

Multiculturalism created funding and audiences for Ukrainian Canadian literary works, so Ukrainian Canadian writers were able to acknowledge and explore their Ukrainian backgrounds for the first time with the officially sanctioned support of Canadian governments, and with the more general approval of Canadian society.

The appearance of Ukrainian Canadian literature on the Canadian literary scene, however, needs to be understood not only in relation to the advent of multiculturalism but also in relation to the development of the Canadian literary institution. While Ukrainian Canadian authors were encouraged by discourses of multiculturalism, these authors were also almost certainly bolstered by significant changes in the production and reception of

⁸⁵ Many Ukrainian Canadian texts published during the 1980s received direct financial assistance from Multiculturalism Canada, or the Office of Multiculturalism, Secretary of State, or Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism, including Andrew Suknaski’s *In the Name of Narid* (1981), Jars Balan and Yuri Klynovy’s *Yarmarok: Ukrainian Writing in Canada Since the Second World War* (1987), Ludmilla Bereshko’s *The Parcel From Chicken Street and Other Stories* (1989), Gloria Kupchenko Frolick’s *The Chicken Man* (1989), and Yuri Kupchenko’s *The Horseman of Shandro Crossing* (1989).

Canadian literature. As W.H. New explains in *A History of Canadian Literature* (1989), between 1960 and 1985, the landscape of Canadian literature changed dramatically with the creation of “new agencies of support for writing, research and publication”; “creative writing and writer-in-residence programmes”; and “Canadian literature courses in schools” (213). During this twenty-five year period, “some four hundred new serious writers appeared” (214), including numerous ethnic, female, and regional writers who challenged the established socio-political structures that had traditionally ignored or marginalized their experiences and their voices. “Ethnicity, region, gender: these three issues,” New writes, “stood behind many a resistance movement” (214) in the latter part of the twentieth century. Furthermore, as a result of technological changes in the publishing industry, numerous publishing houses were established across the country (including Oberon, Ragweed, NeWest,⁸⁶ Talonbooks, Oolichan, Turnstone, Thistledown, Anansi, and Coach House), providing authors with more venues for their writing (224-5).⁸⁷

Beginning in the 1970s, influenced by more inclusive definitions of Canadian nationhood and by the burgeoning of the Canadian literary institution, a number of second- and third-generation Ukrainian Canadians started to write. What they wrote, and how they wrote it, however, often revealed their ambivalence toward the

⁸⁶ NeWest merits special attention here because the press was founded by literary scholar George Melnyk (who is of Ukrainian descent). As Melnyk explains in the second volume of his literary history of Alberta, he established NeWest Press in 1977 “with assistance from academics and writers at the University of Alberta” (including Rudy Wiebe and Henry Kreisel) (173). The Press grew out of *NeWest Review*, founded in 1975 (by Melnyk, Julia Berry, and Sam Gerszonowicz) as an alternative “monthly tabloid book-review magazine” with a western Canadian focus (179). For a detailed discussion of the Alberta publishing industry, see “Alberta Book Culture: Publishing, Literary Institutions, and Writers’ Organizations” (167-90) in Melnyk’s *The Literary History of Alberta, Volume Two: From the End of the War to the End of the Century* (1999)

⁸⁷ For a fuller discussion of this period (1960-1985), see the final chapter of New’s *A History of Canadian Literature*, “Encoders: Literature to 1985” (213-96).

language, institutions, and values of both their ethnic and national communities.

Although these writers were empowered to explore and even celebrate their ethnic subjectivity, the experience of assimilation had profoundly affected them: many had adopted English as their mother tongue, and most had accepted that the immigrant generation's way of life must necessarily give way to the modernity of Anglo-Canadian society.⁸⁸ Yet almost without exception, Ukrainian Canadian writers felt an urgent

⁸⁸ In "Urbanization of Ukrainians in Canada: Consequences for Ethnic Identity" (1980), Leo Driedger suggests that language retention is crucial to the maintenance of ethnic identity. Drawing upon information collected by William Darcovich and Paul Yuzyk in *A Statistical Compendium on the Ukrainians in Canada, 1891-1976* (1980), he argues that by 1971 "[o]nly one-third to one-half of the Canadian-born [Ukrainian Canadians] knew their language and almost none used it in their homes" (124). Driedger attributes the "decline of Ukrainian-language use" to the movement of Ukrainian Canadians from rural to urban communities: "[i]f," he writes, "Ukrainian identity depends on ethnic language use, then the future for metropolitan Ukrainian identity is not encouraging" (131). Olga M. Kuplowska comes to a similar conclusion in "Language Retention Patterns Among Ukrainian Canadians" (1980).

Wsevolod W. Isajiw, in "Identity Retention Among Second- and Third-Generation Ukrainians in Canada" (1983), also examines Ukrainian-language use among Canadian-born Ukrainians, but he focuses on first-, second-, and third-generation Ukrainian Canadians in Toronto, and he looks at other indicators of cultural retention as well. Isajiw's essay is based on research he conducted between 1979 and 1980. He randomly selected Ukrainian Canadian men and women between the ages of 18 and 65; then, he asked them a series of questions related to their experiences of ethnicity—questions, for example, about their "knowledge of Ukrainian as mother tongue"; "knowledge of Ukrainian if mother tongue is English"; "ability to read Ukrainian"; "ability to write in Ukrainian"; "possession of Ukrainian friends"; "participation in Ukrainian functions"; "use of Ukrainian recreational facilities"; "reading of Ukrainian newspapers"; "listening to Ukrainian radio and TV programs"; "eating Ukrainian food on calendar holidays"; "eating Ukrainian food on everyday basis"; "practising Ukrainian customs"; "possession of Ukrainian ornamental or artistic articles"; "speaking Ukrainian to parents"; and "speaking Ukrainian to children" (210-1). Although Isajiw concludes by insisting that "[i]n order to achieve a deeper understanding of ethnic behaviour further questions should be raised" (221), his research reveals that the "intensity of Ukrainian identity drops sharply from generation to generation" (218).

My own experiences as a fourth-generation Ukrainian Canadian make me more than a little skeptical of Driedger's and Isajiw's claims. While I appreciate these sociologists' attempts to understand the ways in which and the extent to which Ukrainian Canadians maintain their ethnic identity, I question the underlying assumptions of their studies. Both Driedger and Isajiw assume that ethnicity is expressed through particular linguistic and/or cultural practices; they leave unexplored, however, the ways in which such practices change over time, and the possibility that "grey areas" exist between the continuation and discontinuation of these practices. Consider, for example, Driedger's statement that by 1971 "[o]nly one-third to one-half of the Canadian-born knew their language and almost none used it in their homes" (124). How is one's "knowledge" and "use" of language defined? While I don't speak Ukrainian fluently, my parents spoke Ukrainian in our home, and I studied Ukrainian in school for several years (my mother was the Ukrainian teacher). So I have some knowledge of the language—enough to read and write the Cyrillic alphabet, and to use certain Ukrainian words and phrases in conversation with my parents, brother and sister, and extended family members. Am I a Ukrainian speaker? No. And yes, at least partly.

Consider, too, some of the questions that Isajiw asked Ukrainian Canadians in his study of ethnic identity retention: questions, for instance, about "participation in Ukrainian functions" and "eating Ukrainian food on everyday basis" (210-1). What is a Ukrainian function? And what counts as Ukrainian food? My

responsibility to document the personal or private histories of their people, previously excluded from official or public narratives of Canadian history—not only to record the experiences of their parents or grandparents, but also to better understand their own identities as second- or third-generation Ukrainian Canadians. In undertaking the project of writing (or “righting”) history, moreover, some writers felt an obligation to represent the voices of those marginalized both within and by Ukrainian Canadian communities. In their work, such writers as Myrna Kostash and Helen Potrebenko examined the political allegiances and patriarchal social structures of their Ukrainian Canadian communities. (Helen Potrebenko, specifically, in numerous works of poetry and short fiction, criticized the gender and class hierarchies of both Ukrainian Canadian and Anglo-Canadian society from her decidedly feminist and socialist political perspective.) Other writers of poetry, drama, and short fiction, including Ruth Andrishak, Andrew Suknaski, Brian Dedora, Maara Haas, George Ryga, and George Morrisette, addressed the commonalties and conflicts between Ukrainian Canadians and other ethnic minorities (especially First Nations people). All of these writers questioned the nature of their relation to other ethnic groups in the shared space of the Canadian prairies. Broadly speaking, in the multicultural context of the 1970s and early 1980s, for numerous Ukrainian Canadian

husband and I frequently refer to our wedding as a “Ukrainian” wedding; recently, however, when a friend asked us exactly what was “Ukrainian” about our wedding, we had difficulty explaining. Aside from the Ukrainian dishes that we served, and the *korovai* (traditional braided wedding bread) that we placed on the head table, we followed no other Ukrainian marriage customs. We describe our wedding as “Ukrainian” because, to us and to our families, it *felt* Ukrainian: the guest list was very large, the alcohol was free-flowing, the music was played by a live dance band, and the party went on for three days. Similarly, several months ago, I hosted a dinner party for a Ukrainian friend (Ukrainian, as opposed to Ukrainian Canadian). I made a point of preparing several favourite Ukrainian dishes that I grew up eating. My friend said that he thoroughly enjoyed the meal, but that it was not Ukrainian. The food was all foreign to him. What, I wonder, would Isajiw say? Was my meal Ukrainian or not?

writers, the specific matter of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity (what it means to be Ukrainian Canadian) intersected with broader issues of politics, gender, and “race.”

Are the concerns, then, of Ukrainian Canadians who began writing in the 1970s and early 1980s substantially different from those of Vera Lysenko in the 1950s? *Yellow Boots*, like later works of Ukrainian Canadian literature, addresses issues of class and gender, as well as ethnicity and “race” (the heroine in Lysenko’s novel, Lilli Landash, escapes from her father’s oppressive home, joins the multi-ethnic working-class of North End Winnipeg, and ultimately finds a way to maintain some aspects of her ethnic heritage while participating in Anglo-Canadian society). And the ambivalent ending to *Yellow Boots* (Lilli’s superficial retention of Ukrainian culture, her almost wholesale assimilation to Anglo-Canadian society, and her subservient behaviour toward her husband) anticipates the uneasy compromises that Ukrainian Canadian characters make in subsequent Ukrainian Canadian texts. In fact, characters like Lilli appear in virtually all writing by Ukrainian Canadians that emerged during the multicultural era. Canadian-born descendants of Ukrainian immigrants who grapple with their ethnic and national identity (and often their gendered and racial identity as well), become ubiquitous in Ukrainian Canadian literary texts. So what sets Ukrainian Canadian writing of the 1970s and early 1980s apart from *Yellow Boots*?

The answer to this question lies not in the story that Lysenko tells but, rather, in her approach to telling it. Whereas, thematically, *Yellow Boots* explores Lilli Landash’s struggle to come to terms with her ethnic and national identity, the genre and language of the novel tell a different story. Lilli’s coming of age follows the structure of a conventional fairy tale romance: a Cinderella figure, Lilli is mistreated by her father and

misunderstood by her family members who fail to recognize her natural beauty and innate musical talent; after meeting Matthew Reiner, her choirmaster and Prince Charming, she blossoms into a successful, confident young woman. But while *Yellow Boots* is about Lilli's transformation from a Ukrainian girl to a Ukrainian Canadian woman, and although much of the text describes Ukrainian folk customs, Lysenko incorporates few Ukrainian words or phrases (she refers to *perohy*, for example, as "dumplings"; to Lilli's *baba* as "Granny Yefrosynia"; to Granny's *kylym* as a "tapestry"; and to *pysanky* as "Easter eggs"). Lysenko could have used the Ukrainian language to enrich her depictions of Lilli's ethnic identity—especially to imply the crucial ways in which language presumably informs Lilli's sense of herself as the child of Ukrainian immigrants. From beginning to end, though, *Yellow Boots* is narrated in a form of English untouched by Ukrainian. Lilli's experiences with and between languages remain unexamined. While the conclusion to her story ostensibly anticipates and celebrates multicultural models of nationhood and nationality, Lilli's identity as a hybrid subject is undermined by the fact that Lysenko's writing nowhere reflects or reinforces Lilli's cultural hybridity. At no point in the novel—tellingly—does Lysenko provide the Ukrainian words to the Ukrainian songs that Lilli sings. Near the beginning of *Yellow Boots*, as Lilli lies on her deathbed (and before she learns to speak English), she sings a "childish rhyme" in Ukrainian (but translated by Lysenko into English): "[d]octor, doctor, shall I die, / Yes, my darling, so shall I. / How many years shall I live? / One, two, three—" (24). Later, during an Easter church service, Lilli again sings in Ukrainian, yet Lysenko provides an English translation with no mention of the original Ukrainian words: "Lord have mercy, / Lord have mercy, / Lord have mercy!" (148). And though,

as a folk singer in the city, Lilly apparently sings in multiple languages (Lysenko makes reference to her Hebrew, Czech, Scandinavian, and Japanese repertoire), these languages are absent from the text. Noteworthy because it is the first novel written in English by a Ukrainian Canadian author and about Ukrainian Canadians, *Yellow Boots* offers few answers to questions about the relation between ethnic identity and ethnic writing. Lysenko's writing—the romance genre, sentimentalist style, and homogeneous language of her novel—bears striking similarities to Connor's *The Foreigner*. Unlike such women writers of her time as Sheila Watson, Ethel Wilson, Gabrielle Roy, and Margaret Laurence, Lysenko makes no attempts at challenging existing narrative forms and literary conventions.

In contrast to Lysenko, however, many later Ukrainian Canadian writers—writers such as Maara Haas, George Ryga, and Andrew Suknaski, who also address issues of ethnic and national identity in their writing—move away from established literary genres in their attempts to articulate the lived experiences of Ukrainian Canadians: in undertaking the self-appointed task of recording and reflecting upon the histories of their ethnic group, moreover, these writers also question the appropriateness of standard English in communicating the social realities of Ukrainians in Canada. For Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski, whose work I discuss at length in this chapter, the process of writing is as much an exploration of their hybrid subjectivity as it is a search for a version of English that authentically captures the stories of individuals who straddle two worlds. Insofar as Lysenko labours in her style of writing to eradicate traces of her “otherness” as a Ukrainian Canadian, such writers as Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski draw upon their sense of marginality vis-à-vis Anglo-Canadian culture in order to draw attention to the limitations

of existing genres and languages in telling their stories. These writers explore not only their relation to the prairie landscape and home but also, to varying degrees, the landscape of language itself. Profoundly affected by their experiences as Ukrainian Canadians, their writing enriches the Canadian literary tradition through self-conscious experimentation with new languages and new forms.

Chapter Overview

For the major portion of this chapter, I examine select works of fiction, drama, and poetry published by Canadians of Ukrainian descent between 1970 and 1984: specifically, I look at Maara Haas's novel *The Street Where I Live* (1976), George Ryga's play *A Letter to My Son* (1981), and three books of poetry by Andrew Suknaski, *Wood Mountain Poems* (1976), *the ghosts call you poor* (1978), and *In the Name of Narid* (1981). I focus on the ways in which Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski respond, both thematically and formally, to emergent multicultural models of nationhood. To prepare for this investigation, I trace Ukrainian Canadians' interest in various folk arts and customs during the 1970s, including Ukrainian folk art, dance, and music, as well as traditional Ukrainian cookery. The revival of Ukrainian folk culture, I argue, contributed significantly to Ukrainian Canadians' sense of pride in their ethnic heritage. As Ukrainian Canadians became involved in organizations formed to promote and preserve Ukrainian Canadian culture, they simultaneously strengthened their sense of community. I suggest, however, that the nature of this ethnic revival needs to be carefully examined. Ukrainian Canadians' nostalgic desire to recreate the customs and traditions of their ethnic group resulted in not only a rediscovery but also a reinvention of Ukrainian

Canadian ethnicity. For second- and third-generation Ukrainian Canadians, the recreated folkways of Ukrainian immigrants—divorced from the often fraught historical contexts in which they were originally practised—became a strategy for at once remembering and forgetting the hardships endured by their parents or grandparents in both the Old Country and the New.

But because the Ukrainian Canadian ethnic revival involved the selective and subjective reconstruction of Ukrainian culture, debate arose between those Ukrainian Canadians who saw folk culture as a positive expression of their ethnic identity, and those who reacted critically to the decontextualized practice of various customs and traditions. A number of Ukrainian Canadian artists and writers questioned folkloric models of ethnicity. In their work, such artists as Peter Shostak, William Kurelek, and Natalka Husar either re-place Ukrainian Canadian folk culture in the context of the lived experiences of Ukrainian Canadians or draw attention to the ways in which Ukrainian Canadian culture, during the multicultural milieu of the 1970s, becomes trivialized and commodified. Ukrainian Canadian writers such as Myrna Kostash and Helen Potrebenko, who seek to reconnect with their ethnicity in the wake of assimilation, but who see folk culture as a superficial means for experiencing and expressing their ethnic identity, use the writing of Ukrainian Canadian history as a strategy for reconciling their ethnic and national identities. In fact, Kostash and Potrebenko offer alternatives not only to folkloric constructions of ethnicity but also to dominant narratives of Ukrainian Canadian history. Outspoken proponents of New Leftist socialism and feminism, they explore, in part, the ways in which Ukrainian Canadian women and Ukrainian Canadian socialists are inaccurately or under-represented in Ukrainian Canadian history. But

insofar as Kostash and Potrebenko are unable to distance themselves and their politics from their subject matter, they inadvertently call into question the notion that history can provide an objective understanding of ethnic identity. How is history written and for whom? How is historical and cultural authenticity defined and expressed?

As I see it, Ukrainian Canadians on opposite sides of the debate about the Ukrainian Canadian ethnic revival have more in common with each other than first meets the eye. Ukrainian Canadians who seek to revive Ukrainian folk customs are interested in recovering aspects of their peasant roots; Ukrainian Canadians who attempt to understand the contexts in which these customs were originally practised are no less interested in reclaiming aspects of their rural history. Both reconstructed folkways and reconstructed historical narratives are forms of reinvention that require remembering and forgetting: the writing of history is as selective and subjective as the performance of particular customs and traditions. What matters is not whether folk culture represents a more accurate or authentic understanding of ethnicity than history, or vice versa; indeed, the two need not be perceived as mutually exclusive ways of experiencing ethnicity. Throughout my childhood and adolescence, during the 1970s and 1980s, I belonged to a Ukrainian dance group, sang at Ukrainian festivals, and made *pysanky*: these and many other experiences of Ukrainian Canadian folk culture made me feel not only Ukrainian Canadian but also proud to be Ukrainian Canadian. At the same time, I listened to my parents' stories about our family history, and about the hardships that they and their parents endured. These stories, too, contributed to my ethnic identity. My interest, then, in this chapter, lies less in evaluating competing models of ethnicity (i.e. determining which offers the preferable way of experiencing or understanding ethnic identity) than in

examining the different ways in which Ukrainian Canadians (re)imagine their ethnic heritage. Almost without exception, Ukrainian Canadian writers, though often critical of Ukrainian Canadians' revived interest in folk culture, return to the Ukrainian Canadian people—the “folk”—they came to know growing up in their ethnic communities. How do they articulate the histories of their communities? How do they recreate the past? And how is language itself reinvented in their narratives?

Like Kostash and Potrebenko, Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski insist that an understanding of history is essential to maintaining ethnic identity: these writers, all of whom explore their own experiences as Ukrainian Canadians, suggest that if second- and third-generation Ukrainian Canadians are to retain their ethnic identity, they must understand the complex social, economic, and political aspects of their history. Haas's novel *The Street Where I Live* fictionalizes her experiences as a second-generation Ukrainian Canadian Jew growing up in North End Winnipeg during the late 1930s; in *A Letter to My Son*, Ryga dramatizes his strained relationship with his father, an aging Ukrainian pioneer; and in his poetry Suknaski narrates the stories of his family and other people he came to know during his childhood and adolescence in Wood Mountain, Saskatchewan. By exploring the experiences of ordinary individuals who are often excluded from official narratives of history (both Canadian and Ukrainian Canadian), these writers make personal history public. Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski illustrate, too, that the “authenticity” of Ukrainian Canadians' ethnic identity is often, if not always, complicated by their interactions with members of other ethnic groups and with Anglo-Canadian society. The characters in *The Street Where I Live*, for example, who live in the culturally heterogeneous community of North End Winnipeg, develop hybrid

linguistic, social, and cultural practices that incorporate aspects of multiple cultures (French characters learn to use Hebrew words; English characters attend Ukrainian plays; Scottish and Ukrainian characters marry, and have children named Angus, Boris, Bruce, and Michaylo McDuff). In *A Letter to My Son*, the main character's son, a second-generation Ukrainian Canadian who is a schoolteacher of English and active in the organized Ukrainian Canadian community, becomes a hybrid or hyphenated (or, again, multicultural) subject. And in his poetry, Andrew Suknaski, who returns to his community in order to rediscover and reconnect with his cultural roots, reflects on the ways in which his identity has been shaped by the history and culture of several ethnic and racial groups, especially Cree and Sioux peoples.

Most importantly, perhaps, the formal choices that Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski make reveal that their experiences as second-generation Ukrainian Canadians shape their approaches to writing. Haas, for example, refers to *The Street Where I Live* as a novel, but the genre is ambiguous: originally written for radio performance, the text reads like a cycle of autobiographical short stories. The generic hybridity of *The Street Where I Live* grows out of Haas's attentiveness to a culturally heterogeneous community of characters (rather than to a single character). Similarly, in *A Letter to My Son*, Ryga calls for a bilevel set and culturally diverse background music (Ukrainian folk melodies; the national anthems of Canada, Ukraine, and the Soviet Union; country and western songs), both of which dramatize his main character's divided sense of self—the difficulties he has in reconciling the past and the present, as well as his ethnic and national identity. So the staging of Ryga's play reinforces the main themes of the text. Additionally, by incorporating Ukrainian words and phrases (both translated and untranslated) into their

writing, Haas and Ryga draw attention to the multiple languages spoken within Ukrainian Canadian communities. For these writers, standard English is inadequate in narrating or dramatizing the social realities of ethnic subjects who speak hybrid languages. In his poetry, too, Suknaski explores his particular fascination with the vernacular idioms of his prairie community—not only the English/Ukrainian patois used by Ukrainian Canadians, but also the hybrid, often ungrammatical and heavily accented, dialects spoken by the multi-ethnic residents of Wood Mountain.

But Suknaski's poetry differs in important ways from *The Street Where I Live* and *A Letter to My Son*. On the one hand, Haas and Ryga seek to challenge official discourses of multiculturalism by focusing on ethnic immigrants who resist assimilation to Anglo-Canadian society without recourse to the superficial performance and practice of folk culture. At the same time, however, insofar as both writers privilege the historical experiences of the immigrant generation, neither explores the situation of second-generation Canadians who come of age during the multicultural milieu of the 1970s and 1980s. Haas's novel gestures toward but fails to confront the ambivalent future of her second-generation characters; and Ryga's play, centred as it is on one aging immigrant and his struggle to come to terms with his past, leaves unexamined his son's present or future. Suknaski, by contrast, records stories from and about the past, but he does so in the present with his gaze implicitly fixed on the future. Like the characters who inhabit his texts—characters wrought from real life, with names unchanged—Suknaski speaks in the first person as Suknaski (or in the third person, referring to himself as “suknatskyj”), the son of pioneer immigrants who attempts to reconcile the past and the present as a writer. More overtly autobiographical than either *The Street*

Where I Live or *A Letter to My Son*, Suknaski's poems are also more sharply and self-consciously focused on the ways in which language mediates between the poet and the world around him. His writing reflects not only his interest in recording the history of the prairie space in which he was raised but also his desire to explore the ways in which this history and this space have shaped, and continue to shape, the very language that he uses. The process of writing is what enables Suknaski to imaginatively come home, revisit the past, and re-imagine his relation to both. He is "always leaving home," "leaving wood mountain"—but "leaving home *having arrived*" (*WMP* 118-9, my emphasis).

Ethnic Revival versus Historical Revision: Ukrainian Canadians and Multiculturalism

In the conclusion to her essay "From Sheepskin Coat to Blue Jeans: A Brief History of Ukrainians in Canada" (1991), Frances Swyripa briefly touches upon the production of Ukrainian Canadian culture in the years following the advent of multiculturalism. Beginning in the 1970s, according to Swyripa, multicultural funding supported activities and projects designed to promote and preserve Ukrainian Canadian culture, but she cautions against the assumption that "Ukrainian-Canadian ethnicity [had] either depended on public support in the past or [was] the product of the multiculturalism policies of the federal and provincial governments since the 1970s" (24). From the outset of their history in Canada, "Ukrainians supported a myriad of community organizations and their activities, combining politics with culture, education and entertainment" (24). Swyripa is correct in suggesting that many Ukrainian Canadians, from the turn of the century onward, actively worked toward retaining aspects of their cultural heritage. Jars Balan's essays on pre-Second World War Ukrainian Canadian theatre, Alexandra Pritz's

study of Ukrainian dance in Canada from 1924 to 1974, and Bohdan Rubchak's work on Ukrainian émigré poets of all three immigrant waves provide examples of the ways in which Ukrainian immigrants transplanted their traditions of cultural expression in Canada.⁸⁹ The large number of Ukrainian newspapers in Canada that published poetry and short fiction by Ukrainian Canadian writers further attests to Ukrainian Canadians' interest in retaining their ethnic identity.⁹⁰ But because Canadian-born Ukrainians tended to reject the culture of their ethnic group in order to participate in Anglo-Canadian society, Ukrainian Canadian cultural traditions largely remained the province of immigrants. In the decades immediately preceding the introduction of official multiculturalism, immigrants of the third wave (pro-nationalistic dissident intellectuals and artists who came to Canada in the late 1940s and early 1950s) were particularly active in promoting Ukrainian culture in Canada.

Indeed, as Robert Klymasz argues in "Culture Maintenance and the Ukrainian Experience in Western Canada" (1983), immigrants of the third wave significantly altered the cultural life of Ukrainian Canadians. The émigrés' "large and sudden dose of professional cultural know-how," Klymasz argues, made an "enormous, far-reaching and indelible" impact on Ukrainian Canadian cultural life (175). When third-wave immigrants arrived in Canada, they found that the "downtrodden and often illiterate"

⁸⁹ See Jars Balan's "Backdrop to an Era: The Ukrainian Canadian Stage in the Interwar Years" (1991) and "Old World Forms, New World Settings: The Emergence of Ukrainian-Canadian Plays on North American Themes" (1998); Alexandra Pritz's "Ukrainian Dance in Canada: The First Fifty Years, 1924-1974" (1983); and Bohdan Rubchak's "Homes as Shells: Ukrainian Émigré Poetry" (1983).

⁹⁰ In Chapter One, I discuss the prominent newspapers (all published in Winnipeg) that were established following the first wave of immigration, including *Kanadiiskyi Farmer/Canadian Farmer* (1903), *The Word* (1904), *Robochyi Narod/Working People* (1909), *Ranok/Dawn* (1905), *Red Banner* (1907), *The Working People* (1909), *Ukrainskyi Holos/Ukrainian Voice* (1910), and *Kanadiiskyi Rusyn/Canadian Ruthenian* (1911). A large number of other newspapers in Manitoba, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Québec "appeared and collapsed with startling rapidity" (Gerus and Rea 10): Marunchak discusses these at length (238-96).

immigrants of the first and second wave had largely accepted—however reluctantly—the dominant assimilationist ideology of Anglo-Canadian society. But unlike established Ukrainian Canadians, the émigré Ukrainians staunchly resisted assimilationist pressures. These immigrants were “more educated, more sophisticated, and more aware” (175) than immigrants of the two previous waves; as members of the persecuted pro-nationalist intelligentsia in Ukraine, they were determined to preserve their culture in Canada. Following their arrival in Canada, then, they initiated the Ukrainian Canadian cultural revival by nurturing Ukrainian music, dance, and literary traditions. According to Klymasz, “[q]uiet denouement and a leisurely paced dissolution would have possibly transformed the Ukrainian community into what is nowadays euphemistically labeled, in multicultural circles, a ‘dormant’ ethnocultural group, were it not for the hypertrophic impact of thousands of Ukrainian war refugees” (175). Their “conscientious attention to, and formulation of, an aesthetic dimension for the Ukrainian ethnic experience in Canada” resulted in intellectually rigorous approaches to Ukrainian Canadian culture:

[t]he printed and spoken word, for example, was not merely a means of communication and pamphleteering but an art form that demanded cultivation, careful study and an appreciation of a rich legacy of poetry, prose and drama. Scholars, artists and assorted literati embodied in their very mannerisms, lifestyle, decorum, and comportment the exalted values of a cultural configuration that was almost completely inconspicuous before their arrival in Canada. (Klymasz 175-6)

In other words, Ukrainian Canadian culture was self-consciously fostered for the first time by post-Second World War émigré intellectuals and artists who saw elevated⁹¹ modes of cultural production as an extension of their Ukrainian nationalist politics. In seeking to retain their Ukrainian identity in Canada, they emphasized ethnic “purity” in

the form and content of artistic and literary works (176). Not surprisingly, “acute tensions” developed initially between established Ukrainian Canadians and the third-wave émigré community: Canadian-born Ukrainians (many of whom had embraced Anglo-Canadian culture and retained few aspects of their Ukrainian heritage) saw the educated, politically active nationalists from Ukraine as arrogant and elitist (Gerus and Rea 18). Some twenty-five years passed before Ukrainian Canadians’ “initial resistance” to third-wave immigrants “was dissipated” (Klymasz 175).

How did émigré and established Ukrainian Canadians reconcile their differences? Ironically, Klymasz argues, between 1945 and 1970 (the twenty-five year period during which tensions between émigré and established Ukrainian Canadians apparently subsided), the émigrés’ intellectual emphasis on ethnic purity, as well as multicultural Canadian society’s demand for “crisp, well-packaged, snazzy, and eye-catching” ethnic culture, contributed to the fossilization and popularization of Ukrainian Canadian culture (176). By the 1970s, the émigrés’ “cultural maintenance” had come to mean “conformity and uniformity in the interests of consolidating a package of instantly recognizable ethnocultural symbols, ranging from onion-shaped domes for Ukrainian churches to acrobatic hopaks for the national television network” (176). Ukrainian Canadians

turned their heritage into a commodity-like product, a staple developed and offered by the Ukrainian community for all to appreciate and consume. In the interest of codifying the product, the national costume, the national instrument (the bandura), and even language norms came to be based solely on those traditions that originated in the Poltava region in central Ukraine. Sunflowers and red poppies, cross-stitch embroidery, traditional cookery, and religious festivities (twelve meatless dishes for Christmas Eve and ornamented, consecrated eggs at Easter) filled out the list of ethnocultural symbols that were on call, so to speak, at a moment’s notice. (176)

⁹¹ By “elevated modes of cultural production,” I mean literature, fine art, and classical music—as distinct from, say, folk tales, dances, and songs.

Klymasz fails to elaborate on the process through which the cultural production of third-wave immigrants was transformed from an elitist intellectual movement to a widespread popular revival of Ukrainian Canadian folk culture, but his work nonetheless provides a general sense of the historical context out of which Ukrainian Canadians—united for the first time by common symbols and expressions of their ethnicity—began to take pride in their cultural heritage.

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, then, Ukrainian Canadian communities revived numerous, primarily folkloric, cultural traditions, often adapting these traditions to fit the unique context of multicultural Canada. Ukrainian dance became, arguably, the most visible aspect of the Ukrainian Canadian cultural revival as countless professional, semi-professional, and amateur groups were organized across the country: *Shumka* (1960) and *Cheremosh* (1969) in Edmonton, for example; *Vesnianka* (1958) and *Desna* (1974) in Toronto; *Zirka* in Dauphin, Manitoba (1977); and *Yevshan* (1960) in Saskatoon.⁹² These and many other dance ensembles performed and competed at annual Ukrainian festivals in Dauphin and Vegreville, Alberta.⁹³ At the same time, Ukrainian Canadians published collections of folk songs, most notably Yurko Foty and Sviatoslaw Chepyha's *Let's Sing Out in Ukrainian* (1977), a songbook that contains the music and words (in the Cyrillic alphabet and in English transliterations) to over one hundred popular Ukrainian songs, including Christmas carols, love songs, children's songs, and Cossack ballads. Numerous Ukrainian Canadian dance bands (including "Bill Boychuk

⁹² For more detailed information about Ukrainian dance in Canada during this period, see Alexandra Pritz's "The Evolution of Ukrainian Dance in Canada" (1984), Irka Balan's "Dance Interpretation and Performance" (1984), and Andriy Nahachewsky's "Ukrainian Performing Arts in Alberta" (1988).

and His Easy Aces,” “Ron Lakusta and the Hi-Lites,” “The Ernie Zaozirny Band,” “The Billey Family Band,” and “The Female Beat”) produced and sold studio recordings of folk songs that they frequently performed at weddings and other community gatherings.⁹⁴ Musicians in these bands played Ukrainian folk songs in the style of country and western music, using a broad range of contemporary and traditional musical instruments (drums, piano, saxophone, and trumpet, as well as violin, dulcimer, and accordion).⁹⁵ Some Ukrainian Canadians translated traditional folk tales into English for both children and adults (Victoria Symchych and Olga Vesey’s *The Flying Ship and Other Ukrainian Folk Tales*, 1975; Bohdan Melnyk’s *Fox Mykyta*, 1978; Lena Gulutsan’s *The Mosquito’s Wedding*, 1980, and *Snow Folks*, 1982)⁹⁶; others brought together Ukrainian and non-

⁹³ Canada’s National Ukrainian Festival is an annual event in Dauphin that started in 1966. Vegreville’s annual Ukrainian *Pysanka* Festival started in 1974.

⁹⁴ One of the most well-loved Ukrainian Canadian groups to emerge during the late 1960s was “Mickey and Bunny,” a Winnipeg-based duo who produced eighteen albums over the course of their musical careers. In 2002, some thirty years after they retired from performing, “Mickey and Bunny” reunited to record a new album, aptly titled “Reunion.” Their enduring popularity was brought home to me when I saw them perform at the Vegreville *Pysanka* Festival in July, 2002: following what seemed to me a very mediocre performance (instruments were out of tune, for example, and “Mickey and Bunny” were often out of time with one another), the sold-out crowd at the Grandstand Show gave “Mickey and Bunny” a standing ovation (in fact, many members of the audience left the show after “Mickey and Bunny” performed!). According to the festival program (the only source of information on the duo that I could find), during their careers, “Mickey and Bunny” primarily recorded Ukrainian folk songs in the style of country and western music, but their biggest hit was a Ukrainian- and English-language rendition of “This Land is Your Land”: they sold over 50,000 copies of the single within three weeks of its release (unfortunately, the program from the Vegreville *Pysanka* Festival fails to mention the year in which the song was released).

⁹⁵ My list of Ukrainian Canadian dance bands is by no means comprehensive. Because albums produced by these bands are difficult to locate (they are only sold in some Ukrainian stores), I’ve used my parents’ collection as a research source. Unfortunately, dates are rarely included on the album covers, so I’ve also relied on my parents for information about the approximate years in which the albums were produced (they say that all of the records were produced between 1970 and 1980). Interestingly, while many bands provide English titles for their songs (Bill Boychuk’s band performs the “Laughing Polka,” for example, “What a Beautiful Day,” and “Please Come Back Home”; and Ron Lakusta’s band plays the “Hi-Lites Polka,” “Come Spring Fox Trot,” and “Moonlight Night Waltz”), the songs themselves are based on the melodies of traditional Ukrainian folk songs.

For additional information Ukrainian Canadian dance bands, see Robert Klymasz’s “Folk Music” (1984) and Bohdan Zajcew’s “Ukrainian Popular Music in Canada” (1984). See, too, the online catalogue of albums provided by the Ukrainian Bookstore in Edmonton (<http://www.ukrainianbookstore.com>).

⁹⁶ See Bohdan Medwidsky’s “Three Types of Ukrainian Folk Tales in Canada” (1988) for a fuller discussion of Ukrainian Canadian storytelling traditions.

Ukrainian recipes in cookbooks (Savella Stechishin's *Traditional Ukrainian Cookery*, 1976; Emily Linkiewich's *Baba's Cookbook*, 1979; the Ukrainian Women's Association of Canada's *Ukrainian Daughter's Cookbook*, 1984).⁹⁷ *The Ukrainian Canadiana* (1976), *Visible Symbols: Cultural Expression Among Canada's Ukrainians* (1984), and *Art and Ethnicity: The Ukrainian Tradition in Canada* (1991) provide detailed information about Ukrainian Canadians' interest in dance, music, and folk tales, as well as embroidery, woodwork, and *pysanky* (Easter egg) making.⁹⁸

Reflecting on Ukrainian Canadian folk culture in 1991, some twenty years after Ukrainian Canadians began taking an interest in this culture, a number of Ukrainian Canadian scholars articulate positive perspectives on folk symbols and expressions of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity. In "From Sheepskin Coat to Blue Jeans: A Brief History of Ukrainians in Canada" (1991), for example, Swyripa argues that a "cultural ethnic consciousness" rather than a "politicized national consciousness" best defines Ukrainian Canadian identity. She says that "politically inoffensive" symbols of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity such as food, embroidery, and Easter eggs create a sense of community among Ukrainian Canadians; at the same time, Ukrainian Canadians are able to use these

⁹⁷ See Frances Swyripa's *Wedded to the Cause: Ukrainian-Canadian Women and Ethnic Identity, 1891-1991* (1993) for a discussion of the ways in which the figure of *baba* (grandmother) became, in the 1970s and 1980s, part of the "grassroots phenomena" that "marked the victory of a cultural ethnic consciousness . . . erected on foods and selected handicrafts as the essence of Ukrainian-Canadian identity" (255). Swyripa provides examples of the ubiquitous *baba* in Ukrainian Canadian folk culture: *baba* takes the form of ceramic figurines; she appears in paintings, and on lapel buttons and T-shirts; and her name is used in Ukrainian fast-food restaurants such as "Baba's Best" in Edmonton (241-52). While Swyripa acknowledges that *baba* represents one of the "overwhelmingly self-conscious, symbolic, ceremonial, and stylized" expressions of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity, she argues that *baba* nonetheless "legitimize[s] . . . Ukrainian Canadians' sense of their place and role in Canadian nation building, as founding peoples of western Canada; and she embodie[s] the essence of their Ukrainian peasant heritage" (256).

⁹⁸ The prominence of the *pysanka* among other symbols of Ukrainian Canadian culture was perhaps best illustrated by the erection in 1974 of "the world's largest *pysanka*" in Vegreville. Oddly enough, the Vegreville Pysanka was erected to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The monument, which weighs 2270 kilograms, is almost nine metres long, and more than five metres wide (Jones 56).

symbols to showcase their culture to non-Ukrainian Canadians because folk culture is “compatible with what is apparently a satisfactory grassroots definition of multiculturalism” (26). Isajiw, in “Ethnic Art and the Ukrainian-Canadian Experience” (1991), concurs. He divides folk culture into four categories (folk, naïve, professional, and souvenir art⁹⁹), suggesting that all of these art forms enable Ukrainian Canadians to revive and celebrate their cultural traditions. Isajiw sees souvenir art, in particular, as an “inexpensive way of representing the community’s ethnic identity to the wider society” by providing “a visitor with a token that symbolizes the community and its culture” (36). Similarly, in “A Folklorist’s Viewpoint on Ukrainian Canadian Art” (1991), Michael Owen Jones argues that Ukrainian Canadian folk culture, in general, and *pysanky*, in particular, contribute to Ukrainian Canadians’ sense of pride in their ethnic heritage (57), as well as their “increased visibility” in Canadian society (55).¹⁰⁰

Yet, writing in the 1970s and early 1980s, a number of Ukrainian Canadian scholars express their concerns about the extent to which Ukrainian Canadians can preserve their ethnic identity through folk symbology. In “Museums and Ukrainian Canadian Material Culture” (1983), Steve Prystupa argues that ethnic customs and traditions must be re-placed in their historical contexts in order to facilitate a genuine

⁹⁹ Folk art, according to Isajiw, “encodes in carvings, embroidery, drawings, dancing, singing and storytelling a community’s conception of the world and serves to validate and teach about its experiences and its struggles with the basic questions of life” (29). The “dividing line,” he says, “between folk art and naïve art is not always clear” but naïve art “usually focuses on the community rather than the world around it” (31). Professional art, unlike other ethnic art forms, “raise[s] questions” and “suggest[s] alternative ways of thinking”; Ukrainian Canadian professional art, specifically, addresses “the problems of ethnic experience” (31). Finally, souvenir art—mugs, for example, plates, tablecloths, and spoons—“imitates folk, naïve, or professional art” but it is “usually inexpensive and produced for mass consumption” (34).

¹⁰⁰ I would argue, too, that the commodification of Ukrainian Canadian culture serves an economic function within Ukrainian Canadian communities. The packaging and selling of souvenir art to Ukrainian Canadians and non-Ukrainian Canadians alike is a primary source of income for many Ukrainian Canadians who participate in the tourist economy.

understanding of Ukrainian Canadian culture (17).¹⁰¹ Roman Onifrijchuk, in “Ukrainian Canadian Cultural-Experience-As-Text: Toward a New Strategy” (1983), argues that symbols of Ukrainian Canadian folk culture are problematic precisely because they are focused exclusively on the past and because they are detached from the contemporary experiences of Ukrainian Canadians (160). In “Ukrainian Cultural and Political Symbols in Canada: An Anthropological Selection” (1983), Zenon Pohorecky suggests that the popularization of Ukrainian Canadian folk culture in the form of “T-shirts showing Campbell’s borshch or gag-buttons” is “good fun” (139) but he insists that “the future lies most securely in the Ukrainian textbooks and workbooks being produced in Canada to teach youngsters their ancestral language, always the best gateway to the rich Ukrainian heritage” (140).¹⁰²

My own ambivalence about the Ukrainian Canadian ethnic revival forces me to question both proponents and critics of folk culture. I understand, on the one hand, the temptation to dismiss some forms of Ukrainian Canadian folk culture as superficial or inauthentic expressions of ethnic identity: I’ve balked, for example, at Ukrainian fast

¹⁰¹ The Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village is one example of a museum that recreates Ukrainian Canadian pioneers’ way of life. Located forty kilometres east of Edmonton, Alberta, on a 320-acre plot of land, the Village is a replica of a Ukrainian bloc settlement circa 1892 to 1930 (it includes farmsteads, churches, stores, a one-room school, and a grain elevator, as well as an interpretive centre; one of the reconstructed homes at the Village, the “Grekul House,” belonged to one of my ancestors). Visitors encounter role-playing guides in period dress who re-enact the daily activities of Ukrainian Canadian settlers. Construction of the Village began in 1976, with private funding and support from Alberta’s Department of Culture, and a good deal of research has gone into authentically replicating the past. For a look at the Village, as well as the background research that went into its construction, see the website of the museum (<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/ukrainian>). See, too, Sandra Thomson’s “The Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village: Interpreting Ukrainian Canadian History” (1988) and Radomir Bilash’s *Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village* (1989).

¹⁰² The pop art to which Pohorecky refers emerged in the 1970s: T-shirts and buttons featuring such slogans as “Kiss Me, I’m Ukrainian”; “Baba’s Borshch” (superimposed on a Campbell’s soup can); “Cute Chick” (with a cartoon of a chicken next to a *pysanka*); and “Hell’s Babushkas” (a play on the “Hell’s Angels” complete with a drawing of an old woman on a motorcycle). Glasses and ceramic dishes and mugs with decals replicating Ukrainian embroidery were also produced and sold in Ukrainian Canadian stores or at Ukrainian Canadian festivals. More recently, in the 1980s, Ukrainian Canadian versions of “Roots” clothing appeared, with the word Roots translated into Ukrainian on the original Roots logo.

food sold at shopping malls in Edmonton because mass-produced “perogies” (a Polish, not Ukrainian word) seem to me a cheap approximation of my mother’s home-made *perohy*. At the Vegreville *Pysanka* Festival, I’ve walked past ceramic coffee mugs, cookie jars, and butter dishes decorated with tacky embroidery decals, wondering about the genuine “Ukrainianness” of these items. At the same time, however, I have no desire to turn to “Ukrainian textbooks and workbooks” (Pohorecky 140) in order to become fluent in my ethnic language. I don’t believe that the Ukrainian language is the “best gateway to the rich Ukrainian heritage” (140)—nor do I see history as the defining feature of my ethnic identity. On visits to the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village near Edmonton, I find myself questioning the relevance of the recreated pioneer experience to my day-to-day life: the Village may be an accurate replica of Ukrainian immigrants’ way of life, but how can I incorporate aspects of their way of life into my daily activities without significantly altering them to suit the context of the present day? Culture is not—and cannot remain—static. Indeed, while I have reservations about some commodified forms of Ukrainian Canadian culture, I delight in the creativity and wit behind Ukrainian Canadian parodies of mainstream Canadian (or North American) pop culture: T-shirts with “Roots” translated into Ukrainian and superimposed in Cyrillic letter onto the original “Roots” logo; T-shirts with Molson Canadian’s “I Am Canadian” advertising slogan altered to read “I Am Ukrainian Canadian”; and T-shirts with Southpark cartoon characters dressed in Ukrainian costumes. These parodies foreground the notion that Ukrainian Canadian culture need not be expressed or experienced in the margins of Canadian society through the practice of traditional folk customs and they illustrate, too, that the revival of Ukrainian Canadian culture *does*, in fact, speak to the

social realities of Ukrainian Canadians. The reality of being Ukrainian and Canadian demands the invention of new, hybrid forms of cultural production that collapse the binary opposition between mainstream Canadian and ethnic minority culture.

Interestingly, however, many Ukrainian Canadian artists who produced work during the 1970s and 1980s concur with Prystupa's argument that folkloric expressions of ethnicity fail as a means for preserving ethnic identity because (or when) they are divorced from the complex historical and social realities of Ukrainian Canadians. Ukrainian Canadian painters William Kurelek and Peter Shostak, for example, draw upon their experiences as Ukrainian Canadians in their realist renderings of prairie farm life; in their paintings, folk symbols (food, embroidery, or *pysanky*) are contextualized in the day-to-day activities of Ukrainian Canadians.¹⁰³ Artists such as Nataalka Husar and John Paskievich, by contrast, use folk symbols in their paintings and sculptures in order to parody the ways in which Ukrainian Canadian folk culture, when removed from the lived experiences of Ukrainian Canadians, is simplified and trivialized.¹⁰⁴ Husar is particularly critical of the Ukrainian Canadian ethnic revival in her work. With her sculpture *The TV Dinner Sviat Vechir* (1977), for example, she confronts the conflation of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity with Ukrainian Canadian food. Her TV dinner includes the twelve traditional Christmas Eve (*Sviat Vechir*) dishes, but this conveniently pre-prepared meal, according to Husar, "eliminates more than just labour. It eliminates tradition, ritual, religion—all that is truly important—leaving only food" ("The Relevance of Ethnicity")

¹⁰³ Photographs of some paintings by Shostak (1943-) and Kurelek (1927-1977) appear in *Art and Ethnicity: The Ukrainian Tradition in Canada* (1991). Kurelek is arguably the best known Ukrainian Canadian artist, but his artwork depicts other ethnic groups as well. Reproductions of his art are collected in numerous books, including *Jewish Life in Canada* (1975), *Kurelek Country* (1975), *Kurelek's Canada* (1975), *The Polish Canadians* (1981), *A Prairie Boy's Summer* (1975), and *A Prairie Boy's Winter* (1973). For more detailed information about Kurelek, see Patricia Morley's *Kurelek: A Biography* (1986).

n.p.). A second sculpture by Husar, *After all that, supper or Sex and the single Ukrainian girl* (1977), explores the objectification of women within Ukrainian Canadian folk culture. She arranges several items of women's folk costume on a plate so that red dancing boots and a white brassiere become meat and potatoes; coral beads resemble carrots; and a green ribbon, parsley. In Husar's words, "it is a Ukrainian girl on a platter" (n.p.). For her, folk culture is hardly "politically inoffensive" (Swyripa, "From Sheepskin Coat" 26). By delving beneath the surface of seemingly innocuous folk symbols, Husar exposes the troubling ways in which they actually circulate.

Not unlike Husar, a number of Ukrainian Canadian writers also openly object to the ways in which folkloric constructions of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity fail to account for the multiple, complex dimensions of Ukrainian Canadians' experiences. In *All of Baba's Children*, for example, and *No Streets of Gold: A Social History of Ukrainians in Alberta*, both published in 1977, Myrna Kostash and Helen Potrebenko, respectively, react to the Ukrainian Canadian ethnic revival by undertaking historical studies of Ukrainians in Canada (Kostash primarily focuses on the Ukrainian Canadian community of Two Hills in northeastern Alberta, whereas Potrebenko looks more generally at the history of Ukrainian Canadians in Alberta). Insofar as Kostash and Potrebenko share with other Ukrainian Canadians the desire to "publicize ethnic history" (Kostash 8), and to legitimize Ukrainian Canadians' contributions to the nation by recording their experiences in the space of the scholarly printed text, their works are similar to other Ukrainian Canadian histories published during the 1970s and early 1980s. In terms of thematic structure and research methodology, too, *All of Baba's Children* and *No Streets*

¹⁰⁴ Photographs of works by Husar (1951-) and Paskievich (1947-) appear in *Art and Ethnicity: The Ukrainian Tradition in Canada* (1991).

of Gold closely resemble numerous other Ukrainian Canadian history books. Not unlike, for example, Vera Lysenko's *Men in Sheepskin Coats* (1947), Kostash's and Potrebenko's texts examine the economic, political, social, and cultural lives of Ukrainian Canadians by reflecting on key moments in Canadian history (the large influx of Ukrainian immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century; the First World War; the depression; the Second World War), as well as on important material developments in Ukrainian Canadian communities (the building of homesteads, churches, and schools). Just as scholars such as Michael Marunchak, Jars Balan, and O.W. Gerus and J.E. Rea rely on newspapers, magazines, government documents, and scholarly books to understand the historical realities of Ukrainian Canadians, so too do Kostash and Potrebenko draw upon print sources in their research. Similar to Zonia Keywan's *Greater Than Kings* (1977), Harry Piniuta's *Land of Pain Land of Promise: First Person Accounts by Ukrainian Pioneers, 1891-1914* (1978), and William Czumer's *Recollections About the Life of the First Ukrainian Settlers in Canada* (1981), *All of Baba's Children* and *No Streets of Gold* also substantially draw upon the first person, oral testimonials of Ukrainian Canadians.

Of course, many Ukrainian Canadian scholars (particularly in the 1970s and 1980s) construct narratives of Ukrainian Canadian history that follow a common pattern: they begin by tracing the history of Ukrainian immigration to Canada; next, they examine the ways in which Ukrainian immigrants and their descendants strove to overcome poverty and resist Anglo-Canadian society's assimilationist pressures; and, finally, by foregrounding the stories of individuals within the Ukrainian Canadian community who achieved success in professional, political, and artistic spheres, these scholars provide

evidence of Ukrainian Canadians' success in maintaining their ethnic identity while ascending the social and economic hierarchies of Canadian society.¹⁰⁵ Implicitly or explicitly, they applaud Canadian society for embracing ethnic diversity, however belatedly, and they congratulate Ukrainian Canadians on developing a distinct, unified ethnic community, despite their historical differences.

Kostash and Potrebenko, by contrast, reject this narrative of progress. In *All of Baba's Children*, Kostash acknowledges that, among Ukrainian Canadian historians and storytellers "[t]here is a tendency . . . to ascribe to an often miserable and thankless way of life a dimension of glory and to the people enduring it a prophetic vision, or at least a nobility of character, as though the unedited reality of their experiences is somehow vulgar or banal or even shameful" (31). But to accept this "hackneyed" version of the "Canadian myth of the pursuit of happiness" is, in Kostash's words, to ignore the fact that Ukrainian Canadians'

financial security was tenuous in the extreme, that their labour was far from remunerative, that their 'freedom' to an education was to an anglicized one; the law was discriminatory, their non-Ukrainian neighbours were racists, their leftist political activities were persecuted; and the admonitions to 'work' and 'thrift' applied precisely and only to the working people—the resident elite had neither to work nor be thrifty.
(31)

While, according to Kostash, "the 'official' histories demand that we see [Ukrainian Canadians'] lives as heroic or nothing at all" (31), she proposes a third option, an alternative approach to understanding and recording the experiences of Ukrainian Canadians. By focusing on the experiences of Ukrainian Canadians who cannot be

¹⁰⁵ Harry Piniuta's *Land of Pain Land of Promise: First Person Accounts by Ukrainian Pioneers, 1891-1914* (1978) is an exception. A collection of reminiscences by first-wave Ukrainian immigrants about their early experiences in Canada, the text largely focuses on their hardships rather than their triumphs.

included among the “success stories” of Ukrainian Canadian doctors, lawyers, politicians, and entrepreneurs (30), she undertakes a critical reading and writing of history that recognizes the “pain and loss and even failure of so many . . . lives” (31). Potrebenko provides a similar, if less nuanced, perspective on Ukrainian Canadian history: “I offer no heroes,” she writes. “There were no heroes, there were only ordinary women and men” (302).

By focusing on the lives of ordinary Ukrainian Canadians, and by drawing attention to the ways in which these Ukrainian Canadians are excluded from the Ukrainian Canadian “ethnic establishment” (Kostash 9) and marginalized within Canadian society, Kostash and Potrebenko take a two-pronged critical approach to both their ethnic and national communities. As women, feminists, and proponents of New Leftist socialism,¹⁰⁶ they strongly identify with Ukrainian Canadians whose experiences are under-represented in “official” versions of Canadian and Ukrainian Canadian history, so they write candidly about the gendered, religious, political, and class tensions within their ethnic group, as well as the conflicts between Ukrainian Canadians and Anglo-Canadian society (particularly during the years preceding the advent of multiculturalism). That Kostash and Potrebenko are sympathetic toward socialist and communist Ukrainian Canadians is unsurprising; nor is it surprising that they expose the oppressive patriarchal

¹⁰⁶ In much of their writing, both Kostash and Potrebenko are outspoken about their feminism and socialism. Kostash’s feminist politics inform, for example, *Her Own Woman: Profiles of Ten Canadian Women*, co-edited with Melinda McCracken, Valerie Miner, Erna Paris, and Heather Robertson (1975), and *No Kidding: Inside the World of Teenage Girls* (1987). In *Long Way From Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada* (1980), *Bloodlines: A Journey Into Eastern Europe* (1993), *The Doomed Bridegroom: A Memoir* (1998), and *The Next Canada: In Search of Our Future Nation* (2000), she writes explicitly about her interest in feminism and New Leftist socialism. Similarly, in Potrebenko’s novels, short fiction, and poetry, she frequently (indeed, almost ubiquitously) foregrounds the plight of the working class, and of working class women, specifically. In fact, many of her texts—most notably her novels *Taxi!* (1975) and *Sometimes They Sang* (1986); her collection of poetry *Life, Love and Unions* (1987); and *Hey Waitress and Other Stories* (1989)—read like feminist and socialist political manifestos targeted at the capitalist and patriarchal structures of Canadian society.

social structures that characterize Ukrainian Canadian communities, as well as the prevalence of anti-Semitism within these communities. These writers refuse the notion that, in Kostash's words, "the only way to be a 'real' Ukrainian-Canadian [is] to accept romanticization of our history, trivialization of our culture and piece-meal demands for restitution" (9). They illustrate that an attentiveness to the complexities of Ukrainian Canadian history requires an acknowledgement of the uneasy realities of Ukrainian Canadians' experiences. The outrage expressed by members of the Ukrainian Canadian community in response to *All of Baba's Children* and *No Streets of Gold* attests to many Ukrainian Canadians' resistance to such an acknowledgement.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ In an interview with Sneja Gunew and Margery Fee (2002), Kostash reflects on many Ukrainian Canadians' hostile responses to *All of Baba's Children*. In her words, the book was attacked "because I didn't read or speak Ukrainian at the time, right, I could only consult English language sources, I didn't really know what was going on. I had a very imperfect understanding of Ukrainian history, and the conclusions I drew from it. That it was basically a very naïve and unsophisticated account of things. That was the kind version. The unkind version was that I had completely misrepresented Ukrainians when I talked about their misogyny and anti-Semitism, and particularly because I valorized the Red, the Commie experience within it. I was a renegade" (128).

Both *All of Baba's Children* and *No Streets of Gold* received mixed reviews from Ukrainian Canadian and non-Ukrainian Canadian scholars alike. Many reviewers saw Potrebenko's text as socialist propaganda rather than objective history. In her review of *No Streets of Gold*, Aritha Van Herk suggests that while Potrebenko "pretends to be objective," her "obviously subjective interpretation of historical events" undermines the credibility of her text. "Given her anger and emotional perspective," Van Herk writes, "it is necessary to question whether the author is recounting history or using history as a lever for her own ideology" (40). Similarly, G.A. Rawlyk argues that Potrebenko's "unsophisticated Marxist overview" of Ukrainian Canadian history is "studded with basic factual errors" and "far too many irresponsible historical judgments" (39). Reviews of *All of Baba's Children* were somewhat more positive. Van Herk, for example, says that Kostash's text "suffers from the same rhetoric and polemicism that *No Streets of Gold* does, but for some reason, it is more palatable" (40); and Rawlyk suggests that, unlike Potrebenko, Kostash is more successful in "drilling into the Ukrainian-Canadian experience and in finding an unusually heterogeneous, and divided community" (40). Zonya Keywan's reading of the two texts is perhaps most interesting, given that she published her own work of Ukrainian Canadian history, *Greater Than Kings*, in 1977. Keywan, who focuses her text on the economic and social achievements of Ukrainian immigrants and their descendants in Canada, objects to Potrebenko's and Kostash's critical perspectives on Ukrainian Canadian history. Keywan argues that "the total picture [*No Streets of Gold*] presents is inaccurate": "[w]hile the Ukrainian immigrants who came to Alberta most certainly did not find streets paved with gold, neither has their 86-year history in Canada been one of unremitting gloom and exploitation" (40). And, according to Keywan, *All of Baba's Children* is a text without focus because Kostash "lashes out in all directions": she "mockingly catalogues the Ukrainians' steps along the road to anglicization, but she is equally scathing about those institutions and individuals who have resisted assimilation and have tried to preserve the Ukrainian language and culture" (40).

The problem with *All of Baba's Children* and *No Streets of Gold* is not inaccurate history, or that Kostash's and Potrebenko's criticisms of Ukrainian Canadian communities are unfounded: Kostash's text, in particular, offers a revisionist reading of Ukrainian Canadian history that is as well-researched as it is stylistically sophisticated. The problem with these texts, rather, is that while both Kostash and Potrebenko undertake ostensibly objective studies of Ukrainian Canadian history—and despite their attempts at scholarly rigour (both include extensive bibliographies of secondary sources)—neither is able to distance herself from her subject matter: in a sense, each becomes a character in her own narrative of personal and family history. Kostash deliberately chooses to examine the history of Two Hills “because no Kostash had ever lived there” (8), yet her apparent detachment from this community is undermined by the personal relationships she develops with the residents of the town and by her inability to ignore her emotional ties to their history and culture. As she confesses in the introduction to *All of Baba's Children*, Two Hills “was only twelve miles from the village of Hairy Hill, a place about which I had heard much: my parents met there and so it marks my true beginnings” (8). Over the course of researching and writing *All of Baba's Children*, Kostash comes to see that her literal journey to Two Hills is also a figurative return to her Ukrainian Canadian roots. Upon completing her book, she “stay[s] on” in Two Hills, buying a farm and naming it “Tulova” after the Galician village from which her paternal grandparents immigrated to Canada (8). Potrebenko's personal involvement in her project is just as pronounced if not more so than Kostash's autobiographical interventions in *All of Baba's Children*. Potrebenko's desire to understand her parents' lives—specifically her father's abusive relationship with her mother, and his unsuccessful

struggles to overcome poverty through socialist activism—becomes her motivation for writing *No Streets of Gold*. She begins with a lengthy conversation with her immigrant father that evolves into his account of “How I Became a Canadian” (7-20), and she concludes with a “Personal Statement” (297-303) reflecting on the second-generation’s responsibility to “understand and respect” their history (302).

Kostash and Potrebenko argue that if Ukrainian Canadians are to reconcile their ethnic and national identities, they must come to terms with Ukrainian Canadian history: implicitly, however, they illustrate the limitations of conventional, objective history in achieving such reconciliation. Zonya Keywan’s suggestion, in her review of *All of Baba’s Children*, that Kostash “lashes out in all directions” (40)—that, in effect, Kostash fails to offer a strategy through which Ukrainian Canadians might accept and move beyond their fraught history—seems to me an apt description of both Potrebenko’s and Kostash’s texts. These writers criticize Ukrainian Canadians’ assimilation to Anglo-Canadian society because assimilation requires that they forget aspects of their history; at the same time, their writing illustrates that the process of remembering Ukrainian Canadian history results in a profoundly ambivalent understanding of their ethnic identity. But the reasons Potrebenko and Kostash “lash out in all directions” seem to me less ideological than formal. Neither writer is ultimately able to reconcile her ethnic and national (and gendered and political) identity because neither has yet found a form, genre, or language in which to express her hybrid subjectivity.¹⁰⁸ Although Potrebenko’s and

¹⁰⁸ In later texts by Kostash and Potrebenko, both writers experiment with different genres (Potrebenko writes poetry and fiction; Kostash writes creative non-fiction). In Chapter Four, my discussion of literature from 1985 to 2000, I examine Kostash’s *Bloodlines: A Journey Into Eastern Europe* (1993) and *The Doomed Bridegroom: A Memoir* (1998).

Kostash's autobiographical interventions begin to push the boundaries of history, they neither fully abandon nor substantially challenge the ways in which history is conventionally written. Potrebenko and Kostash, like many Ukrainian Canadians, may see Ukrainian Canadian folk culture as superficial and trivialized expression of their ethnic identity, but, in a sense, the revival of Ukrainian Canadian folk culture succeeds where *No Streets of Gold* and *All of Baba's Children* fail: folk culture illustrates Ukrainian Canadians' ability to (re)create and (re)invent ways of expressing their hybrid identities; Potrebenko's and Kostash's writing reflects the ways in which unchanged modes of history cannot accommodate the unique experiences and concerns of Ukrainian Canadians.

'We aren't buying black oxfords': The Ambivalent Politics of Hybridity in Maara Haas's *The Street Where I Live*

In her novel *The Street Where I Live* (1976), published one year before *All of Baba's Children* and *No Streets of Gold*, Maara Haas addresses many of Kostash's and Potrebenko's concerns about the relation between ethnicity and multiculturalism. Like Kostash and Potrebenko, who write about their ethnic communities in order to come to terms with their own ethnic and national identities, Haas, too, sees the process of writing as an opportunity to revisit and make sense of her past. Just as Kostash and Potrebenko respond critically to the Ukrainian Canadian ethnic revival of the 1970s and 1980s, so too does Maara Haas criticize this revival as an inadequate strategy for Ukrainian Canadians

to maintain ties with their cultural heritage.¹⁰⁹ All three writers are frustrated with the ways in which official discourses of multiculturalism reduce Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity to fossilized and dehistoricized expressions of folk culture; all three are critical of the extent to which many Ukrainian Canadians, including some Ukrainian Canadian scholars, embrace folk culture as an expression of their ethnic identity; and, in seeking to subvert folkloric constructions of ethnicity, all three find themselves reconstructing the complex histories of their ethnic communities. But while Kostash and Potrebenko primarily draw upon the conventions of traditional history to explore their Ukrainian Canadian roots, Haas turns to fiction in order to recreate and reflect upon her experiences as a second-generation Ukrainian Canadian. In fact, *The Street Where I Live* illustrates the necessity of imaginatively reconstructing the past in order to understand and come to terms with it.

At once a written text meant for oral performance, a novel that brings together loosely connected selections of short fiction, and an autobiographical work of history that fictionalizes both the tragic and comic realities of a particular time and place, *The Street Where I Live* belongs to no single generic category. Set in the multi-ethnic community of

¹⁰⁹ In much of her poetry and short fiction, collected in *On Stage with Maara Haas* (1986), Haas is critical of the ways in which official discourses of multiculturalism encourage Canadians to perform their ethnicity through folk song, dance, costume, and art. But her short story "folklorama" exemplifies her attitudes toward superficial expressions of ethnic identity. Set during "Folklorama '77," a multicultural festival during which "[a]t least 60,000 people . . . will be visiting 30 pavilions in a mutual exchange of cultural ideas and traditions" (150), the story narrates Haas's participation in the festival. She appears as the ideal multicultural subject. "Stubbornly mosaic," she writes,

I won't be hard to identify at Folklorama '77, but on the chance you might miss me in the crowd, I'll be wearing a handloomed british wool skirt, hand-beaded, personally chewed indian hide moccasins, a hand-embroidered ukrainian blouse, a hand-strung philippine necklace, a hand-blocked scandinavian kerchief, a flurry of handwoven dutch lace petticoats and an east indian emerald, the size of an onion, pierced through my nose. (151)

By drawing attention to the ways in which culture is reduced to costume, Haas illustrates the superficiality of officially-sanctioned expressions of ethnicity. Does ethnic costume, she asks, express an individual's complex experience of ethnic identity?

Winnipeg's North End during the late 1930s, Haas's novel, broadly speaking, depicts the ethnic community in which she was raised. Because Haas draws on her own experiences and observations growing up on in North End Winnipeg—and because the text is narrated by an adolescent girl whose name and background are strikingly similar to her own¹¹⁰—*The Street Where I Live* is obliquely autobiographical. Haas, of course, refers to the text as a novel (its full title is *The Street Where I Live: A Novel*), and not as an autobiography, but the genre is further complicated by its origin as thirty-eight discrete “episodes” or “scripts” for broadcast on the CBC radio programme “This Country in the Morning” (*On Stage* 34). So *The Street Where I Live* reads less as a novel than as a collection of short fiction or a short story cycle (in fact, the short sentences of Haas's prose suggest that she is also, to some extent, experimenting with the long poem). In “Including the Female Immigrant Story: A Comparative Look at Narrative Strategies” (1996), Tamara Palmer Seiler suggests that, collectively, the multiple stories in *The Street Where I Live* become the single coming-of-age story of Haas's narrator, Maara Lazpoesky, an aspiring young writer (59); the novel, then, might be seen as a female *bildungsroman* or *kunstlerroman*. But while Maara's voice shapes the text, her growth as a character is not the central focus of *The Street Where I Live*: Haas gives as much or more attention to narrating the lives of the numerous other characters who share Maara's world. In a sense, the novel focuses less on a single character than on the character of the

¹¹⁰ Haas has much in common with the narrator of her novel, Maara Lazpoesky: both belong to Jewish families; their fathers (both pharmacists) immigrated to Winnipeg from Ukraine; and their mothers, while also ethnically Ukrainian, came from Poland. Of course, Haas, born in 1920, was a young woman at the time in which the novel takes place (the late 1930s), whereas her narrator is portrayed as an eleven-year-old girl. But in naming her narrator Maara Lazpoesky, Haas nonetheless draws attention to the similarities between author and character. Haas's maiden name was Maara Lazeczko.

That Haas fictionalizes her experiences as a Ukrainian Canadian Jew is also significant: Jews (and Mennonites) with Ukrainian backgrounds are usually excluded from historical and literary works about Ukrainian Canadians.

community as a whole. And its hybrid genre parallels the multicultural nature of this community. The multi-ethnic residents of North End Winnipeg, as Haas depicts them, are in the process of establishing the terms of their new, multicultural society—to use Benedict Anderson’s term, they are imagining their community—by retaining (but altering) some Old Country customs; by rejecting others; and by inventing many cultural and social practices that reflect the heterogeneous make-up of their world. *The Street Where I Live*, then, itself a hybrid (re)invention of the novel genre, mirrors the nascent state of North End Winnipeg. Haas enables us to engage with a new form of writing that seeks to capture, formally, the spirit of a new kind of community.

The Street Where I Live is inhabited by a lively, eclectic group of working-class immigrants and their children whose names reflect their diverse ethnic backgrounds and, in some cases, their professions or outstanding personality traits. Haas introduces, for example, Mrs. Regina Britannia, an English newcomer to the street; Mrs. Weinstein, wife of the local Jewish junk collector; and the Fransciosas, a family of Italian immigrants. The narrator’s father is Meexash the Druggist, but she encounters numerous other men, including Orest the Undertaker, Herman the Laughing Butcher, Samuel Made-to-Measure Rothstein, Mr. Ph.D. Shumansky, and Beelay the Presser. Throughout the novel, in fact, countless characters appear with such names as Moishe the Manipulator, Josef the Bachelor, Aaron the Widower, and Horbaty the Hunchback. Palmer Seiler refers to the characters in Haas’s novel as “laughable but lovable caricatures of stereotypical ethnic characters” (“Including the Female Immigrant” 58), but I think that Haas’s motivations for presenting a collection of seemingly one-dimensional characters are more complex. On the one hand, Maara (the narrator) is a child; the names that she

comes up with for the people in her community reflect the simplicity of her perspective on the world around her. At the same time, Maara (the author) is parodying the conventions of the medieval morality play by ascribing single attributes to her characters. Her choice of nomenclature replaces the morality play in the context of working-class Winnipeg, borrowing from (but playfully reinventing) an archaic genre: unlike characters in traditional morality plays, her characters personify neither good nor evil; rather, their dominant characteristics illustrate that such binary oppositions ill-reflect the ways in which ordinary people conduct themselves. By drawing attention to individuals' professions, social roles, or physical attributes, Haas constructs a world in which no one character is superior to another—all are portrayed as humorously one-dimensional; collectively, they form a colourful and complex community.

Over the course of the novel, as Haas examines all facets of her characters' day-to-day lives, *The Street Where I Live* becomes a text in which everything and nothing happens. Mrs. Kolosky and Mrs. Weinstein fight, make up, and fight again; Xenia Holub marries, leaves her mother's home, and returns with her husband; the Widow Siboolka outlives five husbands, only to be courted by four suitors; and the Beelays save their hard-earned money to bring over a relative from Ukraine who, upon arriving in Winnipeg, makes it her goal to do the same. Even Maara, the character closest to a protagonist, undergoes little change or development over the course of the novel: her observations of the street where she lives leave no obvious impression on her. Numerous incidents in the novel, however, foreground the ways in which the seemingly ordinary, even mundane, lives of the residents of North End Winnipeg are enriched by a grassroots

form of multiculturalism that emerges within their community.¹¹¹ Their street is the place, for example, where a Scottish man (Harry McDuff) marries a Ukrainian woman (Annie McDuff) and raises five sons (Bruce, Angus, Harry, Borislav, and Michaylo) to play “The Maple Leaf Forever” on the bagpipes, recite Robbie Burns poetry, and worship in the Ukrainian Catholic church. In this community, women like Mrs. Kolosky and Mrs. Weinstein come together, however briefly, to prepare nourishing Ukrainian dishes for the recent immigrant family from England. Schoolchildren from different cultural backgrounds are excused from school on British holidays as well as on their own ethnic holidays (such as Ukrainian Christmas, Passover, and St. Patrick’s Day). Similar examples of the community’s hybrid culture abound in *The Street Where I Live*. At the Shevchenko Hall, a meeting place for Ukrainian and non-Ukrainian Canadians alike, a “glossy calendar portrait of King George VI and Queen Elizabeth” hangs beside “the lithographed patriot-poet, Taras Shevchenko” (77). Members of the local baseball team, “The Star of David Ukrainian-Canadians,” wear blue and yellow satin uniforms with “a Ukrainian Trident on the chest and a Star of David on the sleeve” (199). Catholics and Jews attend the Easter Monday supper at the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish (137-43), and everyone goes to the weekly cockroach races at the Cockroach Café where they bet on such competitors as “MacKenzie King,” “Rasputin,” and “Humphrey Bogart” (88-91). The world of North End Winnipeg becomes, in a sense, proof positive of the paradoxical notion that Canadian society is defined by “unity in diversity.”

¹¹¹ In a panel discussion at the *Identifications* conference (1978), Haas made the point that multicultural communities existed long before the introduction of official multiculturalism: “when the first fur traders and the first explorers landed on the shores of Canada and integrated with the Indians, we became multiculturalists. So I cannot see why we even use the word” (149).

The Ukrainian Catholic wedding ceremony of Krisla and Xenia exemplifies the ways in which the residents of North End Winnipeg collectively reinvent Old Country customs in Canada. While Krisla and Xenia, two second-generation Ukrainian Canadians, prepare for their traditional Ukrainian Catholic wedding ceremony, their friends Orest the Undertaker and Moishe the Manipulator (a Ukrainian Canadian Jew) realize that many of the traditional marriage customs have lost their meaning in the context of Canada. As Moishe reads from “the book of Ukrainian Wedding Rituals,” Orest prompts him to skip through much of the text:

De two betrotheds bind each udder’s arms wit embroidered linen scarfs.
 Skip that, says Orest.
 De fodder takes de wheat to de mill. De mudder whitewashes de cottage.
 De goil sews her princess shoit.
 Skip that.
 De mudder gives de goil a needle and silk tred to sew a reet from de ever-green leaves of de periwinkle barweenok on de last night of her goilhood?
 Skip that. (18-9)

Moishe eventually questions Orest’s instructions. “Skip dat, skip dat, skip dat,” he repeats. “So what’s left?” (19). What’s left, Haas reveals, is a modified portion of the wedding ritual in which three unlikely matchmakers “go see Xenia’s old man,” get his permission to take her to church, and then join the wedding party in the bridal car, a Model T Ford with a row of tin cans attached to its bumper (19-20).

But Haas’s satiric description of the community’s Ukrainian Canadian intelligentsia—those who ardently attempt to preserve the purity of Ukrainian Canadian culture by building Ukrainian Canadian community halls and organizing Ukrainian Canadian organizations—perhaps most pointedly illustrates that, like it or not, the residents of North End Winnipeg cannot distance or detach themselves from their multi-ethnic neighbours. To begin, she points out that

[i]n our district there are twenty-three halls names after Shevchenko.
 The names of the buildings vary:
 Shevchenko Reading Hall
 Shevchenko Cultural Hall
 Shevchenko National Hall
 Shevchenko's Shevchenko Hall. (77)

Next, in her description of a political gathering in "Shevchenko Hall No. 18" hosted by the "Free Fraternity of Ukrainian Intelligentsia," Maara provides the credentials of the group's five members. They are:

Ancient Grandfather Hetman Slovoda, archivist, linguist from the Free Academy of Obsolete Languages, now on C.P.R. pension,
 Professor Yakim Golombioski, graduate Gymnast, the University of Chernowitz and first-class bricklayer,
 Igor Kapusta, world famous Bandurist, composer, musician, ditchdigger,
 And last but not least, Wasyl Skrypnyk, graduate Come Laddie from the University of Kiev, landlord-author of the brilliant thesis on twelfth century Onomastic Apostasy, a private collection. (79)

Haas's portrayal of the Ukrainian Canadian intelligentsia and their activities in Winnipeg is layered with irony. On the one hand, the educated elite's involvement in establishing some twenty-three Shevchenko halls illustrates their commitment to preserving Ukrainian culture in Canada: Shevchenko, after all, the "People's Poet" of Ukraine, is a ubiquitous symbol of Ukrainian nationalism.¹¹² The nationalistic purposes of the halls, however, are undermined by the fact that these halls become meeting places for individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, united in their status as working-class immigrants. While the educated men of the "Free Fraternity of Ukrainian Intelligentsia" once enjoyed positions of prestige in their home country, they become, in Canada, ordinary members of

¹¹² Taras Shevchenko (1814-61) was born a serf and he was orphaned early in his life. In 1838, he was freed from serfdom by a group of intellectuals who recognized his talents as an artist and a writer. Throughout his life, Shevchenko fought for the emancipation of serfs and for the freedom of Ukraine from Russian rule. His poetry and paintings reflect his love for and loyalty to Ukrainians, especially Ukrainian peasants. Exiled for ten years (1847-1857) for his political activities, Shevchenko died seven days before serfdom was abolished.

the working class. Yet their loss of status is oddly appropriate, given that Shevchenko was born a serf and became the champion of the downtrodden peasant.

Haas's multi-ethnic characters do not express their ethnic identities, then, by performing folk songs and dances, or by producing folk art; rather, they experience ethnicity in the hybrid social and cultural practices that become a part of their daily lives. As significant, however, as the multicultural practices Haas describes are the languages she uses in her descriptions. Few of the individuals in *The Street Where I Live* speak standard English: some speak dialects of English (Harry McDuff refers to his wife as "Annive uv Afton, Annie ma' wee wife, Annie ma' dearrie, ma' luv" [14]); others, including many Ukrainian immigrants, speak broken English with heavy accents (before performing his first wedding ceremony in the city, Father Mashik says to himself, "God is vatchink, Bishop is vatchink . . . Whole parish, she is vatchink poor village priest, greenhorn in new country" [17]); and many of Haas's characters use words and phrases from their ethnic languages when they are speaking English (after her finishing her wash one Saturday, Mrs. Fransciosa says, "[f]inire, perfezionare . . . The sheets iss-ssa cook" [156]). Haas's decision to foreground the variations of standard English spoken by her characters is deliberate and strategic. The hybridization of language in her novel becomes a process through which individuals from multiple cultural backgrounds collectively challenge (however unconsciously) the dominance of standard English in Canadian society and, by extension, enduring discourses of imperialism that privilege Anglo-Canadian culture over the cultures of other ethnic groups. When Percival Pshawkraw, the English politician, addresses an audience of Ukrainian Canadian voters,

he does so in Ukrainian (81) because he understands that if he uses English, he will alienate members of the Ukrainian Canadian community.

As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin argue in *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (1989), language is “the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth,’ ‘order,’ and ‘reality’ become established” (7), but the “syncretic and hybridized nature of post-colonial experience refutes the privileged position of a standard code in the language and any monocentric view of human experience” (41). Indeed, as Haas makes clear in *The Street Where I Live*, none of her characters actually speaks standard English—not even Regina Britannia, the English woman who lives in North End Winnipeg (Regina speaks a Cockney dialect; commenting on a Ukrainian play, she says, “Blimey . . . [a]yn’t it a pyle one. No bleedin’ ’eads, no stabbin’. It tykes Shykespeare to do th’ bit rye-t” [52]). Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin distinguish between “English” (the standard English of the imperium) and “english” (hybridized variants of the standard), and they suggest that the latter “abrogates the privileged centrality” of the former because it “signif[ies] difference while employing a sameness which allows it to be understood” (51). The “english” languages spoken in *The Street Where I Live* serve a political function in the text because they simultaneously draw upon and decentre the linguistic norms of Canadian culture. So when Haas’s characters speak broken English or dialects of English with heavy accents, and when they incorporate untranslated words from the ethnic languages in their speech, they not only reveal their status as newcomers and outsiders vis-à-vis Anglo-Canadian society, they

also implicitly announce their refusal to embrace wholeheartedly the dominant language, and by extension the dominant culture, of their new society. In fact, by incorporating a number of untranslated Ukrainian words, phrases, and names into her novel, Haas makes outsiders of her English-speaking readers.¹¹³ Readers who are not familiar with Ukrainian are excluded from inside jokes between the author and her Ukrainian-speaking audience (translated into English, the gentle Mrs. Holub becomes Mrs. Dove; the Widow Siboolka, who makes her rejected suitors weep, becomes the Widow Onion; and the sniveling Shmarkaty Kapusta becomes Snot-nosed Cabbage Head!).

For the most part, however, within the text itself, Haas illustrates the important contributions that ethnic subjects can—and do—make to Anglo-Canadian culture by foregrounding the hybrid languages spoken by the residents of North End Winnipeg. Over the course of the novel, as various characters exchange words from each other's ethnic languages, they invent new languages appropriate to their multi-ethnic community. During the performance of a play at the Shevchenko Hall, for example, Mrs. Golombioski "offers to translate" for Mrs. Britannia who, in turn, attempts to pronounce some Ukrainian words (48). After Mrs. Le Vert Frelon finishes measuring Mrs. Vloshkin for a new dress, the two women say their farewells, however imperfectly, in each other's languages: Mrs. Vloshkin says, "Bon Jor to you Mon Amee" and Mrs. Frelon replies, "Slolum" (195). Differences, and even conflicts or tensions, between members of diverse ethnic groups dissipate as individuals, in talking to one another, create a common language. Vloshkin, for instance, the Jewish tailor, makes his transition to Canadian

¹¹³ In "Art of Intrusion: Macaronicism in Ukrainian-Canadian Literature" (1989), Robert Klymasz explores in greater depth Haas's use of untranslated Ukrainian words and phrases. Klymasz argues that macaronicism is a comic device in *The Street Where I Live*, but he stops short of discussing the ways Haas uses macaronic humour to undermine the dominance of Anglo-Canadian culture.

society by sending a Christmas package home to his family in Ukraine. At the post office, in English peppered with Yiddish words, he says, “[n]u, I tell myself . . . don’t be a schlemiel. Send a peckl of goods to your sister at Christmas and be Canadian” (60). “Worlds,” Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin write, “exist by means of languages” (44), and the hybrid world that Haas creates in *The Street Where I Live* is coming into being through the “english” languages spoken by the characters in her novel.

In terms of its hybrid genre and languages, then, *The Street Where I Live* represents a dramatic departure from texts such as Vera Lysenko’s *Yellow Boots*, Helen Potrebenko’s *No Streets of Gold*, and Myrna Kostash’s *All of Baba’s Children*, all three of which are also concerned with exploring the ways in which Ukrainian Canadians reconcile their ethnic and national identity (but all three of which fail to push the boundaries of genre and language). Thematically, however, *The Street Where I Live* concludes as ambivalently as the texts by Lysenko, Potrebenko, and Kostash. If Haas seems to idealize the interactions between her characters by drawing attention to the ways in which they collectively and successfully resist assimilation to Anglo-Canadian society, the ongoing financial struggles of her characters simultaneously undercut the notion that these individuals’ lives are without hardship. In other words, the immigrant community’s hybrid linguistic, social, and cultural practices ultimately offer little in the way of relief from social and economic marginalization within Canadian society. Mr. Peekoosh and Mr. Hinkel must exchange vegetables for medicine (“Rose-Hip medicinal tea” and “a bottle of Sex-All,” respectively) because they cannot pay the druggist with money (33); Moishe the Manipulator collects and re-sells stray buttons to make his living (though he often spends his earnings on crap games and “girlie” shows) (6); and Mr. Weinstein is the

local junk collector (his junkyard is the “Half-Moon Paradise Palladium”) (7). Insofar as many, if not all, of the stories in Haas’s text are at once comic and tragic—insofar as she reveals both the humour and the pathos in the daily lives of her characters—*The Street Where I Live* becomes a bittersweet portrayal of ethnic immigrants in Canada. The scene in which Annie McDuff returns to her home from the government relief office illustrates that the McDuff family wants to undermine the authority of the Canadian government. The McDuffs should not receive relief because Harry McDuff is perfectly capable of finding work and because, ostensibly, the family can afford precious commodities such as Annie’s prized second-hand persian-lamb coat. From the point of view of the “Spy from Relief” who plagues the McDuffs with her frequent visits and her “nose like a gopher” (14), Harry is lazy: during one visit, she reminds him that, since coming to Canada in 1912, he has spent

1 hr. laying C.N.R. railroad ties
 2 hrs. 12 minutes in the freight shed
 35 minutes, 4 seconds—employed as a ditch digger
 7 minutes—Canada Packers, in the slaughterhouse . . .
 1 month in a bush camp 20¢ a day, at the generous expense of the
 Bennett government. (15)

According to the Spy from Relief, Harry has “taken no advantage of the golden opportunities this country has to offer” (15). She fails to understand that Harry is not indifferent to the so-called “golden opportunities” available to him: he deliberately chooses not to seize upon these opportunities because he refuses to accept the role of the exploited immigrant, under-paid for his backbreaking labour. But the McDuffs’ apparent success in outwitting the Spy from Relief and, by extension, the government (Annie scrambles to hide her persian-lamb coat in the chicken coop, and Harry, feigning consumption in their brass bed, calls for the priest to deliver the Last Rites) becomes only

a partial victory over the Canadian government, for the family lives in poverty and in constant fear of being caught. Harry is forced to spend much of his time in bed, and his wife cannot ever wear her persian-lamb coat.

In the end, the unofficial, grassroots form of multiculturalism that characterizes the ethnic community in *The Street Where I Live* becomes a decidedly ambivalent and arguably short-term strategy for challenging the ethnically-inflected social and economic hierarchies of Anglo-Canadian society. Palmer Seiler, who sees the dominance of Anglo-Canadian culture in Canadian society as a legacy of British imperialism, argues that “the nature of the post-colonial space Haas creates . . . is so profoundly ambivalent as to be an interesting but not altogether convincing challenge to imperial centres” (“Including the Female Immigrant” 59). Haas portrays the community in which she lived as a hub of linguistic and cultural exchange between multiple ethnic groups, and the resultant hybrid culture of North End Winnipeg attests to the community’s success in resisting assimilation. Importantly, however, the characters in her novel do not consciously choose to construct a multicultural community in Winnipeg: they initially come together not because they are actively interested in each other’s cultures but because, as ethnic immigrants, they are outsiders in relation to Anglo-Canadian society; because their ethnic identities and class status mark them as different from and marginal to the Anglo-Canadian mainstream. So the immigrants’ hybrid linguistic, social, and cultural practices are less a deliberate strategy for resisting assimilation than an inadvertent by-product of their shared experience of marginalization. In a sense, the multicultural community in Haas’s novel is an ethnic ghetto, a temporary stopping place for immigrants to gradually orient themselves to a new culture before inevitably joining mainstream Anglo-Canadian

society. Haas's ambivalent portrayal of the hybrid, multicultural community of North End Winnipeg foreshadows the tenuous nature of her characters' resistance to assimilation.

Of course, Haas does not explore the immigrants' and/or their children's eventual movement away from the street where they currently live since her novel focuses on the discrete and brief historical moment during which these individuals begin the process of Canadianization. But in the final scene of *The Street Where I Live*, the scene in which Maara and her best friend Magda buy a new pair of shoes at Oiving Monahan's general store, Haas hints at the immigrant community's future. Enamoured with the glamorous lifestyles of Hollywood film stars such as Gloria Swanson and Jean Harlow, Maara and Magda buy not two practical, inexpensive pairs of black oxfords but a single pair of "Joan Crawford glamour shoes, black patent leather with an ankle strap and four-inch heels" (213). Just as Lysenko's *Yellow Boots* concludes with her heroine putting on a pair of dancing boots, symbols of her ethnic heritage that ironically signal the extent to which her ethnic identity has been reduced to the performance of folk culture, *The Street Where I Live* ends with Maara and Magda putting on their shoes (Maara wears the right shoe, Magda wears the left) and strutting out of the store. The destination to which they are headed, while unformed, is far from the street where they live; far from the immigrant community they presently call home; far from the culture in which they have been raised. Monahan understands that the "glamour shoes" foreshadow the girls' movement away from their ethnic roots, and so he weeps over their decision not to buy the black oxfords.

'We laugh, but we are sad': Oral History in George Ryga's *A Letter to My Son*

Broadly speaking, in its exploration of the ways in which Ukrainian Canadians struggle to make sense of their role and identity in Anglo-Canadian society, George Ryga's *A Letter to My Son* (1981) picks up where *The Street Where I Live* leaves off: in a sense, one of the final, fleeting images in Haas's novel—the image of an elderly Ukrainian immigrant who weeps as he watches the world change before him—becomes the starting point of Ryga's play. Like Haas, Ryga attempts to retrieve ordinary, working-class Ukrainian Canadians from the margins of Ukrainian Canadian, and indeed Canadian, history; and both writers seek to undermine the ways in which history is conventionally written by turning to fiction and drama in order to examine the social realities of Ukrainian immigrants and their children in Canada. But although—or because—they draw upon their own experiences as second-generation Ukrainian Canadians, their texts become very different explorations of particular places and moments in Ukrainian Canadian history. In contrast to *The Street Where I Live*, *A Letter to My Son* is a darker, more complex exploration of the ways in which one Ukrainian pioneer struggles—with his family, with the institutional structures of Canadian society, and with the secrets of his past—to come to terms with his ethnic and national identity in the present. At the same time (and largely because Ryga chooses drama, as opposed to fiction, to tell his story), Ryga's play is a simpler, starker, and more stylized portrayal of a specific aspect of Ukrainian Canadian history. Whereas Haas's novel takes place in the colourful, multi-faceted urban context of North End Winnipeg during the 1930s, Ryga's play, set in the late 1970s, unfolds against the sparse rural backdrop of the Manitoba prairies. While Haas, from a child's perspective, examines the relationships between

numerous immigrants from multiple ethnic backgrounds who are united in their similar experiences as newcomers to Canada, Ryga, from the point of view of an old man, focuses on the relation between one Ukrainian immigrant and his son—two men divided by their very different experiences as first- and second-generation Ukrainian Canadians. What Haas and Ryga have in common is less the details of their experiences as Ukrainian Canadians than an underlying concern, as Ukrainian Canadian writers, with finding new genres and languages appropriate to their subject matter.

A Letter to My Son is not the first of Ryga's works to feature Ukrainian Canadian characters, nor is it unique in its focus on the condition of the peasant/working-class man. Although best known for *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* (1967), a play that draws attention to the plight of First Nations people in Canada, Ryga wrote numerous poems, short stories, novels, screenplays and radio dramas (most notably, perhaps, his novels *Hungry Hills* [1963] and *Ballad of a Stone-Picker* [1966]; and his plays *Captives of the Faceless Drummer* [1971], and *Ploughmen of the Glacier* [1977]) that narrate or dramatize the stories of farmers and manual labourers, including Ukrainian pioneers and their descendants.¹¹⁴ As Jars Balan explains in "‘A Word in a Foreign Language’: Ukrainian Influences in George Ryga's Work" (1982), Ukrainian Canadian characters appear in numerous novels and plays by Ryga. "In addition to the Bayracks, Ruptashs, Zaharchuks, Sadowniks, Makars and Burlas of *Ballad of a Stone-Picker*, and Joe Skrypka and his friend Nick in *Hungry Hills*," Balan writes, "we encounter a Michael J.

¹¹⁴ As Christopher Innes notes on the back cover of *Politics and the Playwright: George Ryga* (1985), Ryga (1932-1987) wrote "over 90 scripts for radio, television, and film, 3 published and 6 unpublished novels, 16 short stories or novellas, a volume of poetry, two oratorios, two folk song albums, and a documentary travelogue." For a bibliography of Ryga's work, see Innes's study, and E. David Gregory's *The Athabasca Ryga* (1990).

Tomaschuk in *Sunrise on Sarah* [1973], a Grace Stefanyk in *Portrait of Angelica* [1984], and a . . . character named Romeo Kuchmir in the novel *Night Desk* [1976]" (39).

According to Christopher Innes, moreover, in *Politics and the Playwright: George Ryga* (1985), Ryga's texts frequently thematize "the positive values of manual work and the individual who defines himself in opposition to an alien and alienating social structure, which imposes an inner exile on its citizens and turns all into displaced persons" (14).

His texts often examine, too, the "distorting emptiness of official history that presents the achievements of the governed masses as the acts of the governing few" (14). In much of his writing, Ryga implicitly calls for a "unifying cultural myth drawn from the unarticulated experience of the immigrants and outcasts, the subculture of the working classes who built the country" (14).

As critics such as Balan, Innes, E. David Gregory, and James Hoffman suggest, Ryga's lived experiences explain to a large extent his identification with peasant and working-class people (especially Ukrainian Canadians) and his desire to explore their way of life in his writing.¹¹⁵ Born in 1932, the son of second-wave Ukrainian immigrants, Ryga grew up on his parents' homestead near Athabasca, Alberta; as an adult, however, he left the farm and worked as "a carpenter, cook, waiter, dry cleaner, furniture remover, and, naturally enough, farm-hand" (Gregory 47) while pursuing his career as a playwright and novelist. In some ways, Ryga's background—as a second-generation Ukrainian Canadian who rejected his father's way of life by leaving the farm and becoming a writer—sheds light on his motivations for examining the complex and conflicted relationship between one Ukrainian immigrant and his son in *A Letter to My*

Son. In part an (auto)biographical exploration of his vexed relationship with his father, the play becomes Ryga's attempt not only to retrieve the immigrant everyman from the margins of official history but also to come to terms with a particular man in his own private history. In an essay on the play written in 1985 and published posthumously in *The Athabasca Ryga*, Ryga insists that *A Letter to My Son* is not a fictionalized rendering of his relationship with his father, George Ryga Sr.: "this is not the story of my father," he writes, "it is the story of many mythical fathers" (78). Yet, in describing his father's reaction to the play when he first saw it performed, Ryga reveals the extent to which he and his father were emotionally affected by *A Letter to My Son*. "When my father first encountered this drama," Ryga writes, "he wept, and we both achieved a reconciliation we had never had before" (78).

A short, two-act play (first produced in 1984 at the Kam Theatre Lab in North Bay, Ontario), *A Letter to My Son* comprises a small cast of characters in comparison to *The Street Where I Live*, and it unfolds against a relatively bare set. The play focuses on Old Man Lepa, an aging Ukrainian immigrant who lives alone in his sparsely-furnished farmhouse, and the main action of the play revolves around two problems with which he grapples in his old age: in the first place, Lepa wants to write a letter to his estranged son, Stephan, and in so doing reconcile their differences. (Stephan, a schoolteacher in the city, has no interest in his father's way of life; and Lepa sees his son's movement to the city as a betrayal of both his ethnic heritage and his peasant roots.) Each time he sits down at his kitchen table to write to his son, however, Lepa becomes tongue-tied and his

¹¹⁵ See Balan's "Ukrainian Influences in George Ryga's Work" (1979), Innes's *Politics and the Playwright: George Ryga* (1985), E. David Gregory's *The Athabasca Ryga* (1990), and James Hoffman's *The Ecstasy of Resistance: A Biography of George Ryga* (1995).

mind wanders back to moments from his past, for Lepa is preoccupied with a second, though not unrelated, matter. Although he has worked hard all his life, and although he has applied for the old age pension, he has not yet received his first pension cheque. On the one hand, Lepa wants Stephan to acknowledge the role he has played in making a better life for his son; at the same time, he seeks recognition from the government for the contributions he has made to the building of the nation. Lepa's letter-writing is frequently interrupted by the appearance of Nancy Dean, a young social worker (a third-generation Ukrainian Canadian Jew, roughly the same age as Stephan) who has been assigned to help Lepa with his application for pension. Again, though, in conversations with Nancy, Lepa loses himself in memories of his younger days as he relives moments he shared with his wife Hanya (who died shortly after giving birth to Stephan), his sister Marina, and his brother-in-law Dmitro (well-to-do Ukrainians who raised Stephan after Hanya's death). Importantly, as Lepa revisits his past, he comes face to face with an incident that he would rather, but cannot, forget. While he was working away from the farm, and while Hanya was left alone (pregnant with Stephan) to tend to the homestead, she accepted help from a wandering religious fanatic. Lepa, upon arriving home and seeing a strange man in his yard, wrongfully accused Hanya of adultery. He drove the fanatic from his yard, only to learn several days later that the man was hit by a train during a blinding snowstorm. In effect, Lepa killed an innocent man—a man who wanted only to help a poor immigrant woman—and, in his own words, he contributed to Hanya's untimely death as well. In a draft of his letter to Stephan, Lepa explains that "something in her health and spirit died that day" (89): "[i]t was my fault that I had broken her spirit" (90). So *A Letter to My Son* thematizes not only one man's refusal to be

forgotten by his son and his country but also one man's struggle to come to terms with how he will be remembered.¹¹⁶

Unlike the characters in Haas's novel, who share a sense of belonging to their multi-ethnic community, Lepa is a loner and an outcast in relation to his ethnic community.¹¹⁷ Although he is not without family, his son Stephan, sister Marina, and brother-in-law Dmitro live in the city, and they have little in common with Lepa. Marina and Dmitro are prosperous clothing merchants and active members of the organized Ukrainian Canadian community; they have successfully entered the Anglo-Canadian

¹¹⁶ Ted Galay's *After Baba's Funeral* (first performed in 1979 at the New Play Centre at City Stage, Vancouver) is similar to Ryga's *A Letter to My Son* in many ways. Set in small-town Manitoba during the summer of 1978, *After Baba's Funeral* is a one-act play that explores the conflicted relationships between second- and third-generation Ukrainian Canadians. The text focuses on the Danischuks (Netty, Walter, and Ronnie; mother, father, and son, respectively) who have recently lost their mother and grandmother (Baba). Joined by Minnie and Bill Horoshko (Netty's sister and her husband), the family gathers in Netty and Walter's kitchen after Baba's funeral. As they talk, the audience learns that Ronnie, a mathematics Ph.D. student living in Vancouver, has disappointed his family by turning away from his Ukrainian heritage: unlike his father, he has chosen not to farm, and he no longer speaks Ukrainian or goes to church. (Ronnie's sister Edie and brother Larry have also rejected their parents' way of life; neither, moreover, has come home for Baba's funeral.) Netty, who nursed her dying mother, worries that no one—no child of hers—will tend to her in her old age. So the relationship between Netty and Ronnie in *After Baba's Funeral* is much like the relationship between Old Man Lepa and Stephan in *A Letter to My Son*. While the second-generation characters in Galay's play (Netty, Walter, Minnie, and Bill) speak English as well as Ukrainian (Galay provides a glossary of translations), they are otherwise stubbornly resistant to Anglo-Canadian society. Farm people who, ironically, worked to make a better life for their children, they see their children's social and economic advancement as a betrayal of their pioneer roots.

Yet *After Baba's Funeral* also differs from *A Letter to My Son* in important ways. Galay's play lacks the sorts of structural devices that Ryga uses to reinforce the central themes of his text. Whereas Ryga's play is expressionistic, *After Baba's Funeral* is realistic: with neither music nor other sound effects indicated in the stage directions, it comprises straightforward dialogue against the simple backdrop of the Danischuk kitchen. And the resolution of the Danischuks' conflict is equally simple and straightforward. At the close of the play, Netty urges Ronnie to look through Baba's belongings and to take with him back to Vancouver something that his grandmother once cherished. Ronnie, in choosing Baba's velvet boots, makes peace with his mother: with this gesture, he shows her that he will not forget his Ukrainian heritage. No such easy reconciliation occurs in Ryga's play between Old Man Lepa and Stephan. Of course, the conclusion to *After Baba's Funeral* echoes that of Vera Lysenko's *Yellow Boots* (Lilli Landash, in the final chapter of the novel, dons her mother's boots, and in doing so ostensibly reconciles her ethnic and national identities)—and both conclusions are ambivalent. Lilli's yellow boots become part of the ethnic costume she wears when performing Ukrainian folk songs; Ronnie's velvet boots become a souvenir of his culture. Ethnic identity, for Lilli and Ronnie, is contained in superficial symbols of folk culture.

¹¹⁷ At one point in the play, Ryga draws attention to the phonological similarities between "Lepa" and "leper": Old Man Lepa, describing to Nancy his trip to the eye doctor, says that the receptionist in the doctor's office called him "Mister Leper" (112).

middle class while retaining aspects of their ethnic heritage. When Stephan was a child, they ensured that he attended Ukrainian language classes in their basement of their church; when he graduated from high school, they encouraged him to go to university. They are, in Lepa's words, the "ones who did good"; the "ones the Angliki call 'them good Ukrainians'" (74). Lepa, by contrast, has no affiliations with the Ukrainian Canadian community. He is a pro-nationalist Ukrainian who also believes in socialism, but—save for one incident during the depression in which he was accidentally drawn into a political rally—he has never been involved directly in politics, and he is outspoken in his criticisms of the church ("I came to Canada," he says, "so I would never bend my knee to another man. For me the road to God was always blocked by a priest" [100]). Lepa's loyalties are to the uneducated peasant and working-class Ukrainian, for he has devoted his life to farming and migrant labour. During the late 1920s he arrived in Canada with little more than the shirt on his back; after taking out a homestead with his wife on the prairies, he worked on railway lines, in lumber camps, and in coal mines to supplement the family income while Hanya worked on the farm. And when Hanya died following the birth of Stephan, Lepa continued to move from job to job, determined to make a better life for himself and his son. Ironically, however, in his old age, Lepa has little to show for the sacrifices he made to ensure that his son would have land to pass on, in turn, to his son: Stephan has long since sold the family farm. Lepa lives alone in his empty farmhouse, the last remaining trace of his lifelong labour, and a poignant metaphor for the lonely life he has built for himself.

But insofar as Lepa is an outsider in relation to the Ukrainian Canadian

community, he is also marginalized within Canadian society. In contrast to the characters in *The Street Where I Live* who rarely, if ever, leave the borders of their ethnic community, Lepa has spent much of his life living and working among Canadians, so he has long been conscious of his low economic and social status as a working-class Ukrainian immigrant. In fact, at the outset of *A Letter to My Son*, when Lepa learns for the first time that, because the Canadian government has no record of his existence, he in fact has no status at all, he is neither surprised nor outraged. As Nancy Dean explains, Lepa cannot receive his old age pension because he was killed in 1934 while working in a northern Ontario coal mine. In the eyes of the government, he must have died, for a newspaper article about the accident listed Lepa as one of the two men who were killed. Seemingly unaffected by Nancy's information, Lepa says, "So?" before he "*moves wearily away from her, almost into gloom in periphery of set*" (78). Lepa's movement to the margins of the set, upon hearing that he is officially dead, dramatizes his feelings of helplessness and resignation (it dramatizes, too, his exclusion from the official public record). In an ironic commentary on the ways in which an individual's existence is validated through official documents and records, Nancy's personal encounters with the living, breathing Lepa—not to mention his own testimony that he did indeed survive the accident—do not constitute proof that he is alive. Over the course of the play, Nancy makes numerous attempts to solicit from Lepa appropriate documents or records that will legitimize his existence: she asks to see his land title (82); a passport or immigration papers (97); Canadian citizenship documents (97); a bill of sale (98); bank or hospital records; and a social insurance number (112). More anguished than angry that he cannot produce the required papers, Lepa offers matter-of-fact explanations for why he has no

official proof of his existence. He strategically placed his farm in Hanya's name, in case something were to happen to him. "To be a widow immigrant is bad," he tells Nancy. "To be a widow with nothing is like being blind and deaf and having nothing to eat" (83). Hanya then willed the farm to Stephan, who subsequently sold it; and before she died, she also mistakenly burned Lepa's landing card and immigration documents. Lepa could have applied—and actually tried to apply—for reissued documents. But, with his limited literacy in English, he could not understand the application forms.

Old Man Lepa's problem, simply put, is that he is suspended between the past and the present, and his inability to come to terms with either—foregrounded by the structure of the stage, as well as the background music and sound effects that Ryga calls for in his stage directions—is what haunts Lepa throughout *A Letter to My Son*. Frequently, though not consciously, Lepa detaches himself from his conversations with Nancy by revisiting incidents from his younger days: much of the play, in fact, unfolds as a kind of monologue in which Lepa talks to himself (not to Nancy) as he recreates scenes from his past. Lepa's psychological movement between the present to the past is further dramatized by his literal movement between the two levels of the stage. While he writes to his son and talks with Nancy in his kitchen, on the lower front level of the stage, Lepa's flashbacks to his younger days are enacted on an elevated portion of the stage behind the kitchen. As Ryga suggests in his stage directions, Lepa should struggle to ascend the elevated portion of the stage, foregrounding not only his physical frailties but also his psychological difficulties in coping with the past (71). Given that, on the elevated portion of the stage, Lepa periodically imagines conversations that he has had with his son—conversations that never actually took place—the bilevel stage structure

dramatizes, too, the extent to which Lepa is unable to distinguish between reality and fantasy. Although mournful Ukrainian folk songs become the background music in much of *A Letter to My Son*, drawing attention to the extent to which Lepa lives in the past, the opening scene of the play begins with a musical collage (or, better, clash) of songs that reflect his divided sense of loyalty to his ethnic and national communities, as well as the tensions between his socialist politics and his nationalistic sentiments toward Ukraine. At the outset of the play, Lepa sits at his kitchen table, drafting the letter to his son, he (and the audience) hears strains of Ukrainian folk music that segue into the opening bars of “Solidarity Forever,” followed by abrupt shifts between portions of “O Canada,” “Land of Hope and Glory,” the Soviet national anthem, “God Save the Queen,” “The Internationale,” and “Battle Hymn of the Republic” (72). During the first act of the play, moreover, as Lepa reveals the dark secret of his past, the weather outside his farmhouse mirrors his internal state: stage directions indicate that the sound of thunder in the distance becomes progressively louder as the storm approaches.

But it is language, ultimately, that both prohibits Lepa from leaving the past behind him and offers him a means through which he can live, fully, in the present. Lepa’s inability to read and write English well, after all, is what prevents him from either re-establishing a relationship with his son or asserting his identity to the government. Like many of the characters in *The Street Where I Live*, Lepa speaks a hybrid “english” (to use Ashcroft, Tiffin, and Griffith’s term) that is both similar to and different from standard English. While he is clearly fluent in English, he often makes grammatical errors (“I don’t know how to read English too good,” he says to Nancy [77]). And while he uses few Ukrainian words, he speaks with a Ukrainian accent, frequently incorporating

common Ukrainian expressions (translated into English) in his speech. As he struggles to write to his son at the start of the play, he says, “[w]hy is it when I write a letter, I am making a wallet out of wood?” (72); and, in describing Marina and Dmitro to Nancy, he explains that “the devil wore his way through a pair of boots finding them for one another” (76). On the one hand, like the characters in Haas’s novel, Lepa seems to refuse, subtly, wholesale assimilation to Anglo-Canadian culture by retaining aspects of his ethnic language. He is certainly, at moments, stubborn, angry, and agitated (raising his voice, for example, when he speaks about Marina and Dmitro). At the same time, however, his speech (like that of the characters in *The Street Where I Live*) is a constant reminder of his “otherness” within Anglo-Canadian society (his low economic status and socialist politics also, importantly, contribute to his status as “other” to the Anglo-Canadian mainstream). Often—and especially when he fights to find words to write to Stephan—he becomes sad, soft-spoken, and defeated.

If Haas’s characters, however, are playfully unaware the ways in which their hybrid languages will hinder their chances of advancing within the social and economic hierarchies of Canadian society, Lepa is painfully conscious that his speech marks him as inferior to educated, middle-class Canadians—like Stephan and Nancy. Embarrassed that he is unfamiliar with some of the vocabulary Nancy uses, he admits, “I don’t understand them big words” (85); ashamed that he cannot write a simple letter to Stephan, he says, “[m]y son is an educated man and would laugh at this foolishness” (72). Lepa believes that, in Stephan’s eyes, he is an ignorant man. In several conversations between father and son (imaginary conversations that take place between Lepa and Stephan on the elevated portion of the stage), Stephan admonishes Lepa for his inarticulate way of

expressing himself. “Be precise and to the point,” says Stephan, speaking to Lepa as a schoolteacher would speak to a student, “I have no time for animal grunts from the ignorant!” (89). Lepa, of course, is not ignorant. He is literate in Ukrainian, as well as in Polish (when he was a young man, he read and wrote letters in Polish for his friend and fellow labourer, Mazur, who could not [93]). But in order to re-establish a relationship with his son, and in order to receive his pension, he must learn to use “English,” the dominant language of Canadian society. He must, more specifically, learn to read and write “English.” Just as Lepa is suspended between the past and the present, so too is he caught between two languages (oral “english,” and written “English”): he is able to speak “english,” but writing in “English,” for Lepa, is “the labour of the damned!” (74).

Given that Lepa cannot write his way out of his identity crisis, speaking becomes the only viable means through which he might tell his story and, in so doing, come to terms with the life he has led and the man he has become. The resolution to Lepa’s situation, then, hinges on Nancy—or, rather, Lepa’s relationship with Nancy. If the government is unwilling to accept Lepa’s word, and if Stephan is uninterested in hearing Lepa’s words, perhaps Nancy is willing to listen to Lepa talk; perhaps she is interested in his stories. If Nancy, in listening to him narrate his life, were to acknowledge him as a man worthy of her attention and affection—if she were to become, in a sense, the daughter he never had (or a female incarnation of the son he wished he had)—Lepa might be able to accept his exclusion from the official public record as well as his uneasy relationship with his son. Nancy could teach him, albeit unintentionally, that his informal, oral way of expressing himself and asserting his identity is no less valid than formal, written texts; that his life can be narrated and legitimized beyond the boundaries

of the written word. Symbolically, moreover, the development of a relationship between Lepa and Nancy could resolve a number of underlying tensions in the play: tensions not only between different generations of Ukrainian Canadian but also between Ukrainian Canadian men and women, as well as Jewish and non-Jewish Ukrainian Canadians.

Ryga, then, offers a resolution to Old Man Lepa's situation not through his application for old age pension, or through the letter to his son, but through his relationship with Nancy. At the outset of *A Letter to My Son*, Lepa and Nancy are, like Lepa and Stephan, divided by their experiences as first- and third-generation Ukrainian Canadians, respectively. Lepa's conversations with Nancy are often characterized by his stubborn refusal to listen or talk to her; when he does respond to her, he is usually angry. Lepa cannot accept the rules of the government that Nancy represents, and she cannot understand his unwillingness to cooperate with her. During her first visit to his home, Lepa is suspicious, unfriendly, and outspokenly sexist. He greets her with a series of questions, insinuating that she is incompetent because she is a woman. "What's the matter?" he asks. "They afraid to send a man to talk to a man?" (76). On several other occasions, Lepa raises his voice to Nancy, unleashing his frustrations on her through sarcasm. At one point in the play, he goes so far as to accuse Nancy of betraying her ethnic heritage by changing her name from Odinsky to Dean (84). Though she would rather not discuss her personal life with Lepa, he presses her to reveal her origins: "What's your name?" he says. "Nancy? Nancy? . . . Gimme the rest . . . What's your name? . . . I want to know your real name!" (84). And, later in the play, when she insists that she needs "something more substantial than [his] word" to prove his identity, Lepa "*fumbles in his pants pocket and takes out a closed pocketknife, which he opens and*

swings under her nose”: “[a]lright,” he says, “get the jar by the stove! . . . I cut that vein there and fill the sonofabitch to the brim . . . you can take *that* to your boss—a present from Ivan Lepa!” (97-8).

These two moments in the play—when Lepa asks Nancy about her name, and when he pulls out his pocketknife—are crucial in the development of the relationship between the two characters. For much of the play, Nancy resists the temptation to lash out at Lepa (by remaining professionally aloof from him, choosing not to become emotional when she speaks to him, and refusing to divulge personal information when they talk). When, however, Lepa demands that she tell him her name, Nancy becomes angry for the first time; and when Lepa pulls out his pocketknife to draw his own blood as proof of his existence, Nancy lets down her guard entirely, calling him an “obstinate peasant who has no need of a pension” (98). “There should be no pensions for people like you!” she roars. “I think the government should give you a few carrot and turnip seeds. You can plant them . . . watch them grow . . . harvest them and make yourself soup. And as you eat your soup, you can pontificate to your four walls as to how you did right, while the rest of the world is skidding down to hell!” (98). Nancy’s outburst marks a turning point in their relationship and, indeed, in the play itself: after she speaks her mind, Nancy and Lepa glare at one another across the kitchen table, but their anger is soon transformed into laughter as the two wordlessly acknowledge that they are equally stubborn, and can be equally childish in their interactions with each other. By standing up to Lepa (in a way that Hanya never could) and by challenging him without the condescending tone that Stephan often takes with his father, Nancy breaks through the emotional walls that the old man has built around himself. Tellingly, after their

argument, Nancy “*reaches out to pat [Lepa’s] hand reassuringly*” (as a daughter might) and “[*t]hey each pick up their coffee cups and toast each other silently*” (like two old friends) (98). The two have connected at last. To break the silence between them, then, Nancy begins to ask Lepa about his past: “[w]hen you were first married,” she says, “what was it like? . . . how difficult was it to live?” (98-9). Rather than ignoring or circumventing each other’s questions, Nancy and Lepa begin to engage in a two-way conversation, listening and speaking to each other. After laughing and toasting each other with their coffee cups, Nancy and Lepa chat about the different worlds from which they come: she tells him about growing up “with all the food [she] wanted . . . television, cooks, records . . . a car”; and he, in turn, talks about watching “men cut fields with scythes, and women beat grain on the threshing floor . . . like they did a thousand years before” (99).

In the final scene of *A Letter to My Son*, Lepa sits alone again at his kitchen table, trying once more to write a letter to his son. But upbeat country and western music now plays in the background—heralding, in its tempo, the start of a new and brighter day for Lepa, and in its style, Lepa’s successful transition from the past (his Ukrainian roots) to the present (contemporary Canadian society).¹¹⁸ Midway through this draft of his letter to Stephan, Lepa “[*b]reaks his pencil and throws the pieces across the room*”; as the music “*rises in volume slightly*,” he then “*slaps the table with his hands, his expression elated*” (117). Lepa chooses to speak—rather than write—about his life because he has

¹¹⁸ As I mentioned earlier, during the first act of the play, the sound of thunder outside Lepa’s house becomes progressively louder as a storm approaches. The thunder reaches a climax at the end of the act, just after Lepa admits that he is to blame for his wife’s death. In his stage directions, Ryga calls for “[*h*]ard crash of thunder and sound of rain deluge on fast blackout” (90). Neither the thunder nor the rain returns in the second act of the play—so, presumably some of Lepa’s inner turmoil dissipates after he discloses his dark secret.

learned from Nancy that, orally, he can author his own life story. While Stephan is not present to hear his father speak, Lepa addresses him nonetheless. “Ah!” he says. “It should go like this—Stefan . . . a man wants to be remembered for the good things he made possible . . . not the stupid things, but the good things” (117). As the light fades and the curtain closes on him, Lepa proceeds to tell stories about his experiences as a young man, chuckling at some of the individuals and incidents he describes. The figure of the aging immigrant, weeping for the past, becomes the figure of an old man laughing as he celebrates it—laughing, that is, as he reinvents the past, remembering some events and forgetting others, in his own words and in his own voice.

Yet the conclusion of *A Letter to My Son* is as poignant as it is triumphant. Earlier in the play, commenting on the ways in which official history excludes ordinary peasant and working-class immigrants, Lepa suggests to Nancy that they “make a big monument of stone” in Halifax to commemorate all the nameless, faceless immigrants who built the country—a monument “of a man standing looking into the country . . . he’s got hands, feet—everything. But no face. And we put that up in Halifax to remind us how we got a fresh start, no?” (86). Although they laugh together at the irony of Lepa’s suggestion, Lepa quickly becomes serious. “We laugh,” he says to himself, “but we are sad” (86). By forgiving himself for his mistakes and finding humour in his hardships, he comes to terms with the life he has led; by becoming the oral teller of his own history, and by choosing the aspects of his history that he wishes to be remembered, he challenges the ways in which official history is recorded. But if Lepa’s history, left unrecorded, can only be told by him, what will happen when he is no longer around to tell it? The oral history that Lepa embraces is not without its limitations. Nancy has heard his history, but

will she pass it on? While lively country and western music promises the start of a new life for Lepa at the end of the play, the sun setting on the fields outside his window foreshadows the fact that his life is simultaneously coming to a close. In describing his inevitable passing, Lepa says, "I feel like a dying man who has closed the big book on his life" (117). The phrase he uses, however, is sadly figurative: no book exists in which his history is included.

'easter bread and clouds': The Poetry of Andrew Suknaski

For readers of Canadian prairie writing, Suknaski, like Ryga, needs little introduction: one of the most prolific writers of Ukrainian descent in Canada, Suknaski has produced an impressive body of poetry over the course of his writing life;¹¹⁹ and, in comparison to literature written by other Ukrainian Canadians, Suknaski's work, like that of Ryga, has received a good deal of critical attention from scholars of Canadian literature (non-Ukrainian Canadian literary scholars, for the most part). Read by many critics (such as Ann Munton, and Patrick Lane) as a regional poet, by some (including Jars Balan, Beverly Rasporich, and Tatiana Nazarenko) as a Ukrainian Canadian author, and by others (Dawn Morgan, for example, and Michael Abraham) as a multicultural writer, Suknaski is, to some extent, all three.¹²⁰ Suknaski's parents were second-wave

¹¹⁹ In the 1970s, Suknaski published several chapbooks and pamphlets, including *Circles* (1970), *This Shadow of Eden Once* (1970), *Old Mill* (1971), *Suicide Notes Book I* (1973), *Leaving* (1974), *On First Looking Down from Lion's Gate Bridge* (1974), *Blind Man's House* (1975), *Leaving Wood Mountain* (1975), *Ghost Gun* (1978), and *Moses Beauchamp for Mike Olito* (1978). His major collections of poetry are *Wood Mountain Poems* (1976), *the ghosts call you poor* (1978), *In the Name of Narid* (1981), and *The Land They Gave Away: New and Selected Poems* (1982). He also published two poem sequences, *Octomi* (1976) and *East of Myloona* (1979). In his introduction to *The Land They Gave Away*, Stephen Scobie suggests that "Suknaski has had an immense influence upon the development of Prairie poetry over the last ten years" (13).

¹²⁰ See Munton's "The Structural Horizons of Prairie Poetics: The Long Poem, Eli Mandel, Andrew Suknaski, and Robert Kroetsch" (1983); Lane's "The Poetry of Andy Suknaski" (1980); Balan's "Voices

immigrants who arrived in Canada and homesteaded near Wood Mountain in 1914 (his father came from Ukraine, his mother from Poland); Suknaski, their sixth child, was born in 1942. After Andrew Sr. left the family, however, in 1948, Suknaski was raised by his mother, and at the age of sixteen, he “ran away from home” (Abraham 25), beginning a seventeen-year period of “wandering around Canada and various parts of the world as an itinerate [sic] labourer, occasional student, and apprentice poet” (Balan, “Voices from the Ukrainian Steppes” 121).¹²¹ An artist and a writer, Suknaski studied at various institutions¹²² in British Columbia and Quebec, and his first published poetry—visual poems collected and self-published in *Rose Way in the East* (1971), *In Mind Ov Xcrossroads Ov Mythologies* (1971), and *Y th Evolution into Ruenz* (1972)—reflect his interest in blurring the boundaries between image and text. In fact, as Jars Balan explains in “Voices from the Canadian Steppes: Ukrainian Elements in Andrew Suknaski’s Poetry” (1988), Suknaski’s early poetry is “characterized by a markedly avant-garde and counter-cultural spirit” (121). In 1969, he founded *Elfin Plot*, an underground literary

from the Canadian Steppes: Ukrainian Elements in Andrew Suknaski’s Poetry” (1988); Rasporich’s “Folk Art and Ethnicity on the Prairies: Lysenko, Kurelek, Suknaski and Sapp” (1998); Nazarenko’s “Ukrainian-Canadian Visual Poetry: Traditions and Innovations” (1996); Morgan’s “Andrew Suknaski’s ‘Wood Mountain Time’ and the Chronotope of Multiculturalism” (1996); and Abraham’s “Cultural Orphans and Wood Mountain: The Poetry of Andrew Suknaski” (1990).

¹²¹ Ryga and Suknaski have similar backgrounds. Suknaski’s parents, like Ryga’s, were second-wave immigrants who settled on the prairies. Because Suknaski’s mother was Polish, and because Ryga’s parents immigrated from Carpathia, a region of Ukraine then occupied by Poland, both writers’ home lives were shaped, in part, by Ukrainian and Polish culture. Given, moreover, that the communities around which their parents settled were by no means ethnically homogeneous, Suknaski and Ryga were surrounded in their childhood and young adulthood by individuals from diverse racial and cultural groups. Ryga grew up around Richmond Park, Alberta, a community that was “mainly Ukrainian” but that also comprised individuals of “Polish, German, Russian, Scottish, and Icelandic” ancestry (Gregory 14). The Wood Mountain of Suknaski’s youth, similarly, was inhabited by Ukrainian and Polish settlers as well as Romanian, Serbian, English, Irish, Dutch, and Chinese immigrants (Balan, “Voices from the Canadian Steppes” 120). Both writers left their families and communities, working a variety of jobs across the country before returning, in their writing, to their roots.

¹²² According to Balan, Suknaski attended the Kootenay School of Art (1962-3), the University of Victoria (1964-5), the School of Art and Design at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (1965), Notre Dame University in Nelson (1967-8) and Simon Fraser University (1968-9) (“Voices from the Canadian Steppes” 121).

magazine and, on one occasion, he floated issues of the magazine “down the North Saskatchewan River in poet Al Purdy’s empty cigar tubes” (122). Around the same time, he established the Elfin Plot Press and self-published numerous pamphlets and hand-bound books with “drawings and handstitched text, which he reproduced in editions of three on cardboard, rice and mulberry paper and gave away without recording or remembering the titles” (121). According to Balan, Suknaski “inscribed poems on clay pots and candles”; constructed “poem-kites”; and had a friend drop paper airplane poems from an airplane (121). Clearly, he was experimenting with radical new ways of writing and disseminating poetry in order to push beyond the linguistic and generic confines of the modernist poetic tradition.

Eventually, after moving back the prairies in the 1970s and attempting to “re-establish himself as a resident of Wood Mountain” (121), Suknaski moved away from visual and concrete poetry, turning instead to realist narrative and documentary poems; as numerous critics point out, however, his later poems reflect his ongoing experimentation with language and form, as well as image and text. According to Harvey Spak, who produced a National Film Board documentary about Suknaski in 1978 (the thirty-minute film is entitled *Wood Mountain Poems*), the process of writing, for Suknaski, has never been conventional. When Spak first met Suknaski, in 1976, the poet was “typing up long poems on blue foolscap sheets or brown grocery bags” that he would subsequently hang on a nail above his table (3). Andy said to Spak that “he liked the feel of type on thick brown kraft paper” (3). But insofar as he was particular about the texture of the paper on which he wrote his poems, Suknaski was also particularly interested in texturing his published collections of these poems with photographs, images, and artwork

related to his writing. *Wood Mountain Poems*, for example, is framed by photographs taken in and around Suknaski's hometown; *In the Name of Narid* includes not only photographs of Suknaski and his parents but also fragments of Ukrainian prayer books; and *East of Myloona* incorporates Suknaski's sketches of the First Nations people he met while traveling through the Northwest Territories.

Importantly, too, in the poems themselves, Suknaski refuses standard English as an appropriate language for recreating or recapturing the spirit of the places and the people he came to know; and, while his poetry narrates or documents history, he resists the formal restrictions of either the narrative or documentary poem. As Ann Munton argues in "The Structural Horizons of Prairie Poetics: The Long Poem, Eli Mandel, Andrew Suknaski, and Robert Kroetsch" (1983), Suknaski belongs to a regional community of writers who seek a new poetics for authentically reconstructing the prairie landscape in language.¹²³ In their poems, Suknaski, Mandel, and Kroetsch incorporate the vernacular languages spoken on the prairies in order to authenticate their storytelling. At the same time, in the process of writing, all three poets redefine story itself. Reflecting on Northrop Frye's notion of the narrative poem as a form characterized by beginnings, middles, and endings, Munton argues that the prairie long poets eschew the "tyranny" of this structure as "beginnings become endings and vice versa" (70). Acknowledging Dorothy Livesay's argument that the documentary poem is "topical,

¹²³ Munton suggests that, while Suknaski, Mandel, and Kroetsch are "[n]ot a part of any 'school' of poets in a traditional sense," they are nevertheless "all a part of a communal regionalism that provides a strong support and basis for the writing of poetry. They attend workshops and conferences together, write about and comment on each other's work, and more importantly perhaps sit together late into the night discussing words, poetry, life" (71-2). Suknaski reveals his sense of belonging to this loosely-connected community by dedicating some of his poems to fellow writers: he dedicates "Poem About Three Billy Tonitas" (*ghosts* 68-9) to Al Purdy, for example; "At the St. Victor Petroglyph Site" to Eli Mandel (*ghosts* 114-5); and "Nez Percés at Wood Mountain" (*WMP* 55-8) to Dennis Lee and John Newlove. In fact, he dedicates one entire collection of poems, *the ghosts call you poor*, to John Newlove and George Morrisette.

informative, and socially-oriented,” Munton suggests that poets such as Suknaski, Mandel, and Kroetsch displace history with “memory or mythologized history” (70-1). Ultimately, Munton draws upon Milton Wilson’s definition of the long poem to define these writers’ works: the long poem, she says, is open-ended and discontinuous; it “certainly has much to do with a renewed sense of place (or remembered, dreamed, or mythologized place)”; and it “has everything to do with language and structural matters” (71).¹²⁴

Not unlike Haas’s *The Street Where I Live*, Suknaski’s *Wood Mountain Poems*, *the ghosts call you poor*, and *In the Name of Narid* comprise the intersecting and overlapping histories of numerous characters from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds. In *Wood Mountain Poems*, Suknaski focuses exclusively on community members he came to know during his childhood and young adulthood in Saskatchewan, many of whom he became reacquainted with during his return to Wood Mountain in the 1970s. Two multi-generational Wood Mountain families feature prominently throughout the collection—the Tonitas (Vasile, his son George, his grand-daughter Leila Hordenchuk) and the Soparlos (“old soparlo,” and his sons John and Lee), both surrogate families to Suknaski—but a remarkable number of other Wood Mountain locals (aging immigrant men, for the most part) find their way into Suknaski’s *Wood Mountain Poems*, often via Jimmy Hoy’s Café, the Trails End Hotel, or the West Central Pub, hubs of social activity in the town. Suknaski introduces Jim Lovenzanna (31-2), for instance, Soren Caswell (33), Alfred and Gus Lecaine (34-5; 43), Philip Well (39-40), James Lethbridge (43; 92), John Moneo (76-7), Billy Brown (91), Johnny and Rory Nicholson (93-5; 111), Eli

¹²⁴ Munton quotes Frye in *The Bush Garden* (1971), p. 149; Livesay in “The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre” (1971), p. 269; and Wilson in “Recent Canadian Verse” (1971), p. 199.

Lycenko (106), Ernie Hudson (107), and Louis Leveille (117). Residents of Wood Mountain appear, too, in *the ghosts call you poor* (Mrs. Krasniansky [73-4], for example, Parinti Dionese Necifur [60-4], “Augusta née Hoffman” [78-80], and Gunnar Folgerberg [85-6]), but the poems in this collection also narrate the stories of individuals Suknaski meets while in Dauphin and Winnipeg (including Jadah Zimmerman [33-4], Alexander Czornucha [36-9], and Harry Grott [40-1]). And while both *Wood Mountain Poems* and *the ghosts call you poor* contain poems in which Suknaski reflects on his family and his relationship with his family (his father, in particular), *In the Name of Narid* is unique because the poems in this text focus more substantially on his ethnic background and his family.

In a sense, the multiple stories that Suknaski records are connected by his presence in them—either as storyteller (drawing upon memories of his boyhood and his more recent experiences of Wood Mountain as an adult), or as listener (recording the voices of the remaining residents of the town who often tell their tales in the beer parlour or pool hall), or as both (not a few of his poems unfold in the form of dialogues between Suknaski and the old people who have never left Wood Mountain). Importantly, however, the poems in Suknaski’s texts—texts that Munton reads as “cycles of short poems, linked by their relation to place, to language, to an attempted understanding of self, and self in relation to environment” (71)—are also unified by the everpresence of the prairie landscape from which they emerge. Because Suknaski moves in time from the past to the present, both between and within poems, the history he relates is less linear than circular. And because he refuses the conventions of narrative that demand a diachronic unfolding of events, choosing instead to construct a collage of textual (and

visual) snapshots that privileges space over time, Wood Mountain becomes a palimpsest upon which multiple histories are inscribed. The prairies, more generally, become the site at which the poet as archaeologist peels away layers of history in his search for origins. Not surprisingly, then, Suknaski's documentation of the past reaches well beyond his own memories, and beyond even the memories of the old people who inhabit Wood Mountain. Some of the characters who speak in and through Suknaski's writing—Heinmot Tooyalaket or Chief Joseph of the Nez Percés (*WMP* 55-8), for example, Sitting Bull (*WMP* 69-70), and Big Bear (*ghosts* 12)—are historical figures who lived in the nineteenth century; neither Suknaski nor his Wood Mountain neighbours knew these people, but Suknaski recreates their voices and stories through his familiarity with, and simultaneous rewriting of, official history. Further back still, Suknaski imagines the ancient people who carved petroglyphs into the rock along the road to Wood Mountain (*ghosts* 114-6), and the prehistoric "Sandia Man" who migrated from Asia to North America (*WMP* 71-3). As Spak argues—correctly, I think—Suknaski's writing "states that we are not isolated in history, but rather that all of us dwell in an ancestral space" (3). The prairies are alive, for Suknaski, with the ghosts of those who came before him, and it is in part through their histories—their relation to place, their responses to the world around them—that he seeks to understand his own.

Spak suggests, too—again, quite rightly—that Suknaski "chronicles the consciousness of a people most of us would dismiss as unimportant" (4). On the page, and through the written word, Suknaski documents the history he shares with the still living and long dead inhabitants of the prairies—individuals whose way of life has been or will be forgotten within the annals of official history—in order to legitimize their

status as historical subjects. And for Suknaski, the process of legitimization involves, in part, his attentiveness to seemingly insignificant moments of human tenderness and humour shared by the residents of Wood Mountain—moments that have no place in or relevance to macro-narratives of prairie or Canadian history but that are crucial in defining the micro-history of the community. In such poems as “Vasile Tonita” (*WMP* 85-7), for example, and “Sat” (*ghosts* 65-7), Suknaski looks back with fondness on the times he spent with his friends and father figures Vasile Tonita and Tonita’s son-in-law Lee Soparlo. Wood Mountain is a world in which individuals develop tightly-knit bonds through their everyday experiences on the prairies, and they nurture these bonds in the ordinary pubs and pool halls where they gather to swap stories over pints of beer. Indeed, beer parlours become the central meeting places in which the history of Wood Mountain—much of it lighthearted—unfolds. While spending time in the community watering holes, Suknaski hears about local storeowner Charlie Blouin’s casual handling of a holdup by a well-known neighbour (“*pete,*” Charlie says, “*you better put that gun down / before you hurt yourself*” [*WMP* 29]), and he hears James Lethbridge talk about being torn between the “buckin broncos” of the Calgary Stampede and his “good woman” in Wood Mountain (92). In the pub, too, an upstart Suknaski, ruminating on the philosophy he has learned at university, is challenged by a local who asks him, “*where the fuck did you get your education?*” (*WMP* 77).

Yet, at the same time, the cafés and taverns of Wood Mountain are the places where Suknaski remembers (or hears for the first time about) dark moments in the history of the town. At Hoy’s place, he learns about the elevator agent who shot himself after imagining that his wife had taken a lover (*WMP* 29); drinking beer with friends in

Assiniboia's Franklin Pub, he recalls Leila Hordenchuk's fatal fall from a runaway horse (*WMP* 36); and, sitting at the West Central, he hears the story of Bill Brown, a regular at the bar who froze to death during a blizzard, drunk outside his own front door (*WMP* 91). As Suknaski reveals in his poems, many residents of Wood Mountain have experienced tragedy and hardship: Philip Well, a man who homesteaded near Suknaski's father, shot himself with his "rusty .22" (*WMP* 39); Johnny Nicholson, a local farmer, died of a heart attack in his son's arms while the two were fixing fence (*WMP* 95); and, summer-fallowing one afternoon, Jim Lovenzanna was crushed under a tractor (*WMP* 32). Indeed, if Wood Mountain is layered with history, it is likewise layered with sadness: the starving Nez Percés, driven from Montana to Saskatchewan with little more than the rags on their backs, are a "walking graveyard" (*WMP* 57): their way of life has ended. But so, too, has the pioneer way of life ended for the immigrant settlers who displaced the First Nations people from their land. Aging immigrants such as Soren Caswell, Eli Lycenko, and Louis Leveille have nowhere to go save for the local pub, where they meet with other retired farmers. The last remaining residents of the (ghost) town, these men, not unlike Old Man Lepa in *A Letter to My Son*, live within their stories of the past.

Suknaski's father, of course, belongs to the immigrant generation of homesteaders, and he becomes a recurrent figure in Suknaski's poems. Among the stories Suknaski tells are numerous references to his own, overwhelmingly tragic, family history. Violent and abusive toward his wife and children as a young man, yet frail and vulnerable in his old age, Andrew Sr. appears in Suknaski's poems as "father" and the "other man" (*WMP* 19-26). "Father" is the "lonely spooked" old man, "merely 110 pounds" at the age of eighty-three, who lives alone in a broken-down shack and uses a

bindertwine to hold up his pants (*WMP* 21-2). The “other man” is the monster of Suknaski’s childhood who beats his pregnant wife with a rolling pin and, “drowning in black rage,” tortures his son (Suknaski’s brother Mike) on a grindstone pulley (*WMP* 25). Much of the darkness that pervades *Wood Mountain Poems*, *the ghosts call you poor*, and *In the Name of Narid* derives from the poet’s struggle to reconcile the two.

As oral historian, then, Suknaski records both the positive and negative aspects of prairie history, seeking to reconstruct an authentic portrait of Wood Mountain: thematically, like Haas and Ryga, he draws attention to both the humour and the hardship that characterize the community in which he was raised. And, again like Haas and Ryga, who write in the “english” languages spoken within their ethnic communities, Suknaski, too, rejects “English” as a medium for recording the history of his town. Many of his poems draw upon the vernacular dialects spoken by the oldtimers he meets on his visits home (like the unnamed old man in “Shugmanitou II” who, in giving advice to Suknaski about killing coyotes, says, “i tellya *boy* / them skidoo’s kind / compared to that strychnine / they useta use” [*ghosts* 28]). Numerous characters who appear in *Wood Mountain Poems*, *the ghosts call you poor*, and *In the Name of Narid* speak in heavily-accented, broken, and/or pidgin English, and Suknaski transcribes these characters’ speech phonetically, implicitly foregrounding the limitations of standard spellings in reconstructing the hybrid “english” languages spoken in Wood Mountain and other multi-ethnic prairie communities. (In “Jimmy Hoy’s Place” [*WMP* 28-30], for instance, Suknaski recalls Hoy’s reaction to an obnoxious drunk who is making trouble in the café: “gee clyz / all time slem ting hoy would say / . . . all time takkie to much / makkie trouble sunna bitch / wadda hell madder wid you?” [*WMP* 28]. And, in “Suknatskyj Taking a

Greyhound North” [*Narid* 55-9], Suknaski remembers his *baba* talking about a conflict between family members: “vhat ees to say now? / dhat sohn een law / on heez brrahderr / dido vahz always call dhem / tasyhany! *geepsiez!*” [*Narid* 58]). Some of the phonetically-transcribed words in Suknaski’s poems must be orally reproduced if the reader is to understand the story being told. But in some poems, even reading aloud is not enough to make sense of Suknaski’s language because he occasionally incorporates untranslated words from languages other than English (especially Ukrainian and Dakota). Readers, then, are drawn into the world of Suknaski’s characters, where multiple languages are spoken—and where words are not always easily understood.

Critics of Suknaski’s poetry are quick to point out (as I have) that the poet is adept at authentically transcribing the voices of ordinary prairie people. Spak says that Suknaski gives the “otherwise forgotten people [of Wood Mountain] a voice” (Spak 4). Stephen Scobie, in his review of *the ghosts call you poor*, argues that Suknaski’s poetic method is “deliberately unobtrusive”; his language is “casual, flowing, colloquial” (4). The rhythms of Suknaski’s poems, Scobie writes, “are those of speech, and the line divisions are used as a kind of loose notation for the speaking voice rather than as formal devices” (4). And, as Munton repeats throughout her discussion of Suknaski’s poetry, his accurate transcription of dialect is “a particular achievement” because it authentically captures the voices of the prairies: Suknaski “clings to the authenticity,” she writes, “the veracity of the voices of real people”; “always the voices sound authentically”; his poems are characterized by “uncompromising authenticity” (81-2). But while these critics make valid observations about Suknaski’s attentiveness to the ways in which the residents of Wood Mountain (and, more generally, the prairies) speak, they make a series of

troublingly vague assumptions that leave several underlying questions unanswered. In suggesting that Suknaski gives the “otherwise forgotten” people of Wood Mountain a voice, Spak implies that the poet is an objective recorder of the stories that he hears. Similarly, in arguing that Suknaski’s poetic method is “deliberately unobtrusive,” Scobie denies, at least in part, the poet’s role in selecting words and placing them on the page. Munton, more explicitly than Spak and Scobie, constructs a one-to-one correspondence between Suknaski’s language and the reality that he explores through language, as though his writing becomes a mirror to the world around him. Spak, Scobie, and Munton never address the obvious, and obviously crucial, question of why Suknaski chooses poetry as the appropriate genre in which to capture the “authentic” voices of Wood Mountain. Why poetry and not prose? Why poetry and not historical non-fiction (or fiction, or drama)? What defines an “authentic” voice? And what is it, exactly, about Suknaski’s poetry—about his writing itself—that (to borrow Munton’s terms) captures the “authenticity” and the “veracity” of real people’s voices?

What I see in Suknaski’s poetry (specifically in *Wood Mountain Poems*, *the ghosts call you poor*, and *In the Name of Narid*) is a poet struggling to define himself as such—which is not to say that he is not, in part, concerned with exploring history by narrating history, or that he is not driven by a desire to understand the ways in which history has shaped his identity. But, reading through Suknaski’s three books of poetry, my feeling is that his concerns as a writer shift through and between the writing of each book. Close readings of three poems drawn from *Wood Mountain Poems* (“In Memory of Alfred A. Lecaine”), *the ghosts call you poor* (“The First People”), and *In the Name of Narid* (“Paska I Khmary”) illustrate that, as Suknaski explores the complex relation

between the past and the present of the prairie space in which he was raised, as well as his sense of self and understanding of community, he repeatedly confronts the gaps between reality and his representations of reality. In *Wood Mountain Poems*, Suknaski (like Haas in *The Street Where I Live* and Ryga in *A Letter to My Son*) primarily uses language to record history: the poems in this collection reflect his interest (and faith) in documenting the past through language. He is, predominantly, the poet as historian. These two roles, however, fit together uneasily because, in the process of transcribing history, the poet transforms it. Even as a poem such as "In Memory of Alfred A. Lecaine," for example, attempts an objective rendering of history, it reveals that the process of writing of history is necessarily selective and subjective. In *the ghosts call you poor*, Suknaski begins to explore the ways in which the poet reshapes history (and his relation to history) as he narrates it: that is to say, he becomes increasingly conscious of the fact that the process of writing history is less about replicating than reinventing the past. Suknaski becomes, in a number of poems, the poet as shaman, turning to First Nations languages and mythologies in order to find a new way of articulating his sense of belonging to the prairies. By translating these ancient languages and mythologies into his own words, he attempts to claim both as his own. In a sense, in a poem such as "The First People," he tries to reconstruct himself as a kind of "new Indian."¹²⁵ Ironically, however, while Suknaski becomes aware of the constructedness of the past, and the constructedness of his relation to the prairies, he nonetheless assumes that translation is absolute; that he can translate First Nations culture into English and onto the page. Is he

¹²⁵ I borrow this term from Patrick Lane. In "The Poetry of Andy Suknaski" (1980), Lane says that Suknaski is "part of the first generation that sees itself as an actual part of the landscape. In a way, a new Indian" (95).

able to bridge the gap between First Nations culture and his representation of it? *In the Name of Narid* narrates Suknaski's return to his Ukrainian roots, through which he learns that translation—both the translation of non-English words into English, and the translation of reality into language—is never exact. But he learns, too, that while language can act as a barrier between people (between cultures, between the past and the present), it can also be used, creatively, to forge new connections. In “Paska I Khmary,” the poet as poet discovers that writing is about accepting the limitations—and continuing to push the horizons—of language in an ongoing search for home.

In many ways typical of the poems in *Wood Mountain Poems*, “In Memory of Alfred A. Lecaine” (*WMP* 34-5) pays tribute to an oldtimer of Suknaski's hometown who has passed away; and, at the same time, the poem commemorates a way of life (the pioneers' way of life) that has also come to pass. By remembering Lecaine, who both belongs to and comes to stand in for Suknaski's bygone childhood in Wood Mountain, the poet at once rediscovers and reconnects with his past. With his old friend Lee Soparlo and two of Lee's sons, Suknaski travels to Lecaine's grave, at once returning to the prairie landscape in which he was raised, re-establishing his relationship with the Soparlos, and revisiting the history of Wood Mountain. The poet's description of his trip to “the lecaine cemetery” is marked by the mingling of past and present; the voices of the people who live (or lived) in the prairies and the sounds of the prairies themselves. As he listens to Lee Soparlo talk about Lecaine's funeral (“*there were cars all over the hills and in the coulees / must have been over 200 people at least*” [34]), Suknaski takes note of the “poplars and willows” (34), and the gopher that “whistles” in the distance (35); as he gazes on the “sioux indian cemetery visible on the next hill,” he hears the weather report

on the radio; and as he waves at Chief Billy Goodtrack stacking hay bales with his sons, he recalls a hockey game, years ago, in which Billy scored the winning goal against Lecaine's team (and after which Lecaine joked, "*if those indians don't take it a bit easier / I'll pull out my telescopic tomahawk / then we'll show em*") (35). In fact, as the poem unfolds, it becomes less a specific meditation on Lecaine (for Suknaski says surprisingly little about Lecaine) than a more general exploration of the world of Wood Mountain. He draws upon Lee's storytelling voice, the radio voice of the weather reporter, and Lecaine's teasing voice in order to paint a realistic portrait of his community.

But "In Memory of Alfred A. Lecaine" is by no means a sort of found poem, unshaped (or minimally shaped) by the poet: Suknaski's voice is prominent throughout the poem—and it is a voice that boldly asserts, more indirectly than directly, its ability to bridge the gap between reality and representations of reality (indeed, the central theme of the poem is the relation between the two). In the telling first two stanzas of the poem, Suknaski reveals that Fred Lecaine was a painter. Two of Lecaine's faded paintings of the prairies hang on one of the outside walls of Charlie Blouin's general store. Before leaving Wood Mountain, Suknaski (a painter as well as a poet) decides to retrace Lecaine's brushstrokes and, in so doing, bring to life again Lecaine's depictions of the area around Wood Mountain. The parallel between Lecaine's paintings and Suknaski's poetry is subtle, yet unmistakable: one man seeks to capture the spirit of the land on canvas, the other, on the page. In fact, Suknaski becomes Lecaine as he retouches the original artist's work (he "sign[s] *fred lecaine* over his faded signature in a corner" [34]); determined to preserve Lecaine's paintings, moreover, he applies "a clear varnish to protect everything" (34). The realizable task of the artist/poet, he suggests, is to preserve

the past (in paintings or in poems), and to protect this past from the forces of social change. Suknaski's confidence in the artist's (and the poet's) ability to replicate the past in art (and language) is reflected in his descriptions of Lecaine's work—descriptions that draw no distinctions between Lecaine's paintings, the landscape that Lecaine painted, and the images that surround Suknaski as he examines Lecaine's paintings. In the first four lines of the poem, Suknaski makes clear the fact that he is observing the land around his home, both unchanged and at rest: "wood mountain and indian summer /," he writes, "still here / where my childhood ghosts move in the tall grass / taking over the half-abandoned village" (34). But as the poet shifts from his description of the land to his description of Lecaine's paintings, the line between reality and the artist's depiction of reality is blurred.

i repaint two of fred's faded paintings:
 a pair of brown horses rearing against high green hills
 in the reserve
 in the distance beneath the horses
 cattle peacefully gaze in coulee (34)

Is Suknaski talking about Lecaine's painting here? Or is he observing his immediate surroundings as he retouches Lecaine's paintings?

What Suknaski seems to suggest, in the first stanzas of the poem—and what he attempts to underscore in the remaining stanzas of the poem—is that the "still here" prairie landscape can be (indeed, must be) recorded for posterity: as caretakers of the past, the artist and the poet become partners in recording and preserving history.

Lecaine's paintings, though faded, and the pioneers' way of life, though fading, can be recuperated by the poet who reanimates both through language. Yet, "In Memory of Alfred A. Lecaine" hints, in a single phrase, at the constructedness of the artist's and

poet's representations of the prairies and prairie history. After Suknaski finishes his work on Lecaine's paintings, he nails the paintings back up "on the false front of charlie blouin's old store" (34). Is it not possible that the paintings themselves are also a kind of "false front" (not because they necessarily idealize, or, conversely, demonize, Wood Mountain but because they are representations of reality, rather than reality itself)? In writing about his repainting of Lecaine's paintings of the prairies, Suknaski is thrice removed from the actual landscape. How "authentic," then, is the poet's depiction of his world?

In subsequent poems, Suknaski—still focused on documenting the history of the prairies, and increasingly interested in staking his claim to the prairies—explores the notion that, because his world is invented (or reinvented) in language, he can use language to define (or redefine) his relation to the past and to the place in which he was raised. A number of his poems, in both *Wood Mountain Poems* and *the ghosts call you poor*, narrate the process through which Suknaski attempts to claim First Nations language, history, and mythology as his own, and in so doing proclaim his indigenous relation to the land.¹²⁶ In part, Suknaski's fascination with First Nations language and culture is an extension of his interest in documenting the history of Wood Mountain, specifically, and the prairies, more generally. He is drawn to the Sioux people (and their language) in particular because their history intersects with the history of Wood

¹²⁶ See the following in *Wood Mountain Poems*: "Chaapunka" (43), "Mashteeshka" (44), "Mishmish" (47-51), "Nez Percés at Wood Mountain" (55-8), "The Sun Dance at Wood Mountain" (64-5), "Poem to Sitting Bull and his Son Crowfoot" (66-8), "The Bitter Word" (69-70), "Sandia Man" (71-3), "Neehhreson" (74) and "Soongeedawn" (75). See, too, these poems in *the ghosts call you poor*: "The Indian and the White Man" (18-9), "The First People" (20-5), and "Shugmanitou I" (26-7).

In addition to writing about First Nations (primarily Sioux) people in *Wood Mountain Poems* and *the ghosts call you poor*, Suknaski writes about Dene and Inuit people in *East of Myloona* (a collection of poems published in 1979 that grew out of his travels in the Northwest Territories), and he retells Sioux legends in *Octomi* (1976).

Mountain.¹²⁷ The history of Sitting Bull and his tribe is a recurrent concern for Suknaski in such poems as “The Teton Sioux and 1879 Prairie Fire” (*WMP* 62-3), “The Sun Dance at Wood Mountain” (*WMP* 64-5), “Poem to Sitting Bull and his Son Crowfoot” (*WMP* 66-7), and “The Bitter Word” (69-70).¹²⁸ Acutely aware of the ways in which the Sioux were displaced from their land and forced to give up their traditional way of life, Suknaski seeks to “right” history by writing frankly about their mistreatment by both the Americans and the Canadians. In “Poem to Sitting Bull and His Son Crowfoot,” Suknaski alludes to the “lying faces of men who betrayed [Sitting Bull] / giving him an ultimatum: / *starve or surrender to the enemy*” (*WMP* 67), and in the concluding stanza of “The Bitter Word,” the poet imagines that Sitting Bull, unable to return to the U.S. but unwelcome in Canada, “must have sensed the hunger to follow / which was exactly what the authorities hopes for / on both sides of the border” (*WMP* 70). To some extent, though, Sitting Bull (a picture of whom is featured on the cover of *Wood Mountain Poems*¹²⁹) and his tribe come to stand in for all First Nations people in Suknaski’s poems. In recording the specific history of this group, Suknaski draws attention to the general plight of all aboriginal groups in Canada. Importantly, too, he seeks not only to document the history of First Nations people but also to recuperate some aspects of their lost way of life by using their language, at least in part, to narrate their histories and by focusing on some of their cultural and spiritual practices. Hence, in poems such as “Neehreson” (*WMP* 74) and “Soongeedawn” (*WMP* 75), he implicitly reveals the close

¹²⁷ In 1876, following the massacre of George Custer’s troops by the Teton Sioux at the Battle of Little Big Horn in Montana, Chief Sitting Bull led his people north across the “Medicine Line” into southern Saskatchewan; seeking refuge from American troops, Sitting Bull appealed to the Royal North West Mounted Police posted in Wood Mountain and Fort Walsh but he received no help from the Canadian government and eventually surrendered to U.S. authorities in 1881.

¹²⁸ Sharon Pollock’s play *Walsh* (1973) also revisits the history of Sitting Bull in Canada.

¹²⁹ Interestingly, the same image of Sitting Bull is featured on the front cover of Pollock’s play.

connection between First Nations culture and the natural world; and in “The Sun Dance at Wood Mountain” (*WMP* 64-5) and “The First People” (*ghosts* 20-5), he writes explicitly about important Sioux customs and rituals.

In writing about First Nations history and mythology, however, and in claiming both as his own, Suknaski makes a transition from the poet as historian to the poet as shaman, a transition illustrated emphatically by “The First People” (*ghosts* 20-5). Like “In Memory of Alfred A. Lecaine,” “The First People” is focused on an individual from Suknaski’s past: the “you” to whom the poet speaks throughout the poem is Nelson Small Legs Jr., a First Nations political activist from Wood Mountain who committed suicide at the age of twenty-three.¹³⁰ Just as Suknaski sees Lecaine as both belonging to and representative of the pioneer way of life (he also, importantly, sees Lecaine as an artist who captured this way of life in his paintings), so too does Suknaski see Small Legs as at once a participant in and a symbol of First Nations history. Small Legs’ tragic death mirrors the dying culture of his people, but by remembering Small Legs, Suknaski seeks to resurrect him and, by extension, his culture. “Resurrect” might seem too strong a word, except that Suknaski incorporates Small Legs into his new prairie mythology, a fusion of Biblical and First Nations mythologies.

Divided into six sections, “The First People” begins by rewriting the Biblical Book of Genesis: the world, in the opening lines of the poem, is created not by the Christian God but by “unktehi,” the “feminine creator” of Sioux mythology (20). In fact, in the first part of the poem (“*genesis*”), Suknaski provides a long list of the Sioux gods

¹³⁰ Although “The First People” is dedicated “*to the memory of nelson small legs jr (23) and eddie bazie (23)*,” Suknaski only makes references within the poem to Nelson Small Legs Jr. My guess is that Eddie Bazie (who, like Small Legs, died at the age of twenty-three) also committed suicide.

or spirits who help “unktehi” bring the world into being: she is helped by “tunkan” (the “stone god”), for example, “takuskanska” (the “moving spirit”), “wakinyan” (the “thunder spirit”), and “wakan tanka” or “manitou” (the “great spirit”) (20). As Suknaski explains in the second part of the poem (“*the first people*”), “the first people of the plains were humble / knew they were not worthy enough / to speak directly to manitou / and therefore appealed in prayer or song / to intermediators” (21). The third part of the poem (“*prayer*”) then serves as a guide for re-enacting the Sioux practice of speaking to manitou through animal “intermediators” such as “shoonkawaka” (the “holy wild horse”), “good sister ookjekeehaw” (“magpie”), and “uncle khaahxree” (“crow”) (21). “[P]ray to shugmanitou [coyote] for endurance,” Suknaski writes, in the imperative: “pray for courage”; “pray with care” (21). In the fourth part of the poem (“*failure*”), Suknaski turns his attention to Small Legs’ death, through which the young man returns to his ancestors (“the broken hoop” is “made *one* again” as Small Legs joins his people on “the other side,” “more real and lasting” than the world he has left [23]). Small Legs has not failed his people by giving up the will to live; rather, he has been failed by “the white man’ betrayer,” “the green frog skin world’ of money lenders,” and the “fattakers’ bloated on the blood / of the first people” (23-4). Small Legs becomes, in the fifth and sixth parts of the poem (“*ascent*” and “*descent*”), a Christ-figure who has given his life for his people: he has become an “intermediating” spirit, promising in a suicide note to “always help . . . from the other side” (23), but never leaving the prairie space to which he belonged. Though he has passed into the spirit world, he is an everpresence among the living.

As a number of critics argue, an understanding of First Nations history and culture becomes crucial to Suknaski's sense of belonging to the prairies: by claiming this history and culture as his own, the poet proclaims his right to call the prairies home.¹³¹ But Suknaski's embrace of First Nations mythology is problematic. I don't want to suggest, as some critics would, that, by writing about First Nations culture, Suknaski becomes a figure of the (neo-)colonizer: that, like his people who "stole" First Nations land, he "steals" First Nations culture.¹³² Suknaski is, after all, conscious of the enduring inequalities between aboriginal and non-aboriginal people in Canada. Because his desire

¹³¹ According to Leslie Monkman, Suknaski "locate[s] guides to a new sense of place in the myths and legends of the prairie Indians" (143). In inventing an "indigenous Western Canadian mythology" (Balan, "Voices from the Canadian Steppes" 124), moreover, the poet becomes a prototype of the "new Canadian"—not an immigrant but "rather part of the first generation that sees itself as an actual part of the landscape. In a way, a new Indian" (Lane 95).

¹³² While, on the surface, my choice of words ("stole" and "steals") may seem unduly harsh, in the context of ongoing debates about cultural appropriation—debates to which Suknaski's writing is exceedingly relevant—such language is not uncommon. In "Stop Stealing Native Stories" (1997), for example, Lenore Keeshig-Tobias refers to non-native authors' interest in native stories as "cultural theft" and the "theft of voice" (71); and in "Who Can Speak for Whom?" (1993), Dionne Brand says, "[t]here can be no question that Canadian culture has marauded the cultural production of First Nations peoples not to speak of their spiritual myths and icons and their land" (18). For First Nations writers and other writers of colour, the tendency of white writers to draw upon non-white cultures in their texts is as baffling as it is enraging. Keeshig-Tobias asks, "why are Canadians so obsessed with native stories anyway? Why the urge to 'write Indian'? Have Canadians run out of stories of their own? Or are their renderings just nostalgia for a simpler, more 'at one with nature' stage of human development?" (73).

Nor are Keeshig-Tobias and Brand alone in their concern over the extent to which and the reasons for which white writers appropriate the stories and voices of First Nations peoples, and, more generally, the stories and voices of people of colour. Beginning in the late 1980s, the Canadian literati engaged in—and continue to engage in—heated discussions about white authors' right to depict cultures other than their own. As Marlene Nourbese Philip writes in "The Disappearing Debate; or, How the Discussion of Racism Has Been Taken Over by the Censorship Issue" (1997), discussions about cultural appropriation originated in 1987 when the editors of the *Women's Press* in Toronto argued about whether or not to include three short stories (by white writers who had "drawn on and used the voices of characters from cultures and races other than their own" [97]) in their anthology *Imagining Women* (eventually published in 1988). Sneja Gunew, in her overview of the ways in which the issue of cultural appropriation surfaced over the next few years, explains that, in 1988, Lee Maracle (at the annual meeting of the Writers' Union of Canada) asked Anne Cameron "to stop using traditional Native stories in her work"; in 1989, "controversy broke out over the representation of minority Canadian writers at the PEN conference in Toronto"; and, in 1990, "the Canadian Council set up an Advisory Committee for Racial Equality in the Arts," whose final report was controversial (<http://www.english.ubc.ca/~sgunew/minint.htm>). In the 1992 newsletters of the Writers' Union of Canada, moreover, "issues of censorship and the writer and voice" took centre stage (Philip 97), and in 1995, the Writing Thru Race Conference, held in Vancouver, aroused much media attention (the conference excluded white writers from most of its workshops; for a fuller description of the conference and the controversy that surrounded it, see Roy Miki's essay "Sliding the Scale of Elision: 'Race' Constructs / Cultural Praxis" [125-59] in *Broken Entries* [1998]).

to recuperate First Nations culture is part of his broader project of (re)constructing a hybrid mythology that acknowledges and reflects the cultural diversity of the nation, the impulse behind Suknaski's borrowing of First Nations culture is not in itself troubling. As Bruce Ziff and Pratima V. Rao argue, in their introduction to *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation* (1997), cultural appropriation is a pervasive and multidirectional phenomenon that need not connote an unequal power relationship between different cultural communities (4-5). Cultures (and this is especially true in multicultural societies) constantly and complexly "blend, merge, and synthesize" (5).

The problem with Suknaski's hybrid mythology is not *that* he draws upon First Nations culture but, rather, *how* he draws upon it. History, the poet knows, is a product of language: when, in a poem like "The First People," he rewrites foundational Christian myths by incorporating First Nations figures and stories in these myths, he is conscious of the ways in which language can be used to reconstruct the past. History (as well as mythology, and, more generally, culture) is always mediated by language. Yet, in "The First People," as well as in other poems about First Nations culture, Suknaski seems unconscious of the possible gaps between this culture and the language in which he writes about it. Rife with English translations of Sioux words and phrases, his poems implicitly suggest that First Nations culture and mythology can be fully experienced and known in English; that nothing is lost (or gained) in the process of translation.¹³³ In such

¹³³ Sioux words are almost always glossed in footnotes or within the poems themselves. In a number of poems, readers encounter "*chaapunka*" or mosquito (*WMP* 43), "*mashteeshka*" or rabbit (*WMP* 44), "*tatanka*" or buffalo (*WMP* 65; 67; 69), "*shugmanitou*" or coyote (*WMP* 71-3), "*neehhreson*" or antelope, and "*soongeedawn*" or fox (*WMP* 75). Such poems as "The Indian and the White Man" (*ghosts* 18-9) and "Shugmanitou I" (*ghosts* 26-7) contain prayers to "*manitou*" or the great spirit; and "The First People" (*ghosts* 20-5), of course, comprises a litany of Sioux words (all translated within the poem) that refer to the Sioux's spiritual way of life.

poems as “The First People,” Suknaski attempts to construct a new, hybrid prairie mythology, but he leaves unexplored (at the level of language) its newness and hybridity: he never actually confronts or reflects upon the nature of its constructedness. Just as animals serve, in First Nations mythology, as “intermediators” between the human and the spirit world, so too does language mediate between First Nations culture and Suknaski’s understanding of it. How do his words affect the meaning of the culture that he writes about it? “[P]ray as the young sioux boy prayed to become a man,” he writes,

through the four day fast
ending with his first holy vision
“*tunkashila*
tunkashila
tunkashila
grandfather . . . grandfather spirit . . . help me!” (22)

The poet as shaman is thrice removed from the prayer he describes: he hears the Sioux boy’s words, transcribes them in Sioux, and then translates them into English. Does the prayer change with each remove? Does it mean something different to the Sioux boy and to the poet (not to mention his readers)? Are “*tunkashila*” and “*grandfather spirit*” really one and the same thing, as Suknaski implicitly asserts, or does the meaning of “*tunkashila*” change when the word is lifted out of its original cultural context?

In “Paska I Khmary” (*Narid* 60), Suknaski revisits the question of translation, this time in the context of Ukrainian Canadian culture. As in most of the poems in *In the Name of Narid*, “Paska I Khmary” narrates Suknaski’s return to his ethnic roots: the poet, who, geographically, has traveled back to the prairies, and who, temporally, has revisited the history of the prairies, now explores his familial connection to both. More importantly, he explores the ways in which he can (re)connect with family members through language. But, in comparison to some of Suknaski’s earlier poems in *Wood*

Mountain Poems and *the ghosts call you poor*, “Paska I Khmary” represents a shift in his attitude toward language. In “In Memory of Alfred A. Lecaine,” for example, Suknaski is confident in his ability to document history in and through his poetry. Similarly, in “The First People,” he assumes that he can translate First Nations culture into English and onto the page; that translation is not only possible but also a possible strategy for forging links between different ethnic communities. In “Paska I Khmary,” by contrast, Suknaski confronts the notion that language can drive a wedge between people (specifically, between first-generation Ukrainian Canadians who speak Ukrainian, and their second-generation children who speak English). Focused on the poet’s relationship with his mother, this poem reflects on the ways in which the two are separated by the different languages that they speak. As the poem reveals, coming home requires that Suknaski come to terms with his inability to speak the language of his ancestors. Translation, he learns, is uneasy, and sometimes impossible, because the meanings of words (and, by extension, the complex nuances of culture) are often lost in the movement between languages. What Suknaski discovers, however, over the course of the poem, is that language—the very barrier that stands between him and his mother—can also be used in creative ways to bring them together. Translation is a creative process: the poet as poet not only acknowledges his active role in (re)creating the world as he moves within and between languages, he is also empowered by his ability to re-establish personal relationships through language.

Not unlike “In Memory of Alfred A. Lecaine,” “Paska I Khmary” centres on a painting of the prairies—on, more specifically, a linocut by Suknaski’s friend George Melnyk.¹³⁴ On one level, the poem is about Suknaski’s and his mother’s impressions of the print: the poem describes the two drinking black current wine together as they talk about Melnyk’s picture. On another level, however, “Paska I Khmary” is about the ways in which mother and son (native Ukrainian- and English-speakers, respectively) manipulate languages in order to speak to one another. In the opening lines of the poem, Suknaski’s mother “gazes at the print / on his shack’s wall” and “asks what it is” (60). The title of Melnyk’s work, the poet explains, is “*the land also rises*,” but “too long from home / and unable to speak ukrainian,” Suknaski “cannot translate his friend’s title” (60). Unable to come up with a literal translation, Suknaski is nonetheless determined to bridge the linguistic distance between him and his mother, and so he comes up with a translation that enables his mother to relate to the print: “*paska i khmary*,” he says, “*easter bread and clouds*” (60). Less abstract than Melnyk’s original title, and more rooted in the concrete world with which his mother is familiar, Suknaski’s translation enables his mother to relate to the picture. For the remainder of the poem, mother and son study Melnyk’s depiction of the prairies, giving voice—in Ukrainian and in English—to their impressions of it. Suknaski’s mother asks, “‘vhat be dhat underr clouds?’” (60). With his limited knowledge of Ukrainian, Suknaski answers, translating his Ukrainian words into English.

‘*polia*
 . . . fields’
 he murmurs
 ‘*navit polia*

¹³⁴ George Melnyk is a Ukrainian Canadian artist, writer, and literary scholar who currently teaches Canadian Studies at the University of Calgary. See fn. 3.

v nebi
 even fields in
 heaven' (60)

Broken by pauses and hesitations, Suknaski's description of Melnyk's print reveals his struggle to find words in which to speak to his mother. After Suknaski says "*navit polia*," he pauses, trying to remember "*nebi*," the Ukrainian word for heaven; unsure of his choice of Ukrainian words, and his ability to accurately translate these words, he speaks softly. As Suknaski's mother offers an alternate interpretation of Melnyk's work, she, too, struggles to find words that her son will understand, pausing and hesitating as she speaks: "orr myte be rrayz ov sohn," she says, "ahbofh cloudz brroken / by geese koming norrt" (60). Like the sky in Melnyk's painting (that Suknaski's mother describes as "brroken / by geese"), Suknaski's language and his mother's language are "broken": he speaks imperfect Ukrainian; she speaks imperfect English. What matters, however, is not the imperfection of Suknaski's Ukrainian or his mother's English: what matters is that they are able to experience a rare moment of closeness and intimacy by meeting each other halfway. Despite the different languages that they speak, they make themselves understood.

What Suknaski learns, ultimately, is that language facilitates his connection to the place in which he was raised, its history, its mythologies, and its people: the poet as poet discovers that language makes possible and defines these connections. So the landscape that he comes to explore in his poetry is less the literal landscape of the prairies (the backdrop against which history, mythology, and community take shape) but, rather, the figurative landscape of language itself. And his travels within this figurative space are never over, never complete, because the poet as poet is constantly recreating and

4. **(Re)imagined Communities: Ukrainian Canadian Literature, 1985-2000**

From Multiculturalism to Transculturalism: Shifting Paradigms in Ethnic Minority Literary Studies

In her 1991 essay “From Mosaic to Kaleidoscope,” published in *Books in Canada*, Janice Kulyk Keefer, discussing the current state of ethnic minority literary studies in Canada, suggests that discourses of multiculturalism are no longer sufficient for defining contemporary trends in Canadian ethnic minority writing. Prefaced by an autobiographical overview of her experiences as a second-generation Ukrainian Canadian and a writer, Kulyk Keefer’s essay (subtitled “Out of the multicultural past comes a vision of a transcultural future”) traces the historical shifts in dominant attitudes toward ethnic minorities and their literatures in Canada. “In the Canada in which I grew up,” she writes, “that is, the Toronto of the 1950s and 60s, there was no such thing as multiculturalism”: “[e]thnicity—that is, belonging to a non-British ethnocultural group—was definitely not an asset in the school system of the day . . . There was no question in my school of our studying or even being apprised of the value of languages, literatures, and cultures other than English” (13). As a university student in the 1970s, Kulyk Keefer goes on to explain, “there was a sudden flurry of interest round the term ‘ethnic’”—a flurry that she attributes, retrospectively, to “the Trudeau government’s creation of something called ‘multiculturalism’ in 1971” (14). The popularity of “doing the ethnic thing” in the 1970s, however, had “no impact on [her] sense of what [she] could do as a writer” (14). In her words, “I grew up convinced that only people with names like Smith or MacPherson could be published and read in this country—a belief that led me to think and write, for the most part, in what I understood to be the manner of a Smith or a

MacPherson” (14). Kulyk Keefer admits that “for all my attempts to put my linguistic, cultural, and I suppose one might say racial ‘otherness’ behind me, I continued to be haunted by the stories my family told of a country that didn’t exist anymore”; but, she insists, “it is only now, some 20 years after I first started to write with any seriousness, that I feel it’s possible for me to address that other ‘where’ in a Canadian writer’s life . . . that other country by which immigrants’ children are so often obsessed” (14).

In a roundabout way, then, Kulyk Keefer arrives at the crux of her argument: that the practice of multiculturalism, focused as it is on promoting and preserving ethnic diversity within Canada, ill-accommodates ethnic subjects who discover that they need to maintain literal or imagined ties with their ancestral homelands. Transculturalism, she suggests, more accurately describes the experiences of individuals whose ancestral countries seem “as important” as the country in which they reside (14). For Kulyk Keefer, the Roman deity Janus (god of “new beginnings” who “presides over doors, thresholds, and gateways, his two heads looking out in opposite directions”) is a “particularly appropriate *daimon*” for writers who “find themselves compelled to look back to their ancestral country of origin, and also ahead to the possibilities of their actual homeland, Canada” (15). In a sense, Kulyk Keefer’s argument is one of semantics because, as she points out, transculturalism is not a new phenomenon in Canada. Gesturing toward the works of such writers as Pier Giorgio di Cicco, Joy Kogawa, SKY Lee, Myrna Kostash, Austin Clarke, and Michael Ondaatje, Kulyk Keefer argues that transcultural writing has become a “well-established and perhaps a premiere literary tradition in Canada” (16). What she calls for is less a shift in ethnic minority writing itself than a shift in the critical discourse surrounding this writing, and, more generally, a

shift in thinking about the Canadian nation. In keeping with Ven Begamudré's notion that while multiculturalism "seeks to preserve and succeeds in paralyzing cultures," transculturalism "brings out the dynamic potential of cultural diversity, the possibility of exchange and change among and within ethnocultural groups" (14), Kulyk Keefer proposes a "change in Canadian iconography" from the mosaic (multicultural) model of nationhood to a kaleidoscope (transcultural) model. As a metaphor for transculturalism, the kaleidoscope "suggests ongoing process rather than fixed and finished product" (16); it reflects the continual, fluid exchange of culture both within and between different nations. Whereas the mosaic promotes cultural "separation and rigidity," the kaleidoscope emphasizes "interconnection, mobility, and transformation" (16).

Kulyk Keefer's thinking about transculturalism is neither singular nor anomalous among ethnic minority literary scholars. She belongs to a growing group of intellectuals, both within and beyond Canada, who, beginning in the 1990s, have become increasingly attentive to forms of cultural production that transcend national borders. Though their work centres on different diasporic groups (Latino, East Asian, South Asian, African), such scholars and intellectuals as Smaro Kamboureli, Rey Chow, Sneja Gunew, Ien Ang, Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan, Amy Kaminsky, and Pico Iyer have in common the desire to explore the ways in which writers negotiate their hybrid identities within and between local and global spaces.¹³⁵ But with few exceptions (Smaro Kamboureli and Sneja

¹³⁵ See, for example, Smaro Kamboureli's *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada* (2000); Rey Chow's *Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies* (1993); Ien Ang's *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West* (2001); Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan's *Diasporic Mediations: Between Home and Location* (1996); Amy Kaminsky's *After Exile: Writing the Latin American Diaspora* (1999); and Pico Iyer's *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls and the Search for Home* (2000) and *Imagining Canada: An Outsider's Hope for a Global Future* (2001). Sneja Gunew (with Margery Fee) is currently working on *Diaspora, Indigeneity, Ethnicity: The Multiculturalism of Postcolonialisms in Contemporary Canada and Australia*; she is also involved in an

Gunew come to mind), much of the work that has been done on transcultural or diasporic writing focuses on “racial” minority groups.¹³⁶ Insofar as Kulyk Keefer offers a new strategy for reading *ethnic* minority writing, then—a strategy that places emphasis on the movement (either real or imagined) of ethnic minority groups between their ancestral homelands and their adopted country, rather than on their experiences in Canada—her essay is somewhat exceptional (especially for its time). Indeed, as Daphne Winland argues, in ““Our Home and Native Land”?: Canadian Ethnic Scholarship and the Challenge of Transnationalism” (1998), the dominant view of ethnic minorities is that “an immigrant simply uproots from her country of origin to settle in a new land” (557); as a result, “Canadian studies have, by and large, overlooked those factors that enmesh ethnic groups in global processes, and have focused instead mainly on the internal dynamics of ethnic communities and intergroup relations” (562). Referring to the work of such sociologists as Wsevolod Isajiw and Leo Driedger (whose studies I discuss in Chapter Three), Winland suggests that “[a]pproaches to the issue of ethnic identity are usually framed by pluralist frameworks that routinely stress the cultural vitality and contributions of immigrant/minority groups in a multicultural society” (563). Ethnic minority scholars often rely upon a definition of community that is static and homogeneous; their studies “concentrate largely on familiar themes of ethnic

international project on transculturalism sponsored by the International Council for Canadian Studies (ICCS).

¹³⁶ I make the distinction here (as I have throughout this book) between “racial” and “ethnic” minority groups. Conscious of the possibility that such a distinction might perpetuate a rigid binary division between “white” and “non-white” groups, I acknowledge that many scholars whose work centres on diasporic or transcultural writing attempt to deconstruct this binary by exploring hybrid or “mixed race” subjectivities. What I want to emphasize, however, is that these scholars tend to focus on “racialized” minorities (including East Asian, South Asia, African, Caribbean, and First Nations groups), overlooking or under-emphasizing the diasporic or transcultural nature of “white” ethnic minorities (such as Ukrainian Canadians).

persistence/retention and incorporation” (563). And the underlying assumption of most ethnic minority scholars is that all ethnic immigrants eventually undergo assimilation in their new country: immigrants’ experiences are characterized by a shift “from culturally coherent and homogeneous settings in the country/region of origin, to the host country, where [they] either assimilate to the dominant way of life or selectively appropriate new patterns and symbols in efforts to accommodate to their next context” (563). According to Winland, “few ethnic researchers have investigated the powerful attachment of homeland ties for ethnic group identities in Canada” (562). Despite the “plethora of both historical and contemporary Canadian examples of sentimental, political, or material links between immigrant groups and homelands,” she writes, “there has been little if any systematic effort to problematize this dimension of ethnic group experience” (564). In other words, by focusing on the experiences of ethnic minority groups in Canada, scholars have tended to ignore the extent to which (the ways in which, and the reasons for which) these groups remain connected, literally or figuratively, to their ancestral homelands.

Of course, as Kulyk Keefer suggests, literary scholars have good reason for making Canada the locus of their work on ethnic minority literatures. Most ethnic minority writing, she argues, falls into three categories—“Getting There” (accounts of immigration), “Being Here” (literature of “acculturation and accommodation”) and “Turning Back” (narratives about return to the homeland)—two of which privilege immigrants’ (and their descendants’) host country over their country of origin (“From Mosaic to Kaleidoscope” 16). Careful to point out that “the enormous upheaval involved in changing cultures is not something that can be ‘worked out’ in one generation,” Kulyk

Keefe notes that the three themes she identifies as dominant within ethnic minority literatures are “often conflated in literary texts” (16). Nonetheless, if critics tend to under-emphasize the relation between ethnic minority groups and their ethnic homelands, they do so, at least in part, because ethnic minority writers often foreground their characters’ experiences “here” rather than “there.” Certainly the development of literature by Canadians of Ukrainian descent, from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century, attests to the extent to which Ukrainian Canadian writers have been preoccupied with their ethnic group’s history in Canada. In what Winland calls the “increasingly globalized world” (557) of the late twentieth century—a world characterized by the “deterritorialization of the borders and boundaries of nations” (556)—many Ukrainian Canadian writers continue to focus their texts on the experiences of Ukrainian immigrants and their descendants in Canada. Much like Illia Kiriak’s *Sons of the Soil* (1939-45) and Vera Lysenko’s *Yellow Boots* (1954), a number of works published by Ukrainian Canadian writers after 1985 are historical narratives that sentimentalize or romanticize the bygone days of early immigration and settlement. Novelists Yuri Kupchenko (*The Horseman of Shandro Crossing*, 1989), Gloria Kupchenko Frolick (*The Chicken Man*, 1989; *Anna Veryna*, 1992), and Larry Warwaruk (*The Ukrainian Wedding*, 1998) all revisit the pioneer past with an underlying, but unmistakable, sense of nostalgia for (what they see as) a simpler time and place, as well as a nobler way of life. Kupchenko Frolick’s collection of short fiction, *The Green Tomato Years* (1985), and Ted Galay’s play *Tsymbaly!* (1987) are similarly sentimental in their portrayals of first-wave immigrants’ experiences in Canada.

Interestingly—and, I think, quite astutely—Sonia Mycak, in “‘A Different Story’ by Helen Potrebenko: The Prairie-Pioneer Myth Re-Visited” (1996), sees these relatively recent Ukrainian Canadian texts as “part of an entire genre of Ukrainian-Canadian pioneer stories” (68). Central to the genre, she argues, is the “readily identifiable” prairie pioneer myth that finds its roots in the multicultural milieu of the 1960s and 1970s (68). Mycak goes on to list no less than seven “significant and identifiable aspects” of the prairie pioneer myth. The myth, she says, is built upon (1) the “undeniable hardship” that Ukrainian pioneers endured, and (2) the “toil, blood, and sweat” they invested in their homesteads. The Ukrainian farmer, specifically, is (3) “imbued with a certain nobility of character: he is “stoical, hard-working, honest, trustworthy, and morally upright, albeit at times mischievous and decidedly rough around the edges.” And Ukrainian pioneers, more generally, are (4) “presented as being responsible not only for the future generations of their own off-spring, but for helping to build a strong and healthy country from which all Canadians now benefit.” Central to the prairie pioneer myth is the depiction of Ukrainian immigrants as a “founding people of the Canadian nation.” Frequently, in writing about Ukrainian pioneers, writers rely on (5) “biographical material and alleged socio-historical truth” with the “conscious aim of documenting the history of a particular area or era in the history of Canada”: they are encouraged to do so by (6) the “multicultural ethic” and their goal, in part, is to provide (7) “positive models with which today’s Ukrainian-Canadians can identify” (68-9). To my list of literary texts that focus on the pioneer era of Ukrainian Canadian history, Mycak adds several titles: Susan Woywitka and Randy Mueller’s play *Kyla’s Christmas Concert*, for example (performed

in Edmonton, 1994); Danny Evanishen's short stories collected in *Vuiko Yurko* (1994); and Yar Slavutych's bilingual poetry collected in *The Conquerors of the Prairies* (1984).

By identifying the ways in which the prairie pioneer myth circulates—not only in literary texts but also in Ukrainian Canadian “scholarship, media, official material, and cultural artifacts” (69)—Mycak draws attention to the ways in which a particular narrative of Ukrainian Canadian history has become dominant within Ukrainian Canadian communities.¹³⁷ The myth is predicated on, and perpetuates, a narrative of progress that constructs Ukrainian immigrants and their children as innately amenable to hard work; as willing to assimilate, in part, to Canadian culture while retaining some aspects of their ethnic identity; and as successful, ultimately, in ascending the social and economic hierarchies of the multicultural society they helped build. In her reading, then, of Helen Potrebenko's “A Different Story” (from *Hey Waitress and Other Stories*, 1989), Mycak outlines the ways in which Potrebenko tries to rewrite this narrative of Ukrainian Canadian history. Like such writers as Maara Haas, George Ryga, and Andrew Suknaski, Potrebenko attempts to subvert the prairie pioneer myth by exploring the complex and uneasy aspects of Ukrainian Canadian history. While, Mycak argues, “A Different Story” incorporates many of the “significant and identifiable aspects” (68) of the prairie pioneer myth, the text “functions as a parody of the myth of the glorified pioneer” (71). According to Mycak, Potrebenko's satirical approach to narrating the experiences of Ukrainian Canadian pioneers undermines the “stereotypes” and the

¹³⁷ Mycak points to several “tangible” and “quite public” examples of the ways in which the prairie pioneer myth circulates within Ukrainian Canadian communities (70). She suggests that the myth is perpetuated by historical studies of Ukrainians in Canada, such as Michael Marunchak's *The Ukrainian Canadians: A History* (1982); by films such as *Legacy to a New Land: A Celebration of Ukrainian Settlement in the West* (produced by the National Film Board of Canada in 1991); and by museums such as the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village. Mycak also gestures toward the “striking range of souvenirs and paraphernalia which has been produced, which image the pioneer as a kind of cultural icon” (70).

“syrupy nostalgia” of the prairie pioneer myth by foregrounding the darker sides of Ukrainian Canadian history (82). “A Different Story” criticizes the “capitalist exploitation of farmers, labourers, and immigrants alike” as well as the “subordinate position of Ukrainian women” within the patriarchal structures of Ukrainian Canadian communities (82). The problem with Potrebenko’s story is that, even as the text exposes the harsh realities of Ukrainian pioneers’ experiences, it simultaneously reaffirms the centrality of the pioneer era in the Ukrainian Canadian imaginary. And the problem with Mycak’s reading of “A Different Story” is that, in heralding the text as a provocative re-telling of and successful challenge to the hackneyed prairie pioneer myth, Mycak fails to consider the possibility that Potrebenko’s criticisms of the pioneer era are themselves hackneyed. By the late 1980s, and in the wake of such texts as Potrebenko’s *No Streets of Gold* and Myrna Kostash’s *All of Baba’s Children* (not to mention Maara Haas’s *The Street Where I Live*, George Ryga’s *A Letter to My Son*, and Andrew Suknaski’s poetry), Potrebenko’s interest in exploring the negative aspects of Ukrainian Canadian history seems less provocative than predictable.

Beginning in the 1990s, in theme and form, the more interesting developments in Ukrainian Canadian literature—and the more successful challenges to the prairie pioneer myth—come from those authors who, to use Kulyk Keefer’s terminology, write about “Turning Back” to their ancestral homeland. In fact, although Kulyk Keefer makes only passing reference to Ukrainian Canadian literature in “From Mosaic to Kaleidoscope”¹³⁸—and although she explicitly calls for literary *scholars* to emphasize the transcultural, rather than the multicultural, nature of ethnic minority writing in Canada—

¹³⁸ Kulyk Keefer includes Myrna Kostash in her list of “Janus-faced” transcultural writers (15). This is her only direct reference to Ukrainian Canadian literature in “Mosaic to Kaleidoscope.”

she also, albeit implicitly, argues as a Ukrainian Canadian *writer* for a shift in the Ukrainian Canadian literary tradition. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, in the years following the appearance of “From Mosaic to Kaleidoscope” in *Books in Canada*, Kulyk Keefer began to explore her own “Turning Back” experiences as the daughter of Ukrainian immigrants. In her novel *The Green Library* (1996) and in her family history *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family* (1998), Kulyk Keefer narrates her belated interest in, and rediscovery of, her ethnic roots as she writes about her journeys to the “Old Place” from which her family immigrated. In several essays, moreover, and in her introduction to *Two Lands, New Visions: Stories From Canada and Ukraine* (co-edited with Solomea Pavlychko, 1998), Kulyk Keefer continues to make the case for transcultural approaches to the writing and study of ethnic minority literature.¹³⁹ Kulyk Keefer, however, is neither the first nor the only Ukrainian Canadian writer to travel “back” to Ukraine (“back,” that is, for the first time to the country she heard about from her parents while growing up in Canada). Myrna Kostash, in *Bloodlines: A Journey Into Eastern Europe* (1993) and *The Doomed Bridegroom: A Memoir* (1998), also returns to Ukraine in order to explore the meaning of her ethnic and national identity as a third-generation Ukrainian Canadian. In fact, *Bloodlines* and *The Doomed Bridegroom* narrate Kostash’s long-term engagement with the politics and the people of not only Ukraine but also other countries in Eastern and Central Europe (including Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, and Greece).

Why, exactly, do Kulyk Keefer and Kostash travel to Ukraine (and, in Kostash’s case, throughout Eastern and Central Europe)? Why do they feel the need to write about

¹³⁹ See, for example, these essays by Kulyk Keefer: “‘Coming Across Bones’: Historiographic Ethnofiction” (1995); “From Dialogue to Polylogue: Canadian Transcultural Writing During the Deluge,” (1996); “Home Comings/Border Crossings: Travels Through Imagined and Actual Worlds” (1999); and “Personal and Public Records: Story and History in the Narration of Ethnicity” (2000).

their travels? How are their journeys, and their writing about these journeys, similar? How are they different? Broadly speaking, Kulyk Keefer and Kostash have in common the desire to understand their connection to the fraught territory—at once real and imagined—of Ukraine. In the process of writing, both writers grapple with their nostalgic feelings toward a country that is, and is not, their own. But what narrative strategies do they use to bridge the gaps between fact and fiction, here and there, the present and the past? How successful are they in re-imagining their sense of self, community, history, and home? In what ways, and to what extent, does their transcultural writing push Ukrainian Canadian literature—and, more generally, Canadian literature—in new directions?

Chapter Overview

In this chapter, I undertake close readings of Janice Kulyk Keefer's *The Green Library* and *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family*, and Myrna Kostash's *Bloodlines: A Journey Into Eastern Europe* and *The Doomed Bridegroom: A Memoir*, four texts that focus less on Canada than on Ukraine as the country to which Ukrainian Canadians might (re)turn in order to arrive at a new understanding of their ethnicity. I claim that, for Kulyk Keefer and Kostash, as for Maara Haas, George Ryga, and Andrew Suknaski, the process of writing about, and coming to terms with, their ethnic and national identities has much to do with their relation to history and place. But whereas Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski explore in their writing the history of Ukrainians in Canada, and while they search for appropriate languages and genres in which to express their sense of belonging to the Canadian prairie landscape, Kulyk Keefer and Kostash look further back (both

geographically and temporally) to the complex social, economic, and political contexts of the Old Country from which their families immigrated. In part, I argue, both writers are motivated to return to, and write about, Ukraine by relatively recent sociopolitical developments in Eastern Europe; before discussing their texts, then, I provide a brief overview of the historical context out of which these texts emerged. Specifically, I draw attention to the dramatic changes that took place in Eastern Europe during the late 1980s and early 1990s, opening former Eastern bloc countries such as Ukraine to the rest of the world and making travel to such countries more common (though not necessarily easier). Prior to the breakdown of the Soviet Union and the independence of Ukraine, contact between Ukrainians and Ukrainian Canadians was hardly unheard of.¹⁴⁰ But with the dismantling of the Soviet Union, the movement of Ukrainian Canadians back to Ukraine (and, more generally, the movement of Canadians of Eastern European descent back to their countries of origins) significantly increased. The proliferation of literary texts published in the 1990s by first-, second-, and third-generation ethnic Canadians who write about their journeys “home” attests to the popularity of traveling to and within Eastern Europe (and writing about the experience). And the development, more specifically, of numerous joint Canada/Ukraine projects within Ukrainian Canadian studies programs suggests that recent social and political changes in Eastern Europe have opened the way for networks of cross-cultural exchange between Ukrainian and

¹⁴⁰ Kostash visited Ukraine in 1984, 1988, and 1991 (before and during Ukraine’s transition to independence), illustrating that travel to the country was not impossible while it was under Soviet rule. Several of my relatives (including my father’s mother in the mid-1960s) also traveled to Ukraine prior to independence. As Kostash makes clear in *Bloodlines*, of course, the movement of foreigners within Soviet Ukraine was tightly monitored and controlled by governmental authorities. But, as she mentioned to me in a conversation we had (during the summer of 2000), traveling in Ukraine was no easier after the Soviet Union collapsed. Kostash talked about food and petrol shortages, poor road conditions, and lingering restrictions on where foreigners were permitted to lodge.

Ukrainian Canadian scholars. Part of the worldwide phenomena involved in globalization, however, the newly-opened borders of Eastern Europe seem to have had more positive consequences for individuals and institutions in the West. Ideally, globalization promises dynamic cultural and social interactions between individuals from different nations: realistically, however, in the context of post-communist Eastern Europe, its benefits are more keenly felt by individuals from more developed nations who have the economic and cultural capital necessary to travel to, and make connections with, the developing world of Eastern Europe. What I want to keep in mind, as I look closely at Kulyk Keefer's and Kostash's texts, is that these writers—despite their emotional ties to Ukraine—travel as Canadians. How do they come to terms with their actual status as foreigners within their imagined homeland?¹⁴¹

Following my overview of the changes that took place in Eastern Europe during the 1990s, I turn my attention to Kulyk Keefer's writing about her travels to Eastern Europe, beginning with *The Green Library*, a novel that Kulyk Keefer wrote after her first trip to Ukraine in 1993. Loosely autobiographical in its exploration of one Toronto woman's (Eva Chown's) discovery, at the age of forty-three, that she is of Ukrainian descent, *The Green Library* fictionalizes Kulyk Keefer's own rediscovery of, and renewed interest in, her ethnic heritage. A quest narrative, the novel centres on Eva's attempts to piece together the details of her family history. Over the course of the novel, she finds herself traveling to Kiev in search of the truth about her Ukrainian father and

¹⁴¹ Later in this chapter, I discuss at greater length the extent to which Kulyk Keefer idealizes transculturalism, under-emphasizing the fact that globalization has had devastating effects on individuals living in Eastern Europe. My argument is that, whereas Kostash is conscious of her privilege as a Canadian traveler, and while she comes to realize that this privilege prevents her from making real her imagined sense of belonging to Eastern Europe, Kulyk Keefer never fully confronts the ways in which her Canadian citizenship creates an unbridgeable gap between her and her family members in Ukraine. Her argument—

grandparents—who they were, how they lived, what they experienced during and after the Second World War in both Ukraine and Canada. Certainly the narrative structure of the novel mirrors Eva's struggle to make sense of her past: *The Green Library* comprises multiple characters whose inter-related stories are narrated from multiple points of view. For much of the novel, readers (like Eva herself) are disoriented by the introduction of new, unidentified voices as Eva's family story is pushed in unexpected directions. Insofar as Kulyk Keefer explores the ways in which history is recorded, historiography becomes a central theme in the text. The problem with the novel, however, is that it offers two contradictory perspectives on the relation between history and historiography. On the one hand, Kulyk Keefer seems to question the notion that individuals can fully uncover (or recover) the truth about the past. Both thematically and formally, after all, *The Green Library* illustrates that history is a complex puzzle, the pieces of which rarely fit together because they are crafted by different people with different agendas. But while Eva never learns the full truth of her history, her son does. (And Kulyk Keefer's readers are also left with a seamless reconstruction of Eva's family history.) In the conclusion to her novel, Kulyk Keefer leaves no questions unanswered, no mysteries unsolved. She seems to suggest that second- and third-generation Ukrainian Canadians need not be troubled by their detachment from their ethnic homeland. Reaffirming conventional assumptions about the ways in which ethnic identity is defined, she illustrates that, just as ethnicity is passed on through bloodlines, so too is history.

Picking up on many of the dominant themes in *The Green Library*, *Honey and Ashes* also confronts the complexities of family history. More overtly (auto)biographical

that she is connected to Ukraine by blood—seems to me too easy and too convenient because it excuses her from acknowledging, and grappling with, the reality of her detachment from the country and its people.

and historiographical than *The Green Library*, *Honey and Ashes* focuses on Kulyk Keefer's family: her maternal grandparents, her mother, and her mother's sister, second-wave immigrants from Ukraine who settled in Toronto during the late 1930s. In seeking to understand the hardships and joys her family experienced in both Ukraine and Canada, Kulyk Keefer relies upon numerous sources: personal, family stories that she heard while she was growing up in Toronto; official documents related to her family's experiences; and scholarly studies of Ukrainian and Ukrainian Canadian history. She also, importantly, draws upon her first-hand observations of Staromischyna, the village (then part of Poland, now part of Ukraine) from which her family immigrated. A substantial portion of *Honey and Ashes* is devoted to narrating Kulyk Keefer's return to Ukraine in 1997. Not unlike *The Green Library*, *Honey and Ashes* foregrounds the complex, often uneasy, aspects of Ukrainian and Ukrainian Canadian history (the historical tensions, most notably, between Ukrainians and Jews). Indeed, both texts argue that, in order to understand the meaning of their ethnic identity, second- and third-generation Ukrainian Canadians must come to terms with the positive and negative aspects of their ethnic group's past. Both texts illustrate, too, that history is a puzzle, the pieces of which must be first retrieved from memory or from the official public record, and then reordered to form a complete narrative. Can all the pieces be retrieved? And does the puzzle, once put together, tell the "truth" about the past? Unlike *The Green Library*, *Honey and Ashes* draws attention to the inherent gaps between individuals' actual, lived experiences and representations of these experiences (in the form of oral narratives or written documents). Kulyk Keefer can neither answer all of the questions nor solve all of the mysteries around which her text is structured. Why, then, does the conclusion to *Honey and Ashes* leave

readers with a sense of resolution—as though Kulyk Keefer has in fact succeeded in her quest to uncover the truth about her family history? My argument is that, because she takes for granted her blood connections to her family’s past and to Ukraine—and because she simultaneously takes for granted the fact that she can maintain these connections without giving up the material comforts of her life in Canada—*Honey and Ashes* necessarily ends happily. Less a challenge to, than an affirmation of, conventional assumptions about the ways in which ethnicity is defined, this text, like *The Green Library*, again underscores the notion that ethnic identity is passed on by blood.

Shifting my focus from *The Green Library* and *Honey and Ashes* to *Bloodlines* and *The Doomed Bridegroom*, I argue that Kulyk Keefer and Kostash have less in common than meets the eye—not only in their approaches to writing about Ukraine, but also in their reasons for traveling to Ukraine, and for engaging with the historical and contemporary realities of the country. Both writers believe that second- and third-generation Ukrainian Canadians must confront their history, the roots of which extend back to Ukraine, if they are to understand the meaning of their ethnicity.

Unlike Kulyk Keefer, however, who travels to Ukraine (twice) in order to gain a better understanding of her family history, Kostash makes numerous journeys to Ukraine, Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Greece, and she has multiple reasons for visiting these countries. In fact, as Kostash states in her introduction to *Bloodlines*, her motivations and plans for traveling to Eastern Europe constantly changed while she was “in transit.” So while Kulyk Keefer’s clear sense of purpose vis-à-vis Ukraine comes across in the tightly-controlled structures of both *The Green Library* and *Honey and Ashes*, Kostash’s exploratory approach to traveling in Eastern and Central Europe is

mirrored by her more experimental form of writing. That, over the course of writing *Bloodlines* and *The Doomed Bridegroom*, Kostash increasingly blurs the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction is unsurprising because, unlike Kulyk Keefer, she is concerned with radically challenging the ways in which history is written, community constructed, and identity defined. Interestingly, neither Kulyk Keefer's heroine in *The Green Library* nor Kulyk Keefer herself in *Honey and Ashes* questions the assumption that she will travel to—and then away from—Ukraine: both texts conclude with the second-generation Ukrainian Canadian's return to the comfort and stability of her life in Canada. Kostash, by contrast, refuses to narrate her actual return to Canada. Her writing becomes an imaginative space in which she remains, textually, within the borders of Eastern Europe by choosing not to script her departure from this part of the world.

I begin my discussion of Kostash's writing with *Bloodlines*, a text that narrates her attempts to travel through Eastern Europe as a journalist, a relatively detached observer of the social, economic, and political realities of Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Ukraine. From the outset of her travels, however, and from the outset of the text, Kostash's objectivity and impartiality are undermined by her emotional investments in Eastern Europe, as well as her political allegiances to various individuals and groups in Eastern Europe. In part, Kostash travels as a third-generation Ukrainian Canadian,¹⁴² in search of the country from which her grandparents immigrated at the turn of the century. At the same time, she travels as a New Leftist socialist and a feminist (an

¹⁴² Throughout this book, I have referred to Ukrainian immigrants (such as Kostash's grandparents) as first-generation Ukrainian Canadians, their children as second-generation Ukrainian Canadians, and their grandchildren as third-generation Ukrainian Canadians. Kostash's nomenclature is slightly different. She refers to her parents (the first generation born in Canada) as first-generation Ukrainian Canadians, and herself as a second-generation Ukrainian Canadian (*Bloodlines* 2).

“alumna of the 60s” [2]), keen on meeting with leftist political activists throughout Eastern and Central Europe, and eager to learn about their experiences in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. And she travels, perhaps most importantly, as a writer who is not content simply to witness and document social change in the countries that she visits but who is, rather, determined to befriend dissident artists and writers, and to gain an intimate understanding of the ways in which their lives have been shaped by the shifting economic, political, and social realities of their time and place. That she returns again and again to Eastern Europe is important: unlike Kulyk Keefer (who makes brief contact primarily with family members), Kostash makes numerous visits to her friends and colleagues in Eastern Europe (most of whom are not related to her by blood). Simply put, she wants to become part of their communities. And so, despite its title, *Bloodlines* is shaped by Kostash’s desire to challenge the assumption that her connection to Eastern Europe is defined by blood. But insofar as *Bloodlines* is characterized by unsettling discoveries and unresolved tensions—insofar as the text raises more questions than it answers—it illustrates that Kostash’s struggle to redefine her relation to Eastern Europe is an ongoing, uneasy process. The open-ended conclusion to the text suggests that her engagement with Eastern Europe has only just begun.

Not surprisingly, in *The Doomed Bridegroom* Kostash revisits the subject matter of *Bloodlines*—though from a somewhat different perspective, and with a slightly different set of objectives. A more candid and personal exploration of her career-long infatuation with Eastern and Central Europe, *The Doomed Bridegroom* sheds new light on the reasons for which Kostash is drawn to these “other” parts of the world. Focused

on Kostash's relationships with six "rebel men" over the course of three decades, the text reveals an important (but hitherto unexamined) dimension of her identity: her sexuality. As she explores the ways in which her romantic and sexual relationships (at once real and imagined; both within and beyond the borders of Canada) have influenced her coming of age as a Ukrainian Canadian, a New Leftist socialist, a feminist, and a writer, Kostash confronts the nature of her attraction to men who are married to history, to their political causes, and, at times, to other women—but never to her. Less real than imagined, her "bridegrooms" are romanticized and eroticized "others": her desire to become involved with them is inextricably linked with her desire to become a part of their fraught worlds. By attempting to establish lasting relationships with her lovers (relationships that often transcend national borders and ethnic allegiances), she seeks to redefine her sense of identity and community. Importantly, however, all of Kostash's love affairs come to an end because she is doomed to play the role of the mistress, the girlfriend, the comrade, or the lover—but never the wife. *The Doomed Bridegroom* becomes, then, the story of the "doomed bride" who struggles to come to terms with her conscious decision to "never marry" (163). Yet, despite the doomed nature of her love affairs, Kostash ultimately succeeds in arriving at a new understanding of her self and her relationships with others: in the process of writing, after all, she becomes a mother figure whose legacy to future generations of writers in and beyond Canada can be found in the creative non-fiction she writes. Indeed, Kostash may appear to focus her memoir on the past, but the future is a central, if implicit, concern for her. Whereas Kulyk Keefer, who sees herself as a link between generations, never doubts her blood ties to the past as well as the future, Kostash, in choosing to neither marry nor bear children, must find a new way to connect

with past and future generations—and her awareness of her identity, and her abilities, as a writer becomes the key to her success in doing so.

Ultimately, while Kulyk Keefer and Kostash both set out to redefine their sense of self, community, and home by returning to Eastern Europe and by exploring the possibilities of transnational cultural and social exchange, their writing reveals that transculturalism is less a real than an imagined paradigm for individual- and group-identity formation. Kulyk Keefer's attempts to re-imagine her relation to the "Old Place" fail precisely because, in the process of writing about her experiences in Ukraine, she is unwilling to test the limits of non-fiction by developing creative new strategies for exploring her ethnic roots. In narrating the "true" story of her brief travels to Ukraine—and her eventual return to the security and comfort of her home in Canada—she reaffirms the conventional, and convenient, assumption that ethnic identity is defined by blood; and, in doing so, she implicitly demonstrates that she is unwilling to abandon the privileges of middle-class Canadian life in order to develop lasting ties to Ukraine. Kulyk Keefer's writing is marked by tension between her insistence that she feels suspended between two homes, and her simultaneous refusal—even in the imagined space of her texts—to give up her Canadian home. Kostash, by contrast, takes numerous trips to Eastern Europe, trying again and again to make real her sense of belonging to this "other" world. Like Kulyk Keefer, she too cannot escape her outsider status vis-à-vis the people she meets. But, unlike Kulyk Keefer, Kostash confronts the limitations of non-fiction in narrating her sense of herself as a transcultural subject, suspended between Canada and the "other" world of Eastern Europe; between the past and the present. Over the course of *Bloodlines* and *The Doomed Bridegroom*, Kostash comes to accept that her

ties to Eastern Europe are less real than imagined. Yet by turning to creative non-fiction—by recognizing that the “true” story of her feelings toward the people, politics, and history of Eastern Europe can only be told, paradoxically, through the blurring of reality and fantasy—she at once acknowledges and transcends national borders and family bloodlines as she re-imagines her sense of self and community. Home, for her, means being at home with her identity as a writer who is able to use language as a tool for rewriting history and her relation to it.

The Changing Face of Eastern Europe

In the late 1980s, following Mikhail Gorbachev’s appointment as President of the USSR, dramatic changes began to take place throughout Eastern Europe, changes that would significantly alter not only the existing political, economic, and social structures within Eastern bloc countries but also the tense relations between these countries and the rest of the world. The notion that I can summarize these changes in a few short pages is, of course, absurd: I am talking, after all, about multiple nations (including Ukraine, Poland, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Estonia, and Lithuania) with histories as complex as they are long. A comprehensive discussion of the collapse of the Soviet Union would require, first, an overview of its rise (the reasons for which and ways in which communism swept Eastern Europe during the first half of the twentieth century) as well as an analysis of the effects that communism had on individuals and groups living both within and outside the borders of Eastern Europe. I would need to explain the origins and development of Cold War tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States; the aims and activities of multiple resistance movements (based in and beyond

Eastern Europe) that sought to challenge totalitarian governments within various Soviet states; and the very different kinds of economic, social, and political reforms that were implemented in each former Soviet state after the USSR was dismantled. In short, an exhaustive analysis of Eastern European history and politics, both pre- and post-communism, is impossible for me to undertake here, in this introductory portion of my chapter on Janice Kulyk Keefer's and Myrna Kostash's writing about Eastern Europe (indeed, as Kulyk Keefer, Kostash, and numerous historians and political scientists implicitly make clear, even book-length studies cannot fully address the encyclopedic array of events and issues that have shaped, and continue to shape, the fraught terrain of Eastern Europe). What I offer, then, is a brief outline of the myriad changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe since the late 1980s, followed by an overview of the complex questions and problems that arise in discussions of the "new" Eastern Europe.¹⁴³

The beginnings of the end of the Soviet Union can be traced back to 1986, the year in which Gorbachev, the newly-appointed leader of the USSR,¹⁴⁴ announced his policies of "glasnost" and "perestroika." ("Glasnost" has become shorthand for Gorbachev's cultural and social policies of "openness," characterized by his willingness to acknowledge and discuss past and present problems in the country. "Perestroika," roughly translated as "reform," refers to the economic and social policies he implemented in an attempt to transform the centrally-controlled command economy of the USSR to a decentralized market economy.) Over the next few years, state control over the

¹⁴³ Kulyk Keefer and Kostash (in *Honey and Ashes* and *Bloodlines*, respectively) provide extensive bibliographies of scholarly material related to the history and politics of Eastern Europe. I consulted several online sources, however, including BRAMA Gateway Ukraine (<http://www.brama.com>), Infoukes (<http://www.infoukes.com>), and the Encyclopedia Britannica (<http://www.britannica.com>) for general information about the dismantling of the Soviet Union.

¹⁴⁴ In March, 1985, Gorbachev became General Secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee.

economic, social, and political institutions of the USSR gradually decreased as the Gorbachev government began to allow elections to take place, and to introduce freedoms of press, speech, and assembly. Without a doubt, Gorbachev's initiatives promised democratic reform and increased economic prosperity, accompanied by unprecedented openness in social, political, and cultural spheres. And, at least from the perspective of individuals living outside of Eastern Europe, Gorbachev seems to have succeeded in bringing about positive social change in this part of the world.¹⁴⁵ By the time he resigned from the leadership of the Soviet Union, in 1991, Soviet-style communist rule had come to an end: the Berlin Wall had come down (in 1989); the Warsaw Pact was dissolved (in 1991); and the Cold War was drawing to a close. Most importantly, perhaps, the Soviet Union itself had collapsed under the pressure of independence movements in virtually all of its member states (although, in 1991, eleven of these states joined together to form the Commonwealth of Independence States, they did so as sovereign nations¹⁴⁶). For the first time in decades, the borders of Eastern Europe were open to economic trade and cultural exchange with the rest of the world, and people living within these borders were able to take an active role in determining the future of their nations. A period of radical reform and restructuring, the last decade of the twentieth century signaled the dawn of a new, if yet unformed, era in the history of Eastern Europe.

¹⁴⁵ Gorbachev won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990 for his role in effecting positive social change in Eastern Europe.

¹⁴⁶ Eleven states formed the Commonwealth of Independent States in December, 1991: the Azerbaijan Republic, the Republic of Armenia, the Republic of Belarus, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan, the Republic of Uzbekistan, and Ukraine. In December, 1993, Georgia joined the CIS.

In 2002, eight Eastern European countries were approved for entry into the European Union. The Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Slovak Republic, and Slovenia will join the EU in May, 2004.

The problem, of course, with this “macro” view of Eastern European history is that it over-simplifies—and, to a large extent, idealizes—the changes that took place during the late 1980s and early 1990s by reading the fall of communism¹⁴⁷ and the rise of democracy as the triumph of “good” over “evil” in Eastern Europe. On the one hand, the collapse of communism meant that countless political prisoners were freed and that some were able to take on leadership roles in their nations (following the “Velvet Revolution,” in 1989, Vaclav Havel became president of Czechoslovakia, and Solidarity leader Lech Walesa was elected president of Poland in 1991). Artists, writers, and intellectuals were able to express their political and social views openly, without fear of recrimination; and ordinary people were given a voice in democratic elections, as well as new opportunities for social and economic advancement. But the people of Eastern Europe paid, and continue to pay, a high price for the promise of economic, social, and political freedom. Economic hardship, social upheaval, and political unrest have characterized many Eastern European societies since the late 1980s as newly-independent nations scrambled to establish new systems of government and to reform existing economic infrastructures. Beginning in 1989, a series of violent street demonstrations and strikes took place in Czechoslovakia, Romania, Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania. At times, conflict erupted between the Soviet army and pro-independence groups (this was the case in Lithuania, where, in 1991, Soviet troops killed fourteen people who were peacefully demonstrating against Soviet control of the country) or between communist regimes and pro-democracy agitators (in 1989, for example, the Romanian army staged an uprising against Nicolae

¹⁴⁷ I use the phrases “fall of communism” and “collapse of communism” throughout this chapter as shorthand for the specific changes that took place in Eastern Europe during the late 1980s and early 1990s, acknowledging that communism (as a political theory and a political practice) has not disappeared. Cuba, China, and North Korea are communist states.

Ceausescu, dictatorial leader of Romania for almost twenty-five years; the uprising culminated with the trial and execution of Ceausescu and his wife Elena in December, 1989). At times, too, in the vacuum of power left by the retreat of Soviet troops and the collapse of communist governments, violence broke out between groups vying for territory within (or control over) former communist states. In the Balkans, most notably, ethnic tensions between Serbians, Bosnians, Croatians, Albanians, Macedonians, and Slovenians escalated into a full-scale, decade-long war (a war in which NATO countries have repeatedly intervened, sparking debate and controversy about the role of “peacekeepers” in the former Yugoslavia).¹⁴⁸ For many Eastern Europeans, however—even those who have not experienced the war in Yugoslavia—the beginning of a “new era” in Eastern European history has had little positive impact on day-to-day life. Devalued currencies, food shortages, and low wages persist in many former Soviet states, despite moves toward free trade and economic privatization. In these politically and economically unstable societies, widespread unemployment and high crime rates remain constant; a good deal of political power, moreover, rests in the hands of Mafia-style organizations that control strong black market economies.¹⁴⁹

Importantly, the changes that have taken place in Eastern Europe since the 1980s raise a number of broad questions about the ways in which nation-states, and international relations between them, have been reconfigured over the past twenty-odd

¹⁴⁸ See John Allcock’s *Explaining Yugoslavia* (2000); Jasminka Udovicki and James Ridgeway’s *Burn This House: The Making and Unmaking of Yugoslavia* (2000); and Joyce Kaufman’s *NATO and the Former Yugoslavia: Crisis, Conflict, and the Atlantic Alliance* (2002).

¹⁴⁹ The reality of life in Eastern Europe has been brought home to me again and again in conversations that I have had with friends from Russia, Poland, and Serbia—graduate students and university professors who live in small apartments with their parents and/or other family members because their salaries cannot cover basic living expenses. My friends work as private tutors and translators in their spare time in order to supplement their incomes; one friend, who lives in Russia, remarked to me that her parents’ vegetable garden provided much-needed supplements to their diet.

years. Does the collapse of the Soviet Union signal the decline, or the triumph, of the modern nation-state as the politically unifying force of the twentieth century? Does it reflect, or challenge, worldwide trends toward globalization, transnationalism, and transculturalism? While the opening of the borders of Eastern Europe seems to privilege the global over the local (individuals' relation to the world takes precedence over their relation to the nation), the increasing insularity of ethnic communities in Eastern Europe (witness, for example, the fracturing of Yugoslavia in the 1990s) suggests that nationhood and nationalism remain central to the ways in which people define their individual and group identity. According to Masao Miyoshi, in "A Borderless World?: From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State" (1996), the radical changes that took place in Eastern Europe during the 1980s and 1990s (the effects of which are still being felt) are intimately connected with global reconfigurations of power and culture (in other words, the "new" Eastern Europe does signal the demise of the nation-state in an increasingly globalized world). But Miyoshi also suggests that transnational networks of power and culture closely resemble the "historical metropolitan-colonial paradigm" (79). He argues—quite convincingly, I think—that globalization primarily benefits multinational and transnational corporations. Though based in, or headed by individuals from, industrialized nations (such as, for example, the United States, Japan, and countries in Western Europe), these corporations undermine the power of the nation-state. "Against the effective operation of [multinational and transnational corporations]," he says, "the nation-states more and more look undefined and inoperable" (92). While the nation-state "did, and still does, perform certain functions, for which there is as of now no substitute agency" (it, for instance, "defines

citizenship, controls currency, imposes law, protects public health, provides general education, maintains security, and guides the national economy”), transnational corporations are becoming increasingly powerful and influential (in the spheres of economics, politics, and culture) (92). For Miyoshi, the splitting of such countries as the USSR and Yugoslavia into numerous (often ethnically-homogeneous) nations says less about the viability of nationhood and nationalism as a politically unifying force than it does about the “rapidly altering” and “bewilderingly complex” network of transnational power relations. Separatist movements in Eastern Europe (in the Balkans, for example) are “expressions of ethnicism,” he argues, “not nationalism” (92). “As globalization intensifies,” Miyoshi says, “neoethnicism is appealing because of its brute simplicity”: “[i]t is as if the inadequacy of the nation-state is now fully realized, and the provincial strongmen are all trying to grab a piece of real estate for keeps before all is incorporated and appropriated by transnational corporations” (92). Ethnically-based nations that hearken back to tribal-like structures of community become “local” defense mechanisms against the encroachment of the “global.”

Miyoshi’s discussion of globalization and its implications for Eastern Europe is important because it draws attention to the ways in which transculturalism (the phenomenon that Kulyk Keefer uncritically embraces in “From Mosaic to Kaleidoscope”) is predicated on a troublingly uneven network of international economic and political relations. As Max Pensky argues, in his introduction to Jürgen Habermas’s *The Postnational Constellation* (2001), globalization may be a term that has become “indispensable” and “unavoidable” in discussions “from political economy and democracy, law and human rights to cultural controversies over identity and difference”

(vii), but it is a term that seems “destined to provoke only ambiguous reactions” (vii). For some (like Kulyk Keefer), globalization evokes a “utopian vision” of the world, an image of “proliferating interconnections and interrelationship, of better communication between the most far-flung regions of the world, challenging old prejudices and pointing toward a future where the cultural, geographical, and political sources of social conflicts have become antiques” (vii). For others, globalization hints at “the dystopian specter of forced cultural homogenization either by decrees of a centralized administration or by market fiat” (vii). Developing countries, in particular, face the “eradication of the sources of any cultural identities uncondusive to the mandatory, market-drive adaptation to Western-style modes of life” (vii). It is precisely this ambivalence that Eastern Europeans have had to contend with over the past two decades: how to negotiate between the promise of an increasingly inter-connected and inter-related world, and the reality of neo-colonial global hierarchies of power.

In their relatively broad and abstract approaches to the ambivalent phenomenon of globalization, of course, both Miyoshi and Pensky leave unexamined the ways in which individuals are affected by increasingly globalized networks of social and cultural exchange: what impact, specifically, have the changes in Eastern Europe had on relations between individuals living in former Eastern bloc countries and those who have familial and/or cultural ties to these countries? Evidence abounds of the extent to which Canadians of Eastern European descent (including Ukrainian Canadians) have been able to travel back to, and reconnect with, their ethnic homelands following the collapse of communism in the early 1990s. Over the past few years, for example, numerous writers have returned to Eastern Europe and published accounts of their travels. In *Blood and*

Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism (1993), Michael Ignatieff writes about his travels in Russia; Eva Hoffman (*Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, 1989; *Exit into History: A Journey Through the New Eastern Europe*, 1993; *Shtetl: The Life and Death of a Small Town and the World of Polish Jews*, 1997), Lisa Appignanesi (*Losing the Dead*, 1999), and Irena Karafilly (*Ashes and Miracles: A Polish Journey*, 1998) write about their experiences in Poland; and Anna Porter, in *The Storyteller: Memory, Secrets, Magic and Lies* (2000), narrates her return to Hungary. Since the independence of Ukraine in 1991, more specifically, Ukrainian Canadian writers and artists have been particularly active in developing connections with Ukraine.¹⁵⁰ In addition to Kulyk Keefer and Kostash, who write about their experiences in Ukraine, filmmaker John Paskievich documents his return to Ukraine in *My Mother's Village* (2001); and Nataalka Husar draws upon her travels to Ukraine during the early 1990s in many of her paintings, including her series *Black Sea Blue* (1995).¹⁵¹ But Ukrainian Canadian scholars have been, arguably, most tireless in their ongoing efforts to maintain intellectual, social, and cultural links with Ukraine and Ukrainians. The Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (CIUS) at the University of Toronto sponsors numerous projects focused on Ukrainian history, culture, and politics (some of them based jointly in

¹⁵⁰ The independence of Ukraine in 1991 coincided with centenary celebrations of Ukrainian settlement in Canada. In the introductions to several books published in 1991 to mark the centenary (including *Art and Ethnicity: The Ukrainian Tradition in Canada*, edited by Ramon Hnatyshyn and Robert Klymasz; *Canada's Ukrainians: Negotiating an Identity*, edited by Lubomyr Luciuk and Stella Hryniuk; and Orest Subtelny's *Ukrainians in North America*), Ukrainian Canadian scholars acknowledge and applaud the sovereignty of their homeland.

¹⁵¹ The image on the first page of Kulyk Keefer's *The Green Library* comes from Husar's "Pandora's Parcel to Ukraine" (1993), one of the paintings in her *Black Sea Blue* series. In *Honey and Ashes* (alongside an assortment of family photographs), Kulyk Keefer includes a photograph of the same painting.

Canada and Ukraine), as well as exchange programs that promote cross-cultural contact and dialogue between Ukrainian and Ukrainian Canadian scholars.¹⁵²

Yet, looking at the formal and informal transnational or transcultural connections between Eastern Europeans and Canadians of Eastern Europe descent (between Ukrainians and Ukrainian Canadians, especially), I find myself questioning the nature of these connections.¹⁵³ Transnational networks of social and cultural exchange seem to transcend national borders, challenging nation-based notions of identity and community by bringing individuals from different countries (but ostensibly similar cultural backgrounds) in contact with one another. But how exactly do these networks operate?

¹⁵² The Canada Ukraine Legislative and Intergovernmental Project, started in 1996, works toward developing and sustaining democratic and economic reforms in Ukraine. Established in 1989, the Peter Jacyk Centre for Ukrainian Historical Research brings together scholars from Canada and Ukraine who cooperate on joint scholarly publications related to Ukrainian history (the centre also organizes international conferences and seminar series). The Stasiuk Program for the Study of Contemporary Ukraine (1990) and the Kowalsky Program for the Study of Eastern Ukraine (1998) support exchange programs between Canada and Ukraine, as well as providing extensive scholarly resources for the study of Ukraine in Canada.

¹⁵³ My own experiences in Eastern Europe (in Poland, more specifically) have encouraged me to think critically about the nature of transcultural connections between Canadians and Eastern Europeans. In April, 2001, I attended an international conference on Canadian studies (“Exploring Canadian Identities”) at the Nicholas Copernicus University in Torun, Poland. From the outset of the conference, I was struck by the fact that some twenty or thirty years seemed to separate the work of Canadian literary scholars (a handful were present) from that of the Eastern and Central Europeans (who formed the majority). As I listened to several presenters who drew upon Margaret Atwood’s *Survival* (1972) as an (or even *the*) authoritative source on Canadian literature—and to others who relied on Northrop Frye’s “Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*” (1971) to guide their readings of Canadian literary texts—I recall feeling as though I had stepped back in time. The problem, in part, was that Canadian literature had only recently (i.e. in the past five years) become a field of study in many Eastern and Central European countries, so scholars from these countries were just beginning to explore Canadian literary texts and literary criticism. Canadian scholars at the conference (as well as scholars from universities in Western Europe and Israel with more established Canadian studies programs) seemed to be in a position to teach their Eastern and Central European colleagues about recent developments in Canadian literature and literary studies. But it was precisely this dynamic—teacher/pupil; parent/child—that troubled me as I observed, and participated in, conversations at the conference. As many Eastern and Central European scholars explained, they have neither access to Canadian books and periodicals nor the funding necessary to acquire this material. Many graduate students and professors with whom I became acquainted talked about wanting to study or work—or, at the very least, go to conferences—in Canada; again, however, lack of funding made this next to impossible. The fact is that whereas I (even with my limited income as a graduate student) had no trouble traveling to Poland, many of the scholars I came to know there simply could not, and cannot, travel to Canada. While I continue to correspond with some of the people I met in Poland, our email conversations tellingly centre on their search for funding to travel to Canada rather than on Canadian literature.

Who actually travels between Canada and Eastern Europe, and why? Who benefits from the increasingly open borders of Eastern Europe, and how? In the specific context of transnational relations between Ukrainians and Ukrainian Canadians, the socioeconomic inequalities between the two groups seem to me impossible to ignore. How often do Ukrainians travel to Canada? Do Ukrainians write about their travels to Canada? Are Ukrainian scholars able to visit Canada without the support of CIUS exchange programs?

The brute fact is that, because Ukrainian Canadians are decidedly better off than the majority of people in Ukraine, transcultural exchanges between Canada and Ukraine most often take the form of Ukrainian Canadians traveling to Ukraine and Ukrainian Canadian scholars implementing cross-cultural programs (such as those sponsored by the CIUS). Without a doubt, many Ukrainian Canadians travel to Ukraine and/or nurture ongoing relationships with Ukrainians in order to help improve the situation in their homeland. (Several members of my family, for example, are involved in church-sponsored charity projects that send clothing and household items to families in Ukraine; and, on a broader scale, the Canada Ukraine Legislative and Intergovernmental Project, established by the CIUS in 1996, works toward strengthening the economy in Ukraine.) But despite their benevolent intentions, Ukrainian Canadians cannot escape the reality of their economic superiority over Ukrainians: living in Canada, they have access to better health care and food, and a wider variety of household commodities and consumer goods; even Ukrainian Canadians with modest incomes, by Canadian standards, are, by Ukrainian standards, wealthy (not only because Ukrainians are poorly paid but because the exchange rate between Canadian dollars and Ukrainian *hryvnia* heavily favours the former over the latter). In a sense, really, Ukrainian Canadians who return to Ukraine

have the best of both worlds: by traveling back to Ukraine, they strengthen their bonds with the ethnic homeland, congratulating themselves, in the process, on helping to improve the living conditions of their family, friends, or colleagues, while never actually having to face the hardships of day-to-day life in Ukraine. They travel, after all, as tourists with Canadian passports—with the security, that is, of knowing that they can and will return to Canada.

My analysis of the relation between Ukrainian Canadians and Ukrainians may seem unduly critical but it points to the ways in which terms such as globalization, transnationalism, and transculturalism take on different meanings for people living in different parts of the world. In her examination of the ways in which “global-local intersections” produce new forms of culture (“In Whose Interest?: Transnational Capital and the Production of Multiculturalism in Canada” [1996]), Katharyne Mitchell identifies many scholars’ tendency to “celebrate the positive implications of transnationalism” by focusing on “notions of hybridity and pluralism” (219-20). She notes that “[c]ulture-workers interested in questions of identity and the constitution of subjectivity herald the ways in which new cross-border movements have facilitated the production and reworking of multiple identities, dialogic communications, syncretic cultural forms, and seemingly emancipatory multicultural ideologies” (220). But Mitchell suggests—quite rightly, I think—that “this kind of abstract celebration of travel, hybridity, and multiculturalism” is premature (220). According to Mitchell, the problem with “numerous celebratory representations of these ‘new’ transnational cultures and hybrid subject positions” is that the “powerfully oppressive socioeconomic forces underlying the changes are neglected” (220). The luxury of exploring the ostensibly exciting spaces

between the global and the local is simply not available to many individuals from former Eastern bloc countries who are necessarily preoccupied with negotiating day-to-day life in the midst of political and economic instability. Individuals, on the other hand, who have the privilege of living in relatively stable, developed nations (such as Canada) can afford, both literally and figuratively, to move beyond the borders of these nations.

As I turn my attention to Kulyk Keefer's and Kostash's texts, I want to emphasize that neither writer is unaware of her relative privilege as a (middle-class) Canadian. Both set out—in their travels and in their writing—to close the gaps between their actual status as Canadians and their imagined ties to the fraught “other” world of Eastern Europe. But Kulyk Keefer's strategies for connecting with the people and history of Ukraine are problematic precisely because she refuses to acknowledge that her blood ties to Ukraine are imaginary or constructed. Her assumption that blood forms a real bridge between Canada and Ukraine enables her, conveniently, to claim Ukraine as home without giving up the comfort or security of her home in Canada. Kostash, unlike Kulyk Keefer, comes to see that she cannot—in reality—change her status as an outsider vis-à-vis the multiple communities she visits in Eastern Europe. Her writing, however, becomes a space in which she creates a new identity and a new sense of community by self-consciously blurring the boundaries between reality and fantasy. While Kostash acknowledges that Canada is her actual home, she refuses to return to it in either *Bloodlines* or *The Doomed Bridegroom*. By experimenting with the hybrid genre of creative non-fiction, she embraces her identity as a writer who is empowered to transcend, imaginatively, national borders and familial bloodlines in her re-vision of self, community, history, and home.

From Canada to Ukraine—and Back: Janice Kulyk Keefer's The Green Library and Honey and Ashes

The Green Library

In “‘Coming Across Bones’: Historiographic Ethnofiction” (1996), Janice Kulyk Keefer, having recently completed *The Green Library*, reflects on the reasons she decided to write the novel. Referring to her protagonist as a woman who “having grown up as a WASP Canadian, suddenly discovers that she is half-Ukrainian”—and whose identity is, consequently, “multiply fractured along familial, ethnic, and even national lines”—Kulyk Keefer could be describing herself (84). Unlike Eva Chown, the central character in *The Green Library*, of course, Kulyk Keefer grew up knowing that she was, and is, Ukrainian (both of her parents are Ukrainian); yet, for many years, and particularly as an adult, she deliberately distanced herself from her ethnic roots. In order to “remove [herself] as far as possible from the claustrophobia and painfully split subjectivity induced by [her] experience of ethnicity” (87), she moved to England, married an “*Anglik*,”¹⁵⁴ and, for a time, even developed an English accent. She became, in her own words, an “arch-Anglophile” (88). Although Kulyk Keefer insists that she neither wanted to nor could “shake off” (88) her grandmother’s, mother’s, and aunt’s stories about Ukraine, she established herself as a writer largely without drawing upon this family history.¹⁵⁵ Kulyk

¹⁵⁴ Ukrainian Canadians use the word “*Anglik*” pejoratively to refer to English people. As Kulyk Keefer explains, friends of her family referred to her husband as an “*Anglik*” despite the fact that “his father’s family has lived in Canada since 1790” (“‘Coming Across Bones’” 88).

¹⁵⁵ Prior to writing *The Green Library*, Kulyk Keefer published three short story collections (*The Paris-Napoli Express*, 1986; *Transfigurations*, 1987; *Travelling Ladies*, 1990), a book of poems (*White of the Lesser Angels*, 1986), and two novels (*Constellations*, 1988; *Rest Harrow*, 1992). She also published two works of literary criticism (*Under Eastern Eyes: A Critical Reading of Maritime Fiction*, 1987, and *Reading Mavis Gallant*, 1989). Several of Kulyk Keefer’s short stories—including “Red River Cruise” (from *The Paris-Napoli Express*), “Unseen, the Cuckoo Sings at Dawn” (published in *Yarmarok: Ukrainian Writing in Canada Since the Second World War*), and “Prodigals” (from *Travelling Ladies*)—thematize the experiences of Ukrainians in Canada, but *The Green Library* is her first book-length exploration of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity.

Keefer explains her “recalcitrance vis-à-vis ‘writing ethnicity’” by admitting her reluctance, “even in the heyday of multiculturalism in the 1980s, when it was suddenly ‘fun to be ethnic,’ to be pigeonholed as an ethnic writer, someone whose work would only be of interest to a small community of ‘like-blooded’ readers” (89). But she confesses, as well, to feeling ashamed of her ethnic background: ashamed of “being tied, despite the fact of [her] Canadian birth and citizenship, to a country that some said did not exist, or was a mere colony of vastly more important, culturally more imposing states”; and ashamed of “being marked . . . by an ethnicity whose visible signs were the butt of ethnic jokes about hunkies in sheepskin coats eating perogies” (89).

Why did Kulyk Keefer suddenly, in the 1990s, decide to explore her ethnicity in her writing? In part, she says, her interest in “writing ethnicity” (as she terms it) was sparked by “the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of an independent Ukrainian state,” developments which “made it imperative for [her] . . . to visit Ukraine for the first time” (89).¹⁵⁶ Outspokenly critical of the ways in which officially-sanctioned, folkloric models of ethnicity trivialize the social and historical realities of Ukrainian Canadians’ experiences (in both Canada and Ukraine), she set out in search of “the true site of [her] ethnicity” (89). To “authentically” reconnect with her ethnic heritage, she needed to travel, both literally and figuratively, to the Old Country, the place where “familial stories” and “collective history” intersect (89). As Kulyk Keefer explains, however, she traveled to Ukraine with her eye on the future as well as on the past. “[I]n terms of descent or biological affiliation,” she says, “ethnicity has reached a dead end with me” (89). Because her children “consider themselves to be Canadians, unhyphenated, *tout court*,” she felt an obligation or a responsibility to record her family’s history—a history

that would be otherwise lost or forgotten—for future generations (89). That Ukrainian and Ukrainian Canadian history becomes a central theme, then, in *The Green Library* (and later in *Honey and Ashes*) is unsurprising. Rather more surprising—given Kulyk Keefer’s notion that ethnicity (in her family, at least) reaches a “dead end” with the third or fourth generation—is the fact that *The Green Library* (and, as I will argue, *Honey and Ashes*) implicitly affirms the centrality of genealogy in defining identity. On the surface, Kulyk Keefer’s novel illustrates that ethnicity “has nothing to do with religious rituals, social customs, cultural traditions, national costume, and cuisine”; her heroine’s “newly discovered” Ukrainian-ness, instead, “has to do with history,” at once “personal and public, private and collective” (84). But the underlying theme of the novel (underscored, in part, by recurrent references to, and images of, blood) is that ethnicity has “to do,” most of all, with bloodlines. In fact, Kulyk Keefer structures her text around two troubling assumptions: first, that individuals are connected to particular histories by blood; and, second, that they can fully reconstruct these histories by returning to the supposed “true sites” from which they originated.

Set in Canada and Ukraine, and spanning a period of sixty years (1933 to 1993), *The Green Library* focuses on Eva Chown, a forty-three-year-old woman living in Toronto. As complex as it is convoluted, Eva’s story—or, rather, the story of her family—is narrated in multiple voices that constantly shift in time and space, often disorienting the reader. The novel’s collage-like structure, however, mirrors Eva’s struggle to piece together the details of her past. Eva is a daycare worker with an eleven-year-old son, Ben; she lives with her partner of nine years, Dan, who runs a travel agency

¹⁵⁶ I would argue that the collapse of the USSR also made it much easier for Kulyk Keefer to visit Ukraine.

(and who has a thirteen-year-old daughter, Julie). All is well in Eva's life until, one day, she receives a puzzling photograph from a strange man who has been watching her and her son. Troubled by the photograph (obviously taken decades ago) of a woman and a boy (who bears a striking resemblance to Ben), Eva begins to doubt everything she knows (or thought she knew) about her past. She embarks, then, on a quest to find out the truth about her family history. Who are the people in the photograph? How is she connected to them? Seeking answers to these questions, Eva travels to Porcupine Creek in northern Ontario where her parents, Holly and Garth Chown, lived before Eva was born and where, she discovers, her mother had a brief affair with Ivan Kotelko, a "DP" from Ukraine. Eva suspects—quite rightly—that Kotelko is her biological father. She soon learns, too, that he was the little boy in the photograph, and the stranger who gave her the photograph in the first place.

Having discovered that she is actually half-Ukrainian, Eva is unable to stop thinking about her father (who is he, exactly, and what is his story? how is he related to the woman in the photograph? why has he suddenly appeared in her life?); at the same time, she is overwhelmed by a flood of long-repressed memories of other Ukrainian "DP's" she knew, briefly, during her childhood and adolescence in Toronto (Olya Moroz, the Chowns' cleaning woman, and her two children, Oksanna and Alex). Determined to know more about her father, Eva enlists the help of Oksanna and Olya, both of whom still live in Toronto (Alex, the boy with whom Eva was infatuated as a girl, returned to Ukraine with his father in 1963). Olya is particularly helpful. She provides Eva with information about the mysterious photograph (the woman in the photograph is Kotelko's mother), and she also urges Eva to visit her grandmother's grave in Ukraine. Eva does

indeed travel to Ukraine, but her motivations for doing so become confused once she contacts Alex in Kiev, for he becomes more than her tour guide and translator: he also becomes her lover. Distracted by her involvement with Alex, Eva spends little time thinking about her family's past experiences in Ukraine—and rather more time grappling with her ambivalent attitudes toward the current state of affairs in the country (she is at once fascinated with, and appalled by, Alex's life in Kiev). After returning to Canada, Eva's relationship with Dan ends; and, though she and Ben, with the help of Oksanna, are reunited with Kotelko (at Porcupine Creek, no less, the very place where Eva was conceived), her story concludes on a bittersweet note. Kotelko, who is dying, wants to develop a relationship with his grandson, not with his daughter. Eva, who wants to make a life with Alex, is unable to bridge the distance between them. In the final scene of the novel, she tentatively reaches out to Alex by telephone, but their connection is poor.

In part, *The Green Library* thematizes the notion that, in order for second-generation Ukrainian Canadians to understand the meaning of their ethnicity, they must come to terms with their history—in both Canada and Ukraine. The novel rather unambiguously suggests, too, that folkloric cultural expressions trivialize the complexities of Ukrainian Canadian identity. Before finding out that she is half-Ukrainian, Eva pays little attention to the ethnic “kitsch” displayed by stores and restaurants in Bloor West Village, the predominantly East European neighbourhood in Toronto where Dan's travel agency (Janus Travel, “specializing in trips back to the Old Country” [12]) is located. But Dan, who is Jewish, balks at “embroidered appliqué on duck-shaped ceramic ashtrays” and “identical busts of some national hero wearing an astrakhan hat, a walrus moustache and sad, small eyes” (51). He, after all, has “grown up

on cossack-shaped bogeyman; for him, borscht suggests something saltier and far darker than mere beets” (51). In fact, when Eva comes to Dan, excited about the discoveries she has made about her past, he is quick to point out that “[i]t’s not just Easter eggs and perogies, being Ukrainian. It also happens to be things like pogroms” (112). By telling Eva about Bohdan Khmelnytsky (a national hero of Ukraine who was “one of the great pogrom-makers of all time”) and by mentioning the “little matter of Babi Yar” (the “Old Women’s Ravine” outside Kiev where, in 1941, seventy thousand Jews were murdered by Nazis and their Ukrainian collaborators), Dan draws attention to the fact that these (and other) uneasy and unsettling moments in Ukrainian history are also a part of her ethnic inheritance (113).

Even without Dan’s urging, though, Eva is willing to accept both the positive and the negative aspects of Ukrainian and Ukrainian Canadian history. Compelled to know more about people like her father and the Moroz family—her people—she starts by going to the local library, and by poring over books about so-called “Displaced Persons,” the “people she grew up calling, when she thought of them at all, Dee-Pees” (75). Slowly, Eva begins to understand what brought these immigrants to Canada, and how they suffered in exile from their homelands. She reads stories about the “hundreds of thousands” from Eastern Europe who, having fled to Germany when the Soviets invaded their countries or having been shipped to Germany by the Nazis, were left with nothing at the end of the war: “[n]ot just without a roof over their heads, and no family to return to, but without a country” (76). Once in Canada, she learns, women worked long hours for poor, sometimes “starvation,” wages as “domestics in private homes, cleaners in hospitals, workers in textile mills”; and men, trained in their home countries as teachers,

writers, and doctors, were forced into mining and lumber camps (76). Thinking back to her experiences with the Moroz family (with Oksanna Moroz, especially, who was in Eva's class at school), Eva realizes that she was more than insensitive to their situation. (As a girl, she was particularly cruel to Oksanna, telling their classmates that Oksanna's mother scrubbed toilets for a living [84]). Aware for the first time of the ways in which the Moroz family struggled during their early years in Canada, Eva sees, too, that, some fifty years later, they continue to grapple with the aftermath of the Second World War. Olya, no longer a housekeeper, now works as a translator for a professor from the Department of Slavic Studies, but she has had no contact with her son, Alex, since his father took him back to Ukraine in 1963. And, although Oksanna is a successful doctor (a dermatologist with a thriving practice), she is a cold woman, embittered by years of discrimination (fittingly, her Ukrainian surname, "Moroz," translates as "frost"). No longer interested in her Ukrainian language or culture, in fact, she has changed her name from Moroz to Frost.

Eva's family history, of course, is no less marked by hardship and tragedy. From Olya Moroz (who recognizes the woman in the photograph given to Eva by her father), Eva learns that Kotelko was born in an artists' colony ("Soloveyko" or "Nightingale") near Kiev: his mother, Lesia Levkovich, was a well-known poet, and his father, Pavlo Bozhyk, an artist (98-9). (Kotelko was the name of Lesia's husband; not unlike Eva, who believed for most of her life that her mother's husband, Garth Chown, was her father, Kotelko also believed that his mother's husband was his father.) Olya explains that, for a period of ten years before Stalin came to power (in 1929), the painters, writers, actors, and musicians who formed Soloveyko were able to work in their own language, keeping

their Ukrainian culture alive. “Publishing houses, newspapers, journals, theatres—everything was allowed, everything that would keep the language alive and open and growing” (100). A student then, Olya witnessed this renaissance of Ukrainian culture. But she witnessed, too, Stalin’s aggressive moves toward wiping out all things Ukrainian: “[b]ooks were hauled off library shelves,” she says, “plays banned, theatres closed. Even the museums were ordered to dispose of pottery, embroidery—anything identifiable as Ukrainian. To be Ukrainian was to be anti-Bolshevik; to use our language was to commit counter-revolution” (100-1). Executions followed, often without trial. Nearly all of the Soloveyko artists and intellectuals “died before their time,” either in Stalin’s purges or in the Second World War, and everything they worked for was “wiped out” (99). From an excerpt that Olya finds in *The Literary History of Ukraine*—one that chillingly echoes Dan’s reference to Babi Yar—Eva discovers that Lesia, her grandmother, was among “those executed in 1941 for political activities deemed subversive by the Nazi occupiers of Kiev”: she was “taken to Babi Yar and shot, her body thrown in the ravine” (120). While some Ukrainians may well have perpetuated injustice (at Babi Yar, for example, where they collaborated with the Nazis), others (even non-Jews such as Lesia) suffered unspeakable violence and terror.

But insofar as *The Green Library* illustrates that second-generation Ukrainian Canadians must learn their history if they are to understand the meaning of their ethnicity, the novel also suggests that they must return to the original site of this history—to Ukraine—in order to claim their ethnic inheritance. Eva visits the country in which her grandparents lived and died because she feels connected to it by blood: by virtue of her newly-discovered ethnicity, Ukraine has become her homeland.

Importantly, from the outset of her story, Eva's thoughts turn again and again to "[b]lood ties" and "family ties" (41). Paddling a canoe, for example, through the waters of Porcupine Creek (where she first learns about her mother's affair with Kotelko, and where, in a sense, she is reborn as the daughter of a Ukrainian) she tries to imagine "what it must feel like in the womb, its blood-warm waters" (54). And, listening to Olya Moroz talk about her Lesia Levkovich, Pavlo Bozhyk, and Ivan Kotelko, she visualizes a "bloodline," a "thin, tough line of blood linking her, now, in this glass and concrete library, with these doomed people" (99). "Suddenly," she sees that "the impossible distance between this young, scowling boy in the photograph and her own son has been bridged, and by nothing more than a line of blood" (99). The problem is that, when Eva actually traces this bloodline back to Ukraine, she discovers that her connection to the country is less real than imagined. Her status as a middle-class Canadian marks her, indelibly, as a foreigner in Ukraine (while making plans to meet Alex Moroz in Kiev, she asks if she should "wear a rose in [her] lapel" to identify herself; he replies, "I'll have no trouble finding you, Miss Chown. I'm afraid it's still all too easy to spot the Westerners in any crowd" [130]). Although Dan warns her about the standard of living in Ukraine—"[y]ou'll pay first-class hotel rates for a place where you wouldn't want to leave your dog," he says, and "you'll get sick of potatoes and cabbage after your first two days" (110)—Eva is ill-equipped for the stark poverty she encounters there. In fact, she is bewildered and frightened by everything in Kiev—telephones and elevators that don't work, subway stations and apartments that are over-crowded. Because she cannot speak Ukrainian, the simplest tasks become impossible. She "can't flip through a newspaper, buy an apple from a sidewalk vendor, ask for directions" (158). But her inability to speak

Ukrainian is not the only obstacle she faces in Ukraine. Local “customs” and “survival tactics” mystify her as well (158). Without the help of Alex, her “eyes and ears, her guide, interpreter, bodyguard,” she is as “clueless” and as “helpless” as a “baby wet from the womb” (158).

On the one hand, Eva is powerless in Kiev without Alex: as a naïve tourist, she relies upon him, the savvy native, to guide and protect her. But, at the same time, and even as she seemingly surrenders to him sexually, she holds all the cards, so to speak, in their relationship. Both Eva and Alex are painfully aware of the differences—the dramatic inequalities—between them. To Eva, Alex’s apartment “seems almost as small as the playhouse she had as a child, and just as bare” (155); and Alex, who has lived in Canada, is embarrassed by his meager lodgings—by the poor restaurants in Kiev, too, and the sparsely-stocked markets, and the general lack that characterizes his day-to-day life. When Eva offers to buy him dinner at a “good restaurant”—an “expensive one”—Alex obliges, knowing full well that she will be disappointed, if not shocked, during their evening out (141). She anticipates a meal of “sturgeon, cucumber salad, meringues, and berries in cream”; “[w]ine from Georgia and Crimean champagne”; and a “small string orchestra” playing in the background (142). What she actually experiences is “more dreadful than she’d ever imagined,” for the “expensive” restaurant offers no variety in its menu, and neither wine nor vodka. Rather than choke down her meal, Eva “pushes a chicken leg across her plate, hiding lumps of gristle under the potatoes” (142-3). (Later, Eva’s and Alex’s waitress, “glad the couple has left early, and eaten so little,” scrapes their uneaten food into containers to take home to her family [143].) Eva is more impressed by, and at home in, the market to which Alex takes her—until she learns that

“ordinarily, he never shops here; only rich people, those in government and business,” can patronize the place (156). Although Alex spends half a week’s salary on a shawl for Eva, his sacrifice goes unnoticed by her. He wants her to take the shawl home, as a gift, but she spreads it across his kitchen table. For her, the shawl is nothing more than a cheap tablecloth.

Clearly, in becoming involved with Alex, Eva wants to become a part of his world, to make his world her own. Once, in fact, while making love, she attempts to stake her claim to both Alex and his country by “baring her teeth, nipping him until she tast[es] his blood on her tongue,” and “[s]wallowing the blood as if it were some red bead she could lodge inside herself forever” (166). But the words “*as if*” are key. Eva’s desire to bridge the differences between her and Alex is unrealizable because, while they may be physically intimate, Eva knows little about Alex—about his failed marriage; his daughter’s illness (she has developed bone cancer as a result of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster); and his daily struggle to survive (a professor at the Academy of Sciences, he earns seventeen dollars a month). After Eva insists that they visit Babi Yar, moreover, and makes a series of flippant comments about Ukrainians’ involvement in the massacre, Alex begins to see, too, that she knows little about the complexities of Ukrainian history. He sees her as an insolent foreigner, breezing in and out of Ukraine, presuming to “judge him, his country, [and] its history” (188) with neither sensitivity nor compassion. As she prepares to leave Ukraine, the simmering tensions between Eva and Alex erupt into a heated argument precisely because she has the luxury of leaving Ukraine and returning to the stability and comfort of Canada. Flaunting both her arrogance and her ignorance with regard to Alex’s situation, Eva says, “[w]hen are you coming back to Canada?” (204).

After explaining that he cannot travel on his salary, Alex turns her question around. “What about you, Eva?” he asks. “When are you moving to Kiev?” (204). And then, giving voice to his belief that “[t]hey will always be playing the swineherd and the princess” (188), he says, “[w]hy don’t you stay home if you can’t live without pizza and Coca-Cola? Why don’t all you Westerners, with your big money that you spend like water over here, for Christ’s sake just stay home?” (204). Oddly enough, on the day of her departure, while strolling through a museum in Ukraine (wearing, for the first time, the shawl that Alex bought for her), Eva is reminded of the reason for which she could not “just stay home.” Quite accidentally, she comes face to face with a painting by her grandfather, Pavlo Bozhyk—a portrait of Lesia Levkovych, her grandmother—and, as she gazes at the painting, an old woman tenderly but wordlessly links arms with her. Suddenly, despite the tumultuous few days she has spent with Alex, her trip seems worthwhile: the old woman, standing in for Eva’s grandmother, becomes her living link to Ukraine.

What I find troubling about Eva’s chance discovery of Pavlo Bozhyk’s painting at the museum in Kiev, and her unexpected encounter with the old woman, is that this entire scene rather too conveniently redeems her trip to Ukraine—as if a moment of symbolic connection with her long-dead grandparents can cancel out her actual detachment from Ukraine. But Eva’s experience in the museum is just one of several accidents or coincidences around which *The Green Library* is structured—many of which I find equally troubling not least of all because they undermine the realism of the text by clumsily driving home the notion that individuals’ destinies are pre-determined by blood. To some extent, I suppose, as with all works of fiction, readers are meant to suspend their

disbelief when they approach this novel. Ivan Kotelko just happens to see Eva's son, Ben, in a playground one day; Ben just happens to look exactly like Kotelko at his age. Kotelko goes to a trusted friend in Toronto because he wants advice about approaching the boy and his mother; this trusted friend (also, incidentally, his ex-lover), Oksanna Moroz, just happens to know Eva. And Eva, whose partner happens to own a travel agency specializing in return trips to Ukraine, discovers that her grandmother (fortuitously a well-known poet who is easily recognized by Olya Moroz) happened to die at the age of forty-three—the same age at which Eva is figuratively reborn as a Ukrainian. Believable? In the realm of fiction, perhaps. Kulyk Keefer's role in shaping the narrative, however, becomes overwhelmingly intrusive when she introduces Mykola Savchuk, an old friend of Ivan Kotelko who happens to live next door to Alex Moroz in Kiev. One of the most important—and, arguably, one of the most absurdly coincidental—turn of events in Eva's life comes near the end of the novel, during her visit to Ukraine. After venturing out of Alex's apartment one day, she meets Savchuk, the "one person in [Kiev] who can tell her what she needs to know" about her father (192). From Savchuk, Eva learns that her father was a soldier in the underground Ukrainian nationalist army—a revolutionary who, caught up in an internal conflict between two factions of the nationalist underground, sided with the German army in order to oust the Bolsheviks from Ukraine.

For several reasons, Eva's meeting with Savchuk becomes a crucial moment—a turning point, really—in *The Green Library*. For Eva, the meeting (not unlike her chance discovery of Bozhyk's painting) affirms what she has always suspected about her relation to Ukraine: she can neither ignore nor escape her blood connection to the country and its

history. Clearly, she was meant to come to Ukraine. For readers of *The Green Library*, too, Eva's meeting with Savchuk provides important insight into the narrative structure of the text. From the outset of the novel, Kulyk Keefer leaves a trail of puzzling clues related to Eva's family history: Eva's story (narrated in the third person) is interrupted by her grandmother's story (also narrated in the third person, but limited to the grandmother's perspective) as well as italicized portions of text (narrated in the first person by an unknown scribe who appears to be writing Lesia Levkovych's story). Who is the unknown scribe? He is Savchuk, Kotelko's old friend-cum-historian, a man determined to record Kotelko's family history for posterity. Of course, Eva never learns the full truth about Kotelko's past. Unlike readers of the novel, she is not privy to Savchuk's thoughts, so she never discovers that Kotelko turned over his own mother, Eva's grandmother, to the Nazis, ensuring her death at Babi Yar. In an attempt to hide the truth about his friend's past—to protect Kotelko, in the present—Savchuk chooses not to tell Eva about her father's complicity in Lesia Levkovych's murder. He also, importantly, chooses not to write about Kotelko's act of betrayal. Although Savchuk knows that his friend moved to Canada after the war, he insists to Eva that Kotelko died in the war. "It is best for Ivan to be dead in the war," he thinks. "Dead men court no dangers" (201). While Eva necessarily questions Savchuk's story (for she knows that her father is alive)—and while Alex points out to her that "[n]o story tells the whole truth, and no story's nothing but lies"—her meeting with Savchuk "adds up to the same thing": Eva is "no longer the stranger, the permanently foreign visitor [Alex has] taken her to be, but a prodigal, like him. Someone who's had to return to the place where she came from, however little she belongs to it" (197).

In some ways, Kulyk Keefer seems to suggest that, although Eva is connected by blood to Ukraine, she will never really belong in Ukraine (because she is Canadian), and she will never learn the full truth of her family's history there (because Savchuk deliberately withholds it from her). Structurally, *The Green Library* foregrounds the inherent gaps between history and historiography; and, thematically, the novel ostensibly questions the assumption that blood is enough to connect Ukrainian Canadians to Ukraine and to Ukrainian history. Propelled as it is, however, by a series of fateful events and seemingly pre-destined occurrences, all related to Eva's newly-discovered ethnicity, the text repeatedly underscores the notion that individuals are powerless to ignore or deny their blood ties to family and history. "Blood ties," thinks Eva, "family ties. You're born with family like a chain around your neck: metal rings, each one kissing, biting into the next. And even if you break the links, the chain doesn't dissolve. It just sinks under your skin, you wear it without knowing" (41). The underlying message of the novel, ultimately, is that bloodlines constitute an absolute link between Ukrainian Canadians and Ukraine, between Ukrainian Canadians and their history in both Ukraine and Canada. As Kulyk Keefer makes clear in the final chapters of the novel, while Eva may never know the truth about her family's (especially her father's) history, her son Ben will—precisely because he is related to Kotelko by blood.

Indeed, the conclusion to *The Green Library* hinges less on Eva than on Ben, the boy who unwittingly set in motion her quest to uncover the truth about her past. When Eva returns to Toronto from Kiev, her quest (not to mention her relationships with both Dan and Alex) appears to come to an end, leaving her with a bittersweet sense of belonging to, and separation from, Ukraine, and only a partial understanding of her

family's history. But in a final twist of fate—the last in a long series of highly unusual events and occurrences—Oksanna Moroz appears out of nowhere, whisking Eva and Ben off to Porcupine Creek (against Eva's will) to meet Ivan Kotelko. Throughout the novel, Eva has been careful to shield her son from the truth about her (or, rather, their) ethnicity because she wants neither to confuse nor to frighten Ben with this information. Yet Oksanna, Eva learns, has been meeting with Ben in secret, telling him about his grandfather. "Hungry" from the start of his friendship with Oksanna for stories about his *dyido*, Ben is now eager to meet Kotelko (243)—and Kotelko is equally, if not more, eager to meet his grandson. At first, Eva resents the fact that Kotelko wants little to do with her; that he is only interested in his grandson. To Kotelko, she is "not a daughter but the woman who has given him his grandson" (252). Eventually, however, Eva comes to recognize the importance of her role as a link between generations. She is part of the past, as well as the future, because "the womb which tipped her out is linked to that other womb, the one that harboured the man who is her father" (261). Arriving at a curiously gendered understanding of genealogy, she sees herself as one in a "series of connecting rings: her mother, her grandmother, herself" (261). Whereas her son is connected to his grandfather and great-grandfather (he looks like Kotelko, and he is naturally artistic, like Pavlo Bozhyk), Eva is connected to her mother and grandmother ("Holly, Lesia: their lives, their stories—she carries them in her bones" [261]). But regardless of the gendered ways in which the past (from Eva's perspective) seems to live on in her and her son, what matters most (from the reader's perspective) is that Ben inherits more than his grandfather's genes. Kotelko is determined to meet his grandson because he wants to tell Ben about his past—"tell it to the boy alone, and make him promise to keep it secret,

even from his mother” (255). Clearly too young to take in all of the details of his grandfather’s experiences in Ukraine and in Canada, Ben will hear “a story, one with a great deal of weaving and folding and hiding in its lines.” Kotelko will tell him everything, though, trusting that “the child, remembering the story as a grown man, will undo the folds and see what he’s meant to find” (254).

Neither as challenging nor as provocative as it seems, in its narrative structure, *The Green Library* leaves no questions unanswered, no mysteries unsolved; and it articulates, in the end, a straightforward, conventional understanding of both ethnicity and history. Bloodlines become the bottom line in Eva’s quest to understand the meaning of her ethnic identity. Just as ethnicity is passed on through blood, so too is history: Ben inherits both. The problem with Kulyk Keefer’s notion that bloodlines transcend national borders (imaginatively connecting Ukrainian Canadians to Ukraine despite their Canadian citizenship) is that it fails to account for the actual differences (the inherent material inequalities) between Ukrainian Canadians and Ukrainians. When, near the end of the novel, Eva tries to reach Alex by phone, the “connection is poor,” and they have trouble making out each other’s voices (267). After Eva hears Alex say her name—signally a tentative new beginning to their relationship—she thinks that, “[f]or the moment, this is enough” (267). But is it enough? Little has changed between them. She initiates contact with him from the relative luxury and comfort of her house in Toronto, “a mansion, a palace compared to the apartments in Kiev” (253). If she returns to Kiev, she will go back only for a visit—for “two or three weeks a year” (265)—certainly not to stay. And Alex has said, in a letter, “*the sum total of what I am is just this: where I am, where I have to stay. A place that turns out to be as far away from you as if I lived on a*

star” (264). Beyond her relationship with Ben—a boy who knows little about, and has never seen, Ukraine—what real connection to the country does she have? What real connection is she willing to make? Readers must suspend their disbelief once more if they are to accept that Eva’s and Ben’s lives have been altered in any concrete way as a result of their newly-discovered ethnicity and history. Eva’s notion that “[y]ou’re born with family like a chain around your neck”—and that “even if you break the links, the chain doesn’t dissolve”—is convenient precisely because, as she explains, the chain “sinks under your skin” and “you wear it *without knowing*” (41, my emphasis). At the close of the novel, mother and son alike are left with the best of both worlds, the luxury of claiming Ukraine as their imagined homeland “without knowing” the hardships of day-to-day life in this country; without giving up the relative safety and comfort of their actual home in Canada.

Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family

In *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family*, her second book-length exploration of her identity as a second-generation Ukrainian Canadian, Kulyk Keefer revisits many of the themes that she introduced in *The Green Library*. And although *Honey and Ashes*, as a work of non-fiction, is more overtly (auto)biographical than *The Green Library*, Kulyk Keefer’s approach to writing her family’s history has rather more in common with her approach to writing fiction (to writing *The Green Library*, in particular) than readers might initially expect. In fact, as I read *Honey and Ashes* alongside *The Green Library*, paying close attention to the thematic concerns and formal structures of both texts, my feeling is that, despite their apparent differences, these texts rely upon and reaffirm the

same troubling assumptions about the ways in which ethnicity and history are passed on. Structured as it is around Kulyk Keefer's quest to piece together the multiple stories that comprise her family's history in both Canada and Ukraine, *Honey and Ashes*, like *The Green Library*, illustrates that the experience of being Ukrainian Canadian has little to do with folkloric expressions of culture. If second-generation Ukrainian Canadians are to understand the meaning of their ethnic identity, they must come to terms with their history—preferably, moreover, by returning to Ukraine, the original site of this history (“[f]or me,” Kulyk Keefer writes, in the prologue to *Honey and Ashes*, “ethnicity has been no voluntary affair of food and dress but a mesh of old place and new, of personal and public history—a mesh that cuts deep into the skin” [7]. But, she explains, “as I wrote down the stories my family had told me of their lost home,” and “as I pored over maps and encyclopedia entries and history books, I realized that I would have to make another kind of journey to the Old Place” [5]).) At the same time, of course, *Honey and Ashes* seems to question the notion that Ukrainian Canadians can uncover the “truth” about their pasts through oral stories, written histories, and/or first-hand observations of Ukraine: historical “facts” are, after all, always selectively recorded and subjectively remembered. The problem with *Honey and Ashes* is that, even as Kulyk Keefer draws attention to the inherent gaps between history and representations of history (including official historical documents and records, written works of history, and family stories), the structure of the text provides a seamless sense of resolution to her quest. Just as *The Green Library* conveniently concludes by affirming Eva Chown's imagined connection to Ukraine (through her son, Ben) and by illustrating that the full truth of her family's history will be disclosed (to Ben) without having any real effect on their lives in Canada,

so too does *Honey and Ashes* arrive at a decidedly pat conclusion. Although Kulyk Keefer returns to Canada without all of the answers to the questions she set out to ask in Ukraine, she returns with enough information to confirm what she has never really questioned: Ukraine is, by virtue of bloodlines, her imagined homeland; Canada is, and always will be, her real home.

Given that, in *Honey and Ashes*, Kulyk Keefer draws upon the conventions of fiction and non-fiction, biography and autobiography, history and travelogue, the genre of the text is difficult to define. Broadly speaking, however, *Honey and Ashes* narrates Kulyk Keefer's family history—the history, that is, of her maternal grandparents, Tomasz Solowski and Olena Solowska; her mother, Natalia; and her aunt, Vira. In many ways, *Honey and Ashes* resembles a standard work of history: the text is prefaced by maps of Eastern Europe (illustrating the changes that took place in Ukraine and Poland between 1936 and 1997) and the Solowski family tree; at its halfway-point, Kulyk Keefer interrupts her narrative with a collection of family photographs, complete with explanatory captions; and she concludes with a series of scholarly footnotes as well as a bibliography of the historical works she consulted while writing the book. But the narrative itself, as Kulyk Keefer suggests in “Personal and Public and Public Records: Story and History in the Narration of Ethnicity” (2000), follows a “tripartite” structure (7). The first two sections of *Honey and Ashes* (“The Old Place” and “Departures, Arrivals: Staromischyna—Toronto”) are primarily devoted to family stories related to the Solowskis' experiences in Ukraine and in Canada. Tomasz, Kulyk Keefer explains, first came to Canada in 1927; his wife and daughters followed in 1936. Second-wave immigrants who settled in Toronto, Tomasz and Olena struggled during the depression

trying to make ends meet while becoming accustomed to a new language and a new culture. Natalia and Vira, who were fourteen and twelve respectively when they immigrated, have vivid memories of the hardships they endured in Ukraine and in Canada, and Kulyk Keefer substantially draws on their memories and stories (as well as Olena's) in narrating the first two sections of *Honey and Ashes* (her grandfather, Tomasz, died in 1964, when she was a young girl). In the third, relatively brief, section of the text ("Journeying Out"), then, Kulyk Keefer turns to official historical records and scholarly works of Ukrainian and Ukrainian Canadian history in order to place her family's personal stories in the context of public history. She begins by outlining the ways in which the borders—and indeed the very name—of the Solowskis' home province have continually shifted over the years.¹⁵⁷ After providing an overview of the harsh conditions under which Ukrainian peasants lived for centuries, she pays particular attention to the tense sociopolitical climate in Ukraine and Poland around the time of her grandfather's first trip to Canada. In this part of the text, noting the historical conflicts and tensions between Ukrainians and Poles, as well as Ukrainians and Jews, Kulyk Keefer reflects on Ukrainians' historical roles as perpetrators as well as victims of violence and oppression. In the fourth section of *Honey and Ashes*, having explored her family's past through personal stories and public history, Kulyk Keefer offers a third and final perspective on this past. "Journeying Out" focuses on her actual observations of, and experiences in,

¹⁵⁷ Staromischyna, the village from which Kulyk Keefer's family immigrated, is now part of "Ternopil" (Tarnopil, in Polish), a province in Ukraine. Historically, however, the village was part of a "geographical and political entity" called Galicia (or Halychyna). During the 19th century, Galicia fell under Austrian rule; in 1918, it was claimed by Poland; and, in 1939, it became part of the Soviet Union. When Kulyk Keefer's grandparents immigrated to Canada, Staromischyna was part of Poland—and, in fact, while I refer to her grandfather as Ukrainian, he was actually half-Polish.

Staromischna. This portion of the text narrates her return, in 1997, with her husband, Michael, to the village from which her family originally came.

But while *Honey and Ashes* seems rather neatly organized around the three sources of information that Kulyk Keefer relies upon to piece together her family's history (her family members' memories and stories of their experiences in Canada and Ukraine; official, written records and historiographical works related to these experiences; and her first-hand experiences in Ukraine), the narrative structure of the text is (like the genre of the text) neither as simple nor as straightforward as it seems. Although, at times, Kulyk Keefer attempts to focus on her family's stories about their day-to-day life in Staromischna, she is unable to divorce these stories from what she knows about the broader realities of Ukrainian and Polish history.¹⁵⁸ Nor can she

¹⁵⁸ Relations between Ukrainians and Poles have been marked, for centuries, by tension and conflict. As early as the 14th century, Polish forces began to occupy the Ukrainian provinces of Galicia and Volhynia. In the 16th century, Ukrainian nobles were assimilated to Polish culture and religion (Catholicism) so that the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian customs, as well as worship in the Orthodox church, were increasingly associated with the lower classes of Ukraine. Throughout the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, Ukrainians (and especially Ukrainian Cossacks) revolted (often unsuccessfully) against Polish rulers and landlords in Galicia and Volhynia. During the 1918-1919 Polish-Ukrainian War, Polish troops (experienced in battle during the First World War) easily defeated a Ukrainian army of volunteers. Poland declared to the League of Nations, in 1920, that it would protect the rights of Ukrainians and other minority groups living within its borders; in 1924, however, Polish-occupied Ukraine began to be subjected to rigorous anti-Ukrainian laws (Ukrainian-language periodicals were abolished; Ukrainian cultural organizations were banned; Ukrainian-language schools were shut down; and laws were passed prohibiting the use of Ukrainian in government agencies). In 1930, Poland initiated its "Pasifikatsia" campaign against Ukrainians living in Galicia. Ukrainian buildings and monuments were demolished, and Ukrainians were arrested, beaten, and tortured. In 1934, Poland withdrew its promise to the League of Nations that it would protect the rights of minority groups in Poland; that same year, Polish officials established a concentration camp at Bereza Kartazka for Ukrainian nationalists.

Throughout *Honey and Ashes*, however, Kulyk Keefer is more explicitly concerned with the historical relations between Ukrainians and Polish Jews. The stereotype of Ukrainians as anti-Semites has its basis in Ukrainians' historical involvement in pogroms. As Kulyk Keefer points out in *The Green Library*, for example, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, a national hero of Ukraine, was also "one of the great pogrom-makers of all time" (113). A 16th-century Cossack hetman, and the leader of numerous revolts against the Polish aristocracy, Khmelnytsky and his army allegedly murdered more than 100,000 Polish Jews. During the 1918-1919 Polish-Ukrainian War (as Kulyk Keefer mentions in *Honey and Ashes*), Ukrainians massacred "between 35,000 and 50,000 Jews" (177). And many Ukrainians collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War—at Babi Yar, most notably, where approximately 70,000 Jews were killed. See Orest Subtelny's *Ukraine: A History* (1994) for a fuller discussion of Ukrainian-Polish relations.

document Ukrainian and Polish history without simultaneously considering the ways in which her family members were personally affected by, or involved in shaping, this history. So when, for example, in the portion of *Honey and Ashes* ostensibly focused on family stories, she writes about her grandmother's friendship with Helka, a Jewish woman who ran a store near Staromischyna, Kulyk Keefer finds herself half-doubting the friendship, given the "traditional hostility" between Ukrainians and Jews (79). Even if she believes the story of their friendship, she cannot write about it without also writing about the historical tensions between Olena's and Helka's people. Similarly, in the midst of her discussion of Ukrainian and Polish history, when she mentions the Polish-Ukrainian war that took place from 1918 to 1919, Kulyk Keefer begins speculating about her grandfather's actions during the war. She knows that Tomasz was a soldier in the Ukrainian Galician army; though half-Polish, he fought against the Poles. Did he also march into Kiev in July, 1919? Was he among the troops responsible for the massacre of "between 35,000 and 50,000 Jews" (177) believed to be Bolsheviks? Not surprisingly, *Honey and Ashes* is rife with these sorts of questions because Kulyk Keefer wants to know the truth about her family's history in the Old Place (even if this truth is unsettling). At the same time, however, she knows that memory is fallible, history is selective: neither family stories nor official history can provide her with a full, objective account of what really happened in the past. Conscious that "there's no such thing as a true story, just the echoes between different versions, and the desire to know" (62), she structures *Honey and Ashes* around precisely such "echoes." From beginning to end, as Kulyk Keefer suggests, the text is "interrupted and traversed by breaks and complications in both narrative method and the 'story line' itself," so that the structure of the book mirrors

the complex and uneasy nature of her quest to uncover the “truth” about her family’s past (“Personal and Public” 8).

Throughout *Honey and Ashes*, Kulyk Keefer repeatedly underscores the notion that she can never know the truth about her family’s history: even if she could trust that family stories and/or official works of history represent full and accurate accounts of the past (which she cannot), her family’s history is simply too complex, too convoluted, to distill into a single, linear, definitive narrative. “I do not claim to know or tell The Truth about my family,” says Kulyk Keefer in her prologue, “what I am doing is sieving memory and retelling stories that make memory material, and public. The difference between what I was told and what I heard; what memory hides and what imagination discloses—all this is part of the book I have written” (5). Importantly, Kulyk Keefer’s imagination—her role in collecting fragments of stories, reordering them, and filling in the gaps between them—results in a highly romanticized family history. In describing her grandmother’s family, for instance, Kulyk Keefer constructs her grandmother as the heroine of a fairy tale: although she is treated like Cinderella by her miserly stepfather, cruel sister, and heartless mother, Olena never loses her Snow White-like “goodness” and “largeness of heart” (35). Fairy tale romance forms the foundation of her family’s history (as she sees it, at least): despite their parents’ opposition to a union based on love rather than on land, Olena and Tomasz married for love. “It’s love she married for, not bread” Kulyk Keefer says of her grandmother, in an overwrought passage near the beginning of *Honey and Ashes*: “what I’m about to tell you is a love story from a world where bread is hard and sour, honey rare as amber” (30). Of course, as the title of the text suggests, *Honey and Ashes* is characterized as much by tragedy and loss as it is by romance and

love. Kulyk Keefer writes about the children her grandparents lost early in their marriage, and about Olena's unnamed sister who, at the age of fifteen, chose death over the amputation of an injured leg. But above all, *Honey and Ashes* is a text haunted by dark secrets and tantalizing mysteries related to the Solowskis' family members and friends who never left Ukraine. What became of Helka, Olena's Jewish friend? What happened to Volodko and Adela, Tomasz's half-brother and half-sister, and Hannia, Tomasz's sister? As Kulyk Keefer goes to Ukraine in search of answers to these and other questions, she places herself in the centre of a dramatic story that she has deliberately constructed as such by focusing on—and heightening—the romance and tragedy of her family's experiences in the "Old Place."

In many ways, of course, Kulyk Keefer's trip to Ukraine is marked by disappointment, for the actual village of Staromischna is nothing like the Old Place of her family's stories, and the relatives she meets in and around Staromischna are neither as warm nor as welcoming as she had hoped. Although, before going to Ukraine, she tells herself that six decades of social change and political and economic upheaval will have dramatically altered the landscape her family left behind, Kulyk Keefer is nonetheless shocked by present-day Staromischna. She and her husband prepare well for the physical difficulties of traveling in Eastern Europe: they secure the appropriate travel documents, buy a car sufficiently modest and second-hand to take into Eastern Europe without fear of theft, and carry with them a host of household and personal items unavailable in Poland or, especially, Ukraine. They fully expect delays at border crossings, poor roads, low standard hotel rooms, and heavy pollution. But nothing, it seems, could have prepared Kulyk Keefer for the differences between her family's stories

about their homeland and the realities of contemporary life in Ukraine. As she scours the landscape around Staromischna for traces of her family's lives, seeking the lush orchards and quaint thatched houses she has heard about from her mother and aunt, she finds only potato fields and homes "roofed with corrugated iron . . . all of them built after the war" (245). The "outdoor cafés, where people sit at white plastic tables," and the "parks with statues of Shevchenko"—none of these, she says, "could have existed in [her] mother's time" (245). Where, Kulyk Keefer wonders, are the schoolhouse, marketplace, and store that she knows from her mother's stories? When, at last, she locates a building from her mother's childhood—the gloriously modern new schoolhouse that her mother described—Kulyk Keefer is dismayed by its appearance: "[t]he school's tin roof looks rusted through; great pieces of stucco have peeled from the walls, leaving turquoise scars" (276). Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Kulyk Keefer finds what she is looking for in the L'viv ethnographic museum: "a small house with whitewashed walls, its thatch crowned with a row of crossed sticks . . . my grandmother's house, the very room where my mother was born. What I've always longed for" (255). Walking barefoot around the museum, she proclaims (with self-conscious irony) that she is at last "in the Old Place" (256), acknowledging that the idealized Old Place of her family's stories and her own imagining no longer exists (if indeed it has ever existed) outside of romanticized stories.

But just as Kulyk Keefer is disappointed by what she finds in Staromischna (or, rather, what she doesn't find), so, too, is she frustrated by her inability to communicate and establish relationships with her relatives in Ukraine. In Staromischna, for example, she meets Evhen Pokotylo (son of her grandfather's stepbrother), who greets her with thinly-veiled hostility. "[H]is thoughts," says Kulyk Keefer, "are as clear as if he'd

spoken them: “[t]hese people who breeze into the village, showing off their good fortune like too many rings on their fingers—what do they want out of me?” (281). Evhen, naturally enough, is unable to see her as she sees herself—a “native of this place” (257)—for she cannot speak Ukrainian and has never lived in Ukraine. She believes that she is an “envoy” for her mother and aunt, her “absent sons,” and her “dead grandparents” (244), but Evhen knows the truth: she is a tourist; she doesn’t belong. In a sense, the inequalities between Kulyk Keefer and Evhen are not simply defined by her relative economic prosperity as a Canadian (she has the luxury of traveling to Ukraine in a car that she and Michael bought specifically for the trip) and his relative poverty as a Ukrainian (his modest home lacks indoor plumbing): rather, each has something the other wants. Evhen envies Kulyk Keefer’s wealth and she envies his first-hand knowledge of family history. That he reluctantly answers her questions about family members (providing few of the details she craves) and that she awkwardly offers him a gift of money before parting (which will make little impact on his circumstances) underscores their inability to connect on equal terms. In Skarszewy, Kulyk Keefer is more warmly welcomed by Adela Wolanik (her grandfather’s half-sister) and Adela’s children, but similar tensions characterize their time together. Adela and Kulyk Keefer struggle to communicate because they are separated by language (Adela’s son translates Adela’s words into German for Kulyk Keefer who understands it imperfectly). And, as with Evhen, Kulyk Keefer’s relative wealth creates an awkward dynamic between her and Adela (because Adela has no space in her home for guests, Kulyk Keefer and her husband stay in an opulent hotel room, wondering if they should offer it to Adela). Although Kulyk Keefer wants Adela to talk about what happened to Helka, Hannia,

Hannia's sons, and Volodko, her questions "go badly" (314), for Adela is not a storyteller and she is reluctant to relive the horrors that she has experienced.

Importantly, though, in narrating her encounters with both Evhen and Adela—and even as she understands that they see her as a wealthy foreigner, breezing in and out of their lives, "showing off" her "good fortune" (281)—Kulyk Keefer nonetheless sees herself as wronged by history. An accident of history brought her family to Canada (and, hence, drove a wedge between her Canadian and Ukrainian Canadian family members). So while she feels guilty about her relative privilege as a Canadian (which enables her to buy a car, and stay in opulent hotel rooms), and while she is sympathetic toward her Ukrainian relatives' plight, she nonetheless constructs herself as the hapless victim of historical circumstances. Near the conclusion to *Honey and Ashes*, she becomes a figure in another fairy-tale-like story: a princess with peasant roots who is unjustly misunderstood by those who should see past her outward trappings of superiority and recognize her as a kindred spirit with an open heart. She wants to hear stories, but her family members refuse to share them. Why? Kulyk Keefer understands that history, for them, is real, heart-wrenchingly personal, and viscerally painful. But what she never acknowledges is that family stories are all they have to counter her economic wealth and social privilege.

Forced to leave both Staromischyna and Skarszewy earlier than she planned, Kulyk Keefer is frustrated by "[a]ll that [she] didn't ask, all that [she] couldn't say" (324). When she arrives home, she wonders if she has found what she was looking for in the Old Place. Has she? On the one hand, Kulyk Keefer suggests that, even after traveling to Staromischyna she is no closer to uncovering "The Truth" about her family

history. In fact, her failure to learn “The Truth” about one family member, in particular—Volodko, whose mysterious past particularly fascinates Kulyk Keefer—becomes emblematic of her failure to fully reconstruct her family history by reconnecting with family members in Ukraine. Volodko, Tomasz’s half-brother, is a recurring figure in *Honey and Ashes* who haunts the text with his simultaneous presence and absence: “[o]f all the family left behind in the Old Place,” Kulyk Keefer explains, early in the text, “he was the most mysterious, the most seductive” (26). An “artist of sorts,” Volodko made furniture in Staromischyna, including the miniature cupboard that Kulyk Keefer’s grandmother brought with her from Ukraine to Canada. Both the cupboard and its maker carry a great deal of symbolic weight throughout *Honey and Ashes*. Kulyk Keefer describes the cupboard—one of Olena’s few keepsakes from Ukraine—as “the seed for the dining room suite that furnished the happy ending of her fairy tale”: it “[h]olds the memory of everything [Olena had] had to leave behind” (26); and passed on, over time, like family stories, from Olena to Natalia to Kulyk Keefer, it comes to stand in for Kulyk Keefer’s ethnic inheritance. At the same time, the vertical lines that divide the mirror on the cupboard symbolize Kulyk Keefer’s ethnic and national identity. When she gazes into the mirror, she sees a fractured reflection of her self (the lines “seem to divide [her] reflection, making it shift and blur, as if it were crossing border after border” [327]).

What, she wonders, is the story behind the cupboard? How did Olena come to own it? What became of its maker? Although she meets individuals (including family members) in Ukraine who have information about Volodko, Kulyk Keefer is unable to solve the mystery of Volodko’s past. From a woman she meets in Staromischyna (Varvara), Kulyk Keefer learns that Volodko was killed “by the Fascists—or the Soviets—at the start of the

war” (277); Evhen says that Volodko, taken by the Red Army in 1944, died sometime later in an unspecified gulag (283); and Adela, hinting at Volodko’s anti-Semitism, suggests that he was arrested in 1944 by the Russians (she gives no specific reason for his arrest) (319). After hearing these conflicting stories, Kulyk Keefer continues to wonder about what really happened to Volodko. His cupboard, the only physical trace left of him, becomes a tangible reminder of the ways in which individuals (and “The Truth” about them) fall through the cracks of history, both personal and public.

Importantly, however, Volodko’s story (or, rather, Kulyk Keefer’s approach to telling it) foregrounds her refusal to construct her search for “The Truth” about her family’s past as a failed quest—and this is ultimately the problem, as I see it, with *Honey and Ashes*. Near the end of the text, writing once more about the mysterious Volodko, Kulyk Keefer discloses a secret that she has been “carrying with [her] like a jewel sewn up in the hem of a coat”¹⁵⁹: a secret contained in a story that her mother, Nataalka, told her long ago about Olena (321). In retelling this story, Kulyk Keefer reveals that Volodko and Olena were lovers, while Olena’s husband, Tomasz, was away in Canada (and before he sent for his wife and daughters). Why does Kulyk Keefer choose to share this story at the end of *Honey and Ashes*, rather than at the beginning? Why does she withhold this information—this secret that was told to her long before she set out to explore her family’s history—until the final pages of the text? As deliberate as it is strategic, Kulyk Keefer’s decision to conclude *Honey and Ashes* with Olena’s and Volodko’s love story implicitly illustrates her desire to provide not only an ending but a

¹⁵⁹ With this image, Kulyk Keefer likens herself to an immigrant or a refugee, sewing valuables into clothing to avoid having them seized by officials. She also suggests that the secret is as precious and priceless as a family heirloom.

happy ending to the text. True or not (Kulyk Keefer assumes that it is true), this story reveals that, despite her apparent inability to arrive at any definite conclusions about her family history, Kulyk Keefer wants to leave her readers with a sense of resolution and closure—as though she *has*, after all, succeeded in understanding the past.

But Kulyk Keefer's belated disclosure of her mother's (or her grandmother's) secret is not the only narrative strategy she uses to tidy the loose ends of her narrative. At the outset of *Honey and Ashes*, Kulyk Keefer sets a task for herself: to "build a bridge out of words" between the past and the present, Canada and Ukraine (8). Yet, as she insists again and again throughout the text, a bridge—a figurative bridge of blood, more specifically—already exists between herself and her family's history; between herself and the Old Place. This imagined bridge is made visible and real in the "genetic repetitions" that give Kulyk Keefer her grandmother's "near-sighted eyes" and her grandfather's "height and temperament" (15): "I have them in my bones," she says of her grandparents (47). Family, she argues, is what "we carry . . . inside our very cells" (15); history is a "burden you carry in your bones" (300). Not surprisingly, rivers—at once real and figurative—become recurrent motifs in *Honey and Ashes*. Staromischyna lies on the river Zbruch; Kulyk Keefer's home in Ontario is located near a river (left unnamed). And these literal rivers become constant reminders of the figurative "river of the past" (4) that flows in her blood. Indeed, as she leaves Eastern Europe, driving toward Szczecin in western Poland, and as she witnesses floods in the region, Kulyk Keefer draws an implicit parallel between the swollen rivers and her family bloodlines: in both she sees the "[p]ast and present awash," with "nothing to stand between them and the future" (325). Just as Kulyk Keefer has long carried the secret of Volodko and Olena, so too has

she always maintained the belief that the past is in her blood. So *Honey and Ashes*, though explicitly concerned with Kulyk Keefer's inability to uncover "The Truth" about her family's history, implicitly reaffirms "The Truths" she has always known.

From the outset of *Honey and Ashes*, really, Kulyk Keefer takes for granted that, however bewildering and fraught she may discover her family's past to be, it will have no real effect on her in the present. Her literal and figurative journeys "back" to Ukraine may be disorienting and painful, but she knows, long before she departs, that she will return, and that her life in Canada will continue, unchanged. In the epilogue to *Honey and Ashes*, Kulyk Keefer says that "what [she] really want[s] is . . . to be at home" (328). She regrets, though, that (unlike individuals such as Sofia, her tour guide in Ukraine, who "know, infallibly, where home is" [327]), she has no clear sense of where she belongs. And so she concludes that "[p]erhaps home is only this: inhabiting uncertainty, the arguments desire picks with fear. Not belonging, but longing—that we may live in the present, without craving the past or forcing the future" (328). But does Kulyk Keefer not know—and has she not always known, "infallibly"—where her own home is? While I want to believe that her understanding of home is marked by "uncertainty" and "longing," she is ultimately unconvincing in her attempts to complicate notions of home precisely because, in the final pages of *Honey and Ashes*, she comes full circle back to the place at which she began: to her comfortable, middle-class home in Canada; to the river that runs outside the window of her study, a quaint reminder of the stories that have always run in her blood. I cannot help wondering what a different text *Honey and Ashes* would be if it concluded differently—if, that is, Kulyk Keefer had chosen not to narrate the text self-consciously from her "stone house by a river" in Ontario (328); if, in

scripting the conclusion to *Honey and Ashes*, she had dramatized instead the ways in which she feels ambivalently suspended between Canada and Ukraine, belonging to both and neither. Not unlike Olena's and Volodko's love story (the details of which she knew before she set out on her quest), the symmetry of her return to the place at which her quest began illustrates that Kulyk Keefer has always known how her story would end. So much for the "uncertainty" she feels about home: the tidy conclusion to *Honey and Ashes* tells a different story.

Between Borders, Beyond Bloodlines: Myrna Kostash's Creative Non-Fiction

Bloodlines: A Journey Into Eastern Europe

The temptation is strong, I think—certainly at first glance—to draw parallels between Janice Kulyk Keefer and Myrna Kostash: between the writers themselves, that is, as well as their writing (especially *Honey and Ashes* and *Bloodlines*). Both Ukrainian Canadian women, relatively close in age,¹⁶⁰ Kulyk Keefer and Kostash have enjoyed long and successful careers as writers; and, in the 1990s, each published two books about her travels to and within Eastern Europe (*Honey and Ashes* and *The Doomed Bridegroom* were both published in 1998). Broadly speaking, in their thinking about ethnicity, neither writer accepts that officially-sanctioned, folkloric expressions of Ukrainian Canadian culture accurately or authentically reflect the complex nature of their ethnic identity. They focus their writing on re-placing Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity in the context of Ukrainian and Ukrainian Canadian history: in order to understand more fully the meaning of their ethnicity, they explore and document the intersections between

¹⁶⁰ Kostash was born in 1944, Kulyk Keefer in 1953.

personal and public history, acknowledging both the positive and negative aspects of their ethnic group's past. But, looking closely at their texts, I see important differences between Kulyk Keefer's and Kostash's perspectives on, as well as their specific approaches to writing about, Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity and history. In *The Green Library* and *Honey and Ashes*, Kulyk Keefer explicitly foregrounds the inherent gaps between history and historiography (between historical realities and representations of these realities), and she seeks to complicate her understanding of home by drawing attention to the tensions between her real and imagined sense of belonging to two countries. Implicitly, however, as Kulyk Keefer closes the gaps and resolves the tensions in both texts, she undermines her own attempts to challenge conventional understandings of history and identity. A second-generation Ukrainian Canadian whose mother was a second-wave immigrant from Ukraine—and who is herself, crucially, the mother of two sons—Kulyk Keefer takes for granted her genealogical or blood ties to her family's past and to their (/her) ethnic homeland. Her writing affirms the assumption that bloodlines define ethnic identity and that they constitute definitive links to Ukraine and Ukrainian history (they constitute links to the future as well). Writing from the comfort of her middle-class Canadian home, she has the best of both worlds: the right to claim Ukraine as her imagined homeland without giving up her actual home in Canada. For Kostash, by contrast, who is less concerned with family stories and genealogies, the process of traveling to Eastern Europe (and writing about her journeys) is bound up with her desire to redefine her identity and sense of community by exploring allegiances that transcend family bloodlines and national borders.

In part autobiography, in part history, *Bloodlines* is, first and foremost, an

account of Kostash's travels to and within Eastern Europe during the 1980s and 1990s. Over the course of nine years, beginning in 1982 with her initial travels to Rumania, Hungary, and Yugoslavia, Kostash made no less than six separate trips to Eastern Europe: in 1984, two years after traveling for the first time to Bucharest, Budapest, and Belgrade, she visited Ukraine, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, and she revisited Yugoslavia (Croatia, Bosnia, and Serbia); in 1986, she made her third trip to Yugoslavia; in 1987, she returned to Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia (this time to Slovenia and Serbia); in 1988, she went again to Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia (including Kosovo and Macedonia), and Ukraine; and, finally, in 1991, she returned once more to Serbia and Ukraine. As Kostash explains in the introduction to *Bloodlines*, she "did not travel haphazardly" (1). Her plan, at least initially, was to "interview writers of [her] generation, bred by the events of the 1960s, who were writing from within the opposition in their respective societies" (1). In her own words, "I was most interested in how they coped, as creative people, with the *political* demands of their situation" (1). At the same time, she admits to limiting her travels to "Slavic Central and Eastern Europe (excluding, therefore, Rumania, Hungary and Bulgaria)" (1) because her project was also "in some still unformulated way" shaped by her sense of "solidarity," as a Ukrainian Canadian, not only with Ukrainians, specifically, but with Slavs, more generally (1-2). And she notes, too, that her "third traveller's hat was that of the New Leftist socialist" (2). After struggling to come to terms with "the nature of the Soviet Union" by reading books and speaking casually with dissident exiles, she was eager to see for herself "how 'actually existing socialism' looked" and "how this might affect [her] own political beliefs" (2). Conscious that her plans and motivations might sound relatively "neat and tidy," Kostash

underscores the fact that her actual experiences traveling in Eastern Europe were “turbulent” and “very upsetting” (2). “I lost control of my plan,” she confesses, “as I met more and more people who took me further and further afield in my inquiries,” and as, importantly, “I realized that much of the solidarity I felt with them—political, generational and ethnic—was illusory, or at least ambiguous” (2). Reflecting on her first-hand experiences of Eastern Europe, as well as the research she conducted into the history and politics of Eastern Europe, she says, “[m]y travels and my reading threw into question all the assumptions I had leaned on, on the basis of my limited awareness in Canada, to interpret events in Eastern and Central Europe” (2). Fittingly, Kostash summarizes the reasons for which she chose to travel to Eastern Europe and to write about her experiences there with a question rather than a “neat and tidy” assertion. “Take a second-generation Ukrainian Canadian,” she writes, “a feminist, a writer, an alumna of the 1960s, and put her on a train in Belgrade heading north. What exactly is her business?” (2)

Certainly Kostash’s “business” in writing *Bloodlines* is to make sense, retrospectively, of her travels, and the form of the text reflects her desire to create order and meaning out of her “turbulent” experiences in Eastern Europe. Not unlike *Honey and Ashes*, *Bloodlines* is prefaced by a (1988) map of Eastern Europe, and, in an appendix to the text, Kostash provides an extensively annotated bibliography of works related to the history and politics of Eastern Europe (books that she read before, during, and after her trips), adding scholarly weight to her project. Less a linear or chronological account of her travels than a collage of narrative snapshots, *Bloodlines* is not without structure: Kostash divides *Bloodlines* into four chapters, each centred on a single country

to which she made repeat visits (Czechoslovakia,¹⁶¹ Yugoslavia, Poland, and Ukraine); and these chapters are further broken down into distinct sections (similar to diary entries with date, place, and subject headings) that focus on specific individuals Kostash met or events she witnessed. But despite its semblance of order, the narrative structure of *Bloodlines* in many ways mirrors Kostash's loss of "control" over her plans while traveling in Eastern Europe. While she introduces her chapters with brief outlines of historical events related to the specific countries to which she traveled, these ostensibly objective "facts" immediately give way to her subjective interpretations of them which are then frequently undercut by her first-hand encounters with people who live in Eastern Europe (and whose perspectives are often very different from her own). In part, the turbulent nature of Kostash's narrative reflects the tensions that she perceives between history (what actually happened in the past) and historiography (what is selectively and subjectively recorded in history books). At the same time, insofar as *Bloodlines* is characterized by uncertainty and instability (and by Kostash's perpetually present tense narrative voice), the text implicitly foregrounds her desire—and simultaneous inability—to become a part of the present and the future of the communities she visits. From the outset of her travels, Kostash is unable to maintain the detachment and journalistic objectivity of an "outsider" because of her strong sense of belonging to, and solidarity with, multiple communities in Eastern Europe—so that, if a single story emerges from the multiple narratives that Kostash includes in *Bloodlines*, it is the story of her repeated attempts to make real her imagined sense of belonging to this part of the world. Though constantly reminded of the distances (both literal and figurative) that separate her from

¹⁶¹ In 1993, Czechoslovakia was split into two independent states, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic.

the people she meets (from their politics and their histories), she refuses to give up on her quest to connect with them and, in so doing, redefine her sense of self and community. That *Bloodlines* ends without a clear sense that she has succeeded in her quest—but, rather, with a gesture toward a future in which she will do so—is fitting, for this is a text shaped, from beginning to end, by Kostash's naïve optimism about the ways in which cross-cultural communities are formed.

Throughout her travels, then, Kostash's objective is to seek out kindred spirits in Eastern Europe (writers, intellectuals, and political activists who share her interests and ideals): her agenda, however, is routinely disrupted by encounters with individuals who should but do not see eye to eye with her (individuals who challenge, rather than affirm, her personal and political beliefs). In Czechoslovakia, for example (in Prague, more specifically, 1984), she meets with Jiri, a Jew whose "generation had hit the streets" (19) of Prague during the spring and summer of 1968 in support of Alexander Dubcek's "experiments with socialist pluralism" (5). Wearing her "New Leftist socialist" traveller's hat (2), and thinking back to her own involvement during the 1960s in student protests against the war in Vietnam, Kostash announces her solidarity with Jiri and his generation. "There was a time," she says, "when I considered myself to be a citizen of Prague, in the spring of 1968" (17). Though Jiri scoffs at her statement, calling it "an illusion" (17), Kostash persists in drawing parallels between their experiences in Czechoslovakia and Canada. "We thought *you* were magnificent," she says. "You took on Stalinism, we took on Yankee terror" (19). But, again, Jiri's response is cool: "if you'll pardon me," he says, "what exactly did you have to protest about?" (19). In pointing out the inherent contradiction in Kostash's politics—her tacit support for the

Communists in Vietnam and her simultaneous support for the anti-communist movement in Czechoslovakia—Jiri deflates Kostash's hopes of building a cross-cultural bridge between her and him. When Kostash attempts to explain herself—when she insists that members of the New Left in Canada were critical of “Marxism-Leninism” but open to “socialism with a human face” (19)—Jiri counters once more with thinly-veiled hostility: “[y]ou want socialism? Look around” (19). Though Kostash tries to defend her position (“[n]o,” she says, “[n]ot *that* kind of socialism”), the sarcasm in his voice is unmistakable as he has the final word (“[w]e call this the real one”) (19). Everywhere she travels in Eastern Europe, Kostash wears the hat of the political idealist; and, wherever she goes, her political naiveté is called into question. In Yugoslavia (Belgrade, 1991), as in Czechoslovakia, her pro-socialist/anti-capitalist ideals come under fire again, albeit indirectly this time, from her friend Sonja. A Serbian sociologist and peace activist, Sonja has long supported democratic socialism; frustrated, however, by the “nightmare of murderous nationalisms” (108) surfacing within Yugoslavia, she decides that capitalism is the only answer to her country's problems (capitalism, she argues, produces the idea of the “inherent dignity of the individual citizen” without which “it is very difficult for [the individual] to emerge from the tribe” [108]). Kostash is encouraged to see that capitalism may have benefits.

Yet, even as her beliefs are routinely called into question, Kostash has a difficult time accepting that her understanding of Eastern European politics and history is naïve. Jiri may have the last word in their conversation but Kostash has the last word in her account of it. “[L]ooking back to 1968,” after talking with Jiri, she refuses to “see the ghosts of the victims of power”: she sees, instead, the ghosts of “our own youth” (19).

Despite Jiri's insistence on the acute differences between North American and Czech protest movements during the late 1960s, Kostash still draws parallels between the two. In her view, the young people of her and Jiri's generation, in both North American and Czechoslovakia, bid farewell to their adolescence at this time as they came of age as politically-savvy adults. Similarly unwilling to accept Sonja's rejection of socialism, Kostash concludes her chapter on Yugoslavia by dismissing her friend's embrace of capitalism. According to Kostash (and here again she has the final word following her reported conversation with Sonja), the benefits of capitalism are "difficult to see, amid the blood" (108).

Kostash's struggles to find a common ground with the people she meets are most apparent in her observations that some of the political movements she supports (as a socialist) are decidedly patriarchal in structure (and, hence, offend her feminist sensibilities). In Poland, for example, Kostash sympathizes with the free trade movement led by Lech Walesa because Solidarity stands in opposition to the economically and politically repressive (pro-communist) Polish United Workers' Party. When she discovers, however, that Solidarity also stands in opposition to women's rights (their right to abortion, for example), Kostash faces a dilemma. In Canada, her New Leftist and feminist political activism has always gone hand-in-hand; her political coming-of-age in the 1960s involved both. Women in Eastern Europe, by contrast—even women who are active in opposition movements against repressive governmental power structures—have a difficult time pushing gender issues to the forefront of their political agendas. As Julia (one of the "rare" women activists within Freedom and Peace, a pro-democracy organization in Poland) explains to Kostash, women most often participate in Polish

politics by “applauding their darling boyfriends and offering to make coffee and sandwiches” (149). (Indeed, Kostash notices that Julia herself is little more than a glorified secretary: “is there no Polish male capable of doing his own typing?” she wonders [149]). Faced with overwhelming evidence of the pervasive sexism in Poland—the roots of which can be found in the male-dominated structure of the Catholic church¹⁶²—Kostash is troubled by the ways in which women (especially feminist women) are viewed by men in Poland. In Warsaw, 1987, for example, she meets Teresa, a self-avowed feminist who has been married for fifteen years and whose husband used to see their marriage as a relationship defined by “absolute equality” (133). Now, “feeling the pressure of the social and economic crisis,” Teresa’s husband “renounces such egalitarian notions of marriage and demands that his wife be at home to cook his suppers, wash his socks, stroke his poor, embattled head” (133). He sees his wife’s “feminist buddies” as “frigid,” “disappointed,” and “unattractive”; “no longer really women,” according to him, they are “deeply unhappy in their repression of a woman’s real desires (marriage, motherhood)” (133). Talking with a small group of Teresa’s friends and fellow feminists, Kostash learns that women in Poland have three “female destinies” to choose from: “the devoted wife and mother, selfless and speechless in the family”; “the nun, likewise effaced in the church”; and the “streetwalker” who spends her time “near the socialist train stations, fucking for vodka” (134).

But while Kostash assumes that gender issues represent a promising point of connection between her and the women she meets in Eastern Europe, many of these

¹⁶² Kostash notes the irony of the “Mother Poland” (“*Matka Polska*”) trope. Members of Solidarity “[g]enuflect, genuflect, genuflect” (132) before the feminized idea of their country, while treating Polish women as subservient and inferior.

women refuse to align themselves with Kostash and her “western” ideas about gender roles. Marketa, a member of the anti-communist “Charter 77” organization in Czechoslovakia, eschews the “women’s movement in the West,” along with “its ideas concerning the patriarchal family and the struggle of women for equality in the workplace” (39). Having endured years of police surveillance and interrogation as a result of her involvement in “Charter 77,” Marketa craves the simple, “humanizing” pleasures of home and family (38-9). “I’ve never understood women in the West,” she says, “why you would choose a dull and stuffy office job doing stupid work all day when you could be at home with your children!” (39). Even Julia, the outspoken Warsaw feminist, is “fed up to here with kowtowing to western feminists who have big houses and refrigerators stuffed with meat, and who dash about in their cute Japanese cars, bringing enlightenment to their oppressed Polish sisters”: “[w]hat the hell do *they* know about oppression?” (150). Expected to “play the role of the jackbooted feminist from the West” (149), and simultaneously criticized for doing so, Kostash finds herself in a no-win situation. How is she to reconcile her “western” feminist ideals (and her relatively privileged “western” lifestyle) with the day-to-day material realities of the women she comes to know in Eastern Europe? Naïve in her assumption that women everywhere share the same goals and desires (the freedom to choose a career over marriage and motherhood), Kostash is bewildered by, and alienated from, the women she meets, many of whom embrace traditional gender roles.

Kostash is at her most idealistic, however—and most vulnerable, I think—during her interactions with intellectuals and writers in Eastern Europe. That she holds a special place in her heart for her fellow writers from Eastern Europe is obvious from the outset of

the text (when she states her plan to “interview writers of [her] generation” [1]). Because her own writing is politically motivated, and because she conflates the roles of the writer and the political dissident in the context of Eastern Europe, she believes that she has much in common with writers and intellectuals in this part of the world. At the very least—even if they differ in the specific issues they address in their writing—she assumes that they share similar philosophical perspectives on the relation between politics and art. Again, however, Kostash’s intellectual and political ideals are challenged as she comes face to face with writers who refuse to use their writing as either a platform for political commentary or a vehicle for social change. In Belgrade, 1988, for example, Kostash meets David, a writer of short fiction who criticizes her tendency to valorize the role of the writer as political dissident. Conscious of the ways in which people from “the West” require East European writers to be “persecuted and disreputable” (98), David knows that he fails to live up to the stereotype of the dissident writer. According to Kostash, he is “not disreputable. He’s boring. He says so. Writing stories about family life and private conscience and domestic memory. Trying to find a place as a ‘Yugoslav’ writer—not as a persecuted Jew, not as an insulted Serb, not as a dissident” (98). Not unlike Marketa in Czechoslovakia, David wants to experience ordinary human life, free from the burden of history and politics. Disgusted by the “spurious, self-appointed vocation of the writer as the people’s voice on issues of public import,” he believes that “the only free territory for poetry is to be found in poetic creativity itself” (99).

David, importantly, is not the first writer who challenges Kostash’s thinking about the relation between politics and writing: in Warsaw, 1984, four years before meeting David, she talks with Ryszard who is similarly critical of her assumptions about the role

of the writer in society. "How could a writer in our times," Kostash asks Ryszard, "refuse the subjects provided by violent social change? What a gift!" (123). But violent social change is, for Ryszard, no gift. Like David, he too dreams of living in an "ordinary" country; the realities of the country in which he lives are both a "burden" and a "curse" (122-3). According to Ryszard, writers in Eastern Europe have three options available to them: they can choose "speechlessness" within their totalitarian states in order to protect themselves from persecution; they can find "refuge" in "art for art's sake" (also protecting themselves from persecution); or they can "go underground," putting their writing "in the service of the revolution" (albeit clandestinely) (124).¹⁶³ Unlike David, who clearly chooses the second option (seeking "refuge" in the apolitical act of writing "the perfect sentence" [124]), Ryszard "has made none of these 'pure' choices" (he opts instead to live and work "in the interstices between them") (124). Sympathetic toward those writers who choose "art for art's sake," and skeptical of the notion that his political writing deserves "special credit" for its ostensibly revolutionary content (he suggests that "sympathizers from the West make too much of such modest gestures" [125]), Ryszard only sometimes—and, even then, reluctantly—plays the role of the dissident writer (he works as an editor at an "uncontroversial literary magazine that specializes in translations from world literature" [124]). He wants what Kostash has: the luxury of living in a part of the world where writers are not "socially necessary" (126). And this troubles Kostash precisely because, in her words, "I *want* to be necessary" (126). Although she is

¹⁶³ Later, importantly, in Yugoslavia, 1988, Kostash identifies a fourth option. At a meeting of intellectuals in Belgrade sponsored by the Writers' Union of Serbia she witnesses "a moment of collective theatre in which the purpose is precisely not to resolve the dilemma of the community's aggrieved helplessness before history but to sustain it" (101). Although the poets, journalists, and dramatists at this meeting ostensibly share the desire to effect positive social change through their writing, Kostash sees that their "martyrdom" makes them "feel good" and that their real goal is to "keep it going" (101).

conscious of her tendency to idealize the realities of “violent social change” (123), she nonetheless has difficulty seeing the “ordinariness” of her life in Canada as desirable. The “brouhaha of History” upon which Ryszard “gags” is what she has always wanted to experience and write about (127).

Though flippant in her reference to the “brouhaha of History” (127), and though sometimes guilty of romanticizing the historical (as well as the contemporary) realities of life in Eastern Europe, Kostash does confront the complex and uneasy nature of these realities—not only from her point of view as a New Leftist socialist, a feminist, and a writer but also, and always, from her perspective as a Ukrainian Canadian. Indeed, while she devotes only one chapter of *Bloodlines* to Ukraine, her relation to Ukraine and Ukrainian history is a central concern throughout the text. Over the course of her travels—even when she is in countries other than Ukraine, and even when she is attempting to focus on issues or events ostensibly unrelated to her ethnicity—Kostash finds herself unable, and at times unwilling, to ignore the ways in which her ethnicity shapes her observations of, and experiences in, Eastern Europe. Long before she reaches Ukraine (in her narrative), Kostash is forced to grapple with her ambivalent ethnic inheritance. On the one hand, her ethnic identity forms the basis for her broad sense of identification with the people of Eastern Europe (with Ukrainians, specifically, but also with Slavs, more generally); at the same time, her ethnicity simultaneously, and ironically, complicates her attempts at establishing relationships with many of the people she meets. Simply put, her ties to Ukraine—however imagined they may be—implicate

her in the very real enduring historical conflicts and tensions between Ukrainians and other ethnic groups in Eastern Europe.¹⁶⁴

At times eager to claim Ukrainian history as her own, at times distressed by her inability to separate herself from this history, Kostash discovers that her ethnicity is at once a gift and a curse. To be Ukrainian, she believes, is to acknowledge both the positive and negative aspects of her ethnic group's past, but the business of coming to terms with the ways in which this past actually lives on into the present is no easy task. In Prague, for example, 1987, Kostash befriends Zdenek, a literary scholar and a member of "Charter 77" whose professional and political interests coincide with her own. Their friendship becomes strained, however, when Zdenek points out several troubling facts about her people's historical relations with his. As a child, Zdenek explains, he and his family used to holiday in Uzhhorod, "[c]ool and bucolic on the western slopes of the Carpathians" (30). Now part of Ukraine, Uzhhorod is "lost" to him; it has been taken over by the same people who were recruited by the Nazis to decimate villages in Slovakia (30). That Kostash has never been to Uzhhorod—that she has no ties to this part of Ukraine and, in fact, cannot get there (even after enlisting the help of a travel agent in Edmonton)—matters little: she is, in Zdenek's mind, connected to this symbol of Ukraine's aggression vis-à-vis Czechoslovakia. And if Kostash is unable to escape history during her conversations with Zdenek in Czechoslovakia, she is no more able to

¹⁶⁴ At the same time, of course—and this is a central point throughout my discussions of both *Bloodlines* and *The Doomed Bridegroom*—Kostash's ties to Canada drive a wedge between her and the people she meets (because, as a Canadian, she enjoys certain privileges that they don't. She is able to travel freely, for example, and write without fear of recrimination). One of the ways in which she seeks to draw parallels, though, between her experiences and those of the people she visits is by emphasizing that Canadians are subjected—and staunchly resistant—to American cultural and economic imperialism (just as Eastern Europeans are unwillingly subjected to Soviet-style communism). Many of her contacts in Eastern Europe, however, see all "westerners" in the same light—as capitalist consumers with "big houses," "refrigerators stuffed with meat," and "cute Japanese cars" (150).

ignore history in her encounters with writers and political activists in Poland—though in Poland, importantly, she is the one who (like Zdenek) cannot separate the Poles she meets from their people’s long history of conflict with Ukrainians. Indeed, Kostash’s attitudes toward Poland (Polish people, Polish history) are overwhelmingly ambivalent because, while she sympathizes with Poland’s struggle for democracy, she refuses to forget that, for centuries, Poles systematically oppressed Ukrainians. After visiting a Ukrainian family, for example, living in Przemyśl, 1984 (a Polish village that was once part of Galicia in Ukraine), Kostash recalls the Polish government’s “Pacifacacija” campaign: “in the fall of 1930,” she writes, “armed units of the Polish Army and the police terrorized some eight hundred Ukrainian villages in Polish-held Galicia,” destroying “community halls and reading rooms, putting books and newspapers to the torch, confiscating property and arresting more than two thousand ‘nationalist’ troublemakers” (121). Unprepared for “how witheringly the Poles hate the Ukrainians in their midst,” Kostash learns that Ukrainians throughout southeast Poland have never recovered from Pacifacacija (140). They have been “sentenced to endure the loss of public memory,” she says; “[n]othing that belongs to public discourse as a whole—monuments, names, liturgies, nomenclature—refers to them or their view of things” (140). How is she to reconcile her pro-Polish and pro-Ukrainian sentiments when the Polish “freedom fighters” she admires are descended from the “landlords and rapists” who oppressed her people—and, when, moreover, the historical oppressor/oppressed relation between Poles and Ukrainians still, to some extent, exists (143)?¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Such writers as Kostash and Kulyk Keefer, who focus on Ukrainian and Ukrainian Canadian history in their writing, raise important questions about the ways in which the past lives on in the present. In the final chapter of this study, however, I argue that Ukrainian Canadian writers of the next generation need to move away from the past in their work (and look forward to the future of their ethnic group in Canada). At some

Constructed within *Bloodlines* as her final destination, Ukraine becomes the climax of Kostash's narrative, the most crucial stop in her narrative journey because, after a long series of failures and disappointments, it represents her last—and arguably best—chance to consolidate her sense of belonging to Eastern Europe. In a sense, her writing about Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Poland serves as narrative build-up to the final portion of the text in which she at last addresses her most personal reasons for traveling to Eastern Europe. Writing about her experiences in Ukraine, Kostash returns to the series of questions she asked in her introduction to *Bloodlines* (“[h]ow does the ‘old country’ live on in the citizen of the new?”; “[h]ow may I understand these people and their extraordinary history—my blood relations, as it were, from whom I was separated by the accident of being born into the new family line in Canada?”; and “[w]hat is the source of my feelings—feelings I didn’t even know I had—about their history, their landscape, their languages, their sites of collective memory?” [2]). I don’t want to suggest that Kostash’s personal motivations for traveling to Ukraine (her desire, as a Ukrainian Canadian, to explore her ethnic or familial ties to the country) are not also political; nor do I want to suggest that her political and professional interests in Eastern Europe are not also personal. Rather, I want to underscore the fact that Ukraine becomes the context in which Kostash is most sharply attuned to the intersection between the personal and political. “Quite simply,” as she explains, “for a Ukrainian Canadian Ukraine is not a country like other countries. Everything about it is ‘loaded,’ freighted with meaning” (168).

point, I think, Ukrainian Canadians must be permitted—or permit themselves—to define their ethnicity without reference to the experiences of previous generations.

Paradoxically, of course, while Kostash is most familiar with, and most emotionally attached to, the culture and history of Ukraine, Ukraine is the most unfamiliar, disorienting country to which she travels in Eastern Europe. As she discovers, over the course of her travels to Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Yugoslavia, the dividing line between “Eastern” and “Western” Europe is difficult to define: in these countries, “East” and “West” collide, collapsing the binary opposition between the two. Despite falling under Soviet-style communism rule after the Second World War, for example, Czechoslovakia bears the impress of its centuries-long cultural interaction with Western Europe. Prague, Kostash notes, is the “Paris of the East,” a “feast at first sight” in comparison to the “unlovely Stalinist renovations of Kiev and Warsaw and ramshackle Belgrade” (6). Poland, also an Eastern bloc country, but predominantly Roman Catholic, rather than Eastern Orthodox, is similarly caught between “East” and “West.” Among Serbians, her fellow Slavs who follow the Eastern Orthodox church and who use the Cyrillic alphabet, Kostash seems to find rather unambiguous evidence of their “Easternness.” But, as she repeatedly asks in her chapter on Yugoslavia, are the Balkans (the Kosovo region of which is “90 per cent Muslim” [75]) even part of Europe? In portions of this chapter narrated under headings such as “Where Does Europe End?” (72) and “Are We Still In Europe?” (81), Kostash wonders how far east one goes before Eastern Europe becomes Asia. True to its title (*Bloodlines: A Journey Into Eastern Europe*), Kostash’s narrative moves roughly eastward, away from the western-most (and most “westernized”) country in Eastern Europe toward the eastern-most (and least “westernized”). Situated further east than Yugoslavia, “U-kraina”—meaning “[a]t the edge” or the “frontier” (210)—lies on the cusp of Europe itself.

Not surprisingly, then, despite her ostensible familiarity with Ukrainian culture, Kostash feels most bewildered in, and alienated by, Ukraine: the most politically repressive and economically backward country that she visits in Eastern Europe (the only Soviet country to which she travels, too), Ukraine shocks and enrages her. Though before going to Ukraine for the first time, in 1984, she expects “economic wreckage, social inertia, aesthetic vulgarity and administrative cruelty” (164), she is unprepared (much like Kulyk Keefer) for the “myriad manifestations” of these realities: the “livid exhaustion on the women’s faces” who stand in long lines for poor-quality food; the countless crones, amputees, and cripples who beg on the streets; the “obligatory first-class prices” she must pay for “second- and third-class service and facilities” (165). Under constant surveillance by Intourist and the Ukraine Friendship Society (organizations that at once facilitate and control her movement within Ukraine), Kostash struggles against paranoia; knowing, however, that cabbies and doormen are KGB informers, and that the lamp fixtures in her hotel rooms are bugged, she is forced to take precautions. She travels “under cover of night” from Kiev to L’viv, for example, in order to meet with a dissident journalist, and she waits until she is in Poland to “write up [her] notes of the entire Ukrainian visit” (167-8). Waiting to meet with family members for the first time (in Chernivtsi, 1984), Kostash realizes that, despite their blood ties to one another, they are strangers. “How are we going to communicate?” she wonders. “My relatives and I have nothing in common—least of all language—except that my grandmother and their grandfather were sister and brother. Baba got away. End of shared history” (162-3). Certainly, to some extent during her travels to other countries in Eastern Europe, Kostash experiences similar difficulties—police surveillance; the

inability to communicate with some of the people she meets; and a generally lower standard of living than she is accustomed to in Canada. These realities, however, in Soviet Ukraine, are not only more pervasive but also, from her perspective as a Ukrainian Canadian, more troubling. “Why was I,” she asks, “not nearly so offended by the Stalinist features of rebuilt Warsaw, say, or the sullen brow-beatenness of the citizens of Prague, or the dilatory ways of business in Belgrade?” (168). In “those other capitals,” she confesses, “I was to forgive and overlook much”: “in Ukraine, 1984, I overlook and forgive nothing. What is this double standard of evaluation and emotion?” (168). The “double standard” derives from the fact that in Ukraine, more so than in any other part of Eastern Europe, she wants to belong; yet Ukraine, more emphatically than any other Eastern European country, reminds her that she does not.

But while Kostash’s narrative of her experiences in Ukraine—not unlike her writing about Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Poland—seems to foreground her inability to connect with the people and places she visits, the final chapter of *Bloodlines* also exemplifies her tenacious refusal to remain an outsider and a foreigner in Eastern Europe. Just as she returns again and again to Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Poland, making repeat visits to individuals with whom she feels a sense of political and/or professional solidarity, so too does she travel again and again to Ukraine (in 1984, 1988, 1991). In 1984, though, after returning to Canada from her first trip to Ukraine, she makes a crucial decision: she will not go back without first learning how to speak Ukrainian. Ashamed that she could not communicate with her relatives during her 1984 trip, and troubled by her inability to read the poetry of dissident writers such as Taras Shevchenko, Volodymyr Ivasiuk, and Vasyl Stus (whose tragic lives are symbolic to her

of the Ukrainian people's struggle for freedom), Kostash spends the next four years honing her Ukrainian language skills, beginning where she "left off thirty years earlier," in Ukrainian "Saturday School" (193). Her "forcible return to baby talk, to simple, declarative sentences and the present tense for all actions" becomes a "humbling," yet ultimately deeply rewarding, experience (195). As a writer, Kostash is keenly aware of the relation between language and culture: "never just a means of expression," she says, language is a "carrier, a veritable caravan of cultural and psychic and political import" (193). So when, finally, she is able to read Shevchenko's poems in Ukrainian—when she discovers that she is "*inside* the language, understanding it directly, the profoundly familiar sounds carrying a story, a voice, a personality where before there had been only babble" (195)—she is elated. Empowered with the ability to "open [her] mouth and speak," she returns to Ukraine with a mission: to forge new connections to Ukraine with and through language. "Baba," she writes, "was the last person in a long line of generations who spoke only Ukrainian; I broke the chain, speaking it not at all. Now I pick it up, wanting to hammer back my link, so that Baba might live again in my broken, stammering syllables" (196). Unlike Kulyk Keefer, who sees family as a "chain around your neck" that you "wear . . . without knowing" (*The Green Library* 41), Kostash sees language as the link between generations and between communities. Unwilling to passively accept that her ethnic inheritance is defined by blood, she actively seeks to redefine her ethnic identity by learning to speak Ukrainian.

What Kostash learns in Ukraine (and this explains, I think, her decision to construct Ukraine as her final destination in *Bloodlines*) is that bloodlines alone are not enough to link her to the ethnic homeland: she cannot take for granted that her ethnic

identity—any more than her identity as a socialist, a feminist, and a writer—guarantees her connection to Eastern Europe, its people, and its history. In fact, whether or not she shares common interests (political, professional, or cultural) with the individuals she meets during her travels matters little in the end: what matters is that she shares with them a common language. When Kostash returns to Ukraine, of course, in 1988, and again in 1991, she is not yet fluent in Ukrainian, and so she struggles to communicate with “broken, stammering syllables” (196). Still rudimentary, her language skills represent the first, not the final, steps toward building a genuine cross-cultural bridge between her real and her imagined homeland, and the conclusion to *Bloodlines*—less an ending, really, than a beginning—reinforces the notion that Kostash’s “business” in Eastern Europe is not yet complete. Absent from her text is the closure that Kulyk Keefer provides in *Honey and Ashes* by narrating her return to Canada. Kostash, in the conclusion to *Bloodlines*, remains in Ukraine. But precisely because she concludes her narrative in Ukraine, foregrounding her refusal to retreat to the comfort and familiarity of her life in Canada, *Bloodlines* offers the possibility, if not the promise, of a future in which she will succeed in bridging the gaps between Canada and Ukraine. While lacking a clear sense of resolution (i.e. a clear sense that she has succeeded in making real her imagined connection to Ukraine), the conclusion to *Bloodlines* is characterized by a distinct sense of hope—not only for Kostash (and her quest to connect with the people of Ukraine) but also for Ukraine itself (the Ukrainian people’s struggle for political independence and economic prosperity).

Interestingly, in narrating her 1984 trip to Ukraine—just prior to the turning point in the text where she decides to learn Ukrainian—Kostash writes about the 1933 famine

in Ukraine, one of the most terrible events in Ukrainian history (as a result of Stalin's high quotas for grain and livestock production, between seven and ten million Ukrainians died of starvation). Focused less on objective facts and statistics than on individual horror stories, her brief description of the famine is the most chilling portion of *Bloodlines*. Readers are left with the haunting images of people who bartered for bread with gold; of a woman who was tried for sabotage, her home destroyed, because she hid fourteen potatoes from the Soviets; of a wife and husband who, "[h]aving cut off their children's heads," then "salted them away for meat" (191-2). Situated as it is, however, near the conclusion of her 1984 trip to Ukraine, Kostash's discussion of the famine becomes more than a glimpse into the unspeakable horror of this moment in Ukrainian history: the famine represents her feelings toward Ukraine in 1984 (her "hunger" for connection with the ethnic homeland) and it becomes symbolic, too, of Ukraine itself (the Ukrainian people's "hunger" for a better life). Her first observation of Ukraine, then, upon her return in 1988, is telling: "[t]he Ukrainian lands seen from the air in June," Kostash writes, "are green, green and green again" (245). In the four years since her first trip to Ukraine, Kostash sees the beginnings of a "new," post-Soviet Ukraine: in the words of her friend Seriozha, the nation is "stirring to life" (201). She is still subject to intense scrutiny by Customs officials—food queues are still long, and Kiev is still dreary (197-200)—but the *beginnings* of change are grounds enough for optimism with regard to the future. Just as she has been transformed in the process of learning Ukrainian, so too is the nation undergoing dramatic changes. Importantly, in the final pages of *Bloodlines*, Kostash draws attention to the centrality and sanctity of both wheat and bread in

Ukrainian culture.¹⁶⁶ Kostash's suggestion is that the history of Ukraine may be marked by famine and war (the "Ukrainian lands" [245] may be fertilized by blood and bones) but the future of Ukraine springs from its rich black loam. Indeed, for her, the "green, green and green again" wheat fields of Ukraine (245)—the literal "beginnings of bread" (245)—become symbols of hope, however tentative, for both the Ukrainian people and her ability to connect with them.

The Doomed Bridegroom: A Memoir

Keeping the conclusion to *Bloodlines* in mind as I shift the focus of my discussion to *The Doomed Bridegroom*, I want to underscore the ways in which *The Doomed Bridegroom* undermines the optimism that characterizes the final pages of *Bloodlines*. My feeling is that the last chapter, and especially the last pages, of *Bloodlines* appear to pave the way for a sequel to Kostash's first journeys into Eastern Europe: a sequel in which she finally succeeds in making real her imagined sense of belonging. But *The Doomed Bridegroom*, focused as it is on Kostash's doomed love affairs with men from Eastern Europe (and from Canada and Greece, as well), tells a different story (or, rather, it tells the familiar story of her failure to develop lasting cross-cultural relationships). Despite her discovery, near the end of *Bloodlines*, that language (the Ukrainian language, specifically) offers her a way "into" Eastern Europe, Kostash chooses not to follow

¹⁶⁶ Wheat, Kostash explains, is the primary ingredient in "*kutia*," a traditional Christmas Eve dish and the "food of the gods of harvest" (245). On Christmas Eve, an "honorific wheat sheaf" called the "*didiukh*" is placed in the corner of the house (246). While "*kolach*," a braided Christmas bread, and "*paska*," a braided Easter bread, are both sacred to Ukrainians, all bread is holy in Ukrainian culture. A Ukrainian will "kiss the bread knife before she cuts the loaf, she will kiss the piece of bread that has fallen to the ground and beg its forgiveness for her lapse of reverence" (247).

Tellingly, after she has learned to speak Ukrainian, Kostash introduces Ukrainian words (for the first time) into her writing. By including Ukrainian words for wheat and bread, specifically, she draws an implicit link between her new language and the symbolically hopeful "beginnings of bread" in Ukraine.

through with the “business” of using Ukrainian to forge links to the people (politics, history) of her homeland—at least not in *The Doomed Bridegroom*.

And yet, I find that Kostash *does*—albeit in unexpected ways—pick up in *The Doomed Bridegroom* where she left off in *Bloodlines*. In *The Doomed Bridegroom*, after all, as she narrates the real and imagined relationships she developed over a period of thirty years with men from within and beyond the borders of Eastern Europe, radically blurring the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction in the process, Kostash also, implicitly, narrates her career-long relationship with language. As much the story of her love affair with the process of writing as it is the story of her love affairs with various “rebel men,” her memoir reveals the ways in which she becomes empowered as a writer to redefine her sense of self and community in and through language. Whereas, in *Bloodlines*, she learns a new language in order to forge links to the people (politics, history) of Ukraine, in *The Doomed Bridegroom* she finds a new way of using language that enables her to develop relationships that transcend borders and bloodlines. Over the course of this text, she reinvents herself as the figurative mother of a new generation of writers to whom she is connected by words.

In *The Doomed Bridegroom* Kostash at once revisits her fascination with Eastern Europe and revises her thinking about this “other” part of the world. Like *Bloodlines*, *The Doomed Bridegroom* explores, in part, Kostash’s interest in the history, politics, and people of Eastern Europe. In both texts, Kostash’s ethnicity represents one—but by no means the only—point of intersection between her identity and the identities of the individuals she meets over the course of her travels. Not unlike *Bloodlines*, *The Doomed Bridegroom* foregrounds the multiple reasons Kostash is drawn to Eastern Europe (her

sense of political and professional, as well as ethnic, solidarity with individuals from Eastern Europe). Just as *Bloodlines* narrates Kostash's attempts to redefine her sense of self and community by journeying "into" Eastern Europe—by developing relationships that transcend family bloodlines and national borders—so too does *The Doomed Bridegroom* reflect upon her desire to bridge the gaps between her imagined sense of belonging to, and actual detachment from, this part of the world. Focused as it is, of course, on Kostash's career-long infatuation with "rebel men" (political activists, dissident poets, and freedom fighters)—some of whom live within the borders of Eastern Europe, and others of whom live beyond these borders—*The Doomed Bridegroom* is at once broader and narrower in scope than *Bloodlines*. Whereas *Bloodlines* centres on Kostash's travels to Eastern Europe between 1982 and 1991, *The Doomed Bridegroom* addresses her experiences in Canada and the United States, as well as in Poland, Ukraine, and Serbia, over a period of more than thirty years (beginning in 1965, with Kostash's coming-of-age as a writer in Edmonton, and ending in 1997, with her mentoring of a young Serbian poet in Belgrade). So, temporally and geographically, *The Doomed Bridegroom* covers more territory than *Bloodlines*. At the same time, because Kostash strictly focuses *The Doomed Bridegroom* on the romantic and sexual relationships she developed with six men (as distinct from the large number and wide variety of relationships she writes about in *Bloodlines*), her memoir offers more limited—though arguably more intimate—insight into her life.

Divided into six chapters, each focused on one of her lovers, *The Doomed Bridegroom* narrates (more or less chronologically) Kostash's "personal history of arousal by transgressive men, alive and dead" over a period of roughly thirty years (vi).

By acknowledging, in her preface to the text, that she “came simultaneously to politics and sexuality in the 1960s” (v-vi)—and by confessing that, since then, she has been drawn “over and over again, in sympathies of desire, to heroic figures in the extremity of resistance and sacrifice” (vi)—Kostash makes clear the extent to which both her private life and her career as a public intellectual have been shaped by her attraction (at once political and sexual) to “suffering and martyrdom, particularly as they were lived out in the political dramas of the Cold War and the New Left” (v). Her lovers include Lenny, an American draft-dodger she met in 1965 while both were university students in Edmonton; Kostas, a (supposed) communist freedom fighter from Greece; dissident Ukrainian poet Vasyl Stus (who died in a Russian gulag in 1985); K, an aging communist bureaucrat living in Warsaw; Canadian writer Patrick Friesen (whose Mennonite ancestors came from Ukraine); and, finally, a young, unnamed Serbian poet from Belgrade. Importantly, however, while all of these men are (or, in Stus’s case, were) real—and while most are (or were) involved in very real “dramas of courage, despair, and failure in countries wracked by a certain complex of cultural and political history” (vi)—Kostash’s relationships with them are defined by her inability to distinguish reality and fantasy (at times, in fact, she deliberately chooses not to separate the two). Some of her actual relationships are predicated on fictions (on lies, that is); others are nuanced by the imagined, though ostensibly historically-determined, roles that she and her lovers find themselves enacting (either consciously or unconsciously); and at least one of Kostash’s love affairs (her affair with Stus) is entirely made up. But all of her love affairs, real or imagined, are shaped by her tendencies to romanticize and idealize the “men of the ‘other’ Europe,” their histories and their politics (vi). For her, these men are caught up in

“huge swirls of historical narrative that threw Slavs down to the Adriatic, Tatars across the Black Sea, Cossacks into the steppes, Byzantine monks to Rus, Ottomans to Belgrade” (vi). In admitting that she is attracted to the “otherness” of her lovers (she associates them with “Bolshevik revolutionary songs, the Cyrillic alphabet scratched in clandestine poems, ruined Orthodox monasteries, doomed peasant insurgents, heroic labourers in the mines and mills of Soviet bosses” [vi]), Kostash reveals her desire to become a part of their romanticized “other” worlds. “Take me,” she repeats again and again in the preface to *The Doomed Bridegroom*, as she addresses a lover from Prague (one of several “bridegrooms” she mentions only briefly in the introduction to the text): “tell me stories of Jan Hus and his uprisings, of the bands of men and women in possession of this countryside before they were defeated and perished, take me in cornfields, limbs flailing near the dead, take me in cobblestoned squares near the funeral pyres” (vii). To be physically or sexually “taken” by her lovers, “in an embrace of excited camaraderie,” is to be taken, symbolically, into their worlds and into their histories.

Thematically, then, in *The Doomed Bridegroom* Kostash confronts for the first time—and with unprecedented candor—the intensely personal ways in which she has been drawn to the people, politics, and history of Eastern and Southern Europe. In terms of its subject matter, her memoir represents a departure from *Bloodlines*, a text that leaves largely unexamined the romantic relationships she developed over the course of her travels. Of course, Kostash’s romanticized perceptions of Eastern Europe are not absent from *Bloodlines*; on the contrary, she travels repeatedly to and within this part of the world precisely because she longs to experience the romance of revolution, political upheaval, and social change. But in *Bloodlines* (and this is a point reinforced by the

narrative structure of the text), as Kostash sets out to observe and experience the “real” Eastern Europe, she seeks to *make* real her imagined sense of belonging to, or solidarity with, multiple communities in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, and Ukraine. While she blurs in *Bloodlines* the genres of autobiography and biography, history and travelogue, the text is, unquestionably, a work of non-fiction, for in it she seldom strays from her actual travels in Eastern Europe (except, of course, when she provides historical background on the places she visits). In *The Doomed Bridegroom*, by contrast, Kostash allows herself the freedom to explore—formally as well as thematically—the ways in which her long-term obsession with Eastern and Southern Europe has been defined by the inextricability of reality and fantasy. By maintaining, in part, her characteristic role of the objective and impartial journalist, keen on recording her actual observations and experiences—but by embracing, at the same time, the role of the storyteller, whose imagination is as limitless as it is lively—she is able to draw upon the conventions of both non-fiction and fiction as she narrates her love affairs. Each chapter of *The Doomed Bridegroom* becomes a complex narrative montage in which Kostash moves in time and space, shifting narrative voices as she alternates between real and imagined scenarios. Alongside matter-of-fact descriptions of her actual encounters with her lovers, and historical accounts of her lovers’ backgrounds, she provides poetic (sometimes erotic) renderings of her imaginary encounters with them. Frequently she interrupts first-person confessions of her feelings with third-person analyses of her behaviour. Quoting from personal letters, and from published poetry, articles, and books (written by other writers), Kostash draws upon myriad “real” sources throughout *The Doomed Bridegroom*, but she also invents mock interviews (between herself and an imaginary interviewer) and mock

love letters (never actually sent to her lovers), as well as “probable” (not definitive) biographies of her lovers.

Sorting through, and making sense of, Kostash’s fragmented, at times disjunctive, narrative style is no easy task, for she seems set against the business of constructing *The Doomed Bridegroom* as a unified or coherent narrative of her growth or development over the course of her relationships. And, though each chapter of the text appears to stand alone, so that *The Doomed Bridegroom* might be read as six distinct love stories, these stories themselves rarely follow a discernible plot. Indeed, the question Kostash asks of her relationship with K—“[i]s there a narrative here [. . .]?” (79)—is a question readers might well ask of every chapter, as well as the text as a whole. My argument, of course, is that there *is* a narrative here—there is a story—but that, in order to understand the meaning of it, readers must pay close attention to the complex ways in which Kostash tells it. While the text is divided into a series of separate love stories, each focused on a specific “doomed bridegroom,” collectively, they form a single story—of the “doomed bride.” In attempting to form lasting relationships with her lovers (and, by extension, their “other” parts of the world), Kostash takes on, or tries out, various different roles: friend, girlfriend, mistress, comrade, colleague. Yet all of her relationships, real and imagined, come to an end because she never plays the role of wife. Insofar as her bridegrooms are doomed to live out their lives “trapped in long histories played out at the overlapping territories of East and West, formed by brutal events” (vi), Kostash is doomed to live outside of these histories. Despite her inability, at times, to separate reality and fantasy—and despite her willingness to blur the boundaries of fiction and non-fiction—Kostash cannot imagine, and chooses not to construct, alternate (i.e. “happy”)

endings to her doomed love affairs. And yet, even as *The Doomed Bridegroom* (not unlike *Bloodlines*) seems to narrate Kostash's failure to connect with the "other" worlds with which she is obsessed, the text concludes with a tentatively hopeful step toward such connection. For, even as she comes to terms in her memoir with her intense attraction to, but simultaneous detachment from, her lovers, her writing itself becomes the key to her success in re-imagining her sense of self and community beyond borders and bloodlines.¹⁶⁷ In and through her writing—in and through the process of developing a new genre of (creative) non-fiction—she redefines herself as figurative mother to the next generation of writers living within and beyond the borders of Eastern Europe.

In the first chapter of *The Doomed Bridegroom*, "Mississippi Dreaming," Kostash introduces herself as the blushing virgin—innocent, both sexually and politically, but eager, at the same time, to enter the erotic "other" world to which her boyfriend Lenny belongs. He, like her, is studying at the University of Alberta; they meet in 1965 while taking a class in "Political Institutions of the Soviet Union" (2). Reliving her days as a student in Edmonton, before meeting Lenny, Kostash becomes a wide-eyed dreamer once more: as she "crunch[es]" her way to class "through the shocking whiteness of the Edmonton winter," she longs to be in Mississippi (1). "I wish to be in that hot, moist place," she writes, "tramping along the delta, my arms linked through black arms, on a freedom march" (1). As presumptuous as it is naïve, Kostash's language sexualizes the political climate of Mississippi. Without reflecting on the painful realities of racism and prejudice, she assumes that the racial politics of the American South are at once exotic

¹⁶⁷ Kostash's writing itself is marked by a double-ness that underscores her ambivalence toward her lovers. She constantly shifts between first- and third-person narrative voices, and between the past and present tense, drawing attention to her sense of herself as a character in—and retrospective observer of—the stories she tells.

and erotic. "Whiteness," for her, is humiliatingly ordinary and dull; "blackness," by contrast, sexually and politically exciting. Against the backdrop of the snowy campus, a constant reminder of her "white girl's humiliation in the middle class," Kostash dreams of being "elsewhere, in the drama of strangers in pain" (1). (That she would be accepted into the black protest movement is a given, in her mind.) But it is Lenny, an American draft dodger from the Bronx, active in the protest movement against the Vietnam War, and a member of the New Democrat Youth, who offers her a way out of the symbolic Edmonton winter and into the heat of another world. Interestingly, when she describes all the boys of the "NDY," she draws attention to the ways in which they "snap and sizzle, heating up the space around them . . . with the ardour of their ideas" (2).

Tellingly, too, she likens her first encounters with these boys to the loss of her virginity; their talk of "oppression, class enemy, being and nothingness" effects the "defloration of [her] virginal vocabulary" (2). Lenny, however, is particularly attractive to her because he is more exotic—more daring and dangerous—than the other "NDY" boys: he has an accent ("Gotta kwawtah foh a cuppa kawfee?" [2]); he uses drugs to stay awake at night (writing "articles for the student paper about Vietnam and the draft resistance in the United States, speeches for a rally in front of the legislature, not to mention letters to all his strung-out friends back in New York, each one of whom, it seems, is in deep shit" [2]); and, most importantly, he is an experienced lover. That Kostash is attracted to both his physical body and his body of political ideals—that she cannot, in fact, separate the two—is obvious: while sitting cross-legged together on a gymnasium floor at an anti-Vietnam War teach-in, and talking about the situation in Vietnam, her eyes settle on the "bulky bulge of his crotch" (3).

Drawn to Lenny's otherness, Kostash eventually gives herself to him sexually (attempting to consummate the union of their political ideals, if not their love), but their relationship is doomed precisely because he is so different from her. Unsatisfied with their sexual relationship, Lenny criticizes Kostash for "being altogether too passive, too virginal, lying there *being made love to* rather than being a participant in a sharing process" (4). Underlying his criticism of her passivity in bed, though, is a deeper—albeit unspoken—sense of disdain for her political passivity. Unsurprisingly, in the years following their break up (in 1966)—years in which Kostash completes her Master's degree in Russian Literature at the University of Toronto and then begins her career as a freelance journalist—Lenny becomes more militant in his pro-communist, anti-capitalist political activism. She chooses a career in writing; he chooses a career in revolution. In fact, Lenny is eventually sent to a California prison for his revolutionary activities. And in letters to Kostash from prison, he gives voice to the reasons for which their relationship could not, and cannot, work. "[W]e were abstractions from each other's life," he writes, "figments of each other's imagination" (11). According to Lenny, their relationship was "not real. What was real was the killing in the yard two weeks ago and the stabbing last week, tension, aggravation, friends locked down. The three thousand pages of his files from the FBI. Cold coffee in styrofoam, cold tortillas from the canteen, a wet towel hanging from a nail" (11). Six months after his release from prison, Lenny marries his lawyer, leaving Kostash with little more than her memories of the time she spent with him. His references to "cold coffee" and "cold tortillas" hearken back to her winter days in Edmonton, before she knew the warmth of his embrace; without him, she is once again "present at the scene of [her] own white girl's humiliation in the middle

class" (1). In 1987, while staying at her cabin, Kostash reflects on her relationship with Lenny some twenty-two years after their love affair ended. "It's cool inside the cabin," she notes. "[T]he sheets are cool" (12). Thinking about Lenny, though, she "throw[s] open the windows" and "throw[s] off the covers" of the bed to "let in the heat" (12). Acknowledging that, realistically, she will "not be going to Mississippi"—she will "never go to Mississippi"—she draws upon the warmth of memory, her only defense against the symbolic cold (13).

In many ways more complicated than her relationship with Lenny, Kostash's love affair with Kostas (the subject of her second chapter, "The Collaborators") seems to foreground her transition from naïve girlhood to savvy womanhood. Kostash meets Kostas in 1981 while vacationing in Greece; older now, more confident about the direction of her career and the nature of her politics, she carries herself with the self-assuredness of a maturing writer (*All of Baba's Children* was published in 1977). Fittingly, when Kostas meets her for the first time, she is sitting in a seaside taverna, writing. The first question he asks her is not "[w]here are you from?" but "[a]re you a writer?" (15); and, insofar as his next question, "[w]hat do you write about?" (15), marks the point at which their love affair begins, the way in which Kostash answers this question comes to define the terms of their relationship. Her assumption, upon meeting Kostas (and before finding out anything about him), is that he will not be familiar with such words as "prairie, Ukrainian, Cree, counterculture, New Left, sisterhood" (15) (words that describe her interests as a writer), for the world in which he lives ("[t]his Greek place") is "nothing like her homeplace" (16). ("Here," she writes of Greece, "there were no hippies . . . and no free-for-alls in campus offices"; here instead were

“students trapped in the searchlights beamed from the army tanks that rolled over the iron gates of the Polytechnic and into the forecourt, the machine guns following the beams of light” [16]). In order to make herself understood, then, she tells Kostas, simply, that she writes about “oppression, exploitation, resistance, and struggle” (16). That she feels “imbecilic” as she makes these broad generalizations about her work is important (16). When she was younger, dating Lenny, such generalizations would have adequately reflected her largely unformed political ideals (i.e. her broad sense of solidarity with individuals in the throes of sociopolitical drama and suffering). In 1981, however, having learned from her experiences with Lenny about the harsh realities of specific resistance movements, and having focused her own work on ethnicity, feminism, and New Leftist socialism, she is no longer a virgin (either politically or sexually): she has a clear sense of herself (who she is) and her politics (what she believes)—and yet, from the moment she meets Kostas, her sense of self-confidence with regard to both is shaken. In the taverna, despite her attempts to busy herself with writing, playing the part of the independent woman traveler, she becomes self-conscious of the fact that she is alone (“[s]uddenly I was no longer a woman alone but a woman without a man” [15]), and she is unable to articulate her precise motivations for writing.

With Kostas, then—who, like Lenny, represents the exotic and erotic “other”—Kostash becomes a virgin once more, naïve in both her emotional and political attraction to him. The more she learns about him, the less sure of herself she becomes. In fact, Kostash is never sure of precisely who Kostas is. Although he tells her that he is a communist freedom fighter—an “organizer for the socialist party” in Greece (PASOK), and a member of an “underground” group of militant communists who meet “in secret to

train for guerilla warfare” (18)—he gives her no details about what he does when he leaves their bed; where he goes; how he enacts his political ideals. And so she finds herself inventing, for the most part, the details of his life. She daydreams about clandestine, late-night gatherings of men “with moustaches . . . smoking suicidely, shouting and waving their arms in the chop-chop Greek manner”: they are, she imagines, surrounded by “heavy wooden boxes holding AK-47’s from Bulgaria” as they plot their “strategies for the defence of the Greek republic” (20). Uncertain, more generally, about the details of Greek history (when, for example, Kostas tells her about his involvement in a student uprising in 1973, she feels “ashamed” that she “did not know this story” and asks “[w]here the hell was I, and all my friends, on November 17, 1973, that this story should not be known?” [24]), Kostash imagines the Greeks as “a people abandoned to semi-literacy and cowed by generations of tyrants in the schools, the courts, the police stations, not to mention at home, in the family” (19). For her, their history is marked by “blood-soaked village squares, ghost armies, and unmarked graves” (19)—but by few specific details. All Kostash knows for certain, really, is that she has been seduced by Kostas, and by the seemingly dangerous world to which he ostensibly belongs.

Should she know more? Or, rather—in retrospect—should she have known more? This question, ultimately, comes to define Kostash’s purpose in writing about her relationship with Kostas, and the narrative structure of “The Collaborators” underscores her desire to find answers. Whereas Kostash narrates “Mississippi Dreaming” entirely in the first person, and in the present tense (reliving her love affair with Lenny as it unfolds), she approaches her relationship with Kostas from a different perspective—or, more accurately, from two different perspectives. Looking back on her experiences with

Kostas as an outsider observer, she narrates their story in the third person (past tense), but this narrative is frequently interrupted by segments of an imaginary interview (in which Kostash speaks with an imaginary interviewer about her relationship with Kostas).

Distanced from the relationship itself, Kostash is able to analyze, retrospectively, what she felt at the time of her affair; how she succumbed to Kostas's advances; and, most importantly, why he deceived her throughout their time together. Throughout the chapter (beginning with her "imbecilic" answers to Kostas's questions about her writing [16]), Kostash hints at the ways in which she played the fool in relation to him. She was too eager to accept his stories at face value ("he kept feeding me stories," she says to her interviewer [24]); too passive to challenge him when he showed a decided lack of interest in her wide-ranging political and social concerns (speaking to him of "Ukrainian weddings and the crisis in the Writers' Union, of a picket line and a study group, she could see on his face how risible these were compared to the project of the Greek revolution" [28]). Reflecting on the truth about Kostas—that he sold "agricultural chemicals manufactured by an American multinational corporation" for a living; that he was married with two children; that he was never involved in political uprisings, as he claimed to be (31-3)—Kostash sees that she was in love with half-truths and lies. Just as she came to understand in "Mississippi Dreaming" that she and Lenny were "abstractions from each other's life, figments of each other's imagination" (11), so too does she come to realize in "The Collaborators" that she and Kostas invented each other. Near the conclusion to the chapter, Kostash acknowledges that they were both active in constructing the fictional terms of their affair: "[s]he wanted a lover who was leafletting the Greek countryside with revolutionary pamphlets. As for Kostas, he wanted someone

who would see him, see him in the blue hills back of Pylos, stride manfully into the village square” (33). By admitting her willingness to see past Kostas’s lies in order to play out her transgressive fantasies, Kostash comes to terms with her complicity in the affair. Perhaps, in the end, she was not the naïve virgin: perhaps, from the start, she was an active participant (a “collaborator”) in shaping this doomed love story.

With Lenny and Kostas, then, Kostash begins to recognize the ways in which her imagination influences her perceptions of, and behaviour toward, her lovers: when, however, in 1990, she chances upon an article in a magazine about dissident Ukrainian poet Vasyl Stus (1938-1985), and soon finds herself imagining her romantic involvement with him, she arrives at a turning point in her thinking about the relation between reality and fantasy. In “Inside the Copper Mountain,” one of the most stylistically complex chapters in *The Doomed Bridegroom*, she pushes the boundaries of non-fiction by narrating her love affair with Stus, a man she came to know only through his writing and through others’ writing about him. In part, this chapter narrates the process through which she became familiar with Stus. While studying Russian literature, she explains, in the mid-1960s, she began collecting books by and about dissident Russian poets. “I was not then,” she says, “aware of dissident Ukrainian poets who were not in any case at the centre of my concern” (35). In time, however, as her “reading persisted”—as her library of books filled with the “excruciating stories of the men and women of the Gulag” (35) became a “harrowing archive of that archipelago of punishment called the Zone” (36)—she began to focus more and more on the “particularly relentless persecution of Ukrainian intellectuals” (36). Acknowledging her sense of ethnic solidarity with these intellectuals (many of them writers, like her), she explains that she learned Ukrainian, the “language

of [her] grandparents,” in order to “understand better who these dissidents had been and what had happened to them” (36). Next, she “began subscribing to Ukrainian journals and magazines” (36). Eventually, she writes, “I noticed the repetition of certain names, made connections among events, stared at photographs” (36). A photograph of Stus—dark-haired and dark-eyed, wearing a black turtleneck sweater and looking like a “Ukrainian Marlon Brando” (34)—is what initially sparked her interest in his story.¹⁶⁸

But as Kostash narrates her increasing obsession with Stus, her story (the story of her research into the lives of persecuted Ukrainian intellectuals) is almost immediately overtaken by his (the story of his life). Determined to piece together the facts surrounding Stus’s life, as well as his death, Kostash provides an overview of his biography by drawing upon the memoirs of Stus’s friend, Mykhailyna Kotsiubynska (published by the magazine *Ukraina* in 1990 as “In the Mirror of Memory”), various historical works related to Stus, and poems written by Stus himself.¹⁶⁹ Yet, having

¹⁶⁸ For a photograph of Stus, see *Vasyl Stus—A Life Remembered* (<http://www.ualberta.ca/~ulec/stus>), an online tribute to the poet put together by the Shevchenko Foundation and the Ukrainian Language Education Centre (sponsored by the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies). This website draws substantially on Kostash’s writing about him in *The Doomed Bridegroom*.

¹⁶⁹ Stus, Kostash explains, was a Ukrainian nationalist from Kiev, outspoken in his objections to Soviet persecution of Ukrainian intellectuals. In the years leading up to his first imprisonment, in 1972, he used various forms of political protest to publicly denounce the “Russification of Ukrainian culture” (37). After witnessing the arrests of his friends and colleagues by Soviet authorities (Kostash offers a sampling of names including Ivan Rusyn, Valentyn Moroz, Mykhailo Osadchy, Mykhailo Horyn, Ivan Hel, Panas Zalyvakha, Myroslava Zvarychevska, Anatoly Shevchuk and Ivan Svitlychny—who were, respectively, “a member of an amateur choir, a history teacher, a journalist, a philologist, a locksmith, a painter, a proof-reader, a linotypist, [and] a critic” [40]), Stus wrote “a flurry of open letters and appeals” and “stood outside . . . courtrooms demanding to be let in” (40). At a cinema once, in 1965, following the screening of a new Sergei Paradzhanov film, he stood up in front of the audience and shouted, “All those against tyranny, rise up!” (37). Most importantly, perhaps, despite the KGB’s “relentless persecution of Ukrainian intellectuals” (36), he refused to stop writing. In 1970, a collection of his poems, *Zymovi Dereva* (*Winter Trees*), was published by a Belgian press. Two years later, he was arrested “on charges of involvement in an espionage ring” (45), his apartment ransacked, and all of his writing (“virtually everything he had written in the last fifteen years” [45]) confiscated. Sentenced to “five years in special regime labour camp in Mordovian ASSR and three years internal exile” (45), Stus continued—from camp—to mount “verbal attacks on the KGB” (48). And, despite his weakening health (at the time of his arrest he suffered from a gastric ulcer that gradually worsened as a result of the appalling conditions of the labour camp), as well as the “severe constraints” (48) on his writing within the camp, Stus was able to “smuggle out” (47) letters and poetry that soon circulated in the west as powerful testimonies to the injustice of the Soviet regime. In

learned through her relationships with Lenny and Kostas about the ways in which what is real is always nuanced by what is imagined—and conscious, at the same time, of the gaps between what has been written about Stus and what he actually experienced over the course of his life—she cannot resist the temptation to insert herself into his story.

Particularly “enchanted” by Kotsiubynska —with whom she shares the same initials— Kostash says, “[t]he temptation is huge: to enter her words here and join her voice contrapuntally as the woman who did not know Stus” (38). At this, one of the most compelling moments in *The Doomed Bridegroom*, Kostash makes the transition from narrator of, to character in, Stus’s narrative by identifying with Kotsiubynska (herself both a narrator of and character in his life story). While Kostash never knew Stus, “*she* [Kotsiubynska] did” and, by imagining herself as Kotsiubynska, Kostash becomes part of his story: “there I am,” she writes, “she is, beside Vasyl Stus” (38). In subsequent portions of the chapter, under the deliberately ambiguous heading of “MK,” Kostash merges her voice with that of Kotsiubynska, placing herself next to Stus in recreated scenarios (originally narrated by Kotsiubynska in her memoirs). Writing about Stus’s outburst in a Kiev cinema, for example, in 1965 (the starting point of his protest against the Soviet regime), Kostash says, “we stood up together. He shouted something despairing—‘Whoever is against tyranny, stand up now!’—while trembling in every cell of his body. I could feel it through the arm I held around his shoulder as we left the hall”

1980, some seven months after his first prison sentence ended, Stus was arrested again under familiar charges of “anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda designed to undermine or weaken Soviet power” (57). Sentenced this time to “ten years’ forced labour and five years’ internal exile” (57), he was held, for a full year before his death in 1985, in “an isolation cell on reduced rations in spite of exhibiting dangerous symptoms of kidney malfunction” (61). A man whose faith in the ideals of freedom and justice was unshakable, Stus died “before his term was up”; and, in a telling commentary on the rigid brutality of the Soviet authorities, his family could not bring his body home until 1989, when it had “‘served’ his entire sentence” (62).

(38). And “here was Vasyl,” she writes, narrating Kotsiubynska’s encounter with him after she rescinded her communist party membership in 1966, “waving his arms about, shouting cheerfully at me” (42). Most importantly, perhaps, in numerous italicized passages (also under the heading of “MK”), Kostash narrates entirely imagined (sometimes erotic) scenarios involving “MK” and Stus—all written in the first person (from “MK’s” point of view); many addressed to Stus (the “you” to whom she refers). Collectively, these scenarios form the narrative of a love affair between “MK” (Kostash/Kotsiubynska) and Stus that never really took place.

In order to become closer to Stus, then, Kostash takes on the persona of “MK,” and invents a romantic relationship between “MK” and Stus: ironically, however, the doomed nature of this relationship serves less as a challenge to than a reminder of the ways in which she is distanced from Stus. Despite her attempts at imagining a love affair with Stus by (re)imagining herself as Kotsiubynska, Kostash cannot “un-imagine” the fact that Kotsiubynska was never actually involved with Stus romantically; and that he was, in reality, not only married to another woman but, by all accounts, intensely devoted to his wife (and child). Doomed less by his anti-Soviet political activism than by his commitment to his family, “MK’s” love affair with Stus is strained from the start because—even within the realm of fiction—Kostash is unable to ignore the very real presence of his wife. Not surprisingly, within the italicized portions of text through which the love story between “MK” and Stus unfolds, Kostash frequently makes reference to Stus’s wife, Valentyna Popeliukh. At one point, for example, early in “MK’s” relationship with Stus, Kostash (addressing him) notes with thinly-veiled jealousy that “[y]our wife sits curled up on the sofa and glares coldly at you. She has

been looking at you like this for some time, while you and I have been talking. She is thin and beautiful. Her neck is fluted with grooves. She does not wear the look of a woman in love. Perhaps I do" (41-2). Later in the chapter (and in their love affair), after "MK" and Stus make love, Kostash (again addressing Stus) draws attention to his relationship with his wife: "[y]ou slide from my bed to wash, for it is time for you to go home," she writes. "Ah, the marriage bed. And do you find your ardour there at three o'clock in the morning?" (46). That Kostash rarely refers to Valentyna by name is telling ("[h]e loved her," she writes, "[h]e chose her" and "[h]e bedded her" [42]), for Stus's wife is present as an absence in documents related to his life. Although he dedicates his poems to his wife, Kostash finds little information about Valentyna in her research: "[w]here is she?" Kostash wonders. "Where is the wife? No one mentions her" (67). "There is no bride here at all," Kostash suggests. "She has a name—Valentyna Popeliukh—but no figure, no face" (41). And yet, Valentyna—the ghostly absence/presence who haunts "MK's" imagined encounters with Stus—is never far from Kostash's thoughts as she writes about Stus. There is a bride here, in his story, who cannot be erased from history by Kostash any more than the Soviet regime could erase Stus. "[F]ecund and child-bearing," Valentyna shares a life with Stus that ultimately, Kostash admits, "*has nothing to do with me*" (54). Following a description of the day-to-day domestic activities of Stus and his family ("*[y]ou brush breadcrumbs off your lapel, check the contents of your briefcase*" while "*[y]our wife is distracted, thinking of the day ahead for herself—the grocery shopping*"), Kostash says, with a tinge of regret, "*I would bear books*" (54). Clearly, what Kostash longs for in "Inside the Copper Mountain"—and she underscores this in the

title of, as well as the epigraph to, the chapter—is to become a part of Stus’s world. The epigraph (an excerpt from one of his poems) reads,

*A thunder of resurrection on the mountain
is being announced for me.
Smash your fists against despair,
hiding within the copper mountain. (34)*

To imagine herself as Stus’s lover is to raise her fist beside his in the fight against the metaphorical “mountain” of “despair.” In the process of narrating her imagined relationship with Stus, however, Kostash learns as much about the limits of fantasy as she does about the constructed nature of reality. She is prohibited from joining Stus “Inside the Copper Mountain” because he already has a bride there, at his side.

In subsequent love affairs—and particularly in her relationship with K, her Polish lover—Kostash becomes increasingly conscious of the other women in her lovers’ lives, as well as the role she plays as the “other” woman vis-à-vis these women. Indeed, in “The Masked Man in Warsaw,” as she narrates her actual relationship with K, Kostash struggles to find a place for herself in his life because the mysterious K (whose politics are as ambiguous as his love life is complex) is not only married, he also already has a mistress. After meeting K at a “literary conference in Slovenia in May 1986” (71), Kostash remains in contact with him for the next few years (until 1990). In fact, aside from the time she spends with him in Warsaw, in 1987, their love affair takes place almost entirely through letters. Looking back on the beginning of their relationship, she explains that what first attracted her to K, a man who belonged to “the Communist Party *nomenklatura*,” was his “public declaration in the conference hall in support of the heroic and persecuted Polish labour organization, Solidarity” (72). Poland, she says, “seemed to me . . . a place where it was unwise to speak too loudly, painful to breath too deeply,” but

“here was K, a bona fide Communist . . . proclaiming in clear English, his name tag pinned to his good suit, that Solidarity has been shamefully repressed” (72). Initially “aroused with admiration” (72) for K, Kostash corresponds with him for a year before traveling to Poland and seeing him again; over the course of this year, however, she is unable to sustain the “near-frenzy of repressed erotic excitement” that K once inspired (72). K, she learns—from him, as well as from her friends who know him—is not the man she thought he was. In the first place, he is not, according to one of her friends, “a garden variety Communist”: he is “high-ranking” (78). Immediately overcome by a feeling of “queasy shame that [she] had let his touch arouse [her] when [she] should have been more alert” (78), Kostash realizes that she “misrepresented” K in her “own imagination as a dissident” (72). “What I had really wanted,” she says, “was a lover from my own generation, one who had fought the student battles of 1968, the Solidarity battles of 1980-81, and who had then gone to jail” (72). K, though, “belonged to an earlier generation who had joined the Party in its heady, reformist days of 1956 and then made endless little ‘adjustments’ as the Party reneged on all its promises” (72-3). Troubled by the discrepancies between his “public declaration” of support for Solidarity (72) and reports that he is a “leading Communist” (123), Kostash wonders “[j]ust who [is] K ‘with’?” (81). Is he, as her friend Jan suggests, “one of those weaklings who went whichever way the wind blew”? (123).

But Kostash is equally, if not more troubled, by the complexities of K’s personal life. At once the “unfaithful” and the “devoted” husband (72), he has been married for thirty-two years, and has kept a mistress (B) for nearly as long. Always, Kostash writes as she describes his letters, “there was news of his two women” (76). And so, just as

Kostash questions K's political allegiances, so too does she wonder about his personal fidelities. "I was becoming afraid of Warsaw," she writes, "of the mask upon mask my lover donned to make his way through his obligations" (77). To whom is K faithful? The Community Party or Solidarity? His wife or B? "[W]hat really," as Kostash phrases it, "would he do with yet another woman clamouring in Warsaw for his attention?" (77). Clearly, to become a part of his life, Kostash must fight for K's affection, yet she feels more pity than rivalry toward the other women in his life—not simply because both are ill (K's wife with glaucoma, B with cancer) but because, in reading K's letters, Kostash realizes that both women, over the course of their long-term relationships with K, have become locked into the traditional, domestic role of the "wife" (even between K and his mistress "there was . . . a *nuptial* faithfulness" [80]). In meeting K a second time, moreover, in 1987, she sees that his identity, too, has been subsumed by his role as "husband" to both women. From the moment of her arrival in Warsaw, Kostash knows that he is "neither going to seduce [her] nor be seduced"; exhausted from taking care of his wife and B, he is "frail, not virile, distraught, not self-possessed" (80). During their time together, she struggles to keep her "erotic energy" focused on K (and "away from the young men in denim" who "sat in jails and swore revenge" with their "fists curled inside their pockets, grease slicking their boots, a gold crucifix at their throat" [82]) because the domesticity in which he is ensconced holds no attraction for her. She wants a rebel hero, not a cowed husband. "If I want a Polish lover," she concludes, after visiting K in Warsaw, "I will have to dream him up" (82).

Of course, as Kostash learns again and again in *The Doomed Bridegroom*, the process of "dreaming up" a lover is never easy because she is never entirely able to

divorce her imagined love affairs from reality. And K's domesticity is not the only reality she must face in her relationship with him. In "The Masked Man in Warsaw," even as—or precisely because—she seeks to reinvent K as her ideal *Polish* lover, Kostash cannot ignore his (and indeed her) ethnicity. Given the historical tensions between Ukrainians and Poles, and given that both Kostash and K are acutely aware of the uneasy relation between their respective ethnic groups, their relationship (real or imagined) comes to represent more than a union of one man and one woman. But whereas K believes that, in forming their "own little Polish-Ukrainian Friendship Society" (113), they can undo the traditional enmity between Ukrainians and Poles, Kostash is less willing to either forget or forgive the ways in which, and the extent to which, Poles oppressed Ukrainians over the course of their shared history. From the outset of their relationship, K confesses that Kostash's Ukrainian-ness (like his wife's Jewishness) is "exciting to him" (75). He repeatedly refers to her as his "blue-blooded" (111) lover (he sees her as a "'Ukrainian lady' of Byzantine provenance" [110] whose "profile remind[s] him of the origin of the Ukrainian nation in the excursions of the Viking princes into Rus" [75]). Kostash, however, is skeptical about what he finds "so glamorous in [her] Ukrainianness" (111). Recalling a different moment in history, when Ukrainians "had been bonded labour on the great Polish estates of Galicia" (111), she identifies not with the blue-blooded Byzantine princess but, rather, with "the Galician, wide-hipped, bawdy, sly" (111). If K is to "lust after the Ukrainian in [her]," she says, "it should be that wench, barefoot in his kitchen, heating up his bathwater" (111). On the one hand, Kostash wants to believe that, in speaking together in a "new language" (English), she and K can transcend the roles assigned to them, ostensibly, by history (114). "English,"

she writes, enables her and K to “say things to each other impossible in our old languages. The landlord and serf girl, for example, [have] been doomed to play their respective parts: in Polish, the rapist; in Ukrainian, the violated maiden. In the new language, however, we [are] freed into a new theatre together” (114). Tellingly, though, Kostash provides no specific examples of the “new theatre” that she and K are “freed into” by speaking to each other in English. The problem is that K gives little more than a passing glance to the historically uneven relation between Ukrainians and Poles. She may believe that they can enter a “new theatre” of dialogue (in English) about the injustices of the past, but his answer to the “Ukrainian question” is to not talk about it at all, in any language. Instead of confronting Poles’ predominantly negative perceptions of Ukrainians (according to Kostash, “the Ukrainian has stood for a whole repertoire of brutes that terrorize the Polish imagination: shifty Asiatic, godless Orthodox, witless yokel, treacherous bandit” [112]), he clings to the idealized version of the Ukrainian lover that *he* has “dreamed up”: the timeless Byzantine princess who transcends history.

Kostash, however, in “dreaming up” her Polish lover, is unable (or unwilling) to ignore the enduring tensions between Ukrainians and Poles (brought home to her by K’s reluctance to acknowledge his people’s oppression of hers). Gradually, in her imagination, K becomes the Polish lord. In fact, as she draws unmistakable parallels between the *pan* (lord and master of his estate) and K (high-ranking Communist Party member), Kostash resolves her lingering ambivalence toward K by constructing herself as the figure of the Ukrainian handmaiden who is attracted not to the Polish gentleman (with “his slim-ankled bay mare, his red velvet riding coat, [and] his golden braid looping his right shoulder” [115]) but to the Ukrainian ploughman (who “dreams of running

away, far east of here, to the emptied lands of Rus scourged by the Mongols, to join the other runaways—the serfs, the defrocked peasants, the army deserters, the town adventurers on the lam—known as the Zaporozhian Cossack Host” [117]). Indeed, once Kostash realizes that she is aroused by neither the real K nor her “dreamed up” version of him—for both are complicit in perpetuating the uneven relation between Ukrainians and Poles—she stops corresponding with K; stops toying with the possibility of taking a Polish lover (literally or figuratively). Her “long unfulfilled desire” goes “stale” and she becomes “distracted, looking out for a more promising avatar of revolution” (119). Doomed from the start, in a sense, her love affair with K ends not because they suddenly have “nothing more to say to each other” (122) but because they have never really been able to speak to one another outside their “pre-scripted” historically- and ethnically-determined roles.

In “Lord, History Falls Through the Cracks,” then, the penultimate chapter of *The Doomed Bridegroom*, Kostash revisits—with mounting anger and frustration—the ways in which particular patterns of historical relations between Ukrainians and other ethnic groups prove difficult to break. As she writes about her relationship with Canadian poet Patrick Friesen (who is of Mennonite descent), Kostash turns her attention to the intersecting history of Mennonites and Ukrainians. Tellingly, she devotes little of the chapter to her specific experiences with Friesen, choosing instead to focus more broadly on Mennonite/Ukrainian history. The details of her relationship with Friesen are sketchy, at best: they come together, briefly, after he divorces his Mennonite wife; though Kostash is eager to become involved with him (she makes “plans, arrangements”) he rejects her (“[f]all[s] in love with somebody else”) (141). Determined to understand the

reasons for which their friendship is doomed never to evolve into a love affair, she embarks on a quest to learn about the historical relations between her people and his—a quest that takes her to Ukraine and into the archive of Mennonite (and, more specifically, Mennonite Canadian) literature. Drawing upon her experiences with K, she explores the ways in which she and Friesen are unwittingly re-enacting, in their personal relationship, a drama that was played out by their ethnic groups on the stage of history, against the backdrop of Ukraine, and that has since been recorded again and again (rather one-sidedly) in Mennonite literature. Examining Mennonite versions of their shared history with Ukrainians, Kostash is troubled by a specific historical moment (1775) in which Mennonites took on the role of colonizer vis-à-vis the Ukrainian colonized (at Khortytsia)¹⁷⁰—and she is no less troubled by the ways in which contemporary Mennonite writers (including Friesen) perpetuate this binary opposition between the two groups in

¹⁷⁰ As Kostash explains in “Lord, History Falls Through the Cracks,” Mennonites share a long, complex history with Ukrainians that can be traced back to the sixteenth century. She begins her narrative of this history in 1553 when, “[o]n the island of Khortytsia in the bend of the lower Dnipro,” a *sich* (fortress) was built by Imperial Official Dmytro Vyshnyvetsky to accommodate some five thousands Ukrainian Cossacks (126). For many years the “first line of Russian imperial defence against marauding Tatars from the Crimean peninsula,” the Cossacks had become, by the late 1770s, a “political monstrosity”—at least “in the estimation of the Empress Catherine” (126). They transformed themselves, over time, from an imperial army unit to a loosely-governed, anti-imperial band of freedom fighters. Eventually “overcome by Russian stealth and treachery” in 1775, the “Cossack rank-and-file fled into Turkey and Turkish-held Europe,” their officers “were arrested and sent into penal servitude in Siberia,” and the *sich* itself was “razed” (127)—all to “clear the way for more tractable settlers, among them the Mennonites from the muggy delta of the Vistula” (128).

Beginning in 1788, then, Mennonites from Danzig “migrated en masse for the steppes of southern Ukraine” (125). Once there, they cleared and cultivated land, built homes and villages; using German words (“Neuendorf, Schonhorst, Rosental, Einlage, Steinbach, and Kronsweide” [129]) to map the countryside, and planting potatoes (“emblematic of German virtue, prudence” [137]) to make their living, they transplanted German culture onto the soil of the former “Cossack lands” (129). During his visit to Khortytsia in 1843, the German traveler Baron August von Haxthausen observed that “[t]he fields are laid out and cultivated in the German manner; the farmlands and meadows are enclosed with German fences” (132). “Everything” about the Mennonite colony, he noted, “is German: the villages with all their individual farmsteads, the gardens and their arrangements, the plants, the vegetables and above all the potatoes” (132). Importantly, however, as Kostash hastens to point out, the “availability of cheap labour”—“to wit: the Ukrainians”—is what guaranteed the Mennonites’ success in building a thriving

their writing. Given that Mennonites have in common with Ukrainians the historical experience of injustice and oppression (at Khortytsia both were eventually forced from their homes, albeit at different times), she expects contemporary Mennonite writers to approach Mennonite/Ukrainian history with a modicum of sensitivity, if not sympathy, for the ways in which Ukrainians were mistreated by Mennonites in Ukraine. What she finds, however, in works by Rudy Wiebe, Al Reimer, and John Weier, is that Ukrainians appear in a limited number of roles (usually houseservant or hired hand), always inferior and/or subservient to Mennonite characters (virtuous landowners and their chaste wives).¹⁷¹ Kostash believes that Friesen—who, as a writer, “belong[s] to The Word” (145)—has internalized the notion of the Ukrainian (and especially the Ukrainian woman) as “other”: she becomes at once the object of his desire and disavowal; he will choose her for a night, but not for a mate. That she stubbornly refuses to accept this role,

colony at Khortytsia (138). At its core, she says, this moment in Mennonite/Ukrainian history is “about the land that the Mennonites have and the Ukrainians covet but cannot afford” (138).

¹⁷¹ In her readings of Rudy Wiebe’s *The Blue Mountains of China* (1970), Al Reimer’s *My Harp is Turned to Mourning* (1985), and John Weier’s *Steppe* (1995), Kostash identifies a narrative pattern in which Ukrainians are reduced to one of two ethnically-inflected and gendered roles—the “blockhead” or the “slut” (165). Whereas Mennonites (especially Mennonite men) are agents in their own stories (given to order, sensibility, and piety), Ukrainians are passive pawns who cannot think, much less act, for themselves. The Ukrainian man recurs in these texts as the ignorant servant who is prone to drink, and who works best “under threat of violence” (164). Even when he is “[h]alf-awakened by agitprop” (as is the case with Escha in *The Blue Mountains of China*, a Ukrainian character who revolts against his Mennonite master), he has no control over himself or his actions: he “loses all restraint” and “strikes out blindly” (165), undermining his own attempts at altering his fate. The Ukrainian woman, on the other hand, usually a “female servant in the same households” (165) as her blockhead brethren, is the slutty, “sloe-eyed, exotic beauty in the starched white uniform” who “drives sons crazy with the suggestion of her availability” (165). Although she acknowledges that the Mennonite woman in these texts is also constrained by her gender (locked into the role of the chaste wife), Kostash underscores the ways in which the Ukrainian woman is twice-marked as “other” to the Mennonite master by her ethnicity and gender: her identity is solely defined by her “primal Slavic body” (165). Indeed, in their interactions with Mennonites, Ukrainians—and Ukrainian women especially—have the lowest status in what Kostash calls a “political economy of cross-cultural desire” (168). In her analysis of this economy, the “Mennonite male desire the Ukrainian female, and may have her. The Ukrainian male desires the Mennonite woman but may not have her. There is,” however, “no notion of the specific desire of the Ukrainian woman—she’ll take anybody—nor of the dignity of marriage between Ukrainians” (168-9).

however, is evident from the outset of the chapter. In “Lord, History Falls Through the Cracks,” tellingly addressed as a letter to Friesen (her “Dear Heart”), Kostash “writes back” to Mennonite versions of history by retrieving Ukrainians from the margins of these stories.

In some ways similar to her writing about K, Kostash’s chapter on Friesen is primarily focused on “righting” history by drawing attention to the historical tensions between Mennonites and Ukrainians: if, however, she is resigned, with K, to play the Ukrainian handmaiden to his Polish *pan*, she stubbornly refuses, with Friesen, to re-enact the historically uneven relation between their ethnic groups. Throughout “Lord, History Falls Through the Cracks,” her tone is aggressive and confrontational. Although Friesen insists that his people “have no homeland”—that it is “the Mennonite condition” to be “devoid of nationality, of country” (134-5)—Kostash reminds him that Mennonite settlers “on the Dnipro and the island of Khortytsia” stayed “long enough to become landlords” (128). By no means unaware that Mennonite history is, in part, a “story of flight” (“you have to be able to get up and go,” she says to Friesen, “when you feel the pressure, the danger; you have to be able to shake off the dirt as though this earth were not beloved” [135]), Kostash acknowledges that, by the 1930s, the Mennonites living in Khortytsia were driven from Ukraine by Soviet authorities (not unlike the Cossacks before them who were driven out by the imperial army of Russia). But given that the Mennonites—despite their own experiences of injustice and oppression—embraced the role of colonizer/oppressor vis-à-vis their Ukrainian neighbours for well over a hundred years, she takes some delight in writing to Friesen (while she travels in Ukraine) about the ways in which the Mennonites’ presence in Khortytsia has been erased. “Where are

they now, those Menno villages of Khortytsia?” she asks. “Where are your names?” (129). And then, answering her own questions, she says, “[e]ffaced and relettered. There are Ukrainian villages here now” (129). With a sense of triumph, albeit belated, over the Mennonite settlers who displaced Ukrainians from their land, she says, “[y]ou left and we grew back. You are utterly gone. No one remembers you” (136). While Friesen’s ancestors may have oppressed hers, the Ukrainians seem to have the final say in naming and claiming back their homeland.

And yet, the lingering problem for Kostash—a problem she seeks to rectify in and through her discussion of Nestor Makhno—is that, in Mennonite versions of history, Ukrainians have no say at all. Makhno (1889-1935), she explains, was a Ukrainian revolutionary, a political idealist and a guerilla fighter, who, between 1918 and 1921, led the “Revolutionary Insurgent Army, a force in the service of no government, no political party and no dictatorship” (152). To Friesen (who writes disparagingly of Makhno in one of his poems), and to many, if not all, Mennonites as well, Makhno was a “bandit, assassin, highway robber, [and] pogromist” (146). (Upon meeting Kostash for the first time, Friesen’s mother asks, “[s]o why did your people kill my people?” And she goes on to denounce Makhno for slaughtering “199 Mennonite farmers from God knows which and whose village” [144].) From Kostash’s point of view, however, Makhno (known as “*Batko*” or “Father” to his followers) is a man to be admired precisely because he and his army (the *makhnovtsi*) stood up for the Ukrainian people; they took an active role in reshaping their country, fighting for the ideals of freedom and justice for all. As a “real life” Ukrainian hero, Makhno challenges fictionalized notions of the Ukrainian man as “blockhead” that so pervasively circulate within Mennonite literature and he also offers

the Ukrainian woman a way out of the Mennonite/Ukrainian “political economy of cross-cultural desire” (168). In imagining herself as his lover, Kostash rewrites the role of the Ukrainian woman: no longer the passive servant/slut who can be taken (and rejected) at any time by her Mennonite master (or by Ukrainian men), she announces and acts upon *her* desire. By retrieving Makhno from the margins of Mennonite history, and by placing him “inside” a “Ukrainian story” (138) as her rebel lover, Kostash ensures that neither he—nor she—slips “through the cracks” of the Mennonite/Ukrainian past.

In a sense, really, of all her lovers, real or imagined, Nestor Makhno is the figure with whom Kostash identifies most strongly, not only because he was a Ukrainian who stood up for his oppressed and downtrodden people, but because Makhno’s real struggle (which mirrors, in many ways, Kostash’s own struggle throughout *The Doomed Bridegroom*) is to represent himself in and through the written word. Although she acknowledges that the success of Makhno’s peasant movement in challenging the power of the “rich” in Ukraine was short-lived (the *makhnovtsi* revolt was quelled by Stalin’s Red Army in the winter of 1920-21 [153]), Kostash believes that Makhno’s actual defeat came years later. Forced to flee from Ukraine to France, in 1921, Makhno—less martyr to his cause than scapegoat for Mennonite bitterness toward Ukrainians—“eked out a miserable existence” for the next fourteen years in exile; he died a pauper in 1935 (154). In a telling commentary on the ways in which Makhno’s historical agency was ultimately undermined, his “enemies [didn’t] even bother to arrange his assassination; they just [stopped] talking about him” (154). In the years before his death, frustrated by misleading accounts of his life (especially N. Herasymenko’s *Father’ Makhno: Recollections of a White Guardist*, 1923), Makhno tried to write his own memoirs, but

only one of the three volumes he wrote was published in his lifetime (the other two volumes were published posthumously by Makhno's friend, Victor Eichenbaum).¹⁷² Sifting through the multiple existing biographies of Makhno (including Al Reimer's *My Harp is Turned to Mourning*, a fictionalized rendering of Makhno's life story),¹⁷³ and comparing these with Makhno's autobiography (edited and, importantly, "embellished" by Eichenbaum [149]), Kostash begins to see his revolution as "a rage to find a language" (150). In her own attempts to separate his voice "from the clamour of those who spoke for him" (149), she discovers that Makhno, ironically, "could neither speak nor write Ukrainian with facility" (150); while he wrote in Russian, moreover, he "admits in his memoirs that he 'mutilated' the Russian language in a most shameful manner" (150). Mennonite versions of Makhno's story have eclipsed Makhno's own account of his experiences because he was unable to fully express himself in any language. Kostash sees Makhno, in his final days, "sweating furiously for a language, any language, a system to hook him into a code of meaning that is neither cryptic nor provisional, but historic": she sees him as a "man trying to catapult himself into the universal language of cause-and-effect, into the company of the revolutionaries who preceded him and those who will come after" (156). "That he could act," Kostash writes, "we agree; that he had agency, well, history cut him off in the middle of a speech" (156). In his fight to make himself heard—to tell his own story, in his own words—Makhno's voice was silenced by those who misrepresented him in their accounts of his life story.

¹⁷² Kostash read excerpts from Makhno's published memoir, *Huliai-Pole*, in a 1991 issue of *Ukraina* magazine. She provides no exact publication date for the memoir, and I have been unable to locate it.

¹⁷³ In her bibliographic appendix to *The Doomed Bridegroom*, Kostash lists the texts that she consulted as she researched Makhno's story, including Peter Arshinov's *The History of the Makhnovist Movement* (1974); Victor Eichenbaum's *The Unknown Revolution* (1975) (Eichenbaum published under the pseudonym Voline); Victor Peters's *Nestor Makhno: The Life of an Anarchist* (1970); and Michael Malet's

Yet if Kostash intimately understands Makhno's desire to "catapult himself into the universal language of cause-and-effect, into the company of the revolutionaries who preceded him and those who will come after," it is because she is searching herself for a "language" or a "system" that will hook her into a "code of meaning that is neither cryptic nor provisional, but historic" (156). Although she explicitly focuses *The Doomed Bridegroom* on her relationships with various lovers, her text becomes, implicitly, the story of her love affair with language itself. On the one hand, in writing about her career-long obsession with "rebel men," Kostash foregrounds her attempts to become a part of their "other" worlds and fraught histories by developing relationships with them. What she craves for herself is a place in history beside the revolutionaries whose stories attract and arouse her: she wants to reinvent herself as an agent of social change, a "rebel woman" actively involved in the dramas that have characterized the histories of Eastern and Southern Europe. But even when she imagines herself as lover to the men who actually played a part in these dramas, she is doomed to play a passive, supporting role in relation to them (as girlfriend, comrade, or mistress, her identity is defined in relation to her lovers). By ultimately rejecting, then, the full repertoire of traditional female roles (and especially the conventional roles of wife and mother), Kostash carves out a new role for herself that is not defined by her relationship, real or imagined, with any man. She narrates her coming-of-age as a particular kind of "rebel woman," one whose constant companion is her pen; who commits herself to a lifelong relationship with words; who is married, in a sense, to her writing. The process of writing, after all, is what empowers her to transcend the limitations of reality, and what simultaneously enables her to accept

Nestor Makhno in the Russian Civil War (1982). For a fuller list of her sources, see Kostash's bibliography.

the limitations of fantasy. By creating a textual world in which the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction are radically blurred, Kostash arrives at a new understanding of herself; and, in doing so, she at last succeeds in her quest to redefine her sense of community beyond borders and bloodlines—at least in her own eyes. In and through her writing, she constructs herself as the figurative mother to a new genre of creative non-fiction (“*I would bear books*” [54]), and to the next generation of writers who will learn from it about the ways in which language can transform the realities of the past, the present, and the future.

In the brief final chapter of *The Doomed Bridegroom*, turning once more to her infatuation with the men of the “other” Europe, Kostash narrates a familiar story: “Belgrade,” a kind of coda to the text, focuses on an unnamed Serbian boy whom she meets in 1997 and who reminds her, in different ways, of all her previous lovers. Boyish and lanky (like Lenny), he is a poet (like Stus) and he has another woman in his life (not unlike Kostas, K, and Stus). Most importantly, perhaps, he feels trapped in—or doomed by—the state of his country. “The truth is gone out of here,” he tells Kostash, “out of this world. Only the enemy is telling the truth. I am losing ground under my feet. Everyday is the same. I get this terrible feeling that I am who I am now, and it will always be like this. Serbia is the worst place to live in the universe” (174). “Why,” he asks, “are you so interested in us? Why do you keep coming here to Belgrade?” (174). Although Kostash never answers him directly, she has been scripting a reply, in a sense, from the beginning of *The Doomed Bridegroom*. In fact, she chooses to conclude her memoir by writing about the Serbian boy precisely because she believes that, as a disillusioned neophyte poet who has yet to discover the transformative power of language, he needs to be guided

and nurtured. Motherly toward him (she buys him dinner; lets him fall asleep on her breast as they watch a movie together [172]), Kostash sees the boy as inheritor of her literary legacy: she looks forward to a day when “[her] story will be his” (174). In time, she suggests, he too—learning from her example—will discover the ways in which he can use language to re-imagine his past as well as his future. Her “story” will become his when he recognizes (as she has) that he is not doomed by the brute facts of history but rather empowered, as a writer, to transcend them.

5. Ukrainian Canadian Literature: Legacies, Old and New

A Postscript from the Margins: The Author Speaks Out

Two-and-a-half years ago, in 2001, when I began planning my Ph.D. thesis, I knew that I had deeply personal reasons for writing about Ukrainian Canadian literature. I saw my thesis as a logical extension of the thinking that I had done for several years about the meaning of my ethnicity. Two texts, as I've explained in my introduction, Myrna Kostash's *All of Baba's Children* and Marusya Bociurkiw's *The Woman Who Loved Airports*, had led me to write my first book, a novel based on my experiences as a fourth-generation Ukrainian Canadian; and my subsequent concerns about the ways in which my novel would be read—if it were to be read at all—became the starting point for this project. With an audience of Ukrainian Canadian and non-Ukrainian Canadian literary scholars in mind, I sought to establish, first, the existence of an English-language Ukrainian Canadian literary tradition, and then to illustrate, through close readings of select texts, the relevance of this body of literature to ongoing debates in Canadian literary studies.

Looking back on my initial intentions, I find myself thinking about the opening pages of Myrna Kostash's *Bloodlines: A Journey Into Eastern Europe*. In her introduction, Kostash lists the various "hats" that she donned over the course of her travels—the "hats" of the writer, the feminist, the New Leftist socialist, and the third-generation Ukrainian Canadian. She emphasizes, too, that she had a clear sense of purpose in traveling into Eastern Europe: "my idea," she writes, "was to interview writers of my generation, bred by the events of the 1960s, who were writing from within the opposition in their respective societies" (1). "I did not travel haphazardly," she

declares. "I had a plan" (1). That Kostash admits to losing control of her plan is, of course, crucial. Unable to maintain journalistic objectivity while traveling in Eastern Europe, she became emotionally involved with, and unsettled by, the people and places she visited; as a result, *Bloodlines* reads less as a rigidly-structured, tightly-ordered account of her travels than as a decidedly "turbulent" search for the meaning of community and home (2).

I'm reminded of *Bloodlines* when I think about my thesis because I also had a plan, at the beginning. My plan was to approach Ukrainian Canadian literature from the combined perspectives of a writer, a scholar, and a fourth-generation Ukrainian Canadian. By drawing on scholarly sources as well as my personal experiences, I would blend critical analysis with creative commentary. Poised to embark on an intensely personal (albeit metaphorical) journey of my own through Ukrainian Canadian literature, I was prepared for emotional turbulence. I expected that this project would challenge my own ideas about community and home.

Only recently— while attempting to write the conclusion to this dissertation, early in 2003—have I come to see that, like Kostash, I also lost control of my plan: not because I've been too emotionally attached to my subject matter, but because I've been too *detached* from it. In a sense, my writing hasn't been haphazard enough. Although I aimed, from the start, at intellectual rigour (I wanted to provide comprehensive overviews of the historical contexts out which various texts emerged before undertaking careful readings of the texts themselves), I also planned to incorporate personal impressions and observations. And yet, as one of my professors repeatedly noted in his comments on my work, "where is Lisa Grekul in this? What does Lisa Grekul think?"

I could go back and try to insert—or assert—my voice throughout the previous four chapters; or I could delete the portions of the manuscript—the odd footnote and occasional aside—in which I hint at how my background has informed my critical work. I’ve chosen to leave the thesis as is, though, in order to confront the ways in which, and the reasons for which, I’ve pushed myself—unconsciously—into the margins of it. (I say “unconsciously” because I not only planned on being present in my writing: until recently, I also believed that I had succeeded in doing so. My professor’s comments about my absence in the text came as a surprise to me.) To simply revise the manuscript now would be to erase what seems to me the most important aspect of this project: my struggle, that is, to define my own identity as a Ukrainian and a Canadian, a writer and a critic—a struggle that is reflected in my unsuccessful attempts at synthesizing my creative and scholarly writing styles, and striking a balance between my objective and subjective responses to the texts.

Rereading the four chapters of this book, I see two problems with my approach: first, a reluctance to offer personal responses to either the texts that I selected for discussion or the contexts in which these texts had been produced; and, second, an insistence, throughout, on writing in an emotionally-detached scholarly voice. In a sense, I twice-marginalized myself. By excluding my own experiences as a Ukrainian Canadian and by adopting a tone characterized by caution and qualification, I passed up the opportunity to develop a more creative critical study. Without a doubt, the thesis has scholarly weight. In fact, as one of my professors soundly observed, I’ve been “relentless” in my attentiveness to scholarly detail. But I’ve been relentless, too, in my tendency to privilege objectivity over subjectivity. While I’ve made the occasional

reference to my ethnicity, I've reflected little on my role—as Ukrainian Canadian reader, scholar, critic, and writer—in the production of this thesis.

Why did I push myself into the margins of this project? I did so—at least in part, I think—because I was working on my novel as I wrote this book: I already had an outlet for my creative energy and a place to confront my feelings about being Ukrainian Canadian. Recently retitled as *Kalyna's Song* (and finally ready for publication), the novel has enabled me to explore my personal experiences of language, culture, and history; assimilation, multiculturalism, and transculturalism; the relation between individual and group identity. Broadly speaking, in the process of writing *Kalyna's Song*—a process that began with my naïve interest in speaking on behalf of all Ukrainian Canadians about the “essence” of our community—I came to abandon my initial goal of capturing “authentic” Ukrainian Canadian culture in my work. Cultural “authenticity” is a central theme of the novel, but my narrator's coming-of-age hinges on her ability to recognize and accept the multiple, complex ways in which individuals experience ethnicity—which then gives her the confidence to come up with her own, unique way of expressing herself as a Ukrainian Canadian.

The argument against fixed, singular definitions of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity is also a dominant thread—if not *the* dominant thread—that ties together my readings of various Ukrainian Canadian texts in this book: the “thesis” of my thesis is that, over the past fifty-odd years, Ukrainian Canadian writers have made apparent the multiple, complex ways in which Ukrainian Canadians experience and express their ethnic identity. Collectively, these writers illustrate that as Ukrainian Canadians respond to the world around them—at once accepting and refuting, absorbing and resisting, various aspects of

their respective historical moments—their attitudes toward language, culture, history, and community change. By drawing attention to Ukrainian Canadian cultures and Ukrainian Canadian communities, Ukrainian Canadian literature, as a whole, debunks the myth of authenticity predicated on rigid notions of Ukrainian Canadian culture and community (namely, that to be Ukrainian Canadian is to speak Ukrainian, belong to Ukrainian Canadian social and political organizations, and maintain literal ties to people in Ukraine).

And yet, even as I have argued, openly, against the assumption that an “authentic” Ukrainian Canadian culture exists, nurtured and sustained by “authentic” Ukrainian Canadians, and even as I have illustrated the ways in which numerous literary works clearly support my argument, I have been haunted, secretly, by nagging doubts about whether I am Ukrainian enough to speak with authority on the subject of Ukrainians in Canada. In many ways an outsider vis-à-vis the organized Ukrainian Canadian community—because I don’t speak Ukrainian, for example, or belong to Ukrainian Canadian organizations, or have any ties to Ukraine (real or imagined)—I have felt, and still feel, vulnerable to attack by other “more Ukrainian” Ukrainian Canadians. Writing a work of fiction in the voice of a fictional character gave me the freedom to confront and criticize the ways in which many Ukrainian Canadians are excluded from or marginalized by the organized Ukrainian Canadian community; finding the confidence to address the same issue in a scholarly work, and in my own voice, was much more difficult. With no character to hide behind in my thesis, I protected myself and my claims with layers of secondary references, explanatory footnotes, and textual evidence. Often cautious and at times defensive, the tone of my critical voice reflects my anxiety about “real” Ukrainian

Canadian readers. I sought to compensate for my relative lack of Ukrainian-ness with an abundance of scholarliness.

But I also took an emotionally-detached, intellectually-rigorous approach to this project because, while I worried about not being Ukrainian *enough* in the eyes of some, I was convinced that I shouldn't come across as *too* Ukrainian to others. On the one hand, I was afraid that Ukrainian Canadian readers might criticize me for not having the authority to write about Ukrainian Canadian history and culture; at the same time, I feared that non-Ukrainian Canadian readers might see me as too emotionally invested in my subject matter to engage with it critically. Working outside of the Ukrainian Canadian studies network, I rarely talked about my research with other Ukrainian Canadians, and so I never actually encountered resistance from Ukrainian Canadians. I have discussed my work frequently, though, with non-Ukrainian Canadian peers and professors, and our casual discussions about my thesis have transformed my imagined audience of non-Ukrainian Canadian readers into a very real source of anxiety. In fact, I have come to dread conversations about my research because they all follow this script, more or less:

- A: So, what's the topic of your dissertation?
 B: Ukrainian Canadian literature.
 A: Oh. Are you Ukrainian?
 B: I am.
 A: And do you have enough material for a whole thesis?
 B: More than enough.
 A: Really?
 B: Really.
 A: But is it interesting?
 B: I think so.
 A: I mean for someone who isn't Ukrainian.
 B: Well, that's what I'm trying to prove.

Occasionally, the script varies. Some people ask me, for example, about my supervisor (“are you working with a professor from Slavic Studies?”), and a few have given me suggestions for my reading list—or, rather, *a* suggestion (it’s always Janice Kulyk Keefer’s *Honey and Ashes*, published recently [1998] by a large press [HarperCollins]). Their underlying assumptions, though, are the same: if Ukrainian Canadian literature does indeed exist (and some people remain skeptical, even after I have recited a long list of authors and works for them), it cannot be either interesting or relevant to readers who are not themselves Ukrainian Canadian. As more than one of my peers has suggested, the nature of my work seems less literary than political; motivated by what they identify as Ukrainian patriotism, my project looks to them more like a personal crusade than a legitimate scholarly book.

“Legitimacy” is the key word: is Ukrainian Canadian literature a “legitimate” sub-field of Canadian literature? Is it a “legitimate” subject for a book-length project? Sometimes, when people ask me about my research, I want to make up a story about how I’m working on Shakespeare, or Milton, or the Victorian novel. No one would press me, then, to talk about my background and no one would question the “legitimacy” of my work.

I’m learning to stand up for myself and my project. Each time I feel pressured to defend Ukrainian Canadian literature, I get better at articulating my reasons for undertaking a critical study of it. I’ve stopped apologizing for my personal investment in this thesis (who *isn’t* personally invested in their research?) and for the political nature of it. I’ve come to see my work as an intervention in Canadian literary studies that resembles earlier literary scholars’ work on other marginalized bodies of literature (I’m

thinking about the emergence of Canadian literature itself as a discipline in the late 1950s and early 1960s, for instance, and about the rise of feminist literary scholarship in the 1970s). Staging such interventions, I've learned, isn't easy (not in the beginning, at least), and it comes with risks (especially for a young scholar taking her tentative first steps into an academic career). But my determination not to give up on this book has everything to do with the fact that it *is* a private, personal crusade, played out in the public, politicized arena of Canadian literary studies through my work on Ukrainian Canadian literature.

These days, when people ask me what my thesis is about, I tell them that it's about language: it's about the Ukrainian Canadian writer's quest to find a language in which to express his or her sense of self, history, community, and home. I talk about my grandparents—and about my mother's father, in particular, who never learned more than a few words in English, and who couldn't read or write in either Ukrainian or English. That my *gido* signed his name with "X" was a source of embarrassment and shame for his children, all of whom grew up speaking Ukrainian at home but not in public, and most of whom stopped speaking Ukrainian altogether when their parents died. And yet the "english" spoken by my parents, aunts, and uncles bears the traces of Ukrainian: some of my family members speak "english" with an accent, many incorporate Ukrainian words and phrases, and at least a few continue to think in Ukrainian (my mom always speaks Ukrainian in her dreams, and my dad says that, after all these years, he still feels that he's translating from Ukrainian when he opens his mouth to speak). Although my siblings and I aren't fluent in Ukrainian, we were surrounded by Ukrainian (and "english") as children. I wonder, then, about the language in which we are fluent: how has it been

influenced by our grandparents' and parents' languages? To what extent is our sense of Ukrainian-ness reflected in the particular forms of "english" that we use?

For me, *gido's* "X" is not the signature of a man without language: his "X" reflects, rather, the position in which he found himself as an immigrant caught between two cultures, two worlds, and two homes. Looking back on our family history, and imagining it as a map that charts the blending and blurring of Ukrainian-ness and Canadian-ness, I see his "X" as the point at which new languages and new identities began to emerge.

I see this thesis as a similar kind of map—one that, in tracing the development of Ukrainian Canadian literature, examines the ways in which this literature reflects the changing landscape of language itself. In a sense, as the author of this study, I have taken on the roles, simultaneously, of traveler and cartographer. My work has been a journey (with a very personal point of departure, the odd detour, and multiple crossroads), as well as a record of this journey—the conclusion of which is less a point of arrival than a new point of departure. What does the future hold for Ukrainian Canadian literature? To what extent will fourth- and fifth-generation Ukrainian Canadians continue to push language and identity in new directions?

My plan, for the remainder of this chapter, is to have another look at where I've been, and how I got there. I'm going to return, ultimately, to the place where I began—or, rather, to the writer who set this journey in motion. Myrna Kostash's *All of Baba's Great-grandchildren* (2000) will be one of my final destinations—on this trip, at least. I'm not unpacking my bags. As a creative writer and a scholar, a Ukrainian and a Canadian, my eyes are on the open road.

Looking Back: The Project in Review

So: where have I “traveled” over the three hundred-odd pages of this study? How did I decide on my itinerary? At what points along the way have I paused, and why? If this final chapter represents an arrival, then what kinds of conclusions greet me there? And how does the end of this journey serve as the starting point for future travels?

Focused on a body of texts that have been under-represented in both Ukrainian Canadian studies and in Canadian literary studies, this thesis chronologically traces the development of literature written in English by Canadians of Ukrainian descent over a period of roughly fifty years (beginning with Vera Lysenko’s *Yellow Boots*, published in 1954, and ending with Janice Kulyk Keefer’s *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family*, and Myrna Kostash’s *The Doomed Bridegroom: A Memoir*, both published in 1998). Because I preface my readings of texts written by Ukrainian Canadians, however, with discussions of three novels by non-Ukrainian Canadian writers (Ralph Connor’s *The Foreigner: A Tale of Saskatchewan*, 1909; Sinclair Ross’s *As For Me and My House*, 1941, and Margaret Laurence’s *A Jest of God*, 1966), my study actually spans the better part of the twentieth century. Divided into three historical periods (1900 to 1970; 1970 to 1984; 1985 to 2000), the book implicitly argues that texts must be read in and against the contexts (historical, social, political, cultural, geographical) out of which they emerged. Hence, I devote a substantial portion of Chapter One to providing a general history of Ukrainians in Canada, and then I return to the subject of Ukrainian Canadian (and indeed Canadian) history at the outset of each subsequent chapter in order to elaborate on both non-Ukrainian Canadians’ dominant attitudes toward Ukrainian Canadians and Ukrainian Canadians’ own perspectives on their ethnic community at particular historical moments.

I begin Chapter Two with an overview of the assimilationist ideologies that defined many Anglo-Canadians' attitudes toward ethnic immigrants and their descendants from the turn of the century until the mid-1960s. In Chapter Three, I draw attention to Anglo-Canadians' increasing acceptance of Ukrainian Canadians and other ethnic minority groups as discourses of assimilation gave way to multicultural models of nationhood. And I introduce Chapter Four by examining the impact of globalization, transnationalism, and transculturalism (beginning in the late 1980s) on nation-based definitions of identity and community, with specific references to recent cross-cultural exchanges between Ukrainians in Canada and Ukrainians in Ukraine.

In my readings, then, I travel both in time and space—from the early decades of the twentieth century to the late; from Ukraine to Canada (usually to the prairies) and back again. And so, while my ideas about what constitutes Ukrainian Canadian literature are quite specific (I focus on texts written by and about Ukrainian Canadians), I am not interested in reading this literature for evidence of essential and fixed notions of Ukrainian-ness, or Canadian-ness, or, indeed, Ukrainian-Canadian-ness. I am interested, rather, in examining the ways in which Ukrainian Canadian writers respond to, and participate in the (re)construction of, dominant discourses of nationhood and nationality, ethnicity and ethnic identity. What do these writers have to say about the experience of being Ukrainian and Canadian at particular places and times? How do different writers grapple with the tensions between ethnic and national identity? What formal strategies do they use to reconcile these tensions, and how successful are they in doing so? My assumption is not that Ukrainian Canadian texts function as mirror-reflections of their historical moments but that these texts participate (both thematically and formally) in re-

visions of the past, present, and future. Importantly, too, I resist the temptation to read the historical development of the Ukrainian Canadian literary tradition—or history itself—as a narrative of progress. While I note innovations in each new writer’s approach to language and genre, I don’t always see these innovations as advances on the formal aspects of previous writers’ work. Nor do I assume that shifts in dominant social and political discourses (from assimilation to multiculturalism to transculturalism) are necessarily positive (I outline the benefits and drawbacks of each ideology). Motivated throughout this study by a desire to understand the relation between text and context, politics and poetics, I circle back again and again to the broad concerns that recur in writing by Ukrainian Canadians (about the relation between ethnic and national identity; self and community; history, culture, and home), attending to the specific ways in which different writers address these concerns.

Vera Lysenko, writing in the 1950s—and in response to models of nationhood that privileged Anglo-Canadian cultural values over those of other ethnic groups—believes that assimilation is a two-way process of negotiation and compromise. In contrast to such previous writers as Ralph Connor and Sinclair Ross—writers who see the nation as a community that absorbs ethnic minority groups by erasing their ethnic languages and cultures (and re-placing them with the language and culture of dominant Anglo-Canadian society)—Lysenko sees all Canadians, “old” and “new,” as active participants in the ongoing project of nation-building. Not unlike Margaret Laurence, whose vision of the nation in her *Manawaka* texts reflects a broad shift in public discourse toward increasing tolerance and acceptance of cultural diversity, Lysenko anticipates multicultural models of the nation (importantly, she also—again like

Laurence—addresses the ways in which women are marginalized within patriarchal social structures). In *Yellow Boots*, as she narrates the story of Lilli Landash's coming-of-age (her transition from girlhood to womanhood; from the farm to the city; from Ukrainian culture to Canadian society) Lysenko portrays Lilli as the ideal Canadian, one who takes the "best" aspects of her old culture and makes them a part of her new way of life. The point Lysenko wishes to make is that, by moving to the (progressive, modern, multicultural) city, Lilli gains independence from her oppressively patriarchal rural home while maintaining her ethnic culture. But to accept that Lilli gains independence as a woman while retaining her identity as a Ukrainian requires a leap of faith on the part of the reader: Lilli's controlling choirmaster-cum-lover takes the place of her father; Ukrainian folk songs (and one pair of yellow boots) take the place of her ethnic language, customs, and traditions. For the female Ukrainian Canadian subject, twice-marginalized within Canadian society as a woman and a member of an ethnic minority group, assimilating to (patriarchal, Anglo-) Canadian society becomes not a "win-win" but a "no-win" series of negotiations and compromises.

Such later writers as Maara Haas, George Ryga, and Andrew Suknaski resist the notion that Canadian history is progressive: they reject the assumption that emergent discourses of multiculturalism improve upon previous, more homogenizing models of nationhood. Reacting to the policies and practices of multiculturalism that were embraced by Canadians (including many Ukrainian Canadians) in the 1970s and 1980s, Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski see multiculturalism as an ideology that reduces the complexities of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity to trivialized expressions of folk culture. For these writers, the celebratory surface rhetoric of multiculturalism belies a deeper

system of inclusion and exclusion that requires Ukrainian Canadians to adopt the language, culture, and values of Anglo-Canadian society.¹⁷⁴ If they are to ascend within the social and economic hierarchies of Canadian society, Ukrainian Canadians cannot maintain ties with their culture—except through superficial, officially-sanctioned forms of cultural production (i.e. song, dance, food, Easter eggs, etc.). I read Haas's novel *The Street Where I Live* (1976), George Ryga's play *A Letter to My Son* (1981), and Andrew Suknaski's poetry (published in *Wood Mountain Poems*, 1976; *the ghosts call you poor*, 1978; and *In the Name of Narid*, 1981) as direct challenges to the kinds of assumptions that Lysenko makes in *Yellow Boots*—namely that by assimilating, Ukrainian Canadians are able to get ahead without losing touch with their ethnic roots. As second-generation Ukrainian Canadians who have assimilated to Canadian society—and who have benefited from doing so—Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski acknowledge that assimilation is not only inevitable but also positive (in some ways, at least). At the same time, however, they are haunted by their decision to reject their parents' way of life. Unlike Lysenko's novel, Haas's novel, Ryga's play, and Suknaski's poetry reveal a sense of loss (loss of culture, loss of ties to the past) and guilt (because the writers themselves have chosen to turn away from their ethnic roots). In these texts, the predicament of the second-generation Ukrainian Canadian—caught between two cultures, with ambivalent feelings toward both—becomes a central concern.

How can second-generation Ukrainian Canadians—immigrants' children who

¹⁷⁴ Anglo-Canadian culture is neither a fixed nor a homogeneous phenomenon—it isn't "real" in the sense that it cannot be identified as a stable set of social and cultural practices (and, as Margaret Laurence illustrates in her Manawaka fiction, individuals from Anglo-Celtic backgrounds are not guaranteed high economic and social status). In the minds of many Ukrainian Canadians, however, the *idea* of Anglo-Canadian-ness is very real: to be able to speak English without a Ukrainian accent; to have an Anglo-Celtic surname; to be Protestant—these are all perceived as benefits to getting ahead in Canadian society.

have successfully assimilated to Canadian society—reconnect with their ethnic heritage without recourse to superficial expressions of folk culture? How can they establish and nurture meaningful ties with their Ukrainian past while living as Canadians in the present? For Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski, history becomes the key to reconciling their ethnic and national identities. All three writers revisit the past and record the stories of first-generation Ukrainian Canadians. Looking back on the histories of their families and communities, they find the stories of “ordinary” Ukrainian Canadians who have been excluded, under-represented, or misrepresented in the annals of Canadian history. To ensure that the immigrants’ way of life will not be forgotten, Haas explores the day-to-day life of working-class ethnic immigrants on a street in North End Winnipeg; Ryga dramatizes the story of an aging Ukrainian homesteader who lives in rural Manitoba; and Suknaski documents the stories told to him by the residents of Wood Mountain, Saskatchewan. These writers retrieve Ukrainian Canadians from the margins of Canadian history by (re)placing them at the centre of their stories.

But how exactly do Haas’s, Ryga’s, and Suknaski’s texts differ from *Yellow Boots*? Lysenko also places a Ukrainian Canadian character at the centre of her novel; she too writes back to versions of Canadian history that relegate ordinary Ukrainian Canadians to the margins of the nation. Indeed, broadly speaking, Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski take on the same subject matter as their predecessor: all four writers explore the struggles of first- and second-generation Ukrainian Canadians to make a better life for themselves and their children while maintaining ties to their ethnic culture. Granted, the ending to Lilli’s story is less triumphant than ambivalent, for her assimilation to Canadian society requires that she abandon most aspects of her cultural heritage. *Yellow Boots* may

be a novel in which Ukrainian Canadians take centre stage, but it is nonetheless a novel that narrates the marginalization of Ukrainian Canadian culture in Canadian society (Lilli's Ukrainian identity is subsumed by her adopted Anglo-Canadian identity). Granted, too, the problem with Haas's *The Street Where I Live*, Ryga's *A Letter to My Son*, and many of Suknaski's poems is that (on the surface, at least) these texts appear to tell a similar story. Although the concept of Anglo-Canadian cultural hegemony¹⁷⁵ may not be an urgent concern for the immigrants in Haas's novel (their ethnic community is isolated from mainstream Anglo-Canadian society), assimilation looms large in the future of the immigrants' children who, inevitably, will leave the street where they live. While Old Man Lepa, the main character in Ryga's play, stubbornly refuses to let go of his Ukrainian past, his son has already done so; once Lepa passes away, so too will his way of life. Not unlike Lepa, many of the characters who speak in and through Suknaski's poems are voices from a bygone era: the next generation has long since moved on and away. If these texts, like Lysenko's novel, document the history of a dying culture—an old way of life that has no place in, or relevance to, modern Canadian society—what sets them apart from *Yellow Boots*?

The answer lies in their approaches: the genres and languages that they use to write about assimilation implicitly illustrate the dramatic differences between their attitudes toward Ukrainian Canadian culture and Lysenko's. One of the most telling—and troubling—aspects of *Yellow Boots* is the language that Lysenko uses to narrate Lilli's story. For a text that many Ukrainian Canadian scholars read as a testament to the

¹⁷⁵ Again, I want to emphasize that “Anglo-Canadian cultural hegemony” is—by mid-century, at least—no longer identifiable as a series of church, school, and government policies of assimilation. But the idea of Anglo-Canadian culture as superior to ethnic minority cultures still circulates, albeit more subtly.

beauty and vitality of Ukrainian Canadian culture—and a celebration of the ways in which discourses of multiculturalism enable ethnic groups to make valuable contributions to Canadian culture—*Yellow Boots* is surprisingly lacking in Ukrainian words and phrases, and in Ukrainian characters who speak Ukrainian, or who speak English with Ukrainian accents. Briefly, near the beginning of the novel, during language lessons with her Anglo-Canadian schoolteacher, Ian MacTavish, Lilli struggles with English grammar and pronunciations: “[m]y tongue lame like old horse,” she says. “I am so stupid! . . . All the time, mistakes!” (56-7). But, determined to speak proper English, Lilli announces her commitment to learning her new language: “all the time I will speak like this” (57), she tells MacTavish. And, for the rest of the novel, she does indeed continue to “speak like this”—in impeccably grammatical English, with no traces of a Ukrainian accent. Even if we suspend our disbelief and accept that Lilli is able to participate in Canadian society without losing touch with her Ukrainian culture, what are we to make of Lysenko’s apparent desire to eradicate all traces of Ukrainian-ness from her heroine’s voice—and, more importantly, from her own narrative voice? The medium—or the language—of the novel is, in a sense, the message: Lysenko’s primary motivation for writing *Yellow Boots* is not to illustrate what Canadian society stands to gain from Ukrainians but, rather, to demonstrate how much Ukrainians are willing to give up in order to become Canadians. The scene in which MacTavish teaches Lilli to speak English is a crucial moment in the novel because, as it dramatizes the superiority of Anglo-Canadian culture over the Ukrainian Canadian culture (not to mention the ubiquity of patriarchal social structures), it reveals Lysenko’s underlying attitude toward her ethnic group: Ukrainian Canadians are backward and ignorant; Anglo-Canadians,

progressive and educated. Author and character alike reject their ethnic language, and by extension their ethnic culture, in order to make successful transitions to what they perceive to be the dominant culture of Canadian society.

If, as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin suggest, worlds are created through language,¹⁷⁶ in the world that Lysenko creates, Ukrainian Canadian culture is erased and re-placed by her construction of Anglo-Canadian culture: the worlds that Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski create, by contrast, synthesize multiple cultures. While these writers may thematize assimilation and cultural loss by exploring the immigrant-generations' disappearing way of life, the formal aspects of their writing tell a different story; in their texts, hybrid genres and languages become strategies for implicitly resisting their perceptions of Anglo-Canadian cultural hegemony. Whereas Lysenko's attitudes toward her identity are encoded in the ("English") language that she uses, Haas's, Ryga's, and Suknaski's forms of "english" reflect their hybrid identities—their sense of themselves not simply as Ukrainians and Canadians but also as members of particular communities that comprise multiple ethnic groups. Region replaces the nation as these writers "home" in on the prairies as the specific backdrop against which their stories take place. By drawing upon the heterogeneous languages of the multi-ethnic prairie towns in which they were raised (North End Winnipeg for Haas; Richmond Park, Alberta, for Ryga; and Wood Mountain, Saskatchewan, for Suknaski), they challenge assumptions about the homogeneity of Canadian culture. *The Street Where I Live* is rife with ethnic characters (not all of them Ukrainian) who speak English with heavy accents and who incorporate words and phrases from their ethnic languages. ("Nu," says Vloshkin to himself, "don't

¹⁷⁶ In *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (1989), Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin argue that worlds "exist by means of languages" (44).

be a schlemiel. Send a peckl of goods to your sister at Christmas and be Canadian” [60]. “SHAME-A YOU MOTHER, GIGOLO ON SKATES,” says Franciosa, admonishing his son for playing hockey [38]. And Moishe, reading from the “book of Ukrainian Wedding Rituals,” says, “[de] mudder gives de goil a needle and silk tred to sew a reet from de evergreen leaves of de periwinkle barweenok on de last night of her goilhood” [18-9].) The main character in *A Letter to My Son* speaks imperfect English with a Ukrainian accent as he struggles to express himself in a language that is foreign to him. (“Why is it when I write a letter, I am making a wallet out of wood?” says Old Man Lepa. “What am I doing? The words fall like stones on the paper” [72-3]. “I got no pension” [74] because “I don’t know how to read English too good” [77].) And, in many of his poems, Suknaski records the voices of old Ukrainian homesteaders (and, again, other ethnic immigrants, as well as First Nations and Metis people) with a faithfulness to their prairie vernacular. (“*suknatskyj’s father*” begins his story of an orphaned Ukrainian girl by explaining that “*she an herr fahderr / dey leef long ago een karpateh / she noh heveh mahderr / pohany vaz pagenz!*” [Narid 36]. Drunk one night, Gunnar Folgerberg, another old timer from Wood Mountain, says, “*you line up 7 chairs / n all go over there n take off ma shoes / n jump over them*” [ghosts 85]. Jimmy Hoy, confronting a drunk in his café, says, “*all time takkie to much / makkie trouble sunna bitch / wadda hell madder wid you?*” [WMP 28]). But by using the hybrid languages of the past to tell “authentic” stories from the past, Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski do not simply write back to “official” versions of history that exclude the experiences of ordinary, working-class ethnic communities: to narrate the dying culture of a bygone era in the language of their

parents' generation is to reconnect with the voices of the past and acknowledge their inextricable ties to the present.

Suknaski's writing exemplifies the ways in which language functions as a carrier of culture and a living link between the past and the present because, in many of his poems, he reflects self-consciously on his understanding of language as such. In *Wood Mountain Poems*, *the ghosts call you poor*, and *In the Name of Narid*, as he repeatedly returns to the community in which he was raised (looking for answers to his questions about the meaning of home, his relation to home, how to re-establish ties with home), Suknaski narrates his development as a poet in search of home. This search begins with his literal return to Wood Mountain and his interest in documenting the history of his home/ghost town (by recording the oral stories of the resident old timers). But as he travels further back in time, imaginatively reconstructing the stories of the First Nations people (the Cree, Sioux and Nez Percés) who once lived in the Wood Mountain area, he begins to see that history is less temporal than spatial: the stories and the voices of the individuals and communities who once called the prairies home have not passed away; they are present in the landscape. His challenge, then, is to find a way to stay connected to home—to carry the landscape with him—when he leaves Wood Mountain. How can the poet translate his understanding of time as space—and space as a palimpsest layered with the cultures, histories, stories, and mythologies of multiple ethnic groups—onto the page? The answer, for Suknaski, is to write about the prairies in a hybrid language that is itself a (figurative) landscape, and that is itself layered with voices from the past. While Haas and Ryga primarily use hybrid languages in order to tell stories about the past,

Suknaski draws upon stories of the past to narrate his engagement with language in the present.

When he writes, then, about the people who homesteaded around Wood Mountain (Alfred E. Lecaine, Philip Well, Vasile Tonita, Louis Leveille), and about the Sioux and Nez Percés who made their last stand near Wood Mountain (led by Sitting Bull, Big Bear, and Chief Joseph), and about his parents' struggle to make a better life for their children who ultimately left Wood Mountain, Suknaski does not only document an "authentic" history of Wood Mountain by faithfully recording the various languages spoken over the course of Wood Mountain history (though this is certainly an important part of his project). He also, and more importantly, explores the ways in which the history and the languages of Wood Mountain have shaped *his* voice as a writer.

Ukrainian, Sioux, and Rumanian words became part of his vernacular. He frequently takes on the forms of English spoken in the local Chinese restaurant, beer parlour, and pool hall. Many of his poems make sense only when they are spoken out loud because he changes the spellings of words to capture the accent of the speaker. And some of his poems make no sense to readers who aren't fluent in languages other than English because he doesn't always offer English translations of non-English words. Often ungrammatical and idiomatic, Suknaski's "english" is never fixed or stable—and, as such, it reflects the poet's ongoing engagement with language. Suknaski visits Wood Mountain again and again in his writing precisely because his connection to home is less product than process—less a matter of arriving than of constantly departing and returning.

“Paska I Khmary,” from *In the Name of Narid*, most succinctly and poignantly illustrates the ways in which Suknaski’s sense of himself and the world around him is mediated by language. In this poem, Suknaski and his mother gaze upon a linocut (produced by George Melnyk) of the prairies, offering different interpretations of the picture. Melnyk calls it “*the land also rises*” (60). When Suknaski’s mother (whose understanding of English is limited) asks her son to translate Melnyk’s words into Ukrainian, Suknaski (who is no longer fluent in Ukrainian and therefore cannot come up with a literal translation) invents a new title for the picture: “*paska i khmary*” or “*easter bread and clouds*” (60). Thrice-removed from the landscape depicted in Melnyk’s linocut (the landscape inspires the linocut, “*the land also rises*”; Suknaski translates this title for his mother as “*paska i khmary*”; then, for his readers, he translates it once more as “*easter bread and clouds*”), Suknaski’s translation of the artist’s original title says more about Suknaski (and his relationship with his mother) than it does about Melnyk’s linocut and the landscape that inspired it. Mother and son bond over Melnyk’s picture not in spite of the different languages that they speak but precisely because they speak to each other in different languages. Their conversation has less to do with arriving at a single, definitive interpretation of the picture (over the course of the poem, Suknaski suggests that, under the clouds, are “*polia*” or “*fields*”—“*navit polia / v nebi*,” he says, “*even fields in / heaven*”—and his mother offers still another reading of the picture when she adds, “*orr myte be rrayz ov sohn / ahbofh cloudz brroken / by geese koming norrt*”) than with sharing their different ways of seeing the world. “Paska I Khmary” suggests that we create the world around us with words; that we make the world meaningful (to ourselves and others) in and through our choice of language. And in this

poem, as in so much of Suknaski's writing, the poet's world—a world with multiple, shifting meanings—cannot be “translated” into a single language.

Reading the work of two more recent Ukrainian Canadian writers, Janice Kulyk Keefer and Myrna Kostash, alongside Lysenko's, Haas's, Ryga's, and Suknaski's texts, I find myself visualizing Ukrainian Canadian literature as a pendulum that swings back and forth between two languages, English and “english.” Lysenko eradicates virtually all traces of Ukrainian-ness from her heroine's (and her own narrative) voice in an attempt to assert Lilli's (and her own) Canadian-ness; Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski deliberately draw upon hybrid forms of “english” to express their hybrid (ethnic, national, regional, class) identities; and Kulyk Keefer and Kostash (less like Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski than like Lysenko) return to “English” as they write about their travels—even as they turn to Ukraine in order to rediscover and reconnect with their ethnic roots. Explicitly, these writers seek to move beyond nation-based definitions of individual and group identity by exploring the ways in which globalized networks of cultural and social exchange contribute to the development of transnational communities. But what does their use of “English” implicitly say about their sense of self, community, and home? To what extent does the (Canadian) nation remain at the centre of the worlds that they create in and through their writing?

In *The Green Library* (1996) and *Honey and Ashes: A Story of Family* (1998), Kulyk Keefer narrates her travels to Kiev in 1993 and to Poland and Ukraine in 1997. Haunted by her children's sense of themselves as “Canadians, unhyphenated, *tout court*” (“Coming Across Bones” 89)—and by her own reluctance to write about Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity in her previous work—Kulyk Keefer sets out to record her family

history to ensure that it will be neither lost nor forgotten. For her, the experience of ethnicity has little to do with song, dance, and food (and other forms of folk culture that are sanctioned by dominant discourses of multiculturalism). She sees her ethnic inheritance, rather, as a series of personal, family stories that are part of the public, collective histories of three nations: Ukraine, Poland, and Canada. To reconnect with her ethnic heritage is to retrieve family stories from the margins of “official” history and to re-place her family’s (and her own) experiences at the centre of her texts. In a sense, Kulyk Keefer’s approach to exploring her experience of ethnicity is not unlike that of Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski, who also turn to history in order to understand the meaning of their ethnic identities. But the history—or, better, the histories—to which Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski turn are rooted in a specific region within the nation; in (re)claiming the stories and languages of the prairies as their own, they simultaneously proclaim their right to belong to the nation. Kulyk Keefer’s sense of “home” is more difficult to define because it transcends the borders of region and nation. How can she (a Canadian, by birth and nationality, who has never seen much less lived in Ukraine) reconcile her emotional attachment to and simultaneous detachment from this “other” part of the world?

A writer who idealizes the global trends toward transnationalism and transculturalism, Kulyk Keefer returns to the specific sites at which her family’s history began in order to collapse the distance between her two homes. In *The Green Library*, an obliquely autobiographical novel about one Toronto woman’s search for the truth about her newly-discovered Ukrainian past, Kulyk Keefer’s central character, Eva Chown, goes to Kiev, hoping to piece together her family’s history at its source. Similarly, in *Honey*

and Ashes, a more overtly (auto)biographical work of non-fiction focused on Kulyk Keefer's maternal grandparents', mother's, and aunt's experiences in Ukraine (then Poland) and Canada, Kulyk Keefer travels back to the "Old Place," looking for answers to her questions about the past. These texts appear to suggest that if Ukrainian Canadians are to understand the meaning of their ethnicity, they must return to and reconnect with their ancestral homeland, confronting both the positive and negative aspects of their ethnic group's history while accepting, at the same time, that the past can never be fully recovered. Some secrets remain hidden, after all (Eva Chown never learns about her father's involvement in her grandmother's murder); and some mysteries cannot be solved (Kulyk Keefer is unable to determine the exact fate of Volodko, her grandfather's half-brother). In the end, what Eva Chown and Kulyk Keefer seem to learn is that to come to terms with their divided sense of self (their "Janus-faced" Ukrainian/Canadian identities) they must reconcile themselves to a profound ambivalence vis-à-vis Canada and Ukraine, the past and the present: not fully at home in either country, yet attached to both, they must—and indeed do—accept that the past ("The Truth" of which they can never fully recover) is inextricably linked, nonetheless, to the present.

Yet, the ambivalence that Kulyk Keefer foregrounds in each text—the notion that the second-generation Ukrainian Canadian is necessarily suspended between two homes, belonging to both and neither, simultaneously connected to and distanced from the past—is undermined, albeit subtly, by the narrative structures of her texts, and by Kulyk Keefer's underlying assumptions about the ways in which ethnic identity is defined. Despite Kulyk Keefer's attempts to complicate Eva Chown's and her own definitions of self, community, and home, readers of *The Green Library* and *Honey and Ashes* are left

with the distinct sense that heroine and author alike know precisely who they are and where home is. With their brief sojourns to Ukraine behind them, both return to the comfort and stability of their middle-class Canadian homes, secure in the knowledge that they need not leave again. Their experiences in Eastern Europe leave no lasting impression on them. Traveling to Ukraine has confirmed (rather than challenged) their attitudes toward ethnicity. “Blood ties,” says Eva, long before traveling to Ukraine, “family ties. You’re born with family like a chain around your neck . . . [E]ven if you break the links, the chain doesn’t dissolve. It just sinks under your skin, you wear it without knowing” (41). And, later in the novel, having returned to Toronto from Kiev, Eva returns to the notion that ethnic identity and history are passed on through family bloodlines. “The womb which tipped her out,” after all, “is linked to that other womb, the one that harboured the man who is her father . . . Holly [her mother], Lesia [her grandmother]: their lives, their stories—she carries them in her bones” (261). Eva, conveniently, has no reason to return to Ukraine—no reason, that is, to actively nurture literal connections to the country and its people—because she is already (and has always been) linked to her homeland by blood. The same is true for Kulyk Keefer. By insisting at the outset of (and then throughout) *Honey and Ashes* that she is connected to her family and to history itself by blood, she forces her readers to question the necessity of her quest to “build a bridge out of words” between the past and the present, Canada and Ukraine (8). A figurative bridge (of blood) has always connected Kulyk Keefer to her family and to her past, and she has always known this; home is the place to which she returns, and to which she has always known that she would return.

In the end, the conflict in *The Green Library* and *Honey and Ashes* is not between Kulyk Keefer's ethnic and national identity or her real and imagined sense of home: the conflict, rather, is between her desire, on the one hand, to say something new about the ways in which ethnicity is experienced and her inability, at the same time, to move beyond existing—and conventional—definitions of ethnicity. What she seeks to demonstrate in both texts is that, by traveling “back” to and reconnecting with their ancestral homeland, Ukrainian Canadians become active participants in transnational networks of social and cultural exchange—active, that is, in the process of building communities that transcend national borders. Transculturalism, according to Kulyk Keefer, facilitates the constant, fluid exchange of culture both within and between different nations. “[I]nterconnection, mobility, and transformation”: these are the transcultural ideals that she embraces in her travels, as well as her writing about these travels (“From Mosaic to Kaleidoscope” 16). But if Kulyk Keefer's experiences in Ukraine have actually changed her—and if she has changed the lives of the people she visited there—her writing nowhere reflects this. “Transformative” images of birth and rebirth may recur throughout *The Green Library* (early in the novel, Eva wonders “what it must feel like in the womb, its blood-warm waters” [54]; near the conclusion, she is struck by a “sudden sensation of sliding through a chute, a blood-warm, blood-dark chute” [260]). Rivers—symbols of “interconnection”—may become a motif in *Honey and Ashes* (in her prologue, she says, “over the last few years I've come to hear the river of the past, my family's and my own, more insistently than ever” [4]; later, just before leaving Poland, she explains that “it seems as if more than the rivers are flooding, it seems as if time itself has risen from its channel and is overflowing the banks meant to

keep it contained” [325]). And yet Kulyk Keefer’s language is not transformed; it bears no traces of the “other” world with which she ostensibly has formed a fluid, two-way connection.

I don’t mean to suggest that the lack of Ukrainian words and phrases in Kulyk Keefer’s writing is the only issue—though it is telling that her “English” remains untouched by any of the languages spoken by her family members in Canada and Ukraine (Ukrainian, Polish, German). The problem, as I see it, goes much deeper: it has to do with Kulyk Keefer’s style—a style that undergoes no transformation either within each text or between the two texts, despite the emotional upheaval that she supposedly went through while writing *The Green Library* and *Honey and Ashes*. My point is not that Kulyk Keefer doesn’t have the ability to vary her writing style or narrative voice: on the contrary, I think that she does. I’m interested, then, in her reasons for maintaining tight control over her style and voice, and I’m concerned with the impressions that this control leaves on readers. In *The Green Library*, Kulyk Keefer’s control over the chaotic world that she seeks to create comes across not only in the unbelievable events and occurrences that propel the plot and in the proliferation of particular images and motifs (virtually every character in the novel is fixated on blood and bones, birth and rebirth) but also in the multiple—and virtually indistinguishable—voices that narrate the novel. Compare, for example, these two portions of the novel that frame the text, the first narrated in the first person by Savchuk (Eva’s father’s old friend who lives in Ukraine) and the second narrated in the third person (limited to Eva’s point of view) by Kulyk Keefer:

A Chronicle of Bygone Years: famine, terror, war. And the rare, bright miracles: so pitiless in their power to make us hope, to make us go on pushing through our lives. (1)

Fatality, randomness, choice: the jaggedness of it shakes her till she thinks she'll never be still again. Holly, Lesia: their lives, their stories—she carries them in her bones, in whatever she makes of herself. (261)

The unmistakable syntactical similarities between these two quotations (note the punctuation of all four sentences; the parallels between “famine, terror, war” / “fatality, randomness, choice” and “to make us hope, to make us go on” / “their lives, their stories”) undermine Kulyk Keefer’s attempts to construct a heteroglossic and dialogic world inhabited by multiple characters who speak in different voices. When different characters think or speak or write in *The Green Library*, they do so in the same voice, and in the same patterns of language. Though Eva Chown and Kulyk Keefer herself are uncertain, even confused, about who they are, Kulyk Keefer’s style is confident in its eloquence and sophistication—and this confidence, I think, reveals the extent to which she is secure in her sense of self.

In *Honey and Ashes*, Kulyk Keefer’s fixed sense of self comes across even more emphatically than it does in *The Green Library*: for, in seeking to create order out of the confusion of personal and public history, unofficial oral stories and official written history, she becomes the unambiguous centre of her family history. Less about her family than it is about her, *Honey and Ashes* coheres, specifically, around Kulyk Keefer’s *unchanging* sense of herself as the family historian who documents the past without being affected or influenced by it. Insofar as the text is structured around her travels from Canada to Ukraine and back again (not on her family members’ movement from Ukraine to Canada), and insofar as it focuses on her questions about the past (not on other

family members' questions), *Honey and Ashes* constructs Kulyk Keefer—and Kulyk Keefer alone—as the active, questing heroine who at once participates in and (pre)scripts her own successful search for answers. Not surprisingly, the text is rife with self-conscious reflections on the “I” who shapes the narrative (“[h]ere *I* am, at the border between story and history, personal desire and a shared reality over which *I* have no more power than *I* do over *my* dreams” [163]. “*I* know what’s at stake here . . . The Old Place *I* know by heart and carry in a fold of memory—what if *I* can only hold onto it by staying at the farthest possible remove? What will happen when the actual displaces what *I* have imagined?” [227]. “*I* could have spent at least another day in *my* mother’s village, looking for *my* grandparents’ fields, their children’s graves. *I* could have asked more questions” [303]. “Did *I* find what *I* was looking for? Has this journey changed *me*? *I* did so little of what *I* thought *I* would” [326]¹⁷⁷). Tellingly, in the brief opening paragraph of *Honey and Ashes*, Kulyk Keefer makes no fewer than ten references to herself:

I stand by a river, looking over the water to a distant shore. When *I* was a child, *I* crossed this river as though water were as natural an element to *me* as the air *I* breathed, the earth under *my* feet. But now *I* know the strength of the river’s current. Were *I* to step into these waters, they would tug *me* upstream or down, anywhere but across; anywhere but where *I* long to be. (3, *my* emphasis)

Tellingly, too, she alludes to her fear of being swept away, “upstream or down,” by the metaphorical current of the past. In the end, it is Kulyk Keefer’s fear of being transformed by her search for home—and not her desire to be transformed—that defines her writing. When she comes back to the image of the river in the final pages of *Honey and Ashes* (“*I* write this in my study,” she says, “in a stone house by a river” [328]), the

¹⁷⁷ The emphasis is mine in these quotations.

(firm, fixed, solid) “stone house”—and not the (fluid, unstable, ever-changing) “river”—becomes the appropriate metaphor for her sense of self, and her understanding of home.

Ultimately, what Kulyk Keefer offers is a series of contradictory ideas about the ways in which ethnicity is experienced and expressed. On the one hand, she argues that ethnicity is passed on through family bloodlines. To be Ukrainian Canadian is to be born Ukrainian Canadian. As (passive) recipients of genealogical legacies, Ukrainian Canadians need not (actively) question the source or nature of their ethnic identity. Their ethnicity, in a sense, is not up for negotiation: it’s a given; like it or not, Ukrainian-ness flows in their veins. At the same time, though, Kulyk Keefer insists that ethnicity is meaningless unless Ukrainian Canadians understand that what flows in their veins is a river of stories—a “river of the past” (4)—linking them to their ancestors and their ancestral homeland. To be Ukrainian Canadian is to know and reconnect with your history. So: ethnicity defined by blood versus ethnicity defined by history; ethnicity passively inherited versus ethnicity actively (re)negotiated. Which is it? How does Kulyk Keefer reconcile the two? My feeling is that, in documenting the history of her family for her children—“strangers to the Old Place” (*Honey and Ashes* 4) who “consider themselves to be Canadians, unhyphenated, *tout court*” (“Coming Across Bones” 89)—Kulyk Keefer is able to position herself as a vital link between past and future generations. By choosing to have children, she has guaranteed the continuance of the family bloodline. The past will live on in and through her sons. And, at the same time, through her writing, she has ensured that the *meaning* of the past will live on as well. The problem is that, having decided on the meaning of the past—having scripted it as a story with a happy ending that leaves no questions unanswered, no mysteries unsolved—

she cripples the next generation's potential for playing an active role in (re)defining their identities as third-generation Ukrainian Canadians. The subtext of *Honey and Ashes* is that, should her sons re-discover their ethnicity someday and become interested in the Old Place, they need only read their mother's book to learn "The Truth" about their ethnic heritage—and "The Truth," according to Kulyk Keefer, is not that ethnicity is constantly redefined by the fluid exchange of culture between two worlds and two homes but that it is contained, rather, in her ready-made "stone house" of history, firmly rooted in Canada.

Surprisingly, perhaps, given the decades that stand between them, Janice Kulyk Keefer and Vera Lysenko share the same attitudes toward ethnicity—attitudes that set them apart from such writers as Maara Haas, George Ryga, and Andrew Suknaski. What Kulyk Keefer and Lysenko have in common is a tendency to compartmentalize ethnic identity and remove it from the business of day-to-day (Canadian) living. One writer "packages" Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity in folk culture, the other "packages" it in family history: each finds a different way to manage her Ukrainian-ness without challenging or compromising her Canadian-ness.¹⁷⁸ By writing about Ukrainian Canadians in "English," both writers drive a wedge between their ethnicity and nationality, privileging the latter over the former. For Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski, the process of writing is about *removing* this wedge. To write in hybrid forms of "english" is to announce that identity itself is hybrid. "English" inadequately expresses their

¹⁷⁸ Finding a compromise between ethnic and national identity becomes more and more difficult with each generation—especially since "mixed" ethnicities become increasingly common over time (see 16n. in Chapter One). I don't want to suggest that some individuals' decisions to identify themselves as "Canadians" are necessarily wrong. My point, rather, is that, though Lysenko and Kulyk Keefer ostensibly offer strategies to those Ukrainian Canadians who wish to maintain ties to their ethnic culture, they actually privilege Canadian-ness over Ukrainian Canadian-ness.

experience of being Ukrainians and Canadians (and prairie-dwellers) because “English” represents the erasure of their ethnic (and regional) identity. Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski write back to the hegemony of Anglo-Canadian culture not simply by writing about Ukrainian Canadians but by writing *as* Ukrainian Canadians. Kulyk Keefer and Lysenko, by simultaneously embracing and containing their ethnic identity, undermine their own attempts at retrieving Ukrainian Canadians from the margins of Canadian society.

Where does Myrna Kostash stand in relation to these two groups of writers—Kulyk Keefer and Lysenko; Haas, Ryga, and Suknaski? How do her perspectives on ethnicity compare to those of other Ukrainian Canadian writers? What does her language say about her attitudes toward ethnic and national identity?

In many obvious ways, Kostash invites comparison with Kulyk Keefer. Close in age, these writers share the same motivations for traveling to Eastern Europe, and writing about their experiences there. By returning to and reconnecting with their ethnic homeland, they both seek to re-position themselves as members of cross-cultural communities that transcend national borders. Each seeks to redefine her sense of self, community, and home by participating in transnational networks of social and cultural exchange. But, whereas Kulyk Keefer actually reaffirms existing assumptions about individual and group identity, Kostash successfully challenges the ways in which identity is conventionally experienced and expressed. While Kostash acknowledges that she travels to Eastern Europe, in part, as a Ukrainian Canadian, she is not (like Kulyk Keefer) interested in consolidating her blood ties to the Old Country by exploring and documenting her family’s history in Ukraine. Indeed, Kostash’s attachment to this “other” part of the world has little to do with either family bloodlines or family history.

In *Bloodlines: A Journey Into Eastern Europe* (1993) and *The Doomed Bridegroom: A Memoir* (1998), she attempts to move beyond borders and bloodlines by exploring her sense of solidarity with individuals from Eastern, Central, and Southern Europe whose professional and political interests are similar to her own. As a Ukrainian Canadian, a writer, a feminist, and a New Leftist socialist, Kostash sets out to forge lasting relationships with like-minded colleagues and kindred spirits—not only from Ukraine, but also from Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, and Greece. Multiplicity and tenacity characterize her writing. Over a period of fifteen years, beginning in 1981, she makes numerous trips to various countries, determined to make real her imagined allegiances to writers, political dissidents, and social activists who live outside of Canada. Kulyk Keefer takes for granted her connection to Ukraine; in deciding that bloodlines constitute a definitive link to her ancestral homeland, she, conveniently, has no need to actively nurture relationships with her family members who still live there. Hence, at the end of *Honey and Ashes*, Kulyk Keefer (like her heroine in the final chapters of *The Green Library*) returns to Canada with no talk of or plans for future travels to Ukraine. Kostash, by contrast, is always departing, always setting out, always on the move. *Bloodlines* and *The Doomed Bridegroom* are less about coming home than about the ongoing search for home.

In a way, Kostash's writing is shaped by the same underlying concerns that characterize Suknaski's poetry. Suknaski, unlike Kostash, associates home with a particular landscape (the prairies) and a specific community (Wood Mountain), but he is no more certain about his relation to either. Like Kostash, who travels to Eastern Europe again and again, eager to make real her imagined sense of belonging to this "other" part

of the world, Suknaski repeatedly returns to Wood Mountain because he is determined to re-establish connections to his hometown. Simultaneously attached to and alienated from Wood Mountain, Suknaski reconciles his ambivalent relation to home by writing in a language that functions as an extension of the prairie landscape. In language, he finds a way to carry home with him when he is away—so that, in the process of writing, as he explores the landscape of language itself, Suknaski figuratively returns to, reconnects with, and reinvents home. Kostash's search for home is in some ways, of course, more complicated than Suknaski's. Over the course of her travels, she comes in contact with individuals whose political, social, cultural, and economic backgrounds are (as she discovers) radically different from her own. Suknaski, at least, is familiar with the residents of Wood Mountain, and their way of life. But Kostash is a stranger to Eastern Europe (a stranger to the social realities, past and present, of the countries that she visits) who routinely fails at developing lasting relationships with the people she meets; though she imagines that she has much in common with these people, she cannot close the gaps between their world and her idealization of it. Insofar as *Bloodlines* and *The Doomed Bridegroom* foreground her desire to make real connections with the history and people of Eastern Europe—without giving up her political ideals—these texts narrate her struggle to reconcile reality and fantasy: a struggle that is played out in the genres and languages of her texts. For the major portion of *Bloodlines*, Kostash's strategy is to draw upon the languages (or the discourses) of history and politics to connect with the people she meets; her assumption, after all, is that they can transcend their cultural differences by acknowledging (what she perceives to be) their shared histories and common political beliefs. This strategy, however—grounded as it is in the historical and political realities

of Eastern Europe—fails precisely because it foregrounds her detachment from the social realities of life in Eastern Europe. In order to redefine her sense of self within globalized networks of social and cultural exchange, she must find new languages in which to (re)construct reality and (re)write herself into being. Not unlike Suknaski, Kostash discovers that she is “at home” in language because language is what enables her to (re)imagine notions of self, community, and home. Her gradual movement away from writing non-fiction (in *Bloodlines*), toward creative non-fiction (in *The Doomed Bridegroom*), reflects her increasing awareness of language as a medium that empowers her to bridge the gaps between what is real and what is imagined; what is or was, and what could be.

In *Bloodlines*, though, to begin with, Kostash attempts to present herself (to her readers) as an authority on the social, cultural, political, and economic realities of life in Eastern Europe, past and present. Rife with instances in which she announces—if not flaunts—her familiarity with the fraught histories of the countries that she visits, the text is designed to prove that, having rigorously researched the histories of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, and Ukraine, she knows as much about these countries as the locals do (if not more). By layering her writing with references to ancient and modern history—and by drawing parallels between the two—Kostash makes clear her intimate understanding of this “other” part of the world. Writing about Czechoslovakia, for example, she notes the similarities between Jan Hus (the fifteenth-century Czech patriot—leader of a peasant rebellion against the Roman church who was burned at the stake in 1415) and Jan Palach (a university student who, in 1969, burned himself alive to protest against the oppressive communist regime). She reads the history of Yugoslavia as

a history of ethnic conflict that has repeated itself again and again, beginning in the fourteenth-century with battles that pitted Turks against Serbs, Bosnians, Wallachians, and Albanians. And she sees, in Ukraine, a pattern of tension between oppressor and oppressed (“[a] thousand years of violated memory—Mongols and Tatars, slavery and serfdom, Poles and czars and Bolsheviks, war, terror, famine, occupations, gulag, silence and fear” [208]) in which sixteenth-century Cossack freedom-fighters are reincarnated in the twentieth-century as dissident writers, artists, and intellectuals. From the perspectives of the people she meets, of course, Kostash’s understanding of their world is at best naïve, at worst arrogant. Everywhere she goes, her assumptions (about feminism, socialism, the role of the writer in society, her ethnic group’s history) are called into question. But even as her travel plans fall apart—even as her political ideals and personal beliefs are challenged—she refuses to abandon her self-appointed role as the interested “outsider” who has privileged insight into the realities of life in Eastern Europe.

Although numerous women in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Poland express their concerns about western-style feminism (which, from their perspective, ill-accommodates their chosen roles as wives and mothers), Kostash insists that her feminism is the right one (“is there no Polish male capable of doing his own typing?” [149] Is there no Polish female, moreover, who notices that “Mother Poland” or “*Matka Polska*” [132], is tellingly ruled over by men?). Several writers in Yugoslavia and Poland refuse to conflate the role of writer and political dissident, choosing instead to see themselves simply as writers, but Kostash maintains that the writer’s first responsibility is to his or her society (in response to one writer’s claim that writers should not be seen as “socially necessary,” Kostash says, “I *want* to be necessary” [126]).

This statement—"I want to be necessary" (126)—defines, I think, Kostash's enterprise in *Bloodlines*: I want to be necessary to these people and their causes; I want to channel my feelings of sympathy and solidarity into concrete action; I want to make myself one of—and indispensable to—they. And so she tries to transform herself from passive, naïve onlooker to active, savvy insider—not only by befriending writers, political dissidents, and social activists in Eastern Europe but also by illustrating that their languages (the languages of social revolution) are part of her vernacular. Throughout *Bloodlines*, Kostash cultivates a streetwise narrative style with numerous seemingly offhand references to "samizdat" (onion-skin underground publications distributed clandestinely [22; 35]), "apparatchiks" (a Russian word for members of the establishment [62]), "Catastroika" (a play on "perestroika" that alludes to the disastrous consequences of Gorbachev's economic reforms [101]), and the "gulag" (a Russian acronym referring to labour camps in the former USSR [208]). Her writing is peppered with socialist jargon—"gastarbeiter," for example (meaning, literally, "guest worker" [53], but shorthand for indentured migrant labourers) appears in her discussion of Vietnamese immigrants in Czechoslovakia, as do the phrases "[p]roletari vsech zemi spojte se! Za sozialisumus a mir! Proletarians of the world, unite! For socialism and peace!" (37). By frequently incorporating words and phrases that belong to the discourses of underground resistance movements, Kostash tries to take on the role of the dissident writer—as if to say, I am a member of these movements, whether or not other members acknowledge me as such; my writing, too, can be a vehicle for social change.

The problem for Kostash is that, though she wants to be necessary, she doesn't really know where or how she can succeed. Less a writer without a cause than a writer

with too many causes, she lands herself in trouble by drawing upon several, often contradictory, political discourses: to adopt the language of socialism is, in some contexts, to speak against democracy; to embrace the language of some political movements (Solidarity, for example, in Poland) is to silence the voices of women. From the perspectives of the people she meets, Kostash's attempts to get inside the world of Eastern European history and politics, however well-intentioned they may be, are necessarily superficial. She remains an outsider because, as a westerner, she has not experienced the harsh realities of day-to-day life in this part of the world—or indeed, in any part of the world—*except* through books and through language. Hence Jiri, in Czechoslovakia, discussing the hippie movement in North America during the 1960s, says, “if you’ll pardon me, what exactly did you have to protest about?” (19); and Julia, in Poland, announces that she is “fed up to *here* with kowtowing to western feminists who have big houses and refrigerators stuffed with meat, and who dash about in their cute Japanese cars, bringing enlightenment to their oppressed Polish sisters. What the hell would *they* know about oppression?” (150).

Even as Kostash acknowledges her failures to connect with the people she meets, she doesn't give up hope that she will eventually succeed, but while the final chapter of *Bloodlines* seems to suggest that Kostash at last finds a way to bridge the gaps between her “self” and the “other” world of Eastern Europe (by learning to speak Ukrainian, she appears to make promising steps toward re-establishing ties to Ukraine, its history, and its people), her experiences in Ukraine actually become part of the underlying pattern that she enacts and re-enacts throughout the text. Though, over the course of her travels, she is frequently reminded that, as a “westerner,” she has little in common with the people

she meets, Kostash relentlessly pursues her goal of making real her imagined sense of belonging to Eastern Europe. But because she stubbornly clings to a single, flawed assumption (the assumption that, if she adopts the right languages, she will be adopted by the communities who speak them), her enterprise is doomed from start to finish. On the surface, of course, Ukraine appears to represent a turning point in *Bloodlines*. Although her first trip to Ukraine, in 1984, is dismal (“[w]ithin hours of arrival in Ukraine,” she writes, “I am in a rage that will grow only richer and more textured” (164); “the rage overwhelms me” [164]; “I am shocked” and “discouraged” [165]; “every trip to the newspaper kiosk and bookshop dispirits me utterly” [166]), her second trip, in 1988, is far more positive—not because the country has been transformed necessarily (she again notes the low standard of living in the country, the long food queues, the high cost of consumer goods) but because *she* has been transformed. In the four years following her first trip to Ukraine, Kostash learns to speak Ukrainian; when she returns, then, in 1988, she is “endowed with the power of speech” (196). Ukrainian (or, rather, her ability to speak and understand Ukrainian) opens a number of doors for Kostash: she is able to re-establish family ties to her ethnic homeland (to learn Ukrainian is to “hammer back” her link to Ukraine, so that her “Baba might live again in [her] broken, stammering syllables” [196]); and she comes to a richer, deeper understanding of Ukrainian culture (reading Shevchenko’s poetry in Ukrainian, she discovers “a story, a voice, a personality where before there had been only babble” [195]). Most importantly, perhaps, Ukraine itself begins to look different to her. Thinking back to her experiences in 1984, Kostash draws a parallel between the 1933 famine in Ukraine and the Ukrainian people’s hunger for political freedom and economic prosperity. Reflecting on her 1988 trip, she writes of

green fields, rich, black loam, and the “beginnings of bread” (249)—symbols of hope for both the Ukrainian people and her ability to develop lasting relationships with them.

On the one hand, the ending to *Bloodlines* (less an ending, really, than a new beginning) seems optimistic: by learning to speak Ukrainian, Kostash appears to take the first steps, however tentative, toward (re)establishing meaningful ties to Ukraine. At the same time, though, because this new beginning represents her return to the same strategy that she employed in other countries, readers are left to wonder about her future vis-à-vis Ukraine. Just as she tried to develop cross-cultural relationships with writers, political dissidents, and social activists in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Poland by speaking their languages (the languages of political resistance), so too does she try to connect with the people of Ukraine by learning their language. But if language failed her before, why should it work now? What is different about her approach to Ukraine? My feeling is that, in order to end *Bloodlines* on a positive, hopeful note, Kostash can only hint at and gesture toward her future success in developing lasting relationships with the people of Ukraine. Insofar as the task that she assigns herself is to narrate the *true* story of her transformation from “outsider” to “insider” in relation to Eastern Europe, she cannot follow through with the *full* story of her experiences in Ukraine. The full story would reveal that, as in Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Poland, Kostash cannot bridge the gaps between her “self” and this “other” world. What she refuses to acknowledge in *Bloodlines* (but what she goes on to explore in *The Doomed Bridegroom*) is that, if her attempts to make real her imagined sense of belonging to Eastern Europe will never succeed, then perhaps she needs to revise her goals, and re-think her approach to meeting them. If she can abandon the project of telling a “true” story, then perhaps she is not

doomed to remain an “outsider” in Eastern Europe: perhaps, by creating a textual world that blurs the boundaries of reality and fantasy, she can write herself “into”—and simultaneously re-imagine—a new history and a new home.

More than an (auto)biographical account of her romantic involvement with various “rebel men” in Canada, Greece, Poland, Ukraine, and Serbia, and more than a memoir that traces her career-long infatuation with “other” parts of the world, *The Doomed Bridegroom* is, first and foremost, the story of Kostash’s love affair with writing. The process of writing, after all, is what enables her to make sense of—and, in a sense, triumph over—her doomed relationships. Over the course of this text, as she confronts the reasons for which her relationships have failed, Kostash acknowledges (for the first time, and with unprecedented candor) her tendencies to romanticize the social realities of life in Eastern and Southern Europe. She admits that she has deeply personal reasons for traveling to these parts of the world—which is not to say that, in *Bloodlines*, the “personal” is divorced from the “political.” But in *The Doomed Bridegroom* Kostash is far more candid about the ways in which she has been emotionally seduced and sexually aroused by the history and politics of Eastern and Southern Europe; and, as a result, she is able to abandon the role that she assigned herself in *Bloodlines* (the role of the objective, emotionally-detached journalist-cum-savvy, streetwise political writer). Indeed, she *must* abandon this role—she must re-invent herself, as well as the genre in which she writes—if she is to lay bare the “truth” about her experiences in, and attitudes toward, the countries to which she has traveled because the “true” story of her involvement in these countries is layered, paradoxically, in fantasy, fancy, and fiction. Only by embracing the role of the creative non-fiction writer (even as she invents the new

genre of creative non-fiction) is Kostash able to narrate the “reality” of her engagements with the history, politics, and people of Eastern and Southern Europe. In the end, the singular achievement of *The Doomed Bridegroom* is that, in this text, Kostash comes up with multiple, shifting answers to her questions about individual and group identity. Her memoir is not a narrative in which she arrives at definitive conclusions about her sense of self and community; it is, rather, a narrative throughout which she illustrates that identity is always a work-in-progress, actively shaped and re-shaped by the writer’s imagination as well as her lived experiences.

Of course, in its thematization of the ways in which notions of self, community, and home are (re)defined within transnational networks of social and cultural exchange, *The Doomed Bridegroom* has much in common with *Bloodlines*, as well as *The Green Library* and *Honey and Ashes*. But what I see in Kostash’s memoir is precisely what *Bloodlines*, *The Green Library*, and *Honey and Ashes* lack—textual evidence of “interconnection, mobility, and transformation” (Kulyk Keefer, “From Mosaic to Kaleidoscope” 16), the touchstones of transcultural identity-formation. In other words, as she writes *about* the ways in which, and the reasons for which, she has changed over the course of her travels, Kostash’s writing itself changes. In part, as I have already gestured toward, her experimentation with form in *The Doomed Bridegroom* sets this text apart from her previous writing, and from Kulyk Keefer’s. By drawing upon the conventions of autobiography, biography, and history, but by simultaneously incorporating elements of fiction, Kostash implicitly positions herself in a space between worlds. Just as she feels at once attached to, and detached from, the various communities that she visits, so too is her writing suspended between the genres of fiction and non-fiction, belonging to

both—and neither. Genre alone, though, cannot—and indeed does not—fully support my argument that *The Doomed Bridegroom* represents a radical departure from other transcultural writing by either Kostash or Kulyk Keefer. Insofar as *The Green Library*, *Honey and Ashes*, and *Bloodlines* all blur the distinctions between different genres, these texts also reflect their authors' divided sense of identity, and their multiple allegiances to various (ethnic, national, professional, political) communities. The point I wish to make, then, is that Kostash's approach to *language* in *The Doomed Bridegroom* more emphatically underscores the dominant themes of the text. Although, in *Bloodlines*, Kostash attempts to take on new languages, the text coheres around her refusal to relinquish authority over her subject matter so that, even as she confesses to losing control of her initial plans—and even as she admits that “[her] travels and [her] reading threw into question all the assumptions that [she] had leaned on” (2)—Kostash never loses control of her narrative voice, and never questions the assumption that she is *in* control of her self and her story. Characterized by a similar sense of consistency and control, Kulyk Keefer's narrative style (in both *The Green Library* and *Honey and Ashes*) also reinforces the notion that she is the central, stable, unifying presence in her otherwise fragmented and chaotic texts: just as she knows where home is, so too does Kulyk Keefer know who she is. In *The Doomed Bridegroom*, by contrast, as Kostash gives herself up to the stories that she tells, she simultaneously frees herself from the constraints of writing in a single, stable authorial voice.

How does Kostash's writing reflect the “interconnection, mobility, and transformation” that define the experience of transculturalism? In the first place, at numerous points in the text, as Kostash narrates specific moments in the histories of

particular nations (Vasyl Stus's first speech at the cinema in Kiev in 1965; the Polish occupation of Ukraine in the nineteenth century; Nestor Makhno's brief rise to power in Ukraine between 1918 and 1920), she alternates between her role as (actual) writer of history and (imagined) subject of history. Her approach to writing about Vasyl Stus in many ways exemplifies her approach to blurring the distinctions between herself and her subject matter. On the one hand, Kostash acknowledges that she is many-times removed from the reality of Stus's life: she never knew him; never visited Ukraine while he was alive; and never experienced the kinds of hardships and trauma that he endured over the course of his life. She learns about Stus from his friend, Mykhailyna Kotsiubynska, who "translated" Stus's life onto the page by writing his biography (in Ukrainian). To "know" Stus, Kostash must translate Kotsiubynska's text into English ("I haul out my Ukrainian-English dictionary . . . [and] look for words, following with my finger the elaborate syntax as the tender remembrance of this woman rises from the paper" [38])—so that her (Kostash's) version of Stus's life relies upon a translation of a translation. And yet Kostash refuses to accept the inherent gaps between her self and either Stus or Kotsiubynska. She writes herself into Stus's life story by taking on the persona of "MK" (Myrna Kostash/Mykhailyna Kotsiubynska)—a hybrid real/imagined figure who narrates moments in Stus's life that did not occur, but might have ("*I remember the morning you came to me in the garden, smiling with the pleasure of the lilacs and held out to me one thick, radiant stem that shook in your trembling hand*" [39]). Even as she regrets that she "did not know Stus," Kostash is "enchanted" and "fascinated"—and indeed empowered—by the fact that Kotsiubynska did: "*she* did, and there I am, she is, beside Vasyl Stus"; "we stood up together" (38). This "we"—referring as it does to Kostash,

Kotsiubynska, and Stus—becomes a turning point in *The Doomed Bridegroom*, for it is the first instance in which her language begins to collapse past and present (she “did” but there I “am”), “self” and “other” (“I am, she is”), enabling her to re-imagine herself as inextricably linked to the people, places, and histories about which she writes (“we stood up together”).

Importantly, however, and paradoxically, the sense of “interconnection” that pervades *The Doomed Bridegroom* is often occasioned by Kostash’s disconnection from herself—or, rather, by the splitting of her (real) self into multiple (imagined) selves, and by her movement between various subject positions. In the chapter focused on her love affair with Kostas, for example, Kostash presents three versions of herself: she appears, first, as one of the characters in a love story narrated in the past tense and in the third-person; second, as the narrator of this story; and, third, as a mock interviewer who questions the character/narrator about her relationship with the Greek man. Similarly, in writing about K, her Polish lover, Kostash moves back and forth between three separate, though not unrelated, roles. As she narrates her relationship with K, exploring the role she once played as his (actual) mistress, Kostash slips into the (imaginary) role of the Ukrainian handmaiden, subject to the whims of her Polish *pan*. And, as she revisits her relationship with Canadian Mennonite poet Patrick Friesen, Kostash addresses him as herself—in the present tense—while periodically drifting into the Ukrainian/Mennonite past, taking on the role of the (anti-Mennonite) Ukrainian revolutionary, and speaking to Friesen *from* the past in the voice *of* the insurgent (“[w]e move into your house . . . and sit in the dark because, although we have lightbulbs, there is no power. Remember how the rooms used to flow with light and you never lacked for fuel? We’ve torn down

Warkentin's house and hauled the material away for one of our own villages" [160]). The point is that, by imagining herself as different characters in the multiple stories that she tells, Kostash not only moves between and (re)connects with various places and moments in history: she also comes to a new understanding of herself in the present. She begins to recognize that she was actually complicit in Kostas's lies; that, with K, she was unconsciously playing out a historical drama between Poles and Ukrainians; and that, in her relationship with Friesen, she was unwittingly caught up in enduring tensions between Mennonites and Ukrainians. But she also begins to see that she can write back to and indeed alter the past by embracing her role as (creative) writer. As she figuratively travels in time and space, moving between different worlds and (re)creating multiple versions of her self, Kostash undermines the assumption that identity is fixed and stable, history rigid and unchangeable.

In the end, Kostash's language in her memoir is dramatically—though not conventionally—transformed by her experiences of transculturalism. This is not a text (like *Bloodlines*) in which she borrows the lexicon of "other" languages in order to announce (or, better, force) her belonging to "other" cultures. And yet (to return to the metaphor that I've used to describe the development of language in Ukrainian Canadian literature), *The Doomed Bridegroom* doesn't quite bring the pendulum back from "english" to "English." In fact, my feeling is that, with this text, the pendulum begins to swing in an entirely different direction. Language, for Suknaski, becomes a reflection and an extension of the landscape that he calls home; by drawing upon the specific forms of "english" spoken in and around Wood Mountain, he constructs the prairies as the centre of his world (a "portable" centre, but a centre nonetheless). And Kulyk Keefer's

“English,” untouched by her ostensible attachment to the “Old Place” from which her family immigrated, similarly reaffirms her belonging to the (national) community she has always known as home—so that, even as she travels to or writes about other parts of the world, her understanding of home is never called into question. Kostash’s language, by contrast, implicitly reveals her profoundly ambivalent attitudes toward self, community, and home. She may write in “English” but her “English” is radically destabilized by her refusal to write in a single tense, in a single voice, or from a single point of view. The world that she creates in language is a world of possibilities—a world in which identity is constantly renegotiated, and the boundaries of community are actively redefined. Near the conclusion of *Honey and Ashes*, Kulyk Keefer suggests that “[p]erhaps home is only this: inhabiting uncertainty . . . Not belonging, but longing—that we may live in the present, without craving the past or forcing the future” (328). But whereas Kulyk Keefer does “force” the future—by rigidly defining the past and the ways in which the past will live on in future generations—Kostash creates a space for ongoing re-constructions of the past, present, and future. In her writing, she becomes mentor and mother to new generations of writers who are freed from the constraints of reality and empowered by her example to re-imagine themselves and their worlds. Here is the future of Ukrainian Canadian writing: Kostash’s invitation for the next generation to challenge what was and is by exploring what could be.

Looking Up/Around/Ahead: By the Vegreville Pysanka I sat down and...

Picking up where *All of Baba's Children* left off twenty-three years earlier, Myrna Kostash's *All of Baba's Great-grandchildren: Ethnic Identity in the Next Canada*¹⁷⁹ begins with a series of questions about the future of Ukrainians in Canada. In the final paragraph of her first book, as she reflects on what she has inherited from her grandparents and parents, Kostash says,

[i]f there's any way at all that I carry on from where [baba] left off, it won't be with her language, because I never knew it, nor with her habits, because they make no sense, nor with her faith, because I have lost it, nor with her satisfaction, because my needs have changed. It will be perhaps with the thing she had no choice in bequeathing: her otherness. As the alien, the bohunk, the second-class citizen, and the ethnic, she passed on to me the gift of consciousness of one who stands outside the hegemonistic centre, and sees where the real world ends and the phantasma of propaganda begins. As for the generation between us, my parents, her children, they gave me the possibility of action as one who is of this place and this time, free of the ghosts of diffidence. (399)

Near the beginning of *All of Baba's Great-grandchildren*, then, Kostash shifts her focus onto the next generation of Ukrainian Canadians, wondering,

[w]ho are the Ukrainian-Canadians who come after me, after deficit slashing and program extermination, after webnets and the Coca-Colonization of everything, after Ukrainian independence and *Koka-Kola* on the sidewalk cafes of Kyiv? How does one go on being Ukrainian-Canadian in *their* world? Does it still matter, in the so-called global village, that hyphen is a kind of hinge between two equally compelling identities? (12-13)

Having interviewed several "20-and 30-somethin[g]" (12) Ukrainian Canadians from Edmonton about their attitudes toward and experiences of ethnicity, Kostash is "rather

¹⁷⁹ Kostash wrote *All of Baba's Great-grandchildren* for the Mohyla Lecture Series—"a programme of annual lectures devoted to a discussion of Ukrainian heritage and current affairs"—at the University of Saskatchewan. She delivered the lecture on November 19, 1999; in 2000, it was published by the Heritage Press (in association with the Prairie Centre for the Study of Ukrainian Heritage at the University of Saskatchewan). For more information about the Mohyla Lecture Series, see the title page of the text and http://www.usask.ca/stm/pcuh/academic/lecture_frame.htm.

taken aback” by their passionate responses to the “issue of their marginalization” (21). Orysia Boychuk (who grew up in the politicized Ukrainian Canadian community of Oshawa, Ontario), for example, her husband Volodymyr (a recent immigrant from Ukraine), and Lisa McDonald (a “half-Ukrainian, half-French-Scottish” Ukrainian dance instructor)—all of whom are active in numerous Ukrainian Canadian social and political organizations designed to preserve ties between Ukrainians in Canada and Ukrainian in Ukraine—bring up similar concerns in their conversations with Kostash: “[i]nvisibility”; “[m]arginality”; “Ukrainians denied equal opportunities”; “their historical experience denied” (19). For Orysia, Volodymyr, and Lisa, the experience of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity is defined by “[h]istory, memory, [and] trauma” (21), but they worry about the extent to which “a lot of issues relating to Ukrainian Canadians” (the internment of Ukrainian Canadians during the First World War, the 1933 famine in Soviet Ukraine, and war crimes controversies) “get put on the back burner” (18-19). Nor are their worries— from Kostash’s point of view, at least—unfounded or irrational. Referring to “20-and 30-something” Ukrainian Canadians as the “children of the loss of memory” (21), she argues that “until Ukrainian experience and articulation circulate in Canadian society, along with other narratives of displacement and discrimination, then even these twenty-first century Ukrainian-Canadians are still relegated to the margins of Canadian concern where their stories are confined in private memory and important only to them” (21).

Little has changed, it seems, in the quarter-century since Kostash first addressed her own “otherness” and began taking “action” against the “hegemonistic centre” of Canadian society (*All of Baba’s Children* 399). Indeed, Ukrainian Canadians of the next generation are not only fighting to have their stories told and their histories

acknowledged, they are also battling against the same deeply-entrenched, song-and-dance stereotypes of their ethnic group that Kostash railed against in *All of Baba's Children*.

“[P]erformances of Ukrainian dancing are very popular with general audiences,” Kostash notes in *All of Baba's Great-grandchildren*, “the giant *Pysanka* in Vegreville, Alberta, is a tourist attraction, and Sunshine Records of Winnipeg distributes over fifty titles in the category, ‘Baba’s Records.’” But even as these representations of Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity “increasingly disconcer[t] those born several generations down the line from the Galician pioneers of western Canada” (21-2), most Ukrainian Canadians “still generally go along with the popular view of themselves as colourful, dancing, *horilka*-tippling hunkies recently arrived from a wheat farm in Saskatchewan” (30). “There’s no getting around the psychological *insecurity*,” apparently, “of a community that has periodically lived under a cloud in Canada as ‘enemy aliens’ in the Great War, ‘Reds’ in the 1930s, anti-Communist extremists in the 1950s, and aging, anti-Semitic alleged pro-Nazi collaborators in the 1980s and 1990s” (32). Who, Kostash wonders, *wouldn't* choose the image of the “fun-loving bumpkin” over these “stigmatizations” (32)?

And yet, turning her attention to *Zdorov*, a Toronto-based, English-language magazine that caters to “20-and-30-something” Ukrainian Canadians—and that was modeled on the “very cool *Eyetalian* magazine, also published in Toronto”—Kostash laments the “unvarnished folksiness” of the Ukrainian publication (29). Whereas *Eyetalian* is characterized by “hyper-urban design smarts and nuovo Tuscan chic” (29) (its contributors include *Globe & Mail* columnists and “a Governor General’s Award-winning novelist” [24]), the layout of *Zdorov* is neither “snazzy” nor “sumptuous” (24).

Not unaware of the ubiquitous image of Ukrainians as “colourful, dancing, *horilka*-tippling hunkies” (30), the editor of *Zdorov*, Nestor Gula, tells Kostash that his goal is to represent Ukrainians in his magazine as “[n]ormal. Even cool” (24). The problem, though, as he sees it, is that Ukrainian culture simply *isn't* “cool.” “Italians,” he says, “think it’s really cool being Italian and going to Italy and listening to opera, and the rest of the world thinks so too. For Canadians, Italy is the Roman Empire, the Renaissance, the source of civilization, while Ukraine? . . . They think of us as dancers” (24-5). In other words, while Gula wants to subvert the song-and-dance stereotypes of Ukrainian Canadian culture, he has no alternative images upon which to draw. He could focus more substantially, perhaps, on “provocative issues” such as the “under-representation of Ukrainian-Canadians in the Canadian elites, and the pursuit of alleged war criminals by Canadian courts”—issues around which his magazine “walk[s] softly” (31). But according to Kostash, Gula “treads a fine line between what’s ‘interesting’ about Ukrainian-Canadians and what’s ‘negative,’” keeping in mind that his targeted audience of Ukrainian Canadian “yuppies” wants to hear the “good news” of “Ukrainian Canadian achievement in the arts, science and business” (31). So, even as *Zdorov* attempts to transform Ukrainian Canadian culture into something “cool,” sexy, and fun (one issue provides “Ten reasons why *varenyky* are better than sex” [29]), the magazine is forced to *reinforce*, albeit playfully, the very stereotypes that it seeks to challenge. Gula ostensibly has no other choice.

Kostash’s argument, in the end, is that Ukrainian Canadians of the next generation face the same challenges as their parents’, grandparents’, and indeed great-grandparents’ generations: how to recuperate their experiences from the margins of Canadian history;

how to overcome enduring stereotypes of their ethnic culture; how to make their ethnicity meaningful in, and relevant to, their time and place. And she concludes *All of Baba's Great-grandchildren* by suggesting that, if Ukrainian Canadian ethnicity is to survive into—and beyond—the twenty-first century, then Ukrainian Canadians must continually re-invent themselves and re-imagine their place in Canadian society. “As is so clear from my interviewees,” she says, “each new generation of Canadians has to think through its own relationship to the past and to its own civic desires” (37) because uncertainties about “who we ‘really’ are” are “never resolved by any particular generation once and for all” (37). Not surprisingly, in the final portion of her text, Kostash provides a brief—but overwhelmingly positive—introduction to two Ukrainian Canadian artists:

(videographer, film-maker, and writer) Marusya Bociurkiw and (multi-media artist)

Tanya Rusnak. What Bociurkiw and Rusnak have in common, according to Kostash, is a desire to draw upon the past as they reshape the future of Ukrainians in Canada. Their work exemplifies the search for a “Ukrainian-Canadian self that does not erase *baba* and *dido* but refigures them in the new cultural materials handed to a new generation” (41). In *The Woman Who Loved Airports* (1994), a collection of short stories, and in *Halfway to the East* (1999), a book of poetry, Bociurkiw primarily focuses on her relationship with her *baba* as she explores her identity as a Ukrainian Canadian and a lesbian. And in her multi-media installation *O Emigratsii* (1996) Rusnak brings together the “debris of the emptied settlements in north-eastern Alberta” in an effort to “reconstruct, elevate, and preserve the fallen signs, symbols, broken narratives and persisting words of early Ukrainian immigrants.”¹⁸⁰ Together, Kostash argues, Bociurkiw and Rusnak illustrate

¹⁸⁰ Kostash quotes from the catalogue that accompanied Rusnak’s exhibit.

that the “compulsion to tell falls on the next generation, and the next, until it will be heard, or heard again, as though for the first time” (42).

What exactly is the “it” that Kostash believes will be “heard, or heard again, as though for the first time” in the work of such artists as Bociurkiw and Rusnak? The vagueness of this “it” troubles me—not least of all because “it” seems to have more to do with the past than “it” does with the present or the future. Indeed, the disturbing irony of *All of Baba’s Great-grandchildren* is that, while Kostash sets out to explore the future of Ukrainians in Canada, the text circles back again and again to the past. Is Kostash correct when she suggests that Ukrainian Canadians must continually re-invent themselves and re-imagine their place in Canadian society? Absolutely. Do Bociurkiw and Rusnak participate in such re-inventions and re-imaginings? I’m not as sure. I don’t doubt that Kostash *wants* to see something new and different in the new generation—something that simultaneously connects them to and sets them apart from previous generations; something that announces their active engagement in the creative process of re-inventing and re-imagining themselves “after deficit slashing and program extermination, after webnets and the Coca-Colonization of everything, after Ukrainian independence and *Koka-Kola* on the sidewalk cafes of Kyiv” (12-3). But because the young people she writes about—Bociurkiw and Rusnak, as well as Orysia and Volodymyr Boychuk, Lisa McDonald, and Nestor Gula—draw upon the same strategies that previous generations have used to explore the meaning of their ethnic identity, they are doomed to repeat, rather than move beyond, existing patterns of representation. Gula’s popularization of Ukrainian Canadian folk culture becomes an extension of the “ethnic revival” that began in the multicultural milieu of the 1970s. Bociurkiw’s and Rusnak’s interest in revisiting

the pioneer era mirrors the interest of numerous writers during the 1980s (including Myrna Kostash, Helen Potrebenco, Maara Haas, George Ryga, and Andrew Suknaski). In their attempts to retain ties to the history and people of Ukraine, Orysia, Volodymyr, and Lisa perform the same kind of “transcultural” work that Kostash and Janice Kulyk Keefer undertook in the 1990s. If these individuals, as Kostash suggests, represent the future of Ukrainians in Canada, then the future looks very much like the past—precisely because the next generation seems fixated on the past as the source of their ethnic identity.

At what point, I wonder, will we stop relying on the past to define ourselves in the present and recognize that the process of re-examining history has exhausted itself as a productive strategy for staking our claims to the future? At what point will we stop looking back to the pioneer era, the over-determined “baba,” and, especially, the “Old Country,” and start looking forward to new ways of understanding our ethnic identity? I have no desire to dredge up the details of my great-grandparents’ experiences as pioneer homesteaders. I know that they suffered and struggled; that my great-grandfathers were probably tyrants and that my great-grandmothers must have endured unspeakable hardship—but I don’t want to relive their lives. I want my ancestors to rest in peace. I have no interest in retracing their steps back to Ukraine and re-establishing relationships with family members who may or may not still live there. Ukraine is not my country. The history of Ukraine is not my history. I feel no emotional attachment—no lingering sense of belonging—to Eastern Europe. Do I feel Ukrainian? I do. My ethnic identity, though, is rooted in Canada: for me, the process of coming to terms with my ethnicity has less to do with remembering than with forgetting—severing my ties to the past and moving on in the present toward the uncharted territory of the future. I don’t think that

I'm alone. The voices of my generation, though, have yet to speak up and make themselves heard. Perhaps, when they do, we will see new transnational connections—not between Ukrainians in Canada and Ukrainians in Ukraine but between Ukrainians living in different corners of the globe (Canada, Australia, Argentina). Perhaps we will begin to see new genres and languages, and new representations of ethnicity, in the virtual reality of cybertext. I don't know what the future actually holds for Ukrainians in Canada. What I do know, however, is that we cannot hold onto the past any longer: we need to re-place it with visions of something new.

This past summer—July, 2002—I made a trip home to northeastern Alberta. I had with me a friend who was visiting from New Zealand. Although Michael had been to Canada once before, he was seeing the prairies for the first time. My sister Jana drove us from Edmonton (where our plane landed) to St. Paul (two-and-a-half hours northeast of Edmonton). As we passed by various landmarks, and as Jana and I gave Michael a running commentary on our surroundings, he remarked to us that we seemed to be traveling through history. Just after entering Elk Island National Park, we spotted a herd of buffalo grazing along the highway. Michael's feeling was that we had stepped back in time to the pre-settlement era of Canadian history. Then we passed by the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village, a perfectly-preserved turn-of-the-century pioneer settlement: here was evidence of the immigrant homesteaders who came to conquer the land. I pointed to the "Grekul House" on the edge of the Village, a reconstructed home that

belonged to one of our ancestors. Michael was intrigued. We promised to come back and spend a day at the museum. Meanwhile, Jana told Michael that he would be seeing many more ancestral homes along the way—old farmhouses, granaries, and barns, long-abandoned and hardly standing anymore. We would be driving past our great-grandparents' original homesteads around Two Hills and Hairy Hill, where some of our relatives still live, and eventually we would come to the Greek Orthodox church at Szypenitz where many of our people are buried. Michael asked all sorts of questions about Ukrainian pioneers, Ukrainian history, and Ukrainian culture. Our mom, we assured him, would prepare Ukrainian food for him (without being asked), and our dad would need little encouragement to narrate the entire family history. I suggested that we all take in the Vegreville *Pysanka* Festival (which takes place each year in early July). I wanted Michael to see Ukrainian dancers perform. His trip to the prairies was shaping up to be very Ukrainian.

Before reaching Two Hills, Hairy Hill, and Szypenitz, of course—and before winding our way past Duvernay, Brosseau, and St. Brides, on the last stretch of road to St. Paul—we would first have to drive through Mundare, a small Ukrainian Canadian farming community situated roughly at the half-way point between Edmonton and St. Paul. Jana and I exchanged glances as we approached the Mundare turn-off. I wondered if it was too late to turn back, and take a different route to St. Paul. It was. I glanced back at Michael in the backseat, hoping that he might have fallen asleep. He hadn't.

Should we warn him? Could we distract him so that he would miss it?

For as long as I can remember, Mundare, Alberta—population 700—has been known for its award-winning Ukrainian sausage. Woytko Stawnichy founded

Stawnichy's Meat Processing in 1959; his son Ed took over in 1971. Over the years, the Stawnichy operation doubled and then tripled in size: it has grown from a small family business to a large and immensely profitable sausage empire. In fact, using state-of-the-art food processing equipment, Ed Stawnichy has diversified his business, so the company now produces numerous meat products (pepperoni, beef jerky, wieners) as well as several traditional Ukrainian foods (*perohy*, *perishky*, *holuptsi*, and *nelysnyky*).

But *kolbasa* is what made Stawnichy's—and indeed Mundare—famous. So, in 2001, when *Mayor* Ed Stawnichy decided that the town needed a tourist attraction to give the local economy a boost, he, naturally enough, decided to build a giant *kolbasa*.

Anyone who is familiar with small-town (and even big-city) Canadian culture knows that countless communities across the country have built similar monuments. The list—which would include the Sudbury Nickel, the Wawa Goose, the Gimli Viking, and the Kamloops Trout—is actually too long to recount here.¹⁸¹ Alberta may well boast the most man-made giants. Fahler has a giant bee; Vilna, a cluster of giant mushrooms; Andrew, a giant duck. Smoky Lake is known for its giant pumpkin and Pincher Creek for its giant pincers. My hometown built a giant U.F.O. Landing Pad in 1967 for their centennial project; then, in 1995, Vulcan (now known as our sister-town) constructed a giant spaceship. But as far as ethnic communities go, Alberta's Ukrainian Canadians are far-and-away the leaders in leaving their unique cultural mark on the prairie landscape. In 1974, the town of Vegreville built a giant Ukrainian Easter egg to commemorate the RCMP centennial (the *Pysanka* is 31 feet high, 25.7 feet long, and 18 feet wide; it weighs over 5000 pounds). In 1991—in an attempt to draw tourists to their village—the people

¹⁸¹ For a comprehensive list, see Ed Solonyka's website "Large Canadian Roadside Attractions" at <http://www.cyberbeach.net/~solonyka/LCRA/main.htm>.

of Glendon (population 400) erected a giant *Perogy*, pierced by a giant silver fork (the *Perogy*, situated in “*Perogy Park*” just off “*Perogy Drive*,” is 25 feet high and 12 feet wide, and it weighs over 6000 pounds).

The Mundare *Kolbasa*, then, wasn’t the first (and may not be the last) Ukrainian Canadian prairie monument—though it is certainly the tallest and arguably the least attractive. Dark reddish-brown in colour, the *Kolbasa* has been the butt of endless jokes in our family: we laugh because it looks less like a coil of sausage than a coil of dog poop; because the thing could be read as a tribute to homo-erotic desire; because *who in the world* would erect a 42-foot ring of Ukrainian garlic sausage?

Michael demanded that we stop.

He forced Jana and me to pose in various spots around the base of the *Kolbasa* while he snapped pictures of it—and us—from every imaginable angle.

We ate lunch (Stawnichy’s *kolbasa-on-a-bun*, of course) beside the *Kolbasa* while Michael stared, at once dumbfounded and delighted by the sheer audacity of it. After Jana and I gave him a quick history of the *Pysanka* and the *Perogy*, he asked if we could visit these monuments as well.

In the end, Michael didn’t find the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village terribly interesting. He loved my mother’s Ukrainian dishes, though; he thought that the Ukrainian dancing at the Vegreville *Pysanka* Festival was terrific; and, of course, he couldn’t stop talking about the *Pysanka*, the *Perogy*, and, especially, the *Kolbasa*.

As for me, I saw home through new eyes during my trip back last summer. I hadn’t been to the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village or to the Vegreville *Pysanka* Festival in years, and I remembered them differently. The Village that I remembered was



Fig. 1 The Glendon *Perogy*, January 2001



Fig. 2 The Mundare *Kolbasa*, May 2001



Fig. 3 The author at the Vegreville *Pysanka*, July 2002

magical: it was a place where history came alive. When I was young, I wanted to be a role-player. I dreamed about living in the “Grekul House,” hoeing the Grekul garden, feeding the Grekul chickens. Vegreville was even more exciting. I Ukrainian danced for ten years and the *Pysanka* Festival was an annual highlight for our whole dance club. Walking around the Festival grounds in our costumes and our stage make-up, wearing the medals that we’d won in competition, poking around the cultural exhibits and buying souvenirs at the marketplace—I don’t ever recall feeling so proud to be Ukrainian. The *Pysanka* Festival was “cool”; there, being Ukrainian was “cool” too. So I was surprised in 2002 at how much the Village and the Festival had changed. Or surprised, I suppose, at how much I had changed. Walking through the Village last summer, I had the feeling that I was walking through a museum. The role-players looked bored to me, and listless—just a group of university kids trying to get through the day, eager to get back to the city for the evening. Even the “Grekuls” seemed uninterested in the whole charade. In many ways more disappointing than the Village, the *Pysanka* Festival made me wish that I hadn’t brought a guest along with me to Vegreville. I remembered a busy, bustling marketplace with dozens of merchants selling a wide variety of classy Ukrainian souvenirs. Had it really gone so down-hill? Or were there always just a handful of craftspeople hawking cheap pottery and kitschy T-shirts? Strolling through the cultural exhibits, I paused for a moment at a dusty display of “Ukrainian Christmas Foods”—twelve dishes of real food that had been shellacked—and felt my stomach turn. The cabbage rolls and *perohy* were discoloured, the mushrooms black and shriveled. A violin-player in an embroidered shirt strolled by playing “Danny Boy.” We watched dancers at the Grandstand Show in the afternoon, and they *were* terrific—polished

professionals; lively, energetic, full of life. Then the headliners “Mickey and Bunny” took to the stage. An aging couple who made it big in the 1960s and 1970s with their Ukrainian renditions of popular songs like “This Land is Your Land,” Mickey and Bunny had lost their touch. They sang off-key and forgot the words to their songs; their geriatric drummer couldn’t keep a steady beat. I wanted to crawl under the bleachers and hide until their performance ended. This was not what I had remembered.

On our way home to St. Paul, we stopped at the outskirts of Vegreville to have one last look at the *Pysanka*—and, posing in front of it while my dad pulled out his camera, I wanted to weep. Are we doomed? I wondered. *Click*. Is this all we are? *Click*. How do we drag ourselves out from the under the shadow of the giant egg? *Click*.

In the introduction to *The Woman Who Loved Airports* (1994), Marusya Bociurkiw, writing about the process of writing, says,

[y]ou’re not or you are or you’re two opposite things at once so that one says defiantly: write it all down and the other whispers secretively: don’t but you write you keep writing you write from your heart you write from your empty pockets you write from your anger you write from your love you write from your sorrow you write from your healing place you write from the centre of your opposite and you make that a fragile home.

You remember that, in Ukrainian, the word for writing is pysaty and that the word for Easter Egg is pysanka: literally, written object . . . To write—because with the pysanka, each mark is a symbol with a specific meaning—is to continue history and to believe in eternal life. (xi)

At the Vegreville *Pysanka*, I got up and walked away—toward the “fragile home” of my novel, this thesis, and beyond.

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