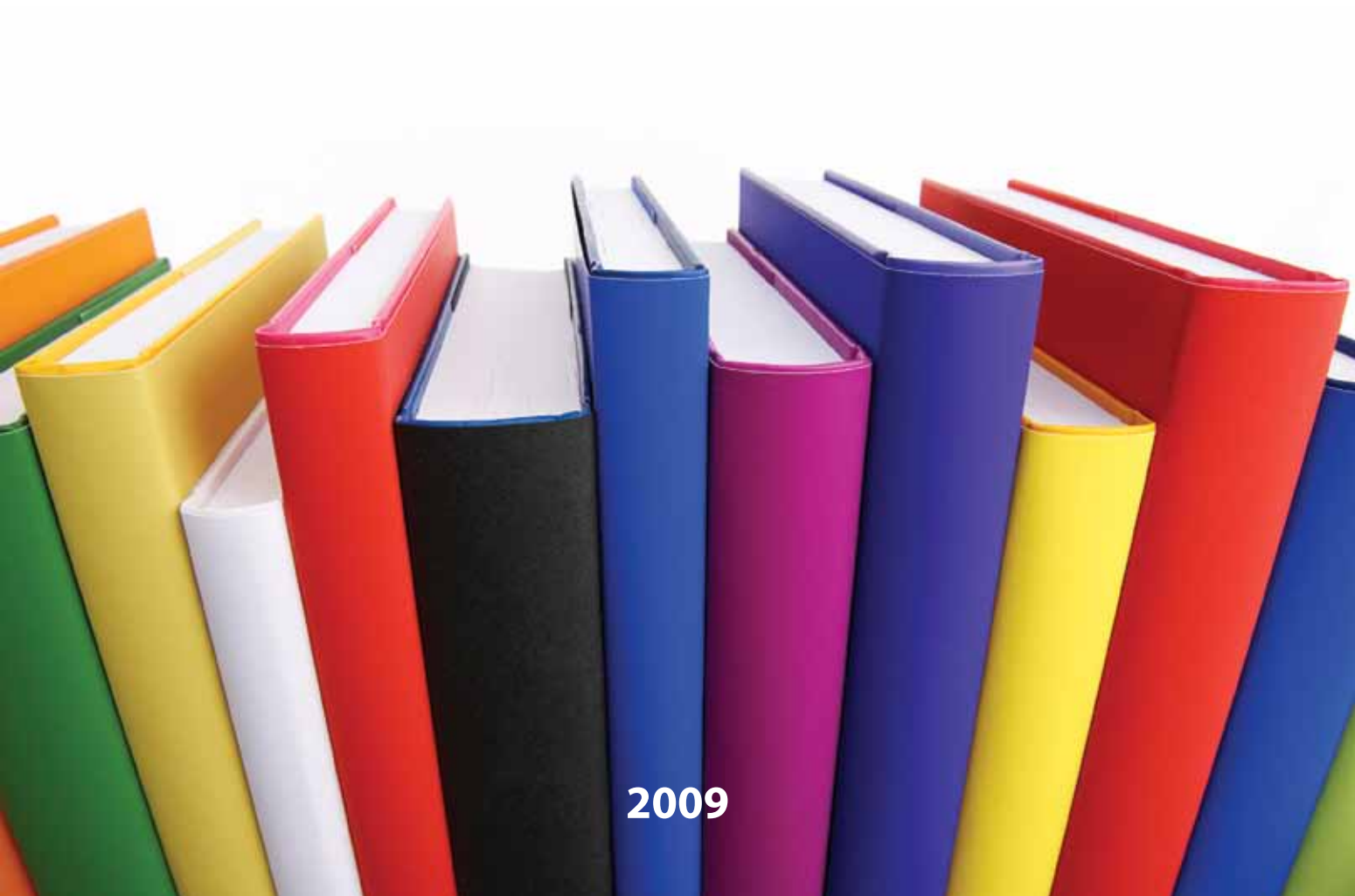


Contemporary Ukrainian Literature

Review



2009

BOOK FUND

Grants for translation of contemporary Ukrainian literature

The BOOK FUND is a part of the Cultural Horizons Program of Open Ukraine Foundation to promote Ukrainian culture abroad. The grant program supports translation of contemporary literature outside Ukraine in order to promote Ukrainian literature and support intercultural dialogue. Popularization of the best Ukrainian writers will increase understanding of Ukraine internationally.

Who can apply: foreign publishing houses

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Application forms must be submitted in English to Open Ukraine office.

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Orysyia Lutsevych
executive director
of the Open Ukraine Foundation

Modern culture breaks demarcation lines and establishes new human connections throughout expanded Europe. Contemporary Ukrainian literature is the direct speech of the young European state named Ukraine. This is why one of our foundation's purposes is making Ukrainian authors' works available on the world's markets.



Iryna Deshchytsya
manager of the Cultural Horizons program
of the Open Ukraine foundation

In April 2008 we have launched a support program for foreign publishers to encourage translating and printing of contemporary Ukrainian authors in Europe. We are open to suggestions and offers, and we hope that this almanac will help publishers to make their bearings in modern Ukrainian literature, one of the brightest and most exiting in Europe.

CONTEMPORARY UKRAINIAN LITERATURE REVIEW 2009

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Discover Ukraine for Yourself and the World

It is not politics or economics that can really represent the life of a country. Politics, so much loved by the media all around the world, turns us all into something like identical hamburgers, as the means and ways of reaching the purpose in politics have always been the same. Meanwhile culture, modern culture in the first place, makes us interesting to each other, different and real. Politics are all about moulds and banality, while culture speaks in tongues of passion, harmony and love. That is, things that make us what we are, things of timeless value.

Nowadays very young people create contemporary Ukrainian culture. That's why it is capable of advancing to the top of world culture in the years to come.

Film director Igor Strembitskiy won his Palme d'Or in Cannes (2005) at the age of 30. Another film director, the author of the first Ukrainian thriller *Shtolnya* (*The Mine*), currently showing in Germany and Russia, Lyubomyr Kobylchuk is 27; the leader of the R.E.P artistic group, whose works are regularly exhibited in Poland, Austria, Sweden and Holland, Mykyta Kadan is 25. Ani Lorak, who represented Ukraine at Eurovision 2008, won the Big Apple Music Award in New York in 1996, when she was only 18. Ruslana, who staggered the audience with her *Wild Dances* in 2004, won the Slavic Bazaar Music Award when she was 23 (the Slavic Bazaar festival being back then the biggest pop-music festival in Slavic countries), and at the same time was named Ukrainian Singer of the Year. Leading actors of one of the most successful and flamboyant contemporary

Ukrainian theatres *Dakh*, that pack the house both in Ukraine and around Europe, are 20 to 27 years old. Young Ukrainian author Ljubko Deresh at the age of 19 had three novels published, all of them becoming best-sellers in Ukraine. Today some of his books have been printed and more are to be printed in Germany, Poland, Italy, France, Romania, Bulgaria and other countries.

It is worth mentioning that young people's drive makes Ukrainian artists of the older generations "keep fit", resulting in a real explosion in all spheres of culture in Ukraine. However, it is literature that provides the most detailed and true-to-life profile of Ukraine today.

This review is intended to acquaint you with the drive and real flavour of contemporary Ukrainian fiction that comes undissected by the literary critic's scalpel. The review is deliberately composed of articles written not by academic scholars, but by those who are an immediate part of the process. Here we prefer the reader's view to that of a professional critic. Specific features on contemporary Ukrainian literature are also contributed by literary translators from Italy, France, Poland, Russia, and Germany. The key words they have chosen to describe the modern Ukrainian literature include: candid, neurotic, humorous, magical, mythic, sensual, imaginative, surprising, energetic and promising.

And here is what we can add to this: contemporary Ukrainian literature is an explosion of desire and passion and the feeling of harmony with the world, with its past and the present.

The Flavour of SuchUkrLit

by Kseniya Sladkevych and Petro Matskevych



Rapid growth in interest to the books written by modern Ukrainian authors, especially on the part of young readers, is hard not to noticed. And it is not only an interest in renowned masters of contemporary Ukrainian literature (or SuchUkrLit, as it's often abbreviated) — Vasyl' Shkljar, Yury Vynnychuk, Yevgenija Kononenko, Vasyl' Kozheljanko, Leonid Kononovych, Halyna Pahutyak etc. This growing attention correlates to consistent (and recently even mass) emergence of a new formation of authors into literary life. Thus, subsequent to Yury Andrukhovych, Oksana Zabuzhko, Taras Prokhasko, Yurko Izdryk, Serhiy Zhadan, Svitlana Povaljajeva, Ljubko Deresh, Irena Karpa, Maryna Mednikova, Maria Matios a new generation has appeared: Halyna Lohinova, Maryna Sokolyan, Tanya Malyarchuk, Sofia Andrukhovych, Kseniya Kharchenko, Halyna Tkachuk, Tetjana Vynokurova-Sadychenko, Sashko Ushkalov and others.

Emergence of a whole new group of young authors makes those of the older generations keep to the standard. As a result, today we can detect a real writing boom and a body of literature capable of satisfying tastes of absolutely any reader.

1984 Phenomenon

It was at the end of 2005 when we discovered a curious tendency: nearly every European country produced at least one teenage author whose first book was written at the age of 15-17 and turned out to be a national bestseller. Examples include Benjamin Lebert (born 1982) in Germany, **Irena Karpa** (born 1980) and **Sofia Andrukhovych** (born 1982) in Ukraine and Dorota Maslowska (born 1983) in Poland. But especially "fruitful", both in Ukraine and in Europe, 1984 year of birth turned out to be. We have called this the "1984 phenomenon". The trend is represented by Melissa Paranello (with her book *One Hundred Touches* (*Melissa's Diary*) in Italy, Anne-Sophie Brasme and her *Breathe* in France, Miroslaw

Nahacz and his books and scripts in Poland, Ana Vickovic in Serbia, and **Ljubko Deresh** in Ukraine.

Thus, Anne-Sophie Brasme's novel *Breathe* was written when the author was 16. In France the book has been named the best debut of the year 2001. *Breathe* has become a national bestseller, with 18 companies competing for the film right.

Ljubko Deresh wrote his first novel *Pokloninnya yaschitsi* (*Worshipping the Lizard*) when he was 15, his second novel *Kult* was written at the age of 18, and *ARCHE* at the age of 19. All three books have become Ukrainian bestsellers, and audiobook version have been recorded. Two more of Deresh's books, *Namir!* (*Aim!*) and *Trohy pitmy* (*A Bit of Darkness*) have also been published. Today his books have been printed or are to be printed in Germany, Poland, Italy, France, Romania and Bulgaria.

The world of adults is almost absolutely non-existent in the books written by the authors of the 1984 phenomenon. They represent a closed world of teenagers with characters shown in particular and often "extreme" conditions. It is due to being extremely provocative that these books have gained their popularity with both adults and adolescents.

The New Generation "16 to 26"

Today in Ukraine a new tendency can be observed, apparently a unique one as we failed to discover something like this in other countries. A new, "other" generation of authors aged 16 to 26 has emerged. The authors of this generation have written their debut works at the age of 17-20, and a fair share of their books were printed after 2005. Among them are **Halyna Tkachuk** (born 1985), **Tetjana Vynokurova-Sadychenko** and **Kseniya Kharchenko** (both born 1984), **Tanya Malyarchuk** and **Sashko Ushkalov** (born 1983), **Halyna Lohinova**, **Maryna Sokolyan** and **Ljubomyra Knjazhych** (born 1979) and many others. And as life keeps going, a number of curious writers born in 1986-1987 have already appeared.

The "16 to 26" authors create a wholly new type of literature. Their books rarely feature violence, alcohol, drugs, foul language and other themes typical of the previous generation. They are so original and interesting that no provocation is needed anymore. And although these works are written by yesterday's teenagers and often tell about adolescents or children, their reader is an adult person.

The "1984 phenomenon" generally represents the closed teenager's world; the "16 to 26" generation is eager to interact with the "adult" world. A curious thing is that almost all authors of the new generation are girls.

One more peculiarity of this "other" generation is the fact that all these children grew up in one and the same era and in more or less similar conditions, but each one is a bright personality. What is more, every new book of one and the same author is quite different from the previous one.

The "16 to 26" generation's writings have already attracted the attention of foreign publishers. This is why we are convinced that these authors represent Ukraine's national identity today. For in a civilized world it is not the state's economic and military power or rudeness and ignorance of its politicians that determine its image, but its culture and, above all, its contemporary literature.

Post-catastrophe Prose

In 2004 **Leonid Kononovych** shocked the Ukrainian audience with his novel *Tema dlya medytatsii* (*Theme for Meditation*). Media had to invent a new term to determine the genre of this novel, as nothing of the like had ever appeared in Ukrainian literature before. Thus the term 'post-catastrophe prose' was coined by Mykola Skyba. The novel received positive press and stirred up sharp discussions concerning not only the novel as such but also who writes about it and what. *Tema dlya medytatsii* has also become a theme for endless discussion on Internet forums. E-source sumno.com, popular among teenagers and post-teens, listed *Tema dlya medytatsii* number one among must-reads for two years, though no other book has ever "survived" more than two months.

"With this review I intend to break our site's standards of writing mini-reviews. Leonid Kononovych's book has changed my worldview, if not broken it completely... This book made me really share the main character's experience; I experienced what he did, as it is an incredible piece of writing. None of the like have I ever met before neither in contemporary literature nor in what is called classics. It is an unreal novel telling of real events and written by a real person..." (*Bohdan Lohvynenko, head editor of sumno.com*)

"*Tema dlya medytatsii*" has proven that writing without dressing-off or special effects is possible, it only costs burned nerves and strenuous mental effort... To my mind, it is one of the first epics in the whole of Ukrainian literature as such." (*Vasyl' Herasym'yuk*)

Provocative Prose

A special genre of contemporary Ukrainian literature is constituted by harsh provocative texts by authors like **Yurko Izdryk**, **Serhiy Zhadan**, **Svitlana Povaljajeva**, **Irena Karpa**

Yuri Andrukhovych

Yury Andrukhovych is one of the most influential figures in the modern culture of Ukraine. He was born and lives in Ivano-Frankivsk. In 1985, together with Viktor Neborak and Oleksandr Irvanets, he founded *Bu-Ba-Bu* poet group, one of the first in Ukraine to start reviving carnival and buffoonery traditions in literature. In the early nineties he began publishing the first Ukrainian post-modernist magazine *Chetver* (*Thursday*) in association with Izdryk. Named "a holy cow of the new Ukrainian literature" by critics, Andrukhovych does not use cell phones, giving preference to e-mail. Andrukhovych's works include numerous books of poetry; novels *Recreatsia* (*Recreation*, 1992), *The Moskoviad* (1993), *Perverzion* (1996), *Dvanatsyat obruchiv* (*Twelve Rings*, 2003), and *Tayemnytsa* (*The Secret*, 2007); books of essays *Desorientatsia na mistsevesti* (*Desorientation on location*, 1999) and *Diavol khovayetsya u syri* (*Devil's Hiding in the Cheese*, 2006). Andrukhovych's books are translated into several languages and published in Poland, Germany, Canada, Hungary, France, Finland, Spain, Russia, Italy, Serbia etc. Andrukhovych has won several awards, including the Herder Prize (2001), the Angelus Central European Literary Award (2006), and the special Erich-Maria Remarque Peace Prize (2005).



and others. Such texts are an integral part within the literature of any modern country. Such books generally tell about life of marginal and subcultural characters, and can make a decent contribution to the collection of someone loving Burroughs's and Kerouac's "psychedelic fiction", or its modern followers — Irvine Welsh or Chuck Palahniuk.

To this genre belong, to a certain extent, early novels by **Yury Andrukhovych** and **Ljubko Deresh's** *ARCHE*.

Psychological Short Stories

The genre of short prose (including short stories, novelettes and micro-novels) has traditionally been potent in contemporary Ukrainian literature. Here we should mention **V'yacheslav Medvid's** micro-novel *Lyokh* (*The Cellar*), **Yevgenija Kononenko's** short stories (collections *Bez muzhyka* (*No Man's Woman*), *Novely dlya nezilovanykh divchat* (*Stories for Unkissed Girls*), and *Poviyi tezh vykhodyat zamizh* (*Prostitutes Marry Too*), **Maria Matios's** short stories and novellas (*Nation* and *Moskalytsya*), **Oksana Zabuzhko's** and **Tanya Malyarchuk's** collections of short stories, **Taras Prokhasko's** *Leksykon tayemnykh znan* (*Lexicon of Secretive Knowledge*) and *Z tsyoho mozhna bulo b zrobyty kilka opovidan* (*There Could Be Made a Couple of Stories from This*), **Vasyl' Kozheljanko's** *Lohyka rechey* (*Logic of Things*), **Natalka Zabramska's** *Zavzhdy* (*Always*), **Leonid Kononovych's** *Povernennya* (*Return*), **Vasyl' Portyak's** *U snihakh* (*In the Snows*) etc.

Vasyl' Stefanyk, who lived and wrote in the first half of the 20th century, set a good tradition and is still, from our point of view, one of the most up-to-date Ukrainian writers. Understanding short prose by V'yacheslav Medvid, Taras Prokhasko and Leonid Kononovych requires certain background, but other authors' books are aimed at a broad spectrum of readers.

Peculiar of contemporary Ukrainian literature is the fact that psychological prose ranges from lesser forms to novellas and novels (such as some novels by Maria Matios, **Anna Khoma**, **Iren Rozdobud'ko** etc.)

Mystic Adventures

The seeds that Gogol and Bulgakov sowed into this soil have grown well in modern Ukraine. Mystic elements are deep-rooted in various SuchUkrLit's books, starting with purely mystic or mystery detective stories and finishing with costume drama and adventure stories, or sometimes even works that hit the highlight class.

However, Ukrainian mystic adventures do not have much in common with Hollywood plots of feature horror movies or European pseudo-historical thrillers.

Ljubko Deresh



Ljubko Deresh is a young and yet famous Ukrainian author. Born in Lviv, he studied economics in the University of Lviv. His major interests include traveling, narcotic plants and Buddhism. Deresh has written two books for children, a number of essays and five novels: *Kult* (*Cult*, 2001), *Poklonimyya yaschirzi* (*Worshipping the Lizard*, 2003), *ARCHE* (2004), *Namir!* (*Aim!*, 2006) and *Trohy pitmy* (*A Bit of Darkness*, 2007). The media have proclaimed him a Ukrainian Stephen King, and every one of Deresh's new books arouses great interest with both his fans and press. Several prominent Ukrainian publishing houses have bought licenses to print his books, and four of his novels have been released as audiobooks. Deresh's works have been translated into several languages and printed in Poland, Germany and Italy. Currently, French and Romanian versions of his books are scheduled to be published. *Die Zeit* magazine wrote about Ljubko Deresh's *Kult*: "This book lures you in through its naivety, its directness, its coolness, its fear; everything is inside this book: love, romance, a quest that makes your head expand and then explode, the eternal drama of youth and also the mocking look of all those who felt they were too good for this drama and chose to live in a world without mystery".

Ukrainian mystic adventures are generally set not in some imaginary worlds, but right in the midst of familiar modern or historical realities. They range from adventures of a 17th century wandering Orthodox deacon who wrote the now popular folk song "A gnat that married a fly" — *Sribne moloko* (*Silver Milk*) by **Vasyl' Shevchuk**; a guardsman Tur from **Serhiy Baturyn's** *Okhoronetz* (*The Guard*) (set in 10th century Kyiv); a vampire's servant from **Halyna Pahutyak's** *Sluhaz Dobromyly* (*The Servant from Dobromyl*) (12th-20th centuries); a kind of "Ukrainian Zorro" from **Volodymyr Lys's** *Maska* (*The Masque*) (18th century); and a witchcraft-practicing granny in **Leonid Kononovych's** *Tema dlya medytatsii* to those of characters from **Vasyl Shkljar's** *Krov kazhana* (*Bat's Blood*) and **Vasyl' Kozheljanko's** retro-story *Sribniy pavuk* (*Silver spider*) (mid-20th century).

And even **Maryna Sokolyan's** purely mystical novels *Kodlo* (*The Mob*), *Cherem* and *Kovdra snovydy* (*Sleepwalker's Blanket*), **Tetjana Vynokurova-Sadychenko's** *Zhart druhyi*, *Kvit paporoti* (*The Joke Number Two*, *Fern-Blossom*) or **Alla Serova's** *Inshiy vyd* (*Another Species*) are based on historical facts, legends or myths.

Alternative History

Vasyl' Kozheljanko — the most prominent Ukrainian author among those who wrote in the genre of alternative history — died at the age of 51 in August 2008. He was dubbed the father of a subgenre known as "Ukrainian alternative history", or "political fantasy". He wrote seven novels belonging to this genre, the most well-known of which are *Defiliada v Moskvu* (*Military Parade in Moscow*), *Konotop* and *Terrorium*. The latter, written in 2001, is an astonishing prophecy of the Orange Revolution and its results.

Another author who has tried his hand at the genre of alternative history is **Oleksandr Irvanets** with his phantasmagorical novels *Rivne/Rovno* and *Ochamymrya*.

Crime, Action and Sob Novel

The following words of Alla Syerova may become the Ukrainian crime novel motto: "Everyone has something to hate distractedly". It is mostly women who read such stories, and there are many women who write them. The best examples of the genre in contemporary Ukrainian literature are **Vasyl' Shkljar's** *Klyuch* (*The Key*); **Alla Sjerova's** *Pravyla hry* (*Rules of the Game*), *Podviyne dno* (*False Bottom*), and *Zabraty tyhrenya* (*Taking Away the Tiger Cub*); **Yevgenija Kononenko's** *Imitatsia* (*Imitation*) and *Betrayal*. *ZRADA made in Ukraine*; **Maryna Mednikova's** *Zirka, abo Terorystka* (*The Star, or Terrorist*) and *Krutaya plus, abo Terorystka-2* (*Die-Hard Extra, or Terrorist-2*); **Anna Khoma's** *Repetytor* (*The Tutor*) etc.

Unlike other genres, quality action novels didn't appear in Ukrainian literature until the mid-1990s. **Leonid Kononovych's** ironic crime novel *Ya, zombi (I, Zombie)* published in *Suchasnist* magazine, was the first occurrence. Kononovych has written some dozen novels of the same genre, the most interesting being *Kaydany dlya oligarkha (Shackles for a Tycoon)* and *Feministka (The Feminist)*.

Kononovych's novels are examples of "macho" fiction; but **Vasyl' Shkljar's** action novel *Elemental* is quite popular among the stronger part of the 'weaker' sex.

As in every country, so-called "women's prose" is also popular in Ukraine with both authors and readers. Here we should first of all mention **Oksana Zabuzhko** and her novel *Polyovi doslidjenya z ukrainskoho seksu (Field Work in Ukrainian Sex)*; **Iren Rozdobud'ko** with her novels *Gudzik (A Button)*, *Dvanatsyat, abo vykhovannya zhinky v umovakh, neprydatnykh dlya zhytya (Twelve, or Educating a Woman in Unlivable Conditions)*, *Ziv'yali kvity vykydayut (Faded Flowers are Thrown Away)*; **Larysa Denysenko** with her novels *Zabavky z ploti ta krovi (Toys Made of Flesh and Blood)*, *Kavovy prysmak korytsi (Cinnamon's Coffee Taste)*, *Tantsi v maskakh (Dancing Masked)*; **Hanna Medvid'** and her novels *Magda, batkova dochka (Magda, Her Father's Daughter)*, *Kolir ochey (Colour of Eyes)* and *Sontse Schastya (Sun of Happiness)* and others.

Horror and Thriller

The horror genre in contemporary Ukrainian literature has just recently begun, but there are already authors who set their horror plots in totally fictional worlds, in their characters' dreams, and in real life circumstances. Pioneers of modern Ukrainian horror literature are **Natalka and Oleksandr Shevchenko** with their novels *Brantsi moroku (Captives of the Gloom)*, *Oksamytovy pereverten (Velvet Werewolf)* and

Kryvava osin u misti Leva (Bloody Autumn in the City of Lion). A new name appeared recently in Ukrainian horror literature — **Serhiy Loboda**; who has written the novels *Schizophrenia*, *Viddzerkalenyia (Reflection)* and a number of short stories published in the collection *Trapeza (The Meal)*.

In fact, there are hardly any Ukrainian writers completely specializing in thrillers. However, various authors write thriller novels and stories from time to time. Thus, now known as a women's and children's fiction books author **Iren Rozdobud'ko** formerly had her debut in literature as writer of the horror thrillers *Mertsy (The Dead)* and *Eskort u smert (Escort into Death)*. **Ljubko Deresh's** novel *Pokloninnya yaschirzi (Worshipping the Lizard)* is a thriller, as are **Andriy Kokotjukha's** *Neitralna terytoria (Neutral Territory)* and *Povze zmiya (A Snake is Crawling)*.

Instead of Conclusion

Certainly, the range of SuchUkrLit described above can by no means be considered complete because to a great extent it's subjective. It is impossible to imagine contemporary Ukrainian literature without **V'yacheslav Medvid's** refined prose *Lyokh (The Cellar)*, *Krov po solomi (Blood on the Straw)*, **Kost' Moskalets's** essays *Kelia chainoyi troyandy (Cell of a China Rose)* and *Lyudyna na kryzhyni (Man on an Ice-floe)*, **Yury Vynnychuk's** brilliant provocative erotic stories *Divy noch (Maidens of the Night)*, *Vesnyani ihry v osinnikh sadakh (Vernal Plays in the Gardens of Autumn)*, **Bohdan Zholdak** writing in "surzhik" dialect *Boh buvaye (God Happens)*, *Topinambur, Synu (Girasol, my Son)*, *Antiklamaks*, **Oles Ulyanenko's** "seamy side" masterful stories *Stalinka*, *Dofin Satany (Satan's Heir)* and many others.

We deliberately avoid any evaluating, and this "classification" is rather relative, since our review is intended solely to help in choosing a book to your liking.

Storytelling

by Oleksander Krasnyuk



and reprinted, sell in their millions and are loved by many

Futurologists, as ever, seem to have been wrong in their surmises. A couple of decades ago they announced the forthcoming "death of the novel", that is, of narrative literature as such. But it is still beyond doubt that a good story always finds its reader. It's clear when one takes a glance at long lists of influential authors, writing bestsellers that are printed

readers all around the world. Meaning *the world* that we (readers or, simply, real people) share with fictional but oh-so-real characters invented by these authors.

Quite a lot of good stories narrated by contemporary Ukrainian authors have been published within the last 18 years (since the independence of Ukraine was proclaimed). Let us make a general review of this fiction.

Leonid Kononovych's *Tema dlya medytatsii (Theme for Meditation)* has become the biggest sensation in its

Yurko Izdryk

Yurko Izdryk is a writer, poet, literary man, artist, musician, script writer and stage director. He worked as a chemical engineer, currently lives and works in Kalush, Ivano-Frankivska region. Izdryk has taken part in many exhibitions and campaigns, has illustrated books and magazines, and released a number of music records.

In 2008, Izdryk joined the famous Ukrainian music band Perkalaba. Izdryk is fond of playing risky games with words, at times causing fiction to become real. He's one of the four creators of the Stanislav phenomenon. In 1989, Izdryk founded "a periodical of texts and visions" *Chetver*, in which the fair share of authors now well-known in Ukraine had their debut. Izdryk wrote the novella *Ostriv Krk (Krk Island, 1994)*, a book of poetry *Stanislav i 11 yoho vyzvolyteliv (Stanislav and 11 of its Liberators, 1996)*, the novels *Wozzek (1997)*, *Podviyniy Leon (Double Leon, 2000)* and *AM™ (2004)*, a book of essays *Fleshka (The Flash Stick, 2007)*, and a number of novellas, short stories and articles on art and literature. Izdryk's works, in whole and in part, have been translated and published in English, Lithuanian, Polish, German and Russian.



Why is Ukrainian literature interesting for the European reader?

Three words that reflect the nature of contemporary Ukrainian literature



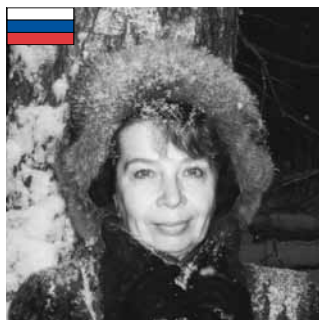
Uilleam Blacker (Great Britain)

A PhD student at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London. He is writing his thesis on representations of space in contemporary Ukrainian literature. He previously studied Ukrainian, Russian and Polish literature at the University of Glasgow and in the Jagiellonian University in Kraków. He has published several articles and reviews on these literatures. He has published his English version of Taras Prohasko's novel *Neprosti*, entitled *No Tsimple*.

Ukrainian literature can be a very revealing and useful prism to look at the question of European identity. Ukraine is geographically and politically on the margin of Europe, and its status as a European country is perceived by both Ukrainians and "Europeans" as questionable and under threat. This knife-edge position makes many culturally aware Ukrainians, especially writers, very nervous and rather obsessed by the Europeanness or otherwise of their country. This nervous

obsession has resulted in a literature which explores the idea of Europeanness in exhaustive depth, and also from a marginal perspective which is unfamiliar and refreshing for the reader from Western Europe.

NEUROTIC, ENERGETIC, PROMISING



Yelena Marinicheva (Russia)

A journalist and translator. Writes for the Novaya Gazeta newspaper and the New Times magazine. Married, mother of two adult sons. She translates contemporary Ukrainian prose and science fiction books from English. She has created and printed Russian versions of works by Oksana Zabuzhko, Maria Matios, Serhiy Zhadan, Yevgeniya Kononenko, and Tanya Malyarchuk. <http://emarinicheva.livejournal.com/profile>

In the first place, it may be interesting not only for the European reader, but, widely speaking, for the foreign reader. In terms of mentality, Ukraine has to a certain extent liberated herself from the shackles of Soviet ideology and the Soviet view of life and human soul (and this is what literature deals with). The "new" Ukrainian literature has vividly reflected this fact. To say more, in many ways it is the literature that has determined this liberation. And this — the

moment of gaining freedom captured in word — is what makes Ukrainian literature so interesting. And this is what determines both its strengths and certain overkills, which can be also called its growing pains. This literature loudly, vividly and shamelessly dissects the inner world of a post-Soviet person, being a psychological phenomenon of a sort and providing a long-lasting source of reflection for us, ex-"Soviets"... And a source of amazement for Europeans, too. Then, certainly, the strive for freedom has awakened most interesting talents in the realm of art of words. And this is something to have its own worth, regardless of time, "post-Sovietism" or "Europeanism".

CANDID, YOUNG (as most of its authors are), **WITTY**



Olaf Kühl (Germany)

A Slavonic scholar, East Europe historian, councilor of the President of the city of Berlin on Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, translator from Polish and Ukrainian. Kühl has translated works by Witold Gombrowicz, Adam Zagajewski, Andrzej Stasiuk and Dorota Maslowska from Polish. His German versions of books by Yury Andrukhovych, Taras Prikhasko, Oksana Zabuzhko, Andriy Bondar and Ljubko Deresh have been printed.

Ukrainian literature attracts the European reader with its "inter"-mentality. I mean not only the difference between East and West. There is a whole range of linguistic, religious and geopolitical factors making Ukrainian literature capable of transgression and crossing borders and mentality stereotypes. It is also capable of bringing a lot of new things into the European mindset. When I read Ukrainian authors I have a strong feeling that they are aware of this 'inter'

position, and it makes a kind of creative frug for them. It is quite possible that this is where the original imaginativeness peculiar of Ukrainian literature since Gogol's time descends from. This special kind of imaginativeness connects the sensual experience to spiritual dimensions and transcendent things (as, for example, can be seen in Taras Prohasko's works).

SENSUALITY, IMAGINATION, TRANSCENDENCE

genre — that of psychological fiction. This is a rare case when professional critics and “unprofessional” readers agree, since the novel is both flawless technically and able of tugging at one’s heartstrings. Set against a broad historical canvas, the plot involves its principal character’s reminiscences about dramatic moments of his own life and the tragic lives of his friends, kinfolk and village-folks that survived — or didn’t survive — the Holodomor (Great Famine of 1930’s) and other “socio-political experiments on human beings”. We see the man coming back into his native village to shed light upon certain events from his past and decide who he is in the end — a winner or a victim. The physical proximity of places belonging to his past makes the main character slip into some kind of mystical visions, though it does not prevent him from turning into an action hero in a manner of a hardball novel personage when the situation demands. Leonid Kononovych (born 1958) has several “purebred” crime novels under his belt. Also he is one of the top translators from French into Ukrainian; certain works by Albert Camus, Jean Baudrillard, and Maurice Blanchot were published with his translations. Surely this experience had an impact on his writing style. Kononovych is capable of thrilling his readers and making them feel like participants of the described events. At the same time he leaves enough room to diagnose the cases of humanity in terms of philosophy, inviting his readers to decide about their own opinions on the age and their place in it. *Tema dlya medytatsii* has a lot in common with other of Kononovych’s significant works, such as *Povernnnyia (Return)*, *Zymova kazka (Winter Tale)* and his essay *Derevo (The Tree)*. The moods and themes of these are interrelated; what differs is the angle taken by the author to describe one and the same subject — the Ukrainian national character (just like Hokusai’s *Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji* are different).

The Ukrainian mindset is described in mass culture as being rather materialistic, and “knowing beans” is really an essential part of it — but at the same time the worldview of a Ukrainian person is deeply and hopelessly mystic. For instance, Nikolai Gogol’s characters generally show the same purely Ukrainian psychology, as their author did, too.

The most influential author in contemporary Ukrainian mystic fiction is **Halyna Pahutyak** (born 1958). She lives in Lviv, a city where every brick and every cobble speaks of the Middle Ages. Ms Halyna’s most popular books are *Smitnyk Hospoda nashoho (Rubbish Dump of Our Lord)*, *Radisna pustelya (A Joyful Wasteland)*, *Pysar Shidnyh Vorit Prytulku (The Clerk of Shelter’s East Gates)*, *Korolivstvo (The Kingdom)*, *Zahid sontsya v Urozhii (Sunset in Urizh)*, and *Sluha z Dobromyly (The Servant from Dobromyl)*. Ukrainian mystic fiction is essentially different from fantasy fiction descending from the British and American tradition. Halyna Pahutyak’s designs and themes generally

have their roots in Central European tradition. However, they are unlike many authors’ novels about Vlad III Prince of Wallachia (also known as Dracula), where valiant vampire-hunters punish the sinister undead for their horrible crimes, and where it is not the plot that makes the difference but rather the way of telling the story — stale (giving the reader the possibility to blame the author for banality) or original (leaving the reader satisfied). One reads Halyna Pahutyak’s books as if they were real folk legends and myths of a land where neither party had ever gained a long-lasting victory even locally, recorded (and not invented) by a professional author. In this land the time itself flows in several opposing streams. Pahutyak’s authentically West Ukrainian Gothic novels are mystic epics with complicated plots and a variety of rivaling characters of equal importance. As a true myth-maker, she is fond of leaving possibilities and questions open in the end, this flexibility of plots and styles being an essential part of her writing’s charm. Halyna Pahutyak’s fiction can make a perfectly elegant mystery thriller film.

Prose by **Mychaylo Brynykh** (born 1974) has nothing to do with romance. Though his debut novel *Realnanzhnistvyrvanoho sertsya (Real Affection of A Heart Torn Out)* demonstrates a most refine maneuvering between three classical elements of fable literature — *he, she* and *a secret society* — it is rather a burlesque version of a typical horror novel. Recently Brynykh has published two more novels. *Elektronny plastylin (Digital Clay)* is a story where living people *become* dead, or pretend so. This rather small book features 26 deaths, and the author’s philosophy is contained in the following quotation from the novel: ‘You’d love living one more life if you got such an opportunity. The number of reincarnations is unlimited. The only problem is that you may think you’re using the clay to make a perfect existence. But you know nothing of the way in which the *clay* views your relationships with it’. The newest Brynykh’s novel, entitled *Shakhmaty dlya dybiliv (Chess for Morons)*, is a story of a man bringing up an adolescent chess-player. The book is packed with fresh ideas and experiments in language and culture. At the same time it is a history of the game of chess with a host of facts and innuendos. Brynykh’s narration is full of unexpected twists and ironical maxims, keeping the reader eager to learn what’s next and thus turning pages. But what is especially delightful is the author’s unique sarcasm. Brynykh is really fond of mocking today’s postmodern life using vividly postmodernist tips.

There’s a rather specific narrative-confessional style indicative of popular writer and musician **Irena Karpa** (1980). Every one of Karpa’s books is a shocking cocktail mixed from true biography fragments and imagined adventures of an author who really has a lot to tell about her inward as well as of the wide world that she explores with unstoppably

Kseniya Kharchenko

She was born and lives in Kyiv, studied journalism in the Shevchenko National University and worked as a proofreader and later editor in a science literature publishing house. Currently she has a job of TV-channel managing editor. Kseniya Kharchenko speaks Polish, English and Russian, and she is studying German. She eagerly takes part in and moderates authors’ get-togethers and festivals all over Ukraine, Poland and Austria. Kseniya’s short stories have been published in various literary magazines. Her debut book – novella *Istoriya (A Story)* – was published in 2005 and brought her the title of a female Márquez. Critics wrote: “If you wish to know what it is that a human being may lack in this world, Kseniya Kharchenko’s book makes for perfect reading. Written in the Medieval *visio* style, it brings something intimate to each individual, some piece of the most precious though impossible-to-reach heart’s desire”. Some fragments of *A Story* have been translated and published in Polish and German. Kseniya Kharchenko is an in-depth reporting author whose articles have been printed in different magazines. She won the *Suchasnist* magazine prize (2005) for the best publication.



globe-trotting. Irena translates her impressions from various nations and ones she gained from her jobs in fashion and show-biz, in editorials of glossy magazines and on TV and her rock star experiences with her band "Qarpa" into acid, prose devoid of erotic and dramatic and comical yarns. Her books *Znes Palenogo (Paleny Wrecker)*, *Freud by plakav (Freud Would Cry)*, *Pyatdesiat hvylyn travy (50 Minutes Of Grass)*, *Supermarket samotnosti. Perlamutrowe porno (Supermarket of Loneliness. Pearl Porno)*, *Bitches Get Everything* and *Doblo i Zlo (The Goot And The Bad)* are favourite reading for teenagers and adults who are eager to know what their own children would tell them if they dared to.

There is an author in Ukraine who is jokingly named George Maria Matios Sand. **Maria Matios** (born 1959) is one of the most exuberant novelists in contemporary Ukrainian literature. She regularly publishes high-quality texts in which both characters and the backdrops they act against are highly elaborate. And the characters act against broad historical canvases (*Natsia/Nation* and *Moskalytsya*). Matios's novels are also often set in times of deathly peril and moments crucial for the Ukrainian nation — during the Second World War and the struggle for Ukrainian independence (*Schodennyk strachenoyi/Diary of the Executed* and *Solodka Darusya/Sweet Darusia*) — and in modern time (*Bulvarny roman/Shilling Shocker*). Maria Matios's main characters are as a rule female, and the cruelty of their existence is described in a very realistic manner. But whether a heroine is an underground resistance operative, someone's lover or a business lady, she always retains her femininity. A number of Maria Matios books successfully have been adapted for theatre, with spectators bursting into grateful tears during performances.

If "harlequin novels" have been mentioned, **Halyna Vdovychenko** (born 1959) should be named as a rising star of the genre. Her debut novel *Piv'yabluka (Half an Apple)* about four women and a magic apple, has been kindly reviewed in the papers.

Nevertheless, the real queen of the genre is **Iren Rozdobud'ko** (born 1962). Her erotic detective novels bear expressive titles: *Pastka dlya Zhar-ptyrsi (A Trap for the Firebird)*, *Gudzyk (A Button)*; *Vin: Rankovy prybyralnyk. Vona: Shosti dveri (He: The Morning Cleaner. She: The Sixth Door)*; *Dvanatsyat, abo vykhovannya zhinky v umovakh, neprydatnykh dlya zhytya (Twelve, or Educating a Woman in Unlivable Conditions)*; *Ziv'yali kvity vykydayut (Faded Flowers are Thrown Away)*; *Ostanny diamant miledi (Milady's Last Diamond)*; *Amulet Paskalya (Pascal's Amulet)*; *Eskort u smert (Escort to Death)*, *Pereformuluyvanya (Re-phrasing)*; *Dvi hvylyny pravdy (Two*

minutes of Truth); and *Vse, scho ya khotila syohodni (Everything I Wanted Today)*. Currently Rozdobudko mainly adapts her novels for films. In 2008, the TV film *Gudzyk*, after the novel of the same name was released. Two more books are currently being filmed.

Action "harlequin novels" by a lawyer, show presenter and writer **Larysa Denysenko**, born 1973 (*Zabavky z ploti ta krovi/Toys Made of Flesh and Blood*, *Kavovy prysmak korytsi/Cinnamon's Coffee Taste*, *Tantsi v maskakh/Dancing Masked*, *Korporatsia Idiotiv/Idiot Corporation*, and *24:33:42*), also have their devoted fans and reprint regularly.

But the garland for the most psychological author of the genre should go to **Yevgenija Kononenko** (born 1959). Her books highly detailed in terms of realism, like *Imitatsia (Imitation)*, *Betrayal. ZRADA made in Ukraine*, *Nostalgia, Bez muzhyka (No Man's Woman)*, *Poviyi tezh vykhodyat zamizh (Prostitutes Also Marry)*, and *Novely dlya nezilovanykh divchat (Stories for Unkissed Girls)* seem to be of use even for generations of readers to come, if they would like to learn of everyday life and feelings of strong Ukrainian women (and men clinging to them) on the brink of the millennia. Granting the reader the possibility to make allegiance with the character is one of the essential features of good fiction, and Yevgenija Kononenko's writing gives us such chance.

Some authors in Ukraine have gained positions of ethics teachers akin to that of spiritual gurus or ideologically influential rock stars in the '60s. Their public readings attract those who wish to communicate with "real literature". An author with this kind of influence is **Serhiy Zhadan** (born 1974). From eastern Ukraine, he impregnates the minds of his devoted readers with both poetry and prose. Every new book of Zhadan inevitably turns out to be a national bestseller. He is especially popular among young readers, as his writing truthfully, sarcastically and yet poetically recreates aesthetical values of those 'slacker' girls and boys that have consciously chosen to live, work, play, feel happy or feel miserable on the mainstream's margins. The author himself once downshifted, giving up lecturing in European and Ukrainian literature in the University of Kharkiv to hitchhike and trek around Europe, this experience certainly granting him some right to throw his heroes in the midst of goings-on that seem at least ambiguous from the point of view of traditional morals and sometimes law (though Zhadan would eagerly help them out of the trouble, not really safe but quite sound). Zhadan's most popular books are *Big Mac*, *Depeche Mode*, *Anarchy in the UKR*, and *Hymn demokratychnoi molodi (The Hymn of Democratic Youth)*.

Yevgenija Kononenko



She is a poet, writer and translator from English and French. Yevgenija Kononenko was born and lives in Kyiv; she studied mathematics and foreign languages and currently works as a research associate in the Ukrainian Centre for Cultural Studies. Women and their problems make the major theme of her writing. Her books have a lot in common with crime fiction, as the author claims the detective story is a metaphor of life's great mystery. Just as *La Comédie humaine* is Balzac's life-long creation, Kononenko's fiction is dedicated to "Kyivite comedy", though she prefers lesser genres and media. She has written novels *Imitatsia (Imitation, 2001)*, *Betrayal. ZRADA made in Ukraine (2002)* and *Nostalgia (2003)*, short-story collections *Bez muzhyka (No Man's Woman)*, *Novely dlya netsilovanykh divchat (Stories for Unkissed Girls)*, and *Poviyi tezh vykhodyat zamizh (Prostitutes Marry Too)*; and a number of books for children and several translations. Yevgenija Kononenko won the Ukrainian Book of the Year Award (2001), the Coronation of the Word all-Ukrainian Contest of Fiction and Scripts Award (2001) and the *Suchasnist* magazine Prize.

Her prose has been translated into English, German, French, Croatian, Czech, Japanese, Russian and other languages.

Life in the East of Ukraine seen from a different angle features in *Klyasa (The Class)* by **Pavlo Volvach** (born 1963). The story is set in Zaporizhia ('the Manchester of Ukraine'). Historically the area has been known as a center of liberation ideas and military struggle for independence. There the Cossak republic Zaporozhian Sich thrived in the 16th and 17th centuries; in 1918-21 a vast area there was ruled by the Insurgent Army of Nestor Makhno, a mighty military movement of Ukrainian farmers against both capitalism and Communism... No wonder that *Klyasa* — a chronicle of a young poet born in industrial suburbia and getting into dangerous adventures with his shady and criminal friends — is soaked with the spirit of anarchism.

A thousand kilometers from Kharkiv and Zaporizhia, in the city of Chernivtsi not far from Ukraine's western borders, **Vasyl' Kozheljanko** (1957-2008) lived and wrote. His books *Defiliada v Moskvi (Military Parade in Moscow)*, *Konotop, Ludynets pana Boha (Mister God's Wild Men Show)*, *Lzhe-Nostradamus (False Nostradamus)*, *Kotyhoroshko, Terrorism*, and *Sribniy pavuk (Silver Spider)* generally feature adventures of fictional and historical characters against "alternative history" backdrops. Development of the real Ukraine didn't follow the way "indicated" by Kozheljanko. But it definitely will not prevent films and computer games based on his books from being produced.

Volodymyr Lys (born 1951), an author from the city of Lutsk, is a journalist, playwright, and novelist. Volodymyr Lys has had his debut in literature as a playwright, and five of his plays have been staged in theatres and broadcasted as radio shows. His career as a novelist started later, when publishing houses in Kyiv, Lviv and Ternopil printed his novels *Aistry na zubri (Asters on Auroch)*, *Romana, Maska/Lyudyna v p'yatyokh maskakh (Mask/A Man in Five Masks)*, *Prodavets doli (Fortuneseller)* and other. Unusual characters in unusual conditions combined with complex psychological issues and a masterful mixture of reality and illusion make Lys's novels perfectly readable, magically compelling and able to satisfy most sophisticated tastes in literature.

For reasons unknown, most Ukrainian authors of the younger generation are female. The most flamboyant debutant of recent years has been **Kseniya Kharchenko** (born 1984). Even if she wouldn't write any new books after her debut novel *Istoria (A Story)*, she has already left her mark in the history of Ukrainian literature. Her text, clear and intoxicating like morning air in spring yet unspoiled by industrial revolution, has been enthusiastically met by readers

and favourably commented upon by critics, but severely criticized by Christian moral crusaders. What was the reason? The phantasmagorical story of a girl named Hlykera is as easy to read as *paganistically* real. The girl was carried to term and born from her granddad's underarm; she came into this world already adult and able to write, as she 'was bound to' write down the story of her kin. Hlykera knows everything about her mother, father, grandmother and all the great-grands. She has a long tail, hooves, beautiful fur covering her body, and a braid that behind her back entwines with her tail lovingly...

Another young author **Tetjana Vynokurova-Sadychenko** (born 1984) embodies all the finest things of young age. Her books *Zhart. Iz zhytya psyhiv/A Joke. From the Life of Loonies*, *Zhart druhyi. Kvit paporoti/The Joke Number Two. Fern-Blossom, MY/WE*, and *Ilyuzia/The Illusion* make easy reading and easy listening, as good adventure fiction should. There's love (can a novel be without it?); magic of folkloristic origin (that's why it looks so real); and a good deal of philosophy and what is jokingly called woman's reason. This wonderful mix is generously seasoned with irony and humoristic self-deprecation, and you can't but help yourself to this savoury meal. Tetjana's themes range from the naked truth of Ukraine's today to legends combining traditional myths and modern youth's tales. Thus, *Zhart druhyi. Kvit paporoti* is a contemporary remake of old legends of the quest for the magic fern-blossom. *MY* is based on real stories from lives of the author's friends, though as ever, Tetjana Vynokurova-Sadychenko adds a hint of magic.

In Ukraine, translations from other languages since the days of yore have abounded, but translations from the Ukrainian language is only starting to appear. No wonder here.

To begin with, non-native speakers of Ukrainian are scarce in the world.

Then, where such people are, they often don't keep in touch with processes constantly taking place in Ukrainian literature (and such processes often bring rapid and dramatic changes).

And, certainly, it takes time for other nations to get used to those (specifically Ukrainian) culture codes that are known to be used by each and every culture to manifest its existence.

Though even right now it seems perfectly possible for some books by modern Ukrainian authors to become global bestsellers — quality translations and smart marketing policies of publishers are needed.

Leonid Kononovych

He is a writer and translator from French and Dutch. Leonid Kononovych was born and lives in Kyiv. In the USSR era he was excluded from the University of Kyiv as "refusing to study the history of the Communist party" and later from Kyiv Pedagogical University for his human rights protection activities. Kononovych has translated a number of works by Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Emile Durkheim, Maurice Blanchot, Jean Baudrillard, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and others into Ukrainian. His works include the novel *Tema dlya medytazii (Theme for Meditation, 2004)*; several existential fiction works written in the 1980s and remaining unpublished until in 2004 *Povernennya (Return)* was printed; a series of historical fantasy novels for younger readers; and 10 ironic crime novels. Because of the latter he has been proclaimed "the father of Ukrainian crime fiction" by critics. One of the principal characters of Kononovych's detective stories is his dog Bilbonskiy, who would often have a glass of brandy with the writer. When Kononovych's *Theme for Meditation* appeared, the novel became the greatest psychological fiction sensation, a rare case when literary critics and readers shared the same opinion. Kononovych's has been instrumental for the notion of "post-catastrophe fiction" to appear in Ukrainian literary circles, as the term was coined to define the genre of *Theme for Meditation*. Nothing like this ever appeared in Ukrainian literature before, the novel being named "one of the first Ukrainian epics". Kononovych won the Ukrainian Book of the Year Award (2005).



Between Two Epochs

Ukrainian Literature in the Period of Transition

by Daryna Zhuzhchenko



Every creative personality begins with learning of the world, reflecting on it and then reflecting it through their work — as honestly as possible. But it seems that in the Soviet era, totalitarian pressure on Ukraine's creative minds was so strong and so masterfully organized that many Ukrainians would associate Ukrainian literature with nothing but Soviet official policy. Obviously, with such a background, the chances of literature recovering couldn't be great. Nevertheless, regardless of the gap between generations, nowadays Ukrainian literature is marked with originality and diversity. However, this article intends to deal solely with those authors and books that vividly represent the ultimate changes of life, psychology and structure of Ukrainian society taking place after the Soviet Union's collapse and Ukraine's independence in 1991.

Both chronologically and thematically, the forefather of good contemporary Ukrainian literature is **Volodymyr Dibrova**. His short stories from the *Pisni Bitlz (Beatles' Songs)* series and the *Zbihovyska (Get-togethers)* series, and the novel *Budryk* are set in the Soviet times, but the mood of narration is not Soviet at all — killingly ironic, providing merciless insight into Soviet realities and psychology. Volodymyr Dibrova, though now living in the USA for many years, didn't let American life enter the circle of his writing's themes. Recently a new novel by Dibrova *Andriyivsky Uzviz* has been published. The book won the Ukrainian Service of BBC Audience's Choice Award.

Halyna Tarasyuk was a known poet in Soviet times, but her prose works remained unpublished until when in 1992 her novel *Smert — sestra moeyi samotnosti (Death, the Sister of My Loneliness)* was printed. The novel depicts the crisis of the powerful Communist elite, and it is done with much greater mastery than in many other authors' books dealing with the same theme. Post-Soviet people's two-dimension motif of life — 'before' and 'after' — is also present in Halyna

Tarasyuks collection of stories *Dama ostannyyoho lytsarya (The Last Knight's Lady)*, written in the style of absurd realism.

The first Ukrainian book to attract readers' attention undreamed of before was **Yury Andrukhovych's** *Rekreatsii (Recreations)*. Back in the '80s he made a name as a talented poet, and later as poet of the scandalous poet group Bu-Ba-Bu. As a member of Bu-Ba-Bu, Andrukhovych together with Viktor Neborak and Oleksandr Irvanets, took part in 'impresas' of humorous and parody poetry. Soon after *Rekreatsii*, two more of Andrukhovych's novels, *The Moskoviad* and *Perverzion*, were published. Then, after a long disruption, the novel *Dvanatsyat obruchiv (Twelve Rings)* and an autobiographical novel *Tayemnytsa (The Secret)* were published. Yury Andrukhovych's typical character is an author not much oppressed by the Soviet authorities, without money problems or family troubles. Witty and unselfconscious, this character has gained sympathy with both the younger generation of Ukrainian readers as well as with European publishers. Today Yury Andrukhovych is the most prominent Ukrainian author, representing the new Ukrainian literature of the Independence period in Europe.

If Yury Andrukhovych is the most influential "exported" Ukrainian author, **Oksana Zabuzhko** is to be mentioned as the most popular author within the borders of Ukraine. Once has also made her debut as a poet. In 1996 her novel *Polyovi doslidzhenya z ukrainskoho seksu (Field Work in Ukrainian Sex)* was printed and gained immense popularity. The novel's character is a dissident's daughter whose childhood was spent in poverty and fear that any time her father may be arrested again. The whole tragic history of Ukraine oppressed by the Soviet power is projected in Zabuzhko's story of love to an apparently nationally-aware Ukrainian man who, however, shows a shameful incapacity of understanding woman's soul. *Polyovi doslidzhenya* is still a best-selling book, and Oksana Zabuzhko has become a public person of the Ukrainian media.

Beside other qualitative changes, one of the features of Ukrainian "Independence" literature is the unprecedented

Vasyl' Kozheljanko



He was a writer, poet and script writer. Kozheljanko lived in Bukovyna and worked a publicist and political analyst. Critics consider him to be the inventor of a genre known as "Ukrainian alternative history", or "political fantasy". Seven of Kozheljanko's novels belong to this genre, the most well-known being *Defiliada v Moskvi (Military Defiling in Moscow)*, *Konotop* and *Terrorium*. He also wrote three retro-historical, or historical reconstruction novels: *Sribniy pavuk (Silver Spider)*, *Tretye pole (The Third Field)* and *Efiopska sich (The Ethiopian Sich)*; *Sribniy pavuk* the most famous. Kozheljanko is said to be "the writer who foresaw the Orange revolution and its results"; as in *Terrorium* (2002) he wrote of mass rallies on Maidan, of a "Great November national democratic revolution", of the old authorities being driven out and even of some contradictory post-revolution processes within the new state. He also wrote several books of poetry, five plays and *Lohyka rechet (Logic of Things)*, a book of realist stories of survival in a "consumerist totalitarianism" society. Kozheljanko's books have been translated into Russian and Finnish. He won the Ukrainian Book of the Year Award (2000), the *Suchasnist* magazine Prize (1998) and the Coronation of the Word all-Ukrainian Contest of Fiction and Scripts Award (2005).

number of female authors, and attention paid to specifically women's problems. Among the most prominent authors focusing on issues that concern Ukrainian women is **Yevgenija Kononenko**. Kononenko attempts to discover a special "female" world, very different from the male one and not limited with confines that patriarchal traditions impose on women. The discovery takes place in the spheres of psychology and emotions and is connected with revision of those traditional roles that the woman has to perform. Kononenko attempts to deny traditional stereotypes as being repressive and destructive in terms of development of women's individuality. This is where the issue of women's right to choose their own way in life comes out to the fore, with mothers imposing their vision of it on their daughters in order to prevent them from making their mothers' mistakes. Kononenko's stories feature scenes from the life of Ukrainian women and their problems eating away love, creativity and life as such. Yevgenija Kononenko's novels *Imitatsia (Imitation)*, *Betrayal. ZRADA made in Ukraine* and novella *Nostalgia*, as well as her essay *Bez muzhyka (No Man's Woman)* and numerous short stories are set against the highly detailed canvas of Ukrainian life at the end of 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries. Kononenko's writing is impulsive, autobiographic and dramatic, and her narrative style can be defined as confessional. She masterfully combines dynamic, easy to read, pictorial, TV-drama-like narratives with insights into the psychology of human social life.

Contemporary Ukrainian literature does not only keep track of current events, often absurd and impossible for common sense to embrace. There are also attempts to comprehend and digest those tragic events of the past that Soviet censorship made impossible to discuss. Such events in the first place are those of Holodomor of the years 1932-1933 in East Ukraine and those connected to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army's struggle in the 1940-1950s in West Ukraine. Authors focus not only on the historical events as such, but also on ways they are interpreted today by politicians and ordinary Ukrainian people.

It may be said without exaggeration that the best book about the Holodomor in post-Soviet Ukrainian literature is **Leonid Kononovych's** *Tema dlya medytatsii (Theme for Meditation)*. Before this novel, Kononovych wrote a number of books about Ukrainian "superman" Oskar, fighting against the world's wrongs. But *Tema dlya medytatsii* has proven the appearance of an interesting author who is able of combining

masterful plot designs and refined language with real psychological depth and convincing strong characters. Nobel Prize laureate Joseph Brodsky wrote in one of his essays that writing about great tragedies does not require great author's skills, as the theme itself is enough to create an attention-grabbing text. In the case of *Tema dlya medytatsii* we can see an example of writing about a great tragedy on the highest level of literary refinement.

Speaking about great themes of the history of Ukraine and contemporary Ukrainian literature, one should mention **Maria Matios**, another bestselling novelist. This author, born in Bukovyna, has continually turned to the theme of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army's warfare in the years of the Second World War and after its end. Especially successful was Matios's novel *Solodka Darusya (Sweet Darusia)*. It is a story of a child who involuntarily betrayed her father and UIA fighters, lived to see her mother's suicide, later became mute, and lives her years in a Soviet village in Bukovyna, a lame and lonely victim of history.

Many Ukrainian authors of the transition period write about the absurdism of Soviet life and the new ways that not everyone is lucky enough to find. The best embodiment of this topic may be found in **Yurko Izdryk's** novels *Wozzek, AM™* and *Ostriv Krk (Krk Island)*. A hard-mouthed drunkard has an immortal soul open to love, too — and you come to believe in this after having read absurd, tragic and yet masterfully written texts by Yuri Izdryk.

The most prominent among the authors who are half a generation younger than those already mentioned is **Serhiy Zhadan**, who also had his debut as a poet. Today Zhadan is known as a flamboyant showman who skillfully presents his texts at both poetry and prose performances. His prose books *Depeche Mode*, *Big Mac* and others feature savoury realities of the transition period in Ukraine, as well as the author's experiences of traveling abroad. Zhadan's prose is polyphonic, as in his writing the last remains of the post-Soviet discourse clash with the commercial "newspeak" of today's Ukraine. Zhadan's prose deals rather with modern discourse of post-Soviet Ukraine and not with lives and minds of modern Ukrainians.

So-called 'alternative' literature, which shows the world of drugs, drink and promiscuous sex from the inside, giving no moral judgment of it and merely stating the fact of its existence, has become a natural part of world literature, both European and American. Perhaps the only one representative

Tanya Malyarchuk

She was born in Ivano-Frankivsk and studied philology in the Precarpathian National University. Currently lives in Kyiv with her husband, cat and cactuses. Tanya Malyarchuk says she's something between a woman and a writer, and believes that if once her head was accidentally cracked open, stuff within it being released, the whole world would go mad. Tanya's writing keeps balancing between surrealism and realism, and critics describe her fiction as "a variety of observations and visions" saying: "Her visions awoke a florist shop aura, as crammed with mysteries, aromas and hues. This shop's illusive and fragrant vibes send an unstable mind reeling. In this shop fleeting emotions and elusive thoughts come into being, bringing a sense of surrealistic phantasm". Malyarchuk has written *Endshpil Adolfo, abo troyanda dlya Lizy (Adolfo's Endgame, or Roses for Liza, 2004)*, *Zhory vnyz. Knyha strakhiv (From Top to Bottom. Fear's book, 2006)*, *Yak ya stala svyatoyu (My Becoming a Saint, 2006)*, *Hovoryty (To Talk, 2007)*. Her debut novel entered the short-list of the Taras Shevchenko National Award (2005).

Malyarchuk won the BBC Book of the Year Award (2006).



Why is Ukrainian literature interesting for the European reader?

Three words that reflect the nature of contemporary Ukrainian literature



Aneta Kaminska (Poland)

A poet and translator of contemporary Ukrainian literature, she was born in Zamość and currently lives in Warsaw. Graduated the University of Warsaw, where she studied Polish language and literature, now teaches the Polish language to foreigners. Has written several books of poetry.

Her translations of poems by Nazar Honchar and fragments of Yury Izdryk's and Ksenja Kharchenko's works have been published in Poland. Currently, Kaminska is composing her anthology of modern Ukrainian poetry: "Being a poet myself, I view translating as a source of adventures, yet another form of creation, and a possibility to exist in somebody else's texts and words. This is why I chose to translate almost exclusively those texts that are congenial to me, give something to me that I would like to write or at least read myself".

I (and other readers too, I guess) am attracted to modern Ukrainian prose because of its magic and mystery. It is a sort of magical realism, but one very different from Latin American magical realism so popular in Poland. It is familiar, put into Ukrainian realities and based on Ukrainian folklore. In Poland there is no literature of such kind at all, so it makes a very attractive offer for the reader. No less interesting can be female writing, I mean ambitious female writing — the one written by women who show the world as they see it, in a vocal, strong and expressive manner. And, to my mind, much braver than Polish female authors tend to. We are also interested in texts set against the canvas of Ukraine, her history, culture, the mentality of her people.

Speaking of prose: **MAGIC, MYTH** and **FOLKLORE**.

Speaking of poetry: **RHYTHM, RHYME** and **EMOTIONS**.



Oksana Mizerak (France)

A translator, member of the French Literary Translators' Association. PhD student at Sorbonne. Her French version of Ljubko Deresh's *Kult* has been published in France. She founded the Ukrainian Literary Club in Paris.

Modern Ukrainian literature attracts with its **DISTINCTIVENESS, SUBTLE HUMOUR** and **LINGUISTIC SAVOUR**.



Lorenzo Pompeo (Italy)

A professional literary translator from Ukrainian into Italian. Has organized several film-fests in Rome and in Warsaw. He has a PhD in Slavic studies (his thesis is about Ukrainian preacher Joannikij Galjatovskij), and started to work as a translator in the last years of his PhD studies. Has compiled an Italian-Ukrainian dictionary in collaboration with Mariana Prokopovych, a translator from Italian into Ukrainian. When the work on the dictionary was over, Lorenzo Pompeo founded a publishing house interested in printing Andrukhovych's novel *Moscoviada*. He translated the novel and promoted it after it was published by *Besa editrice*. At the same time he published a number of translations of such Ukrainian poets as Ihor Kalynets, Yuri Andrukhovych, Oksana Zabuzhko, Vasyl Holoborotko and Bohdan Ihor Antonych in the *Pagine* poetry review. In the meantime, he published his translations of Lesya Ukrajinka's sonnets and a poem by Pavlo Tychyna in an academic review. Lorenzo Pompeo has also translated into Italian Zabuzhko's book

Polyovi doslidjenya z ukrainskoho seksu (*Field Work in Ukrainian Sex*), Serhiy Zhadan's novel *Depeche Mode*, Andrukhovych's novel *Dvanatsyat obruchiv* (*Twelve Rings*), and Ljubko Deresh's *Kult*.

In my opinion contemporary Ukrainian literature is an interesting phenomenon. You can compare it to a baby that is beginning to speak. I know that Ukrainian literature is an old and respectable literature, but I mean Ukrainian literature as a literature of the independent country. Before there was literature, but there were no independent country. Besides, Ukraine is a country searching for her identity, and contemporary literature is, in my opinion, part of this search.

UNEXPECTED, NAIVE, AMAZING

of the trend in Ukraine is **Svitlana Povaljajeva** with her books *Ekshumatsia mista* (*Exhuming the City*), *Origami-Blues*, *Zamist krovi* (*Instead of Blood*), *Simurg* and other. The rebellious spirit and vibrant anti-bourgeois views combined with refined style and rich language make Povaljajeva's writing a prominent phenomenon of contemporary Ukrainian literature.

Life keeps going, and the same is true for literature. **Sofia Andrukhovych**, the daughter of above-mentioned Yury Andrukhovych, is a bright young author. Her first works has attracted attention purely because they were written by a famous writer's daughter. But her novel *Syomha* (*Salmon*), that constitutes of a number of short stories, has proven the appearance of a remarkable author with her own style and worldview. The novel is also interesting as a source of facts, as there are many nimble details from life of post-Soviet children and teenagers.

Day-to-day existence of the same post-Soviet generation constitutes the base of stories by another young author —

Tanya Malyarchuk. Tanya experiments with both forms and modes of narration. In every book her author's role is that of telling tales or gossip or presenting her own reflections. Tanya has her own way of provoking her reader — that of depicting things natural yet inappropriate to talk or write about: flaking nails, falling hair, dirty windows and other if-you-love-me-then-love-my-tobacco-stench stuff. Tanya's characters are perfect in everything — including their triviality and geekness. The common feature that all Malyarchuk's books share, starting with *Endshpil Adolfo* (*Adolfo's Endgame*), is that they all seem to be written about and for "that" kind of people. The kind you can not even call geeks. They seem perfectly normal at first sight-, thoughts and fancies easily projected on one's neighbours or relatives. But it is this elusive sense of 'difference' that is attractive, and Tanya's novel *Hovoryty* (*To Talk*) brings it to the ultimate.

This is original literature of the new generation, and it is able to give birth to those who reproduce it.

Worlds aren't Created for Nothing

Sci-fi, Fantasy and Magical Reality by Olha-Maria Storunska



Ukrainian literature has ancient traditions, and fairy-tales and legends make the most delicious part of these. Stories of fabulous events and fantastic creatures have been in abundance here since the era of tales told by our ancestors near the fireplace. All things strange, mysterious, fantastic and incredible naturally thrive in this land, so it's no wonder

so many interesting authors were born here.

Authors who write high-quality fantasy books — generally based on folk legends and beliefs, capable of surprising and exciting the reader.

Thus, the plot of **Maria Rymar's** *Bilyi Slon* (*White Elephant*) is set in present-day Ukraine, and modern boys have to face ancient beings that still dwell in the Carpathian Mountains. As one would expect, such an encounter makes for a life-changing experience — though no less impressive is the land of great Carpathia itself, where life is so different from the rat-race of our daily urban existence. Reading the book is like having a brief vacation amidst the highlands' wildlife, with its crystal-clear lakes and mythical *poludenytysyas*, *poterchas* and forest spirits.

The heroine of **Tetjana Vynokurova-Sadychenko's** *Zhart druhyi. Kvit paporoti* (*Joke Number Two. Fern-Blossom*)

sets forth to find the mystic blossom of fern, just as ancient Ukrainians did, in hope of solving her quite mundane problems. The author's magical and bizarre world grows straight from the middle of modern routine. Werewolves, spirits, witches, brownies, the Fool and Death feel as at home here as do normal humans and the book's principal character — a young journalist named Tetyana. However, Tetyana's old, chatty, anything-but-tame forest cat Elvis makes the most exhilarating character in the novel. Elvis is a fan of realities on TV and a tabloid-reading teetotaler fond of creamed coffee, witch-herbed tea and folk songs. He's been with Tetyana through thick and thin, advising, protecting and rescuing her. It is Elvis who helps her to get rid of various eerie creatures and pushy "God's publicity agents", and finally gain the mythical fern-blossom (though the talking cat would also scare the wits out of Tetyana's potential boyfriends).

Readers love Tetjana's trademark slight absurdism, well-known since when her debut *Zhart. Iz zhytya psyhiv* (*A Joke. From the Life of Loonies*) appeared. The book, featuring gremlins, a kitten changing into Sphinx, an Angel and a redhead interested in the theory of relativity, is a story of a nut-house, love and search for the meaning of life hidden behind broken mirrors.

Maria Matios

She is a poet and writer. Maria Matios was born in Bukovyna and graduated from the University of Chernivtsi, though she claims years of editing the magazine of Chernivtsi Plant became her real university of life. She currently lives in Kyiv. Maria believes that capturing images of time and human beings is the purpose of literature as such and her writing in particular. Her interests include psychology, traditional customs, and breeding of flowers and horticulture. Maria has written many works of poetry and prose, said to be "the most productive Ukrainian author". Her most popular books are *Zhytya korotke* (*Life is Short*, 2001), *Furshet vid Marii Matios* (*Maria Matios's Cocktail Party*, 2003), *Solodka Darusya* (*Sweet Darusia*, 2004), *Shodennyk strachenoyi* (*Diary of the Executed*, 2005), *Mister ta missis Yu v krayini ukriv* (*Mr. and Mrs. Yu in the Land of Ukres*, 2006), *Natsia. Odkrovenya* (*The Nation. Revelation*, 2006), *Moskalytsya* (2008). Maria Matios's books have been published in Ukraine, Canada, the USA, Japan, Slovakia, Poland, and Russia. She won the Ukrainian Book of the Year Award (2004), the Taras Shevchenko National Award (2005), and the Coronation of the Word all-Ukrainian Contest of Fiction and Scripts Award (2007).



A world to which **Olena Zakharchenko's** *Vyshyvani harbuzy* (*Embroidered Pumpkins*) takes you is a female world where witches, mermaid rusalkas and ghost maras dwell under the rules of those old Ukrainian legends. The heroine has to come through this world and a couple of other ones, searching for answers to her questions. Olena's next book, *Brother-and-sister*, is also based on ancient beliefs. The story (the title is the Ukrainian name of blue cowwheat) deals with troublesome themes of forbidden love between siblings.

Kostyantyn Matvienko's *Chas nastav* (*The Time Has Come*) is set in ancient Kyiv. The protagonist travels in time from the present day into the first years after Christ. He meets Saint Andrew, makes friends with a brownie, and digs for antiquities in Kyiv-Pecherska Lavra monastery — instead coming across a time portal. The story, quite dynamic, features love, complicated schemes and nosy secret organizations. Adventures abound.

Such books make mythical creatures look like an integral part of our reality. Even if our ancestors were simply seeing things after a nice quaffing, the stuff emerged from the imagination has been roaming this land for such a long time that now it belongs here inseparably. Ukrainian authors generally a anything but humourless — so their stories in no way resemble academic studies of folklore, rather being akin to tales told over a glass of *horilka* — sometimes really creepy, and sometimes rather juicy.

Nevertheless, Ukrainian fantasy authors will also eagerly create worlds of their own. **Maryna Sokolyan's** *Novendialiyi* gives a picture of the ancient Eastern European town Drakuv with its own history, secrets and day-to-day routine, that of tourists and musical festivals. However, magic police also make a part of this town's routine. As well as does a daily struggle for human souls and the unceasing hunt after those who have lost their souls (as such people are a danger for society) and those who use drugs to steal this most precious substance. Apart from inserting a decent part of adventures into her stories, Maryna also deals with complicated relationships between people and puzzles her reader with some very unusual philosophy of her own. One more peculiarity of Sokolyan's fiction is "parallel text", accompanying the main one. In *Novendialiyi*, stories from Drakuv's history told by a witty guide follow the main plotline, and in *Kovdra snovydy* (*Sleepwalker's Blanket*) the author inserts an "abstract from a monograph entitled *Consolidation of Mundanity*" into the narrative. *Kovdra snovydy's* fable spins around a tricky question: what may happen to gods whom people do not worship anymore? The story in fact resembles a magic blanket,

knit of bright flickering sparkles. Yet another of Sokolyan's works, *Cherem*, retells the story of the Messiah from a totally unexpected point of view. The author, however, does not insist that her text deals with the biblical tale — but a number of details makes the hint quite obvious. Maryna Sokolyan's fiction is multilayered. Besides the books already mentioned, there is also a mystery social drama *Kodlo* (*The Mob*) and a mystery detective *Chuzhi u domi* (*Strangers in the House*) — where loves mingles with Cabbala. *Balada dlya Kryvoyi Varhy* (*Ballad for Lame Varha*) is also based on Ukrainian myths.

Though the world of **Taras Zavitaylo's** *Tsilkom mozhylyve fentezy* (*Rather Possible Fantasy*) is called Chaos, its rules, however weird, are also quite strict. Into this place human souls slide and are turned into Fevers, Glitches, Succubae and other stuff human imagination has created. These monsters, nevertheless, are completely lawful, and their visits to Earth follow a severe schedule, their mission being to frighten people. Among other cases, Chaos takes souls of those in coma and lethargic sleep. Two principal characters, the Lethargist and the Comatose, have to untangle the cobwebs of Chaos in order to return into their bodies and the world of living. The author's wild imagination is inferior only to his sense of humour, so you will not be bored in the most refined (though not exactly *lively*) company of the two.

Another writer proficient in the use of his imagination is **Serhiy Baturyn**. His *Mech koroliv* (*Sword of Kings*) tells the legend of the race of prahngs, said to descend from the sky. There is love, divorce, war, mysterious ships emerging from the sea — the clash between prahngs and the hostile neighbour kingdom being the most exciting part. The logic of events is absolutely true-to-life, fantastic backdrop and real-world problems making a perfect match.

Such fiction, elegantly combining reality and fancy, and thus opening and revising the wrongs of our daily existence, is written by Marina and Sergey Dyachenko, Henry Lion Oldie, Andrey Valentinov, Vladimir Arenev, and Yana Dubinyanskaya. These authors, born and living in Ukraine, write in Russian, successfully competing with the "genuinely" Russian authors, winning awards, their books printed and reprinted. Best-selling Russian authors being in fact Ukrainians, the situation seems quite *fantastic!*

These writers address the perennial matters of choice and responsibility, of one's ability or disability to rule their own destiny, of power and its impact on human psyche, of "life, the Universe and everything", as Douglas Adams once put it.

Tymur Lytovchenko is also interested in such things, though the tools in his universe-construction kit are those

Halyna Pahutyak

She is a writer and essayist. Halyna Pahutyak was born in Zakolot village in Lvisvska region, later moved to Urizh, where many of her stories are set. She currently lives in Lviv. Halyna is thought to descend from Dracula. As a child she wished to become a queen or an archaeologist seeking for ancient treasures. She shuns publicity and celebrity events, and avoids being interviewed. Pahutyak's works look like professionally rewritten original myths and legends of a land where time itself goes in several opposing streams. Her authentically West Ukrainian Gothic novels are romantic epics with complicated plots and a variety of rivaling characters of equal importance. Pahutyak has written more than 10 books, the most popular being *Smitnyk Hospoda nashoho* (*Rubbish Dump of Our Lord*), *Radisna pustelya* (*A Joyful Wasteland*), *Pysar Shidnyh Vorit Prytulku* (*The Clerk of Shelter's East Gates*), *Korolivstvo* (*The Kingdom*), *Zahid sontsya v Urozhi* (*Sunset in Urizh*), and *Sluha z Dobromylya* (*The Servant from Dobromyl*). Some of Halyna's stories and novels have been translated into English, German, Slovakian, Russian and Croatian, printed mostly as parts of compilations. Her writing can make a perfect mystery thriller film. Halyna Pahutyak won the *Suchasnist* magazine Prize and the Antonovych Foundation Prize, was nominated for the Taras Shevchenko National Award in 2008.



of science fiction. The future, interstellar journeys and high technologies in his *Pryrecheniy zhyty (Doomed to Life)* look entirely convincing. He also masterfully engineers the morals and religion of the future society, though the deity of our possible descendants is but another perfect machine. Such is the backdrop of the story — the main part belonging, once again, to the human being, their doom of choice, their right of sacrifice and, quite naturally, their ability to feel. Lytovchenko follows the path of great Stanislaw Lem, Clifford Simak, and the Strugatsky brothers, whose characters also battle with adversity in the depths of space.

Another author interested in the future of Earth, the further development of technology and its possible effects is **Oleksandr Levchenko**. His short stories are imaginative and witty, featuring machines of time, interplanetary flights and teleportation. In *Vich-ma-vich z samym soboyu (Face to Face with Myself)* the character is split in two because of a “traditional” teleport glitch, and has to handle living in two bodies at once. The hero of *Porazka (Defeat)* comes back to his native planet and faces a trouble quite possible in the distant future, his people divided into warring factions: one striving to return into the fold of the mother civilization, another struggling for independence. Such collisions are indeed not purely stuff of fiction, their keeping in touch with reality making the reader feel more sympathy for the character.

Let us now change blasters for swords and abandon spaceships for horses — it is not the future that we face, but the past, where glorious victories, brave warriors, ardent love and fantastic plots feel at home.

The past with its real wars and historical characters is the source of imagination for those working in the genre of alternative history. **Vasyl' Kozheljanko** (sadly, passed away August 2008) was a true genius of the genre, often called the father of contemporary Ukrainian alternative history, or “political fantasy”. Though “fantasy” here is rather a misleading term, as the world of Kozheljanko’s fiction is the real one. Historical events are generally the same, but certain key aspects differ, the writer playing the eternal game of “what if” with his readers. And some “ifs” produce an astonishing result!

Kozheljanko published seven books belonging to the genre, and the most influential are *Defiliada v Moskvi (Military Parade in Moscow)*, *Konotop* and *Terrorium*. The Ukraine of these novels has a different history, sometimes more fascinating than the real one. Audacious plots and the author’s mastery of the real history make the reading a compulsive thing. The “great November revolution” in *Terrorium* (2001) almost wholly anticipated the Orange Revolution (2004),

Kozheljanko’s book being practically the script of the latter’s events. The names of “alternative” political elite in the novel are exceptionally well-chosen. Characters like general-colonel Kurvenko (Sonovabitch), general-lieutenant Laynov (Crapper) and minister of finance Nischikh (Deadbeat) are scandalous enough, not to mention Kozheljanko’s humour, sharp to the point of cruelty. The book was a bombshell in its time, and today one still can turn back to it for better understanding of current political developments.

Defiliada v Moskvi’s themes of Ukraine’s victory in WWII are in fact not that fresh, as a number of authors have already elaborated upon them, but the Battle of Konotop revised in *Konotop* is unique.

Ukraine as a superpower in *Kotyhoroshko* can make one roar with laughter, while the intricate plot of *Lzenostradamus (False Nostradamus)*, however saturated with Kozheljanko’s ever-present irony, requires attentive reading. The efforts will definitely not be lost upon you, as the book reveals the mechanisms that drive the history.

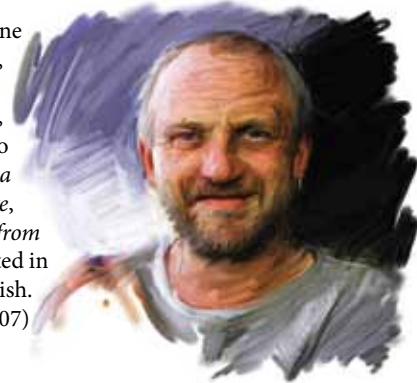
Kozheljanko also wrote three retro-historical, or historical reconstruction novels: *Sribniy pavuk (Silver Spider)*, *Tretye pole (The Third Field)* and *Efiopska sich (The Ethiopian Sich)*. *Sribniy pavuk* has already been translated and published in Finland.

Equally absorbing are books dealing with history and social evolution as such, without focusing on this or that period. **Oksana Zabuzhko**’s *Knyha buttya. Hlava chetverta (Book of Genesis. Chapter Four)* is a combination of philosophical parable and dystopia. The book, though written years earlier, has been published only recently so some of the prophecies did in it have already come true. In the foreword to the book Zabuzhko states that she wouldn’t live to see such Civilization; but the parallels with today are too numerous.

Oleksandr Irvanets’ *Rivne/Rovno* is also a dystopia, the genre becoming rather too prophetic when picked up by a talented author. The novel is about a city divided by an insurmountable wall. Ukraine divided in two could easily have become our reality in 2004. Irvanets paints an uneasily realistic picture of a split country with destinies, childhood reminiscences and families torn asunder. Psychological depth combined with the fast pace of events grabs and holds the reader’s attention to the last page. Another book by Irvanets, *Ochamymrya*, deals with a possible Ukrainian future, though the plot is fictitious, with a giant wyrm, first an imaginary creature, entering the reality and attacking the City (obviously Kyiv). Grotesque Knyez and the other “fathers of the city” would make the reader laugh, as the political “elite” is way too recognizable, unchanged since the book

Taras Prokhasko

He is a writer and author of novellas, short stories, radio-novellas and essays. Prokhasko is one of the Stanislav phenomenon writers. Taras Prokhasko was born and lives in Ivano-Frankivsk, studied biology and worked in a Carpathian forestry institute, had jobs as barman, guard, and radio host. He is often called “a philosophical plant”, as Prokhasko longs to reunite with nature, viewing wildlife as if from the inside. His writing is slow, sincere, and meditative, as if listening to another world. Prokhasko has written *Inshi dni Anny (Anna’s Other Days)*, 1998), *FM Halychyna* (2001), *Neprosti (No Tsimple)*, 2002), *Leksykon tayemnykh znan (Lexicon of Secretive Knowledge)*, 2005), *Z tsyoho mozhna bulo b zrobyty kilka opovidan (Could Have Made a Couple of Stories from This)*, 2005), and *Port Frankivsk* (2006). Most of Prokhasko’s books have been translated and printed in Poland. His novella *Necropolis* and novel *No Tsimple* have been translated and published in English. Prokhasko won the Joseph Conrad Award (2007) and the Ukrainian Best Book Award (2006, 2007) from the *Correspondent* magazine.



was written and unlikely to change in the future, however mythical.

“Remixing” history too, **Dmytro Bilyi** writes in a different vein. In his novel *Basavryuk XX*, unearthly creatures act against the backdrop of the 1918-21 Civil War. The author focuses on things mysterious rather than on the actual tragedy of the war-tormented country, characters searching for the Temple of Horror, the discovery of which is supposed to prevent further tragedies — those of the years 1932-1933 and 1938-1939 — from becoming reality. But as one of the characters, the Black Army anarchist states, “a nation cannot be saved unless it saves itself”. The book, set in an age historically appalling enough, is teeming with witches, vampires and werewolves, the author taking after great master of horror Nikolay Gogol. Parts like that of the hero’s best friend turning into a rotting vampire make one’s hair stand on end, but one just can’t help continuing the reading. *Bewitching* horror seems to be a trademark of Ukrainian mystical fiction.

The Kapranov brothers in *Kobzar-2000* and *Kobzar-2000: New Chapters* (both are collections of short stories) use the same tried and true recipe, but the temporal gap between the era where the actual stories take place and the era when the “source book” was written is wider. The name *Kobzar* clearly alludes to Taras Shevchenko’s *Kobzar*, as names of all the stories in both Kapranovs’ books are those of poems by this great Ukrainian bard. Revised and set in today, these tales retain their mystical charm. *Perebendya* (*The Banterer*), *Katerynka*, *Vovkulaka* (*The Werewolf*), *Dolya* (*The Fate*) and *Neophit* are all stories from life, the authors bringing mysticism into the daily lives of a doctor and a Canadian tourist, a woman from a small village and a sailor. The names are familiar, the contents are unexpected and novel, the magic is old, and the plots keep one reading and reading till the very end of the book. And even after the last pages have been turned, one feels an urge to open the book again, just like a child looking into an empty box of chocolates — is there really nothing more to eat? The sweets by the Kapranov brothers are a savoury mix of day-to-day existence (though the characters are a bit more appealing and intelligent than you would expect in real life, and fiercely sensual) and esoteric themes. Having tasted it once, you can’t wait to enjoy another portion. Let’s just hope that a new book by the Kapranov brothers, made after the same original recipe, is to be printed soon.

But the queen of Ukrainian mystical historical prose is undoubtedly **Halyna Pahutyak**. In her writing, different epochs (from XII to XX centuries), Ukrainian “domestic demonology” and imagination unrestrained are beautifully

interlaced. The author claims she’s related to Dracula himself, and the mere names of her books can thrill you: *Pahn u chornomu kostyumi z blyskuchymy gudzylamy* (*A Gentleman in Black Suit with Shining Buttons*), *Urizka hotyka* (*Gothic of Urizh*), *Sluha z Domromylya* (*The Servant from Dobromyl*), *Pysar Skhidnyh Vorit Prytulku* (*The Clerk of Shelter’s East Gates*) and *Pysar Zakhidnyh Vorit Prytulku* (*The Clerk of Shelter’s West Gates*). Halyna carefully and skillfully choreographs her plots, and no character, no line is left unresolved. In all her works there is the ever-present theme of another world, of crossing this reality’s boundaries and entering a place where time flows differently, folk rites, beliefs and superstitions are at work, and all is full of symbolism.

Sluha z Domromylya is based on Ukrainian folk legends about vampires and their magic power. The novel is set in the town of Dobromyl, soon after WWII is over. A strange patient arrives at the Dobromyl mental hospital, situated in an ancient cloister. The stranger enthralles the hospital’s tired, responsibility-burdened, ill chief doctor, and magically puts the patients and personnel to sleep. He does so to save a wounded young rebel, his wife and son, who are hiding in the hospital. The doctor operates the rebel; the stranger appears to be the mythical Servant from Dobromyl, well-known among the locals. He tells the story of his life to the doctor: descended from a witch and an undead vampire, he is a *dhampir*, a creature possessing strange and magical powers. For 800 years he serves and protects the Dobromyl land and its people.

The action in both *Pysar Skhidnyh Vorit Prytulku* and *Pysar Zakhidnyh Vorit Prytulku* take place in a special place named the Shelter. No map charts it, yet all who really yearn to get here find it easily. There’s no today, yesterday or tomorrow here, and the Shelter itself is both a building and a country, and at the same time it is no more than a road between the East Gates, through which newcomers enter the Shelter, and the West Gates, through which they go back to the real world. The journey hurts both physically and spiritually, and no person comes here for happiness — for the Shelter cannot give but oblivion.

Another brilliant mystical novel is **Vasyl’ Slapchuk’s** *Slipiy dosch* (*The Sunshower*). The story in three parts is told from the first person, one of the characters being a werewolf — which definitely adds suspense and thrill. The unfortunate man changes shape, craves for hunt and the taste of hot blood on his fangs, then becomes a human again — and the author’s talent in storytelling makes his suffering feel disturbingly *familiar*. The novel also gives piercing freshness to a traditional Ukrainian

Valeriy Shevchuk



He is a writer, author of a number of studies in literature and journalism, and translator. He worked as associate professor in the University of Kyiv and presented social and historical programmes on Ukrainian radio. Valeriy Shevchuk was born in Zhytomyr and currently lives in Kyiv. He graduated from a builder college, studied history and philosophy in the University of Kyiv, and had jobs as builder, concrete plant worker, newspaper editor, and a Kyiv-Pecherska Lavra museum employee. He has written more than 90 books. Three major branches of his work are historical adventure fiction, contemporary prose and literary studies. Shevchuk’s writing grips you from the very first pages because of his unique style and profound historical studies. The writer, though, believes that his works have no magic in them, only love for the world and desire to understand it. Valeriy Shevchuk won a lot of national and international awards, including the Taras Shevchenko National Award (1986), the Antonovych Foundation Prize, and a number of awards for studies in the field of humanities. Shevchuk is a Knight of the Order of Prince Yaroslav the Wise.

theme of a girl disgraced, bearing a child and being exiled from the aggressive patriarchal community. The tale of a fabulous search for destiny with all the mystical happenings and rites looks completely real when told by an author like Slapchuk.

Ljubko Deresh's *Kult (The Cult)* anything but lacks mysticism. The plot is much more intricate, but solving puzzles has always been appealing, especially when the answer is not an easy one. The principal hero's trans-personal trips through his inner fantasy worlds are intertwined with the story of a young teacher's love to one of his students. The author claims that love — and this particular love — can save the world (and the novel deals with a possible end of the world!). It's difficult to decide why exactly the novel has been so successful, but it definitely has become iconic for younger readers. Such popularity may be partially explained by the fact that Deresh wrote this novel when he was only 16 years old, thus closely familiar with his teenage fans' tastes.

Another "hope of contemporary fiction" is **Maria Rjapolova** (born 1987), who in 2008 won the *Star Fortress* literary contest, and has published many short stories in different magazines. In 2009 her debut novel *Buretsvit (The Stormflower)* is to come out in print. The author's easy style and imaginative, fresh designs for stories will certainly make her popular among sci-fi and fantasy fans.

Ukrainian sci-fi, fantasy, mystical and horror fiction is growing more and more popular thanks to the Web and literary magazines, with publishing houses starting new series of books. No wonder, as people have always been craving for being surprised, amazed and enthralled by the unknown. The desire to lose oneself in a world so different from this one knows no age, professional or educational boundaries.

This kind of literature lover can be male or female, teenage or senior, professors or loaders, bankers or assassins, deputies or thieves, clerks or street-walkers... So, going book-hunting, do not go past the books I've mentioned to you above!

Crime: Means and Purpose

by Viktor Khyzhnyak



Detective or crime fiction can be compared to comfortable clothes. Fashion changes, regardless of the actual trend people generally give preference to comfort, with only minor details of style really changing. The same is true for the genre of crime fiction: it is ever up-to-date as a means of both entertaining readers and expressing certain concepts. It is only minor features of style that change with time.

All in all, detective prose always provides good examples of simulating critical situations and searching for ways for solving it. This is why a quality piece of crime or detective fiction can actually substitute a visit to a shrink.

Crime as a means

Understanding this, Ukrainian authors often use the tools of detective genre as the most effective means of sharing with their reader things much more serious than simply solving the eternal problem of Who Harmed Whom and How and Why. Bearing the external characteristics of crime of action thrillers, their novels nevertheless belong to the High Literary Fiction.

Leonid Kononovych: aggressive patriotism

Leonid Kononovych's action thrillers have gained popularity among ardently patriotic Ukrainians since the 1990s. The principal character of the series is a Ukrainian man nicknamed Oscar. Heeled and armed with knuckles, he punishes criminals, who offend not merely citizens, but the state as such.

A typical criminal in Kononovych's *Ya, zombi (I, Zombie)*, *Dovha nich nad Sunzheyu (A Long Night over the Sunzha River)*, *Mertva hramota (Dead Chart)*, *Detektyv dlya osoblyvykh doruchen (Detective for Special Missions)*, *Kaidany dlya oliharkha (Shackles for a Tycoon)* and *Feministka (The Feminist)* is a former Communist or Komsomol functionary that was a KGB informer before or still is an agent of the Russian FSB. Oscar's private investigation style and methods of punishing criminals much resemble those of Mike Hammer, a fictional detective character from 50s' classical crime stories by Mickey Spillane.

Kononovych shares his character's radical patriotism, using ironic crime fiction as a means of expressing his position. The fact that the author himself used to work as a private detective undoubtedly adds spice to his novels.

Vasyl' Shkljar

He is a writer and journalist. Vasyl' Shkljar was born in Cherkaschyna and currently lives in Kyiv. He held the position of editor-in-chief in a publishing house; as a journalist he worked in Chechnya, Abkhazia, and Karabakh during military conflicts. Shkljar speaks Armenian, loves "fish-hunting" and chocolate, believes in republicanism and is a person of "Nordic temper", though a bit sentimental. In 1998, Skljar found himself in hospital with a terminal diagnosis, but survived and within a month wrote his most famous novel *Klyuch (The Key)*. The book has been reprinted 8 times and won a number of awards. Skljar has written a dozen prose books, the most popular being *Klyuch* (1999), *Elemental* (2001), and *Krov kazhana (Bat's Blood)*, 2003). Shkljar is one of the most influential and "mystical" modern authors, his every book becoming a bestseller. His works have been translated into Swedish, Bulgarian, Armenian, and Russian. Vasyl' Shkljar has won many literary awards, including the Gold Babai Grand Prix, the *Suchasnist* magazine prize, the *Oligarkh* magazine prize, the Spiral of Centuries Sci-Fi and Fantasy Convention award, and short-list of the Taras Shevchenko National Award for *Klyuch*; the Coronation of the Word Grand Prix for *Elemental*.



Vasyl' Shkljar: psychology, style, eroticism

Vasyl' Shkljar is another author for whom the crime fiction genre is merely an instrument, while the aim lies beyond it. Thus, in his novel *Elemental* French Foreign Legion's elite unit soldier Henry Duchan receives a dangerous secret task — to convey a Chechen politician's daughter to France, while the Russian special services are after her (Kononovych's *A Long Night over the Sunzha River* is set against the same backdrop). Shkljar adds adversities of love to those of war, the former being sometimes more extreme than the latter. As to the finale of the novels, it is very dramatic and quite unexpected.

Krov kazhana (Bat's Blood) is another novel by Shkljar. The three pillars this thrilling book leans on are original detective plot, eroticism and a good deal of mysticism.

But undoubtedly the most iconic and influential in terms of contemporary Ukrainian literature is Shkljar's novel *Klyuch (The Key)*, reprinted in Ukraine eight times within 10 years. The story begins with a man giving a homeless journalist the key to a spare flat in the centre of Kyiv. The owner of the flat mysteriously vanished. The journalist starts to investigate the case, finds out who the benevolent stranger is, and learns about a group of sexual deviants who killed the owner. Attentive reading reveals stylistic and psychological depth of the novel, in a certain sense even more important than its dynamic detective plot, though not at all violating or overshadowing it.

Kurkov, Rozdobud'ko, Kononenko: serious experiments in a light genre

Writing in Russian and being the most widely known Ukrainian author in Europe, **Andrey Kurkov** experiments in various genres. His books range from alternative history and fantasy to social satire. His novels *Piknik na Idu* (known as *Penguin Lost* in the English version) and *Mily drug, priyatel pokoinika (A Matter of Death and Life* in the English version) have some elements of crime fiction in them, but the only pure case of detective fiction by Kurkov is his *Igra v otrezanny palets (The Case of the General's Thumb* in the English version), intentionally designed by the author as an espionage thriller. The two main characters of the book, a young Kyiv policeman and a Ukrainian special service agent, are searching for the gold of the Communist party.

Iren Rozdobud'ko is more popular among Ukrainian readers for her romantic and surrealist novels, similar to so-called 'harlequin novels', but the Ukrainian media would carry on calling her Lady Detective. This nickname is due to her earlier detective books *Mertsy (The Dead)*, also known as *Pastka dlya Zhar-ptytsi (A Trap for the Firebird)*, *Eskort u smert (Escort into*

Death) and *Ostanny diamant miledi (Milady's Last Diamond)*. The latter I would surely be marked as a stand-out novel, as it is not only a very bold experiment (as the plot openly alludes to Dumas' *Tree Musketeers*, and even the characters' names remind those of Dumas' heroes), but also the purest example of crime fiction among Rozdobud'ko's works.

Rozdobud'ko's psychological thriller *Pastka dlya Zhar-ptytsi* invites the reader to take a closer look at the life of flawless, almost goddess-like businesswomen — or, rather, precious dolls scheming one against another and falling into their own traps against luxurious decorations. In *Eskort u smert*, a series of murders is committed in the city. All the victims are young men employed by the *Eskort-service* agency. Their job was to accompany rich ladies for parties, theatrical shows and other events...

A writer and translator, **Yevgenija Kononenko** is currently considered one of the most influential feminist authors in contemporary Ukrainian literature. But readers won't find feminist ideas mentioned in Kononenko's novel *Imitatsia (The Imitation)*, written in the genre of psychological detective fiction. Investigation of the circumstances of a famous public woman's death under the wheels of a suburban train perfectly fits the mould of a detective story, but factually in the process the victim's psychological profile is built — and thus a rather unappealing a picture of Ukrainian intelligentsia and its way of life is revealed. *Imitatsia* is not really about finding out *who* the murderer is — the author rather unmasks a certain social stratum's views and practices. These views and practices, and not the actions of this or that person, are shown to finally result in the death of a successful though cynical young woman.

After Kononenko's *Zrada (Betrayal)* was published, critics compared her with Françoise Sagan, Iris Murdoch and... Umberto Eco. The novel follows the path started by *Imitatsia*. In this thriller a young woman dies under mysterious circumstances, and her friend begins her own private investigation of the case. The novel's complicated fable deals with the global notion of betrayal — one committed against marital fidelity, parents or the state.

Yevgenija Kononenko's *Nostalgia* is a three-in-one — a detective story with an unexpected ending combined with 'topographic' novel, telling the tale of an old city, and a nostalgic love story. The subject of the book is the investigation of two mysterious murders, committed many years before the time in which the action is set.

Crime as a purpose

Popular fiction with no claims of being anything more than easy reading designed to cure one's boredom is also present

Maryna Sokolyan



She is a writer and scriptwriter. Maryna was born in Poltava and graduated the faculty of sociology of Kyiv-Mohyla academy. Currently she works in a PR-agency in Kyiv.

Maryna Sokolyan believes that one should write only if one feels that "everything is different" and his or her ideas can fill a certain gap. She loves traveling all around the world and strives for spiritual fulfillment. Sokolyan has written the novels *Novendialiyi* (2008), *Chuzhi u domi (Strangers in the House)*, (2006), and *Balada dlya Kryvoyi Varhy (Ballad for Lame Varha)*, (2005), novellas *Cherem* (2007), *Kodlo (The Mob)*, (2003) and *Kovdra snovydy (Sleepwalker's Blanket)*, (2005); theatre plays *Dushohoby i dukh kapitalizmu (Hitmen and the Spirit of Capitalism)*, (2005) and *Dialohy bohiv (Dialogues of Gods)*, (2003); and numerous short stories and articles.

She won the Coronation of the Word Award (twice), the Portal International Assembly of Science Fiction and Fantasy *Self-Opening* Special Award, and the incentive ESFS prize of Eurocon 2008.

in contemporary Ukrainian literature. A fair share of authors strives solely to entertain their reader. However, even “slick fiction” often shows a capacity to reveal, softly, Ukraine’s social problems of today.

Andriy Kokotjukha: cure for boredom plus recipes of survival

Among the practitioners of the orthodox detective genre, Andriy Kokotjukha is definitely worth mentioning. His first published criminal novella *Shlyubni ihryscha zhab* (*Mating Games of Frogs*) received a stark negative reaction from those who consider themselves “serious literature” lovers. But even seasoned critics admitted that the story of seven petty criminals stealing a million from real bandits, but unable to divide the money among themselves and constantly haunted by the bandits and police was a perfect specimen of the genre, back then new to Ukrainian literature.

Since then Kokotjukha, who writes both in Ukrainian and Russian, has written a number of novels each precisely following rules of this or that genre. Thus, *Povze zmiya* (*The Snake is Crawling*) is a “noir” thriller, *Shukachi skarbiv* (*Treasure Hunters*) is an adventure novel, *Temna voda* (*Dark Water*) and *Lehenda pro Bezgolovoho* (*The Legend of the Headless*) are Gothic mystery novels, *Udar Skorpionia* (*Scorpio’s Strike*) is an action thriller, and so on. Critics accuse Kokotjukha of stylistic unproficiency, “telegraphic” manner of writing and his characters’ being sketchy and lacking psychological depth. But these — often quite reasonable — remarks are balanced and overbalanced by dynamic action, true-to-life depiction of Ukrainian reality today and a strict following of the genre’s mould until the end, which is always unexpected and astonishing. Psychological depth and stylistic perfection seem odd in this cocktail.

Kokotjukha’s characters are common persons put into uncommon conditions. The author’s technique of simulating emergency situations makes it easy for readers to imagine themselves in the character’s shoes and look for ways out with him, thus learning to survive.

In addition to this, Andriy Kokotjukha carefully designs moods and themes in his novels, and creates anxiety and suspense suddenly bursting with fast-paced action. This is especially true for *Temna voda*, in which the main character has to solve the mystery of an old lake where a mythical monster is said to dwell and wake up once every 100 years, craving for human flesh.

The visual abundance, dynamic action and original designs of Andriy Kokotjukha’s and Iren Rozdobudko’s novels make

them perfect for translating to film. Some of their books have already been adapted for the big screen.

Alla Sjerova: everyone has something to hate distractedly

Debts of the past being called up is the favourite topic of this author from Zaporizhzhya, the winner of the Coronation of the Word all-Ukrainian Contest of Fiction and Scripts Grand Prix (2000), who writes psychological crime fiction. Her characters are always female, as Alla Sjerova believes that women are much more complicated and thus more interesting than men. *Pravyla hry* (*Rules of the Game*), *Podviyne dno* (*False Bottom*), *Duh dzhunhliv* (*The Spirit of the Jungle*) and *Zabraty tyhrenya* (*Taking Away the Tiger Cub*) are modern crime novels with all the necessary features of the genre, where a beautiful woman, armed with a killing sense of humour and recklessness, professionally gets into trouble just to get out of it triumphantly (though without even the smallest awareness of how it *should* be done). Sjerova’s heroines (Red Cross doctor Tori Velychko; Eliza Klymkovska, brought up in an orphanage; Dana Yarosh, a young widow with two children) face emergencies only to successfully cope with everything, including their own complexes and traumas, and then meet a new trouble. However, the plots are not limited to this fable, serving as a mere opening. Intricate and rarely predictable action is set against the disturbingly realistic background of a Ukrainian provincial town, the Peruvian selva or that of grown-up “wolf” children’s existence, when all of a sudden they have to solve riddles dating back to their orphanage childhood.

Oleksiy Volkov: small town’s tales

One more interesting character is Oleksiy Volkov. If we consider crime fiction a kind of city legend or a fairy-tale for grown-ups, then Volkov is a brilliant storyteller. Originally a surgeon, Volkov in due time wrote *Vykonavets* (*The Executor*), a novel that has been reprinted several times and that I believe to be his best novel. The protagonist in *Vykonavets*, as well as in several following books by Volkov, is a doctor from a small provincial town, whose hobby is hunting. Once he faces something he thinks to be a ghost from the past; trying to find out the truth behind the apparition, he suddenly learns that his father was killed — and after all the years since his death finds out who the murderer is.

A motif peculiar of Volkov’s fiction is that of a trap and searching for ways out of it. In *Vykonavets*, there’s the dark basement of the abandoned house in the Siberian taiga; Dniepro’s plavni in *Podorozh u bezvykhid* (*A Trip to Despair*);

Oles Ulyanenko

He is a poet, writer and script writer. Oles Ulyanenko was born in Khorokhol, Poltavshchyna, and currently lives in Kyiv. He graduated from a nautical college and served in Afghanistan, later he led a rock group.

Ulyanenko is said to be a literature anarchist, unprecedented and undisciplined in terms of Ukrainian fiction. The inferno of living and psychology of dying are the objects of his literary study. Ulyanenko has written a number of novels, the most popular being *Stalinka* (1994), *Zymova povist* (*A Winter Tale*, 1994), *Vohenne Oke* (*Fiery Eye*, 1997), *Bohenma rapsodia* (*A Bohemian Rhapsody*, 2000), *Syn tini* (*Son of Shadow*, 2001), *Znak Savaofa* (*Sign of Sabaoth*, 2001), *Dofin satany* (*Satan’s Heir*, 2003) and *Serafima* (2007). Ulyanenko’s books have been translated into English (short-story *The Order* in *Two Lands*, *New Visions compilation*, 1998), Armenian (short-story *Antisemite* in the *Gerun* magazine, 1999), and German (abstracts from *Bahryane oko* in the *Ein Rosenbrunnen* magazine, 1998). Ulyanenko won the *Suchasnist* magazine prize, the *Blahovist* magazine prize, and the Lesser Taras Shevchenko National Award (1997) for *Stalinka*.



and a warren of caves in *Den vidbutya* (*The Departure Day*). Critics consider *Amnistia dlya khakera* (*Amnesty for the Hacker*) to be the most mature work by Volkov. Here the author puts off his favourite design of a man nailed in a trap and tries his hand at an action thriller set in a Ukrainian provincial town. A deathly ill man decides to square up with his old enemy. Starting a dangerous game, he becomes enmeshed in the war between local mafia bosses and policemen from the homicide. *Amnistia* is supposed to be adapted for film soon.

Lapikurs and Shevchenkos: retro and mystics

Valery Lapikur and Natalya Lapikur's writing makes a good example of "retro" detective fiction, now fashionable in Russia. Eight detective stories incorporated into the *Inspector i kava* (*Inspector and His Coffee*) series are supposed to be based on real events. The authors claim that something very similar to what is told in *Pokiyynyk po-flotsky* (*Deadman a la Navy*), *Poyizd scho znyk* (*A Vanished Train*) and *Kava po-dyyavolsky* (*Devil's Coffee*) really took place in Kyiv in the 1970s. These happenings came to Lapikurs' knowledge from their friend the detective, who became the protagonist of the series. Apart from being really absorbing, their books also truthfully depict the atmosphere in Kyiv of the years of the so-called Stagnation in the USSR during the 1970's and 1980's. When investigating crimes, in many cases the Kyiv detective finds the trail leading "up" — to the Communist Party "nomenclature" or the almighty KGB. *Inspector i kava* has recently been loosely adapted as a TV series.

One more author couple, **Natalya and Oleksandr Shevchenko**, were at first writing "solo" sob stories (Natalya Ochkur-Shevchenko) and horror novels (Oleksandr Shenchenko). Their debut joint venture was the horror melodrama *Brantsi moroku* (*Captives of the Gloom*), much influenced by Stephen King's books and especially his *The Shining*. In the novel a couple bargains for an old house that appears to be not a quiet and peaceful place, but a mansion of terrible ghosts. The Shevchenkos have continued with pastiches, and their crime novel *Kryvava osin u misti Leva* (*Bloody Autumn in the City of Lion*) has become quite popular among readers. A macabre maniac is torturing women who once got rid of their unborn babies. The book is visually charged, and its plot is dynamic and intricate.

An incomplete anthology of Ukrainian crime and detective fiction

If I was charged to compose a collection of Ukrainian crime and detective prose from 1991 up to the present day, I would definitely include two thrillers by **Stanislav Stetshenko**: *Chorna akula v chervoniy vodi* (*A Black Shark in Red Water*) and *Metelyky u sklepi* (*Butterflies in a Crypt*) as a bonus.

Worth mentioning also is **Dana Didkovska's** *Obitsyau ne vbyvaty* (*I Promise Not to Kill*) — a highly original tale of an unemployed girl who tries her hand at private investigations and all of a sudden tracks down a maniac, who then appears to be her neighbour. I would also gladly include **Oleksandr Medvedev's** crime action novel *Criminalny romans* (*A Criminal Romance*), in which a police field officer charged of transgressions and his old acquaintance, a criminal, have to flee and hide, and seek for evidence to prove they are not guilty of a murder.

I would also pay attention to **Oleksandr Vynokurov's** *Pid odnym dakhom zi smertyu* (*Beneath the Same Roof with Death*), in which a serial killer is captured with the use of theatrical masks, and the only novel by **Ivan Avramov** entitled *Hru pochynaye pokiyynyk* (*The Deadman Opens the Game*). In action thriller, the main character divides his time between studying the menus of finest Kyiv diners and delving into sexual antics, at odd moments not only detecting his uncle's murderers but also unmasking criminals running an illegal brothel where underage girls have to please influential politicians.

At the same time, as I have already mention above, Ukrainian "boredom-curers" anything but avoid pointing at and diving into the most urgent social issues. Detective and crime fiction authors' novels feature excessive cruelty on TV (Kokotjukha's *Povze zmiya*), corruption of minors (Didkovska's *Obitsyau ne vbyvaty*), destructive sects (Natalya and Oleksandr Shevchenko's *Oksamytovy pereverten/Velvet Werewolf*), medical malpractices (Volkov's *Amnistiya dlya khakera*), and the smuggling abroad of cultural values (Abramov's *Hru pochynaye pokiyynyk*).

Thus, the prospects of Ukrainian detective action fiction, including various subgenres (action, noir, horror, melodrama, political, historical, and retro crime fiction), are quite promising. Not to mention the fact that movie-makers pay increasing attention to influential detective and crime fiction authors; when a film version of a book is released, it definitely adds to the author's popularity.

Lesya Voronyna

Lesya Voronyna writes for children. She is a translator, publicist, author and presenter of several cultural programs on the Ukrainian National Radio; for many years she worked as chief editor in *Sonyashnyk* children's magazine.



Voronyna was born and lives in Kyiv. In her childhood, mastered some karate tricks as well as the Esperanto language, and hitchhiked a lot as a young person. Her first comical and fancy stories came into existence as tales told to other children in her early years. Her first fairy-tales were written for her son Yevhen. Lesya Voronyna's works include ironical detective stories for children from the *Superagent000* series: *U paschi krokodyla* (*In the Crocodile's Jaws*), *Pastka u pidzemeli* (*The Dungeon Trap*), *Tayemnytsya pidvodnoho mista* (*The Secret of the Underwater City*), *V zaliznykh netryakh* (*In Thicket of Iron*) and *Tayemnytsya zolotoho kenhuru* (*The Secret of the Gold Kangaroo*); novellas *Pryhody holuboho papuhy* (*Adventures of the Blue Parrot*), *Hlyus ta inshi* (*Hlyus and the Others*), and *Tayemnytsya Chornoho ozera* (*The Secret of the Black Lake*); books for children *Tayemnytsya purpurovoyi planety* (*The Secret if the Purple Planet*) and *Tayemne tovarystvo boyahuziv* (*The Secret Coward Society*). She also has written scripts for over 100 graphic novels. In Voronyna's stories the Good always prevails – as such is the author's firm principle. Lesya Voronyna won the Ukrainian Book of the Year Award (2004), the Coronation of the Word all-Ukrainian Contest of Fiction and Scripts Award (2005) and the Children's Portal International Contest Award (2006). Her book *Nyamyk i balakucha kvitka* (*Nyamyk and the Talking Flower*) were short-listed for the BBC Book of the Year Award (2008).

If I were a Child

by Bohdan Lohvynenko



If I were a child, a tiny child born in Ukraine, I would have loads of advantages. Imagine, I begin to talk, and then to walk. And this is where my first books are waiting for me, them being **Ivan Andrusyak's** *Kotyky ta kytsi (Cats and Kitties)* and *Zviryacha abetka (Animals' ABC)*, and **Ivan Malkovych's** *ABC*-book. But a person can't live on abecedaries, can one?

The child — meaning me — is growing, and books aren't the stuff to nibble and rumble anymore, but things to look at and through, and to experiment with reading words from them. At first I do not really read, but rather recall from my Mom's and Dad's bedtime stories — as they read to me **Ivan Malkovych's** *Velyke misto, malenky zaichyk, abo Med dlya mamy (Big City Little Rabbit, or Some Honey for Mom)*, and **Yaroslav Pavlyuk's** *Budynochok v yakomu nikhto ne spyt (The House Where Noone Is Sleeping)*, and in Christmas time **Malkovych's** *Zoloty pavuchok (Golden Spider)*. In our small Ukrainian town lived Dad, Mom and their three little kids — Tarasyk, Nastusya and Ilchyk; when Christmas came, they would rent a cart and a horse with golden mane and go to the forest, and once such an amazing thing happened to them... that someone would have to read the whole story to me again, or else I won't sleep.

Oh, and now there's kindergarten, the thing they call the Infant School, though I am not an infant already, and I don't want to sleep during the after-lunch rest but would rather throw a pillow at my friend Halya. Halya has such great books (if she didn't, I wouldn't throw things at her), and when she gets tired of having me beating her with my pillow, she'll read to me a bit. Yesterday she read **Marjana Savka**. I've got no idea who this Marjana Savka is, save that she must be living in a zoo — as she knows such a lot of stories about animals! Yesterday Halya read me some rhymes about a cow. The title of that book was *Korova kolyorova (Multicolored Cow)* because it was a colouring book. I would have taken the book away from Halya, but she had already coloured everything herself. And so I asked Mom to buy me some Marjana Savka of my own.

And today Mom has brought me a book called *Chy ye v babuiyna babusya? (Has a Baboon Got a Granny?)*. I have never heard of baboons having grannies and granddads, but now I know they do! And that was a book by **Marjana Slavka** too, and it took me two days to paint all the pictures, and Mom promised to buy some more. And she did! It was again a book about animals, though I didn't understand about whom exactly. The title was *Chudove chudovysko (Marvelous Monster)* by **Sashko Dermanskiy**, and that was when I read about a girl named Sonya who met a monster named Chu, and that was the beginning of a love story.

And then it's time to go to school. At school you are made to learn poems by heart, and I don't like them, and Mom says that I can learn one poem from those that the teacher tells me to, and one by my own choice. That's how I learned *Skoromovka ne dlya vovka (A Tongue-twister Not for Wolves)* by **Grytsko Chubay**, and got tangled at the lesson and recited this one instead of the poem set by the teacher. It was such fun! The teacher grew angry and told me off, but the class loved the tongue-twister a lot, though they all had to recite another poem and I became a hero of the day.

As a first-year pupil I began to write some tales myself. I'm not kidding! Once they say there was a TV programme in which wonderful Granddad Panas used to tell bedtime stories for kids. The program is no more, but Granddad Panas' tales are still here (though no one ever tried publishing them). Nevertheless, I was writing tales, and Mom would read them and laugh. Funny stories they were, the ones that I wrote — sometimes even I laughed until I cried in the process. And one day Mom bought an extremely interesting book written by **Bohdan Zholdak**. In fact he writes for adults, but that was something incredible — a book called *Kazkaryk, abo Kazkovy konstruktor (Storyteller, or How to Make a Story)*. I started to read, and my writing went much faster. I wrote tales one after another, and Mom simply couldn't manage to read them all, so I read my stories to her when she was back home from work, before she went to bed. But once I decided to publish them, Mom said there was a crunch. A credit crisis or something like that. It meant they couldn't print my tales, but I went on writing them nevertheless.

Yury Vynnychuk

Yury Vynnychuk is an author of poetry and prose, stage director, journalist, and brawler. His underground pseudonym is "Suitcase". He lives and works in Lviv. Vynnychuk's list of jobs includes those of loader, layout artist, stage director of the Lviv music-hall and editor of the mystery and sensation department in *Post-Postup* magazine. Some of his major works are: novellas *Divy nochi (Maidens of the Night, 2001)*, *Laskavo prosymo to Schurohradu (Welcome to Rattown, 1992)*, and *Hee-hee-ee (1992)*, the novel *Malva Landa (2000)*, poetry, short stories, and essays; books about Lviv *Legends of Lviv* (reprinted 6 times), *Knaipas of Lviv (2000)*, and *Secrets of Lviv Coffee (2001)*; and a phytological encyclopaedia *Book of Bestiae (2003)*. Vynnychuk is one of the pioneers of erotic fiction in modern Ukrainian literature. He's a multi-genre author, his works ranging from kitsch (*Divy nochi*) to philosophical stories and postmodernist pseudo-parodies (*Arkanumski istoriyi*). Possessing a "phantasmagorical" mindset, he never writes about anything realistic, with the only exception of writing about himself.

Vynnychuk's works have been translated and published in Great Britain, Argentina, Belarus, Canada, Germany, Poland, Serbia, the USA, France, Croatia, and Czech Republic. Two of Vynnychuk's fairy-tales have been adapted as plays, and *Divy nochi* loosely adapted into film.



When Mom grew completely tired of my tales and they didn't make her laugh anymore, and I was running short of ideas, she began bringing me books from the *Zhytya vidomykh ditey* (*Famous Children*) series. In the series, adult authors write about famous people as children — what meals they used to love and what games, how they used to dance, or sing, or paint and how they won the day. There are stories of Johnny Depp and Hans Christian Andersen, of Louis Bousсенard and Archimedes, of Taras Shevchenko and Hryhory Skovoroda.

And practically all 'adult' authors who have told stories of famous children have also written tales for younger readers. The one I really loved was **Iren Rozdobud'ko's** *Koly ozhyvaut lyalky* (*When Dolls Are Coming to Life*) — about spirits that dwell in cups and dishes, gnomes making the seasons change and placing the stars in the sky and, well, dolls becoming alive. They also say that **Svitlana Povaljajeva's** tales are very different from those by **Larysa Denysenko** or **Ljubko Deresh**. I know nothing about that. Mom reads Povalyayeva, but won't give her books to me as she says I'm too young to read them. Well, I don't really want to — the covers are creepy, and besides there's nothing about Lyalechka.

Do you know who Lyalechka is? It's from a story of friendship between a boy nicknamed Lyalechka and fox that was a painter. The book is entitled *Lyalechka and Matsko* and written by **Halyna Pahutyak**. Mom says that she must be a woman of great beauty and talent. One of the most famous Ukrainian rock ballads *Vona* (*She*) was dedicated to Halyna.

After having read *The Ship Bird* and more of such stuff, I told Mom I wanted some detective stories. So she brought me some Odd Detective. Dunno why it's *Odd*, but such is the series name. The best one to my liking was **Oles Ilchenko's** *Komanda-14. Pastka dlya heymera* (*Team-14. A Trap for a Gamer*). I'm increasingly using the Internet, so need to know more about strangers from the digital world. Sometimes you feel so tempted to steal what doesn't belong to you, to leave all your friends and join some secret Order... but everything has its cost, and sometimes, as I know now, the cost is too dear.

Havrylo Gava, Nina Voron, Olena Verbna — all these named are pseudonyms of one and the same person — **Lesya Voronyna**. She has written loads of ironic detective stories for children in the *Superagent 000* series: *U paschi krokodyla* (*In the Crocodile's Jaws*), *Pastka u pidzemeli* (*The Dungeon Trap*), *Tayemnytsya pidvodnoho mista* (*The Secret of the Underwater City*), *Vzaliznykh netryakh* (*In a Thicket of Iron*) and *Tayemnytsya zolotoho kenhuru* (*The Secret of the Golden Kangaroo*); and adventure books *Pryhody holuboho papuhy* (*Adventures of the Blue Parrot*), *Hluy ta inshi* (*Hlyus and the Others*), and *Tayemnytsya Chornoho ozera* (*The Secret of the Black Lake*). Ms

Lesya's various exploration and detective stories have a lot to do with her hobby, which is writing scripts for comics in the *Sonyashnyk* magazine. Mom said that recently two more books by Ms Lesya have been published, *Prybulets z krayiny Nyamlykiv* (*Stranger from the Land of Nyamlyks*) and *Nyamlyk i balakucha kvitka* (*Nyamlyk and the Talkative Flower*). I was so curious about nyamlyks and their country that eventually Mom had to buy both books. Nyamlyks turned out to be a race of tiny funny creatures who live *inside* house walls and above all things adore cooked semolina. Mom said there even had been a play about nyamlyks staged in one school theatre.

Once I told Mom that I liked *Pippi Longstocking*, and the next day she brought me a book that was a lot like *Pippi*. The author, **Dmytro Keshelya**, lives in Carpathian Ruthenia, and the book's title is *Marmalada*. This is a story of a village, where the boy Mytryk, a goat Tankistka, the teacher Fyisa and Granny with Granddad live. The village is small, but there are so many things happening there! I was laughing like crazy.

Later **Sashko Dermanskiy**, a children's detective prose author, became my favorite writer. He wrote *Korol bukiv, abo Tayemnytsya Smarahdovoyi knyhy* (*The Beech King or Secret of the Emerald Book*) and *Volodar Makutsy abo Pryhody Vuzha Onyska* (*The Lord of Makutsa or Adventures of Onysko the Adder*), telling of awful things happening in the world and big mysteries of mankind solved by detective work. After I read *Babusya oholoshuye viynu* (*Granny Declares War*) by **Dermanskiy**, I know that grannies can be not so nice too, no matter if they are baboon or human grannies.

Well, now the child — me — grew to be not a child at all, but a teenager (what a silly word). Mom said that I was old enough to read some "fantasy for younger readers" and offered me **Serhiy Oksenyk's** *Lisom, nebom, vodoyu. Lysyi. Knyha 1* (*Through Woodland, Sky and Sea. Bald. Book 1*) and *Lisom, nebom, vodoyu. Lelya. Knyha 2* (*Through Woodland, Sky and Sea. Lelya. Book 2*). There's a curious story behind this book. Once Serhiy Oksenyk (his real name is Serhiy Ivanyuk, he is professor in the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy) found an abandoned time-machine with a scroll inside, which he then deciphered. The scroll must have been a huge one, as Oksenyk has already deciphered enough to amount to about 500 pages for two books, and who knows how much more text he may decipher or discover...

Oksenyk's books are easy reading. The story is set in a distant future. After an ecological disaster, humanity is almost extinct, civilization did bite the dust although some people still live only in remote villages surrounded with now huge forests. I can't say what kind of disaster that was, but all the characters — children — are a sort of mutants. Bald can physically feel a danger approaching, Lelya cries with life-giving

Tetjana Vynokurova-Sadychenko



Tetjana Vynokurova-Sadychenko was born and lives in Kyiv. She is a journalist, essayist and writer, and edits an Internet site dedicated to modern culture. When writing, she always listens to music (presumably rock, punk, and metal). Favorite strong drinks are red wines; the *only* preferred soft drink is coffee. At leisure Vynokurova-Sadychenko talks to pet ghosts and educates her dog Dora. Critics spoke of her debut novels *Zhart. Iz zhytya psyhiv* (*A Joke. From the Life of Loonies*, 2006) and *Zhart druhyi. Kvit paporoti* (*The Joke Number Two. Fern-Blossom*, 2007) as of "quality adventure fiction, a good mix of myths and legends seasoned with subtle humour". In 2008 two more of Vynokurova-Sadychenko's novels were published, *MY (WE)* and *Ilyuzia* (*The Illusion*), in which the plot is based on her friends' real-life stories. Currently her fifth novel being prepared for printing, while the author is writing its sequel. *Zhart druhyi. Kvit paporoti* won her second place in the open Internet-rating *Best Ukrainian book 2007* and was short-listed for the Award of the International Assembly of Science Fiction and Fantasy "Portal – 2008", and was nominated for the BBC Book of the Year Award (2008). In 2008 Tetjana won the Grand Award of the President of Ukraine for gifted youth. In 2007 both Tetjana's debut novels were issued as audio books by *CDcom Ukraine*, which bought the license.

water and Marichka is able to understand the tongue of any human, beast or bird, and even Baba Yaha's mortar. The story begins with Bald setting out from his village to find the Ruin (a place much reminiscent of Kyiv) where he hopes to get a powder that makes water potable. He encounters immense worms living underground, werewolves, Baba Yaha the witch, Lishak the forest monster, and other adventures follow. Arriving at the Ruin, Bald meets immortal Engineer and learns that no powder is needed and simply digging a well is the solution. In the second book, trouble is brewing in the village and someone is scheming against the children. They have to hide from Chata the watcher, worms and otters and, most dangerous of all, humans. In the end the village battles against werewolves and wins by the intelligence and wits of the children. Everyone is happy, though Lelya has to shed many tears to revive those who have been slain.

Fantasy appeared to be pretty cool, so I start seeking by the such books. And bought *Mech koroliv (Sword of Kings)* by **Serhiy Baturyn**, the first book in the *Lehendy inshoyi Tery (Legends of another Terra)* series. *Sword of Kings* leaves you

looking forward to the continuation of the story, as there is war, love and farewell, and mysterious ships suddenly emerging from the depth of the sea, and the legend of the prahngs, people said to descent from the sky. The heir of the lord of prahngs is to become the king, but just before the ceremony the sacred Sword of Kings is stolen and taken to the rival kingdom. Adventures follow from there.

Yesterday a neighbor of mine came back from England, having spent five years there. He says no one in England ever heard of Ukrainian authors, and I feel so sorry about English children who have no opportunity to read these beautiful books. Can it be that no one there can translate them from Ukrainian?

And today I have failed the examination that Irka had with me. She's been asking me if I knew so-and-so Ukrainian authors writing children books, but I could remember but a few names. So Irka called me a barbarian and said she wouldn't talk to me until I read them all. So know I'm going to the bookstore, and when I read something new, I'll tell you. No kidding.

Kitsch 2008

by Tetyana Trofymenko



If I was asked which book was the most significant one for the year 2008, I would say straight off that it was **Tamara Hundorova's** monograph *Kitsch and Literature*. The author's reflection on and theorizing about the nature of kitsch is instrumental in characterizing some twists and turns of the year 2008 in terms of literature, to say nothing about the way in which her book helps to understand

some specificities of Ukrainian cultural life as such.

The main conflict of the year, to my mind, was the one that occurred between two types of kitsch embodied by **Mykhaylo Brynykh** and **Maria Matios**.

Maria Matios's *Moskalytsya. Mama Maritsa — druzhyna Khrystofora Kolumba (Moskalytsya. Mama Maritsa — the Wife of Christopher Columbus)* belongs to the type of kitsch that established itself in Ukrainian literature in the age of Romanticism with its fondness of folklore, demonic characters and tragic dualism of human being, and developed through Modernism to become focused on special mental conditions, eroticism, necrophilia, theatrical attitudes and weakness for everything exotic. Neither Matios nor **Lyuko Dashvar** takes their readers into a journey to some imaginary lands or describe

any fantastic events. The apparent realism of their stories is misleading, as both set their stories into realities familiar to their readers, the action happening against the backdrop of day-to-day life in a village or a town. But the flavour of realism doesn't prevent both writers from creating the thrust they strive to create — that of incredible and abnormal emotions unlikely to take place in real life. Thus readers get the possibility to put their real life aside, dipping into empathy for Matios's *Moskalytsya*, who willingly let people consider her a witch and thus leads the life of a pariah, and Mama Maritsa, who seduces her own defective son; and Lyuko Dashvar's Marusya, who ruined her own life and the lives of many other people, sacrificing them to her "tragic" and "beautiful" love.

Such fiction invites readers to realize and satisfy voyeuristic passions natural to human beings. Psychological tension and false emotions grant them affective discharge, a parody of catharsis mentioned by Theodor Adorno, who considered kitsch to be a means of inventing non-existing or false emotions and thus annullating their effect.

Neo-modernist trends can be perceived in many books printed in 2008. **Kateryna Babkina's** *Lilu pislya tebe (Lilu after You)* and **Marianna Kiyanovska's** *Stezhka vzdovzh riky (Path along the River)* are somewhere between the worlds of

Oksana Zabuzhko

Oksana Zabuzhko is a writer, Vice-President of the Ukrainian PEN, member of the IRF Board of Trustees and research associate in the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. The object of her artistic studies is women, as she claims they are more interesting than men. Critics have named Zabuzhko's novel *Polyovi doslidjenya z ukrainskoho seksu (Field Work in Ukrainian Sex, 1996)* "a bible of Ukrainian feminism". Zabuzhko's works are novels *Inoplanetyanka (Extraterrestrial Woman, 1992)*, *Polyovi doslidjenya z ukrainskoho seksu (Field Work in Ukrainian Sex, 1996)*, *Kazka pro kalynovu sopilku (The Reedpipe Tale, 2000)*, *Sestro, sestro (Oh Sister, My Sister, 2003)*, *Muzey pokynutykh sekretiv (The Museum of Abandoned Secrets, 2006)*, and a large number of works in philosophy and literature. Zabuzhko has received many awards, among them the Global Commitment Poetry Award (1997), the Rockefeller Foundation Prize (1998), Munich Culture Department prize (1999), Ledig Rowohlt Foundation prize (2001), and Graz Culture Department prize (2002). Her books have been translated and published in English, Italian, German, Swedish, Dutch, Romanian, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Czech, Polish, Russian and other languages.



real and fictional. Though it is not the depiction of foreign countries or fantastic places that makes them exotic, but the way their characters perceive the world, alienating from the reality and “marvelizing” it. Employing the notion of “sublime” as “beautiful” is the main stylistic feature of **Sofia Maidanska’s** novel *In te speravi. Spodivayusya na tebe (Rely Upon You)* and **Ivan Andrusyak’s** collection of poems *Pysaty myslite*. Both books seem to use prettycisms just a little bit too extensively. Nevertheless, both can be justly counted among pieces of “high” or intellectual literature that saw the world in 2008, as their style is sophisticated and philosophical.

Less complicated examples of the “Matios group” kitsch are novels by **Iren Rozdobud’ko**, **Larysa Denysenko**, **Natalya** and **Oleksandr Shevchenko**, **Ira Tsilyk**, **Artem Chekh** and enthusiastic **Valentyn Terletskiy**. Iren Rozdobudko’s *Vse, scho ya khotila syohodni (Everything I Wanted Today)* is a typical Hollywood-feature story of an average Ukrainian woman ground down by her husband and difficulties of her life being transformed into a free and self-confident individual who all of a sudden meets her true love. Women’s collective imagination of an “extended family” also manifests itself in sob stories, and finds its ultimate expression in Larysa Denysenko’s *Sarabanda bandy Sary (Sarabanda of Sara’s Band)*. Though it to no extent means that men, who have found fulfillment in their family life are unlikely to like the novel.

Many authors tend to emphasize on relations between their fiction and film industry. In the case of Natalya and Oleksandr Shevchenko relations of such kind are crucial in terms of aesthetics. Their novel *Kryvava osin u misti Leva (Bloody Autumn in the City of Lion)* is a vivid specimen of tabloid movies with predictable story (in full conformity to Adorno’s statements of mass culture’s homogeneity and total predictability), sketchy characters and cruel-yet-happy ending.

Though many tend to reduce contemporary Ukrainian literature to a mere apology of “having a glass of port in the gutter”, not many novels of the kind have appeared in recent years. Raving flesh, alcoholic oblivion and celebrating the power of rock music constitute the essence of Valentyn Terletskiy’s *Rock-n-roll, stakan, kokhannya (Rock’n’Roll, Drink and Love)*. I would define the novel as a classic example of kitsch; look only at phases like: “Love is a drug more addictive than life”, “We all are going to die — it’s a law. You’ll die, and you, and you too!” And with ones like “she plays fugues on your prick” or “you can feel the volcanic power of her orgasm” the author could rival Susan Elizabeth Phillips. However, novel by Terletskiy looks like memoirs, and its possible sequel likely has to be a story of hooligan and womanizer Valusha’s redemption.

I would like to emphasize the tendency. It seems aesthetics of the like of **Serhiy Zhadan’s** *Depeche Mode* is currently fading into past. **Artem Chekh’s** *Anatomichny atlas (Anatomical Handbook)*, a rather lame story of “riotous nonage”, reveals the new “young generation’s choice” — that of leaving the slacker’s

lifestyle behind. If Chekh provides only some hints of such a possibility, in Ira Tsilyk’s *Pislyavchora (The Day after Yesterday)* it takes more solid shape. The story of her heroine Kira Butsim’s way to professional success seems to be capable of becoming a new myth for modern young people, re-aesthetizing both “the American dream” and Soviet “factory ground” as a place where one can start a successful career.

All the above mentioned books are kitsch as they promote aestheticism, romance aura, nostalgia, and schmaltziness bordering on infantilism. The latter is an essential feature of modern literary discourse. Kitsch eagerly reads one of the most expressive of the modern world’s images — that of childhood — into a form of escapism (adults escape into children’s world). Ivan Andrusyak’s *Stefa i yiyi Chakalka* provides a bright example of what can be defined as children’s fiction for adults.

Not much stands against this type of literature; that is why it is already possible to regard Mykhaylo Brynykh as an iconic writer of the year 2008. His *Shakhmaty dlya dybiliv (Chess for Morons)* belongs to a different type of kitsch — that descended from 18th century Ukrainian author Ivan Kotlyarevskiy’s *Aeneid*. Brynykh drops readers from philosophical heights into disgraceful naturalism, fiddles with culture codes and symbols (including those of mass culture), mocks them and at the same time views the narrative from an eschatological angle, that of the last game of chess as the ultimate battle between God and the Devil. Similar experiments can be perceived in one more book from the year 2008 — **Andriy Zhurakivskiy’s** collection *Satelity (Satellites)*. The author easily tears his reader’s attention from uncle Romtso, who fell into the outhouse’s hole, to fantastic cyberspace or the Wonderland. One of the most scandalous aspects of *Shakhmaty* is its language, as high literature’s crusaders still view surzhik (Ukrainian-Russian, the pidgin of two languages) as a sign of bad taste. However, in *Shakhmaty* surzhik is not a means of bringing the narration closer to the reader, but rather a tool of constructing a different fictional world — a kind of “posh” surzhik, an attribute of kitsch creating a parody of “high literature”. Brynykh’s success seems to be naturally determined, *Shakhmaty* standing out from the monotonous background of pseudo-beautiful neo-Modernist literature or “white collar” fiction.

The only means of resisting this attitude seems to be healthy irony. And *Tilo i dolya (Body and Fate)*, a novel by **Taras Antypovych**, who belongs to the “Brynykh group”, confirms the statement. Freedom, responsibility, love, sin, betrayal, revenge — these and other eternal issues are solved in the book through grotesque and blatantly burlesque images, realistic in terms of form and unreal in terms of sense, employing all the components of kitsch: surzhik, irony, sarcasm, parody, blend of styles and symbols etc. Maybe this is the way a modern author should use to speak to his reader of the most important things in life, without excessive pathos, but not reducing his work to ordinary clownery.

Serhiy Zhadan



Serhiy Zhadan is a poet, writer, essayist and translator. He has organized literary festivals, rock music concerts and stage shows. Zhadan was born in Starobilsk, Luhanska region, and now works and lives in Kharkiv. He is known for speaking for legalization of prostitution and soft drugs, and feels ok about using dirty words. Zhadan has written many books of poetry and fiction books, including *Big Mac* (2003), *Depeche Mode* (2004), *Anarchy in the UKR* (2005), *Hymn demokratychnoi molodi (The Hymn of Democretic Youth)*, 2007). Zhadan’s books have been translated into German, English, Polish, Serbian, Croatian, Lithuanian, Belarusian, Russian, and Armenian. Serhiy Zhadan translates from German, Belarusian, and Russian. He won the Ukrainian Book of the Year Award (2003), the BBC Book of the Year Award (2006), the *Kyivski Lavry* Poetic Festival Award (2007), and entered the finale of the Joseph Conrad Award (2007).



Nowadays world media tend to view Ukraine as a territory where political and «gas» conflicts constantly occur. But the media do not cover the real life of the country, in its best represented through contemporary culture. At the same time, modern Ukrainian culture products are absolutely competitive on general European terms.

As experience shows, it is modern culture that is instrumental in achieving mutual understanding, establishing connections and destroying negative stereotypes of Ukraine in the world. This is why the Open Ukraine foundation supports contemporary artistic drives and represents them to wider circles of the globe.

Arseniy Yatsenyuk,
Founder
of the Open Ukraine Foundation



I have a conviction that Russian and Ukrainian literatures fall under different rules. While Russian literature follows the rules of slow fading away, the world literature goes in bursts, as it constantly feels lack of fresh blood. This is why it would always find a niche for new literatures from Eastern Europe or Latin America...

The contemporary Ukrainian literature is now on the ascent and has a wonderful chance of growing into a significant European trend. After the collapse of socialism a vacuum was created in Ukrainian literature, and into this void gushed first translated literature from West and later Russian literary merchandise. It is this situation that provided a possibility for fresh and brave Ukrainian creative youth to mature and get angry; prominent characters of this generation are Irena Karpa, Ljubko Deresh, Svitlana Povaljajeva, Taras Prokhasko... And their drive is what helps authors from the older generation. A dog, to win the race, should chase some mechanic rabbit. Ukrainian writers of the older formation do not need one, as they have the literary youth to follow. And there are no young generation authors of the like in Europe...

Andrey Kurkov
author and scriptwriter, Kyiv

