"The Stone Master": On the Invisibility of Women's Writing from the Soviet Ukrainian Periphery

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Abstract: Until the last decade of the Soviet state's existence, only very few Ukrainian women writers achieved literary fame. This study sheds new light on Soviet Ukrainian political, historical, and social contexts that contributed to the invisibility of Ukrainian women's writing by examining the case of Lviv-based author Nina Bichuia (b. 1937). Bichuia's career and the publication history of her works illustrate several characteristics and paradoxes of Soviet literary politics concerning the Soviet periphery—i.e., the non-Russian republics, such as Ukraine. In particular, this article analyzes the differences in permissible literary expression between Moscow the metropole, Kyiv, the centre of the Ukrainian periphery, and Lviv, the Western Ukrainian periphery. It considers gender politics and biases in the Soviet Ukrainian literary establishment and the strictures of the Soviet "Friendship of Peoples" discourse, which had a provincializing effect on Ukrainian literary production and the tastes of the reading public. The article offers a close reading of Bichuia's last short story, "Kaminnyi hospodar" ("The Stone Master," 1990), which reflects this author's "final word" on the Soviet environment for writing literature in the Western Ukrainian periphery. By analyzing Bichuia's use of important literary intertexts and employing recent theorizations about Soviet state discourse, I demonstrate how "The Stone Master" imaginatively represents and criticizes the regime of discursive monopoly established by the Soviet system. This regime is shown to force a Ukrainian female writer into silence, which can be strategic, but cannot result in greater literary visibility.

Keywords*:* women's writing, Soviet Ukraine, Soviet periphery, "Friendship of Peoples," discursive monopoly.

"This phenomenon is difficult to explain, but in the Ukrainian Socialist Realist writing of the 1930s-70s, there were very few women authors," acknowledges Vira Aheieva toward the end of her monograph on the feminist discourse in Ukrainian modernism (315).[1] This fact is indeed puzzling, especially when one considers the flourishing, critical recognition, and subsequent canonization of women's writing in the first decades of the twentieth century, best seen in the cases of two celebrated

I express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers of *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* whose thoughtful comments on an earlier version of this article proved to be immensely helpful.

[1] Here and elsewhere translations into English are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

Volume V, No. 1 (2018) DOI: https://doi.org/10.21226/ewjus375

Ukrainian women modernists, Ol'ha Kobylians'ka (1863-1942) and Lesia Ukrainka (1871-1913).[2]

Moreover, this situation appears to be quite different from what was happening in the literature of the Soviet metropole of the same period. According to literary historian Beth Holmgren, the Soviet postwar era "is perhaps the first period in Russian literature when women signify as a major and distinctive group" (226). As proof, Holmgren cites the examples of Vera Panova (1907-73), Antonina Koptiaeva (1909-91), and Galina Nikolaeva (1911-63), all of whom received the Stalin Prize for their works in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, with Panova being thus "honoured" three times. Holmgren goes on to mention Panova's and Ol'ga Berggol'ts's later "key roles in precipitating the intermittent thaw in Soviet literature" and rounds off her evidence with a sizeable list of both dissident and the more conformist women authors, which includes Evgeniia Ginzburg, Lidiia Chukovskaia, Lidiia Ginzburg, Nadezhda Mandel'shtam, I. Grekova, Inna Varlamova, and Natal'ia Baranskaia (226). Holmgren's explanation of "this boom" focuses on socio-economic reasons, such as Soviet-sponsored "equal-opportunity education and equal-opportunity employment" as well as the opened track for "upward mobility through Party membership" for "lower-class women" (226-27). This analysis leads the scholar to conclude that "surprising as it may seem, the Stalinist system proved to be an institutional and iconic enabler of women's writing" (228).

Even though the Soviet government promoted, at least on paper, equal rights for women's education and employment across all of the republics, Holmgren's conclusion has no bearing for women writers in Soviet Ukrainian literature. There is no "distinctive group" of prominent Ukrainian women writers—especially women writers of prose—to speak of until the 1980s,[3] and none of those Ukrainian women who did write during this

[2] Besides Kobylians'ka and Lesia Ukrainka, there were many other Ukrainian women authors writing in this period. The most well-known among them were Olena Pchilka (1849-1930), Nataliia Kobryns'ka (1855-1920), Liubov Ianovs'ka (1861-1933), Hryts'ko Hryhorenko (pseudonym of Oleksandra Sudovshchykova-Kosach; 1867-1924), Ievheniia Iaroshyns'ka (1868-1904), and Liudmyla Staryts'ka-Cherniakhivs'ka (1868-1941). For brief biographies and some of their works translated into English, see Franko. For a recent analysis of the limited entrance of women's writing into the Ukrainian literary canon of high modernism, see Hnatiuk.

[3] The statistics that I have compiled based on the series *Pys'mennyky Radians'koi Ukrainy* (*The Writers of Soviet Ukraine*, 1987) are instructive in this respect. The series included 13 volumes of essays on more established Soviet Ukrainian writers working in all genres (with a stronger focus on older writers) and was published between 1955 and 1987 by the publishing house of the Union of Writers of Soviet Ukraine, "Radians'kyi pys'mennyk," with an average of three volumes per decade. Out of 127 writers covered in these volumes, there were only four women writers.

period ever received the Stalin Prize or its later version, the State Prize of the USSR.[4] The only Ukrainian female author who came close to being allowed into the Soviet literary canon was Iryna Vil'de (1907-82)—a prolific prose writer from Western Ukraine who, at the time of this region's annexation by the Soviet Union, was already an established and popular author and, thus, by no means a product of "the Stalinist system" Holmgren writes about.[5] In fact, making Vil'de's work fit the ideological and aesthetic strictures of the Soviet canon required her own renunciation or heavy reworking of her pre-war writings as well as a lot of conscious misreading of her later work on the part of some Ukrainian Soviet critics (Zakharchuk 49, 53).[6]

Brutal Stalinist repression of Ukrainian authors of the generation preceding Vil'de's, including such women writers as Zinaida Tulub (1890-1964) and Nadiia Surovtsova (1896-1985), further invalidates Holmgren's argument for Ukraine. Instead, it lends support to Olia Hnatiuk's conclusion

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Out of these four, two were children's writers, one stopped publishing in the 1930s, and only one (Iryna Vil'de) wrote fiction for adults through much of the Soviet period (Petrosiuk 232-36). This is not to say that there were virtually no women writing in this period. If one examines the list of members of Soviet Ukraine's Union of Writers, one will find many more women's names, but only very few of them achieved a position of prominence in Soviet Ukraine.

[4] The Stalin Prize for literature was awarded yearly between 1941 and 1954. In 1966, it was revived and renamed the State Prize of the USSR. While this dubious honour has never been bestowed on any of the Ukrainian women writers, their male colleagues in the Union of Soviet Writers of Ukraine received it many times, most notably Oleksandr Korniichuk (in 1941, 1942, 1943, 1949, and 1951), Mykola Bazhan (in 1946 and 1949), Volodymyr Sosiura (in 1948), and Oles' Honchar (in 1948 and 1982). It was also awarded three times (in 1943, 1946, and 1952) to a Polish Bolshevik woman writer, Wanda Wasilewska, who escaped from Hitler-occupied Poland into Ukraine, joined the Communist Party, married the Ukrainian writer Oleksandr Korniichuk, settled in Kyiv, and wrote propagandist novels in Polish, some of which were commissioned personally by Stalin. Thereafter they were quickly translated into Russian and Ukrainian and awarded prizes already in translation (Vasyliv). For more on Wasilewska, see Leshchenko.

[5] In 1965, at the very tail end of the Thaw period in Ukraine, Vil'de received the Taras Shevchenko Prize for her novel, *Sestry Richyns'ki* (*The Richyns'ki Sisters*, 1964)—a lesser literary award specific to the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, which was nevertheless a sign of her work's official recognition. Another prominent Ukrainian woman author from this period—the poet Lina Kostenko (b. 1930)—did benefit from a Soviet education and even graduated from the Maksim Gorky Literary Institute in Moscow in 1956, but was severely criticized a few years later for formalist experimentation in her poetry and disappeared from the official literary scene until the late 1970s.

[6] For more on Vil'de's struggles to navigate the Soviet-era literary world, see Horak.

that the implementation of women's rights in Stalinist Ukraine often resulted in women intellectuals (in numbers equal to men intellectuals) being persecuted for ideological, and often nationalist, "deviations." Hnatiuk mentions several strategies, which I would call "strategies of invisibility," adopted by Ukrainian women writers in the early Soviet era to escape such an outcome. Some of them abandoned literature altogether, some chose translation or writing for children only, and some switched to Russian as a "safer" language (24). These facts suggest that in order to understand how the Soviet regime impacted women's writing in Ukraine, gender politics and attitudes in Soviet Ukraine, the specificity of the colonial relationship between the imperial metropole and its Ukrainian periphery, and the ways in which this relationship manifested itself in cultural production need to be analyzed.

Taking both Soviet colonial politics and gender biases into account, this article attempts to illuminate the political, historical, and social contexts for women's writing in the Soviet Ukrainian periphery by examining the case of Nina Bichuia—one of very few Ukrainian women prose writers besides Vil'de to achieve some prominence in pre-1980s Soviet Ukraine. Bichuia's publication history, the critical reception of her works, and the kind of place she came to have in the Soviet literary world throw important light on both the differential literary politics between the Soviet metropole and its periphery, and on the specific ways in which such politics circumscribed women's literary careers in the Ukrainian periphery, often creating for them conditions of invisibility and/or making a degree of invisibility desirable to them. I will first discuss the vicissitudes of Bichuia's literary career and then focus on Bichuia's perspective on her place as an author under the Soviet regime, which she expressed in her last short story, "Kaminnyi hospodar" ("The Stone Master"). The story pictures the traumatic environment for writing literature in the Soviet Ukrainian periphery and shows silence to be a woman writer's overdetermined response to it.

THE CAREER

Born in 1937 in Kyiv, Bichuia grew up and lives to this day in Lviv. Being thirty years younger than Vil'de, Bichuia published most of her works during an era of stagnation between the late 1960s and the early 1980s. Like many women writers in the Soviet era, she made her debut in literature with stories for and about children: collections *Kanikuly u Svitlohors'ku* (*Vacation in Svitlohorsk*, 1967) and *Shpaha Slavka Berkuty* (*Slavko Berkuta's Rapier*, 1968). She reached her best, according to most of her critics, in a series of masterful historical and psychological short stories published in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, such as "Drohobyts'kyi zvizdar" ("The

Drohobych Astronomer"), "Sotvorinnia tainy" ("Creation of a Mystery"), "Velyki korolivs'ki lovy" ("The Great Royal Hunt"), "Buiest' Mytusyna" (Mytusa's Bravery), and others (Gabor, *Neznaioma* 62). All of these stories were written in Bichuia's unique and difficult style, usually characterized as "modernist" by her contemporary critics. These fragmented and frequently plotless narratives are primarily interested in exploring the characters' inner world and leave much unsaid and unexplained (Gabor, "Vyvorozhy," 28). Bichuia's first collection for adults that included many of these stories, *Drohobyts'kyi zvizdar* (*The Drohobych Astronomer*, 1970), was well received: writer and essayist Vasyl' Gabor mentions that it was reviewed positively in the literary press over twenty-five times ("Vyvorozhy," 28).

Yet the subsequent publication history of Bichuia's work is complicated. It illustrates the paradoxes and mechanisms of Soviet literary politics concerning the literature of the so-called "Soviet peoples' cultures" ("*Literatura narodov SSSR*")—in this case, Ukraine. In the beginning of the 1970s the well-known Moscow-based translator from the Ukrainian language, Vladimir Rossel's, prepared a collection of Bichuia's stories translated into Russian for publication in the newly established book series: "Biblioteka 'Druzhby narodov'" (Library of *The Friendship of Peoples* Journal) (Gabor, "Vyvorozhy," 30). Fittingly, the journal had for its name Stalin's notorious metaphor from the 1930s that came to designate the official Soviet framework for organizing cultural production within the republics and cultural exchange between them. In Yuri Slezkine's witty formulation, this framework included both the official expectation that each Soviet nationality would produce its own set of "nationally defined 'Great Traditions'" and the official requirement "that all Soviet nationalities be deeply moved by the art of other Soviet nationalities" (226). In keeping with the latter objective, the journal started the new series to acquaint Soviet readers with the best non-Russian writing coming out of various Soviet republics. The publication of Bichuia's collection in Moscow as the first book by a Ukrainian author in the series would have signified a major breakthrough in the literary career of this young writer. However, because the Soviet metropole left it up to the republics to determine which of their cultural riches would represent them at the all-Union level (i.e., the "Great Traditions" were to be "nationally defined"), the publication of Bichuia's collection in Moscow had to receive official approval from Kyiv. According to Bichuia, the decision in this matter was made by the leadership of the Union of Soviet Writers of Ukraine. The literary authorities in Kyiv responded that Bichuia was too young to be the first writer to represent Ukraine in the new series and that her book, though of high quality, would have to wait (Bichuia, Personal interview). Despite Rossel's's appeal to the older and better-known Vil'de, who attempted to intercede for Bichuia with the Union in Kyiv, the book was shelved (Bichuia, Personal interview). Instead of Bichuia's volume, two books by Ukrainian

writers appeared in this series in the early 1970s—a memoir about Ukrainian literary life by Iurii Smolych (1971) and a novel, *Tsyklon* (*Cyclone*, 1972), by Oles' Honchar. Both authors were heads of the Union of Soviet Writers of Ukraine around this time (Honchar until 1971 and Smolych briefly in 1971); both were men. Perhaps it is not so surprising after all that the collection by the young and relatively unknown woman writer from the Western Ukrainian periphery had to cede its place to their work.

This incident is instructive in several respects. First, it illustrates the argument recently made by Serhy Yekelchyk in *Stalin's Empire of Memory* about the significant degree to which local "Ukrainian cultural agents" were involved in the formulation and building of Soviet Ukrainian national culture (6). In this case, too, the Ukrainian literary authorities in Kyiv "acted as classic indigenous elites" in defending their right from the imperial centre to define what they saw as "their cultural domain" (Yekelchyk 6). Second, the incident underscores the constraints that the "Friendship of Peoples" discourse placed on the cultures of non-Russian republics. Because of its tokenist nature, it often automatically generated competition for prestige and resources among the local cultural elites. Last but not least, Bichuia's experience with publication in the book series of *The Friendship of Peoples* Journal has a gender dimension: because the institutional framework for literary production in each of the republics was characterized by a rigid hierarchy with loyal men at the top, it was guaranteed that a young woman writer like Bichuia, no matter how talented, could not be published in Moscow before the male leaders of the Ukrainian branch of the Soviet Writers' Union.

While Bichuia's collection in Russian finally did come out in Moscow in 1974, the same book in Ukrainian, which Bichuia submitted to the publishing house of the Union of Soviet Writers of Ukraine, "Radians'kyi pys'mennyk," never saw the light of day. Gabor indicates that this manuscript received three extremely negative internal reviews ("Vyvorozhy," 30).[7] The reviewers accused the author of painting an excessively dark picture of life as well as of being influenced by the repressed Ukrainian urban prose writer of the 1920s-30s, Valer''ian Pidmohyl'nyi, whose forbidden works Bichuia, by her own admission, had not read at that time (Gabor, "Vyvorozhy," 30).

The seemingly odd scenario in which a Ukrainian writer had less difficulty publishing the same material in Moscow than in Soviet Ukraine occurred periodically throughout the Soviet era and even prompted some

[7] The practice of the so-called "internal reviews" of manuscripts, which were commissioned by publishing houses from politically loyal literati, existed through much of the Soviet period as an additional mechanism of control over the literary process. Bichuia suffered much more from this form of Soviet censorship than from any other in the course of her literary career (Bichuia, Personal interview).

writers to seek out Russian-language publishers in the metropole before attempting to publish in Ukrainian (Yekelchyk 130; Risch 124). The language of publication was part of the matter. As Joshua First explains, in the stagnation era (late 1960s to early 1980s) especially, use of the Ukrainian language "constituted a degree of cultural excess, something that lacked practical necessity and thus possessed potentially dangerous connotations" (12). He recounts an exchange in 1969 between Leonid Brezhnev and the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine, Petro Shelest, in which Brezhnev wondered "why publishers needed to print materials in Ukrainian when almost all Ukrainians also knew Russian" (12). More generally, however, "[t]he area of the 'legally allowed' was much narrower for a Ukrainian writer than for a Russian one" (Petrovsky-Shtern 277). After the brief period of liberalization during the Thaw, Ukraine experienced a renewed, concerted effort on the part of the highest political authorities of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic to stamp out any manifestations of "bourgeois nationalism"—a label that in the postwar era came to be associated predominantly with Ukraine and that was used almost indiscriminately to condemn any type of activity or expression that appeared dangerous to Soviet authority (First 10-11; Bazhan 45). Even Bichuia's quite innocuous vignettes from Ukrainian pre-Soviet history, her interest in psychology and urban themes, and her unconventional style were deemed subversive enough to merit a comparison with the "nationalist" Pidmohyl'nyi and to warrant refused publication in Kyiv. Translated into Russian, however, and placed within the "safe" context of Stalinist "Friendship of Peoples" discourse, which superficially celebrated Soviet cultural diversity, Bichuia's texts no longer evoked the ghosts of "bourgeois nationalism" or the repressed Ukrainian writers of the 1930s.

Through much of her career, like many of her male Ukrainian colleagues, Bichuia acutely felt the brunt of such differential colonial politics of censorship. In the more liberal late 1980s, she even chose to portray these politics in a work of literature. Her *Desiat' sliv poeta* (*Ten Words of a Poet*), published in 1987, depicts a similar and historically true scenario of a Ukrainian writer finding a more hospitable reception for his work in the Soviet capital rather than at home. The novella details the fate of Mykola Kulish's drama, *Patetychna sonata* (*Sonata Pathétique*, 1930), which was banned from the Berezil' Theatre stage in Kharkiv, yet at the same time was performed with great success in the Tairov Theatre in Moscow. Bichuia's moving descriptions of how Kulish felt about the rejection of his play at home and its premiere in Moscow capture some of her pain as a writer in Soviet Ukraine (Bichuia, Personal interview).

Bichuia's situation was also impacted in significant ways by her specific location within the Soviet Ukrainian periphery. Vil'de once described the drastic differences in permissible literary expression between Moscow, Kyiv,

and Lviv in a pithy saying: "When they cut fingernails in Moscow, they cut fingers in Kyiv and chop off the entire hand in Lviv" (qtd. in Il'nyts'kyi, *Drama* 86). The extent of literary policing in the Soviet peripheries depended both on the importance of the place within the imperial hierarchy and on the perceived degree of its potential rebelliousness. Kyiv was significant in its status as the capital of a key Soviet republic; moreover, it had an eventful past, full of struggles for national liberation. Therefore, Kyiv was monitored very carefully. The situation with Lviv seemed to be more ambiguous. On one hand, it was the heart of the recently acquired Western Ukrainian lands and ranked high on the scale of suspected sedition because of its "nationalist" reputation (hence, Vil'de's aphorism). The appointed local and regional party officials were therefore perpetually on the lookout for the slightest manifestations of freethinking among Lviv literati.[8] On the other hand, Lviv was twice removed from the metropole as the Western periphery of the larger Soviet Ukrainian periphery. This distance sometimes permitted one to deviate more from the official party line in literature—as long as one did not attempt to publish these literary "deviations" in Kyiv (Bichuia, Personal interview). Bichuia, who had firmly decided that she "would not write about the Communist hero, the Komsomol hero, or the Pioneer hero," used the peripheral status of Lviv to her advantage through much of her career and published most of her stories in the Lviv-based literary journal *Zhovten'* (*October*) where she had friends among the staff (Bichuia, Personal interview).[9] To be sure, this was another example of the consciously employed strategy of invisibility, though perhaps a less drastic one than those practised by some women writers of previous generations. By submitting her works for publication primarily in Lviv and by choosing to write largely on politically neutral topics, Bichuia, in critic Mykola Il'nyts'kyi's characterization, "managed to find a 'hermetic zone' in which she was able to preserve the purity of her voice" even in those oppressive times (*Drama* 112).

Certainly, these strategies reduced Bichuia's chances of becoming a prominent author, as did her choices of themes and style. In a memoir by

[8] In his memoir of Soviet-era literary life in Lviv, Mykola Il'nyts'kyi describes various repressive measures used by local party bosses against the leadership of the Lviv branch of the Writers' Union and the editors of Lviv's thick journal *Zhovten'* (*October*), including threats to send troops to the journal's editorial office (*Drama* 88).

[9] For more on the role of the journal *October* in the literary politics of Soviet Ukraine, see Risch's *The Ukrainian West*, esp. Chapter 5. In his discussion of literary life in Lviv between 1945 and the late 1980s, Risch mentions dozens of male writers, editors, and other members of the Soviet Ukrainian literary establishment and only one woman—Vil'de. This fact gives additional confirmation to my argument about a virtual absence of prominent Ukrainian women authors in this period.

Roman Ivanychuk, prose writer and editor of the *October* prose section, amidst his circle of populist-minded colleagues in the 1970s, Bichuia "remained a solitary figure with her original, modernist style, which, alas, turned out to be unacceptable to our politicized and sentimental reading public…" (*Blahoslovy* 79). What Ivanychuk meant by "politicized and sentimental" was partly a symptom of another aspect of state politics regarding the literature of the Soviet periphery: within "The Friendship of Peoples" discourse, promotion of the national literatures of the non-Russian Soviet republics had in reality provincialized these literatures by limiting their function to expressions of their peoples' "essence" (Kas'ianov 180). As First put it, "[u]nder a Stalinist mode of 'national' representation, the landscapes and peoples of the Soviet periphery achieved recognition as unique within a folkloric . . . vocabulary, replete with costumes, dancing peasants, and other evidence of 'national colour'" (27). Growing up on a steady literary diet of the simplified sentimental images of Ukrainian peasants in their colourful national garb, many Soviet Ukrainian readers and writers have come to believe that this is what Ukrainian literature really *is* and should be, if it is to be truly Ukrainian and capture "the spirit of the people." Bichuia's stylistically complex, psychologically nuanced, and fiercely unsentimental stories about individual intellectuals and urban life ran counter to such beliefs and readerly expectations.

The differences in literary politics between Moscow, Kyiv, and Lviv, and Bichuia's navigation of this institutional and ideological colonial matrix, impacted her literary visibility and shaped her reception by critics in curious ways. In part because of her ultimately successful, though belated, Russian-language publication in Moscow and the generally favourable critical reception of her stories in the metropole, she was once again noticed by the Ukrainian literary establishment. Toward the end of the 1970s, her name regularly appeared in the central Russian and Ukrainian literary press among the names of male Ukrainian prose writers active in that era. A survey article of Ukrainian prose from the late 1970s published in Moscow's *Literaturnaia gazeta* (*The Literary Gazette*) in 1978 by Kyiv-based Ukrainian literary critic Vitalii Donchyk is a case in point. Among scores of older and younger male Ukrainian prose writers who "became well-known to the all-Union reader," Bichuia was the only female author mentioned by Donchyk (Donchik, "Zaglianut' v budushchee," 4). This is not to say that her works received very much thoughtful attention from Moscow or Kyiv literary critics.[10] Rather, it seems that Bichuia became the token Ukrainian woman

[10] After the favourable reviews of Bichuia's first collection of stories (see especially Adel'heim, as well as Il'nyts'kyi, "Vyvorozhy"), Ivan Dziuba's thoughtful overview of Bichuia's work, initially published in the journal *Kyiv* in 1984, is one of very few careful assessments of this writer's prose by a literary critic from the Ukrainian

prose writer of her generation—frequently mentioned, yet less often critically appreciated.

In the attempts of her colleagues and literary critics to categorize her writing, Bichuia's gender often played an important role. To this day, many of those who write about Bichuia continue to mention that she was once characterized as "the queen of women's prose" of her generation by the Kyiv-based Ukrainian prose writer Valerii Shevchuk.[11] Bichuia herself, who dislikes this phrase, just as she generally disapproves of the division of literature into "men's" and "women's," was at a loss when I asked her what was meant by "women's prose" in her generation (Bichuia, Personal interview). She also found it difficult to name any other well-known Ukrainian women prose writers of whom she was supposedly "the queen" in the 1960s. She was right: as female critic Halyna Hordasevych, herself a prose writer, noted in a 1984 review article of contemporary Ukrainian women's writing, some Ukrainian prose by women began to emerge only in the mid-1970s (116). Hordasevych, who meant by "women's prose" works by female writers that focused on a contemporary woman's inner world and life experiences, included in her review over half a dozen women authors' names, most of which are forgotten today.[12] She also discussed several pieces by Bichuia that featured female protagonists, paradoxically faulting the author for an excessive focus on their thoughts: "…contemporary women do not have this much time to simply sit and think" (Hordasevych 117). All of the above suggests that Bichuia's writing could not easily fit the label of "women's prose" as it was understood in the late Soviet era.[13] It seems that Shevchuk's "queen of women's prose" was a misnomer that, instead of inviting greater attention to this writer's work, made it easier to discount it.

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capital ("Palitra 'mis'koi povisti'"). Even this article appeared only in the 1980s. Other detailed Soviet-era critical pieces on Bichuia were written almost exclusively by her Lviv colleagues (see, for example, Ivanychuk, "U poshukakh" and "Tema liuds'koi tvorchosti"). At the same time, through much of Bichuia's literary career, there appeared occasional short reviews of her works by non-Lviv-based Ukrainian critics that were more or less standard Soviet-era fare and gave little true insight into Bichuia's writing (see, for example, Donchyk, "Dokument i poetyzatsiia," p. 146; Lomazova; Panchenko; Hordasevych).

[11] See Gabor (*Neznaioma* 63); book description on the inside front cover of Bichuia's 2003 collection *Zemli romens'ki*; Khudyts'kyi; Levkova, etc.

[12] Western Ukrainian writer Halyna Pahutiak is one notable exception.

[13] This understanding, or rather misunderstanding, seemed to imply that women's prose was much narrower in scope than the prose written by men, and in Hordasevych's rather Soviet interpretation, it was also meant to be exclusively realistic so that the average female reader could easily identify with its characters (116-17).

Speaking more broadly, it appears that various stereotypes about creative women in general and women's prose writing in particular pervaded the literary circles of Bichuia's time. Ivanychuk, who later became Bichuia's closest friend, once described his initial skepticism about Bichuia's ability to write good, serious prose when he first met her and saw "a slender green-eyed girl with long fair hair" ("Tema" 10). In a memoir about Soviet era writers and artists in Lviv, poet Mykola Petrenko depicted their lives as a valiant struggle against the Soviet functionaries and the system of cultural production such functionaries had imposed on Lviv. Petrenko's almost exclusively male colleagues figured as knights and bohemians who fought against the system with their art and their fortitude, and drank their fear and worries away. Fittingly, the memoir is titled *Lytsari pera i charky* (*The Knights of the Pen and the Shot Glass*). Petrenko's vision of this period gives women mostly marginal, conservative roles: they are male writers' dutiful wives, caring mothers of small children, or, at most, the rare keepers of literary salons where "a tender woman's hand would serve you a cup of coffee and a sandwich" (82). Bichuia is mentioned once, and only as Ivanychuk's colleague. In general, the figure of a female writer or artist and her resistance to the Soviet system are virtually absent in the memoir.

As one can see from the example of Petrenko's work, such biased attitudes toward women writers were shaped in part by the perception of the arts as a male arena for fighting against the Soviet regime. This perception was a dominant one in Lviv where Soviet rule was commonly viewed "as an alien force" (Risch 10).[14] Being a Western Ukrainian writer who felt the burden of colonial Soviet politics through much of her career, Bichuia certainly supported her male colleagues' efforts to resist the system (even though in her own writing she did not push the envelope as deliberately as some of them). Being a woman writer, Bichuia at the same time observed the male dominated literary and cultural life around her—with all of its daring as well as its hypocrisy and blind spots—from a critical distance. She communicated this distanced perspective in her last short story, "The Stone Master," which first appeared in *October* in 1990.[15] Ivanychuk called this work by Bichuia "the quintessence of her intellectual expression" (*Blahoslovy* 106-07). Bichuia explained her silence as a writer since "The Stone Master" as partly due to the fact that she had nothing further to say after this story (Bichuia, Personal interview).

[14] Ivanychuk even formulated a theory about fighting the regime from inside, i.e., by serving the interests of one's own people from various positions of power within the Soviet system of cultural production (*Blahoslovy* 141-44).

[15] Bichuia has published no new fiction since the fall of the Soviet Union, although many of her earlier pieces have recently come out in new editions.

THE STORY

"The Stone Master" is set in Lviv in the late 1970s and relates the thoughts, conversations, and experiences of a Ukrainian woman writer and her literary milieu. As Bichuia has acknowledged in interviews, the story is full of autobiographical details (Khudyts'kyi). Its female I-narrator expresses many of Bichuia's own ideas, fears, and regrets related to living and writing in post-Stalinist Western Ukraine. The historical, cultural, and social proximity of the subject matter to the author makes "The Stone Master" Bichuia's most overtly ideological text, yet it is still in keeping with her trademark style. In this story as in numerous others, Bichuia's disjointed, non-linear narration makes multiple attempts to tackle the main topic of the text by presenting disparate images, symbols, and scenes that illuminate the topic from various vantage points—usually in a self-consciously subjective and fragmentary way.

In what follows I read "The Stone Master" as Bichuia's "last word" on the Soviet environment for writing literature, especially in the rebellious Soviet periphery of Western Ukraine. By analyzing Bichuia's use of important literary intertexts and with the help of some recent theorizations about Soviet state discourse, I demonstrate how "The Stone Master" imaginatively represents and criticizes the discursive regime established by the Soviet system and its effects in the Ukrainian periphery. I argue that within this discursive regime, for multiple reasons, Bichuia's female writer-narrator finds it impossible to speak. The story is primarily about a female writer's painful and overdetermined silence, and it ends with a nightmarish image of her complete annihilation. As such, "The Stone Master" offers additional insights into the conditions of invisibility that impacted a female writer from the Soviet Ukrainian periphery.

The central event in "The Stone Master" takes place around a table where the I-narrator and a small circle of her male writer friends are sharing memories, almost twenty-five years later, about their reactions to the news of Stalin's death. The narrator remembers how upon hearing about it early in the morning, her father started jumping around the room in his underwear chanting "Zdokh! Zdokh!" ("He croaked! He croaked!"; "The Stone Master," 37). Later at school, when the teacher locked up the narrator in the principal's office asking her, because of her literary talents, to write a poem on the occasion of Stalin's death, all that kept coming to the girl's mind was her father's "Zdokh!" Caught between the impossibility of writing *that* and creating anything eulogistic, she finally got out of the sordid task by pretending she was so overcome with grief that she could not write at all. Although the narrator's companions laugh, finding the story amusing, the narrator's unease about their laughter generates a fragmented stream of other traumatic memories from the Stalinist past, both personal and

national. The narrator pictures Stalin's ghost with a fake black moustache standing behind her friends' backs, joining in their laughter and drinking—making all of it possible, in fact, because it is their remembrance of him, however irreverent, that unites their little counter-community.

The portrayal of Stalin as an evil force and the Master of the Soviet "house," complete with such stock features as his thick moustache and his pipe, mark this story as a fairly typical product of its time: in *Literary Exorcisms of Stalinism*, Margaret Ziolkowski mentions a host of works by Russian authors from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn to Aleksandr Bek that describe Stalin in similar terms. However, Bichuia's story is different from these works in that it attempts to shift the focus from the pathologies of Stalin's person to the still totalitarian character of the Soviet system after Stalin. In this respect, Bichuia's most immediate intertext is the well-known sonnet "Koly umer kryvavyi Torkvemada" ("When the Bloody Torquemada Died") from a 1958 collection of poems by her then Lviv-based colleague Dmytro Pavlychko. Pavlychko's poem, which speaks of the sobbing populace after the death of Spain's tyrannical Grand Inquisitor and ends with the famous line "zdokh tyran, ale stoit' tiurma" ("the tyrant died, but the prison still stands") was an early and daring allegory of post-Stalinist Soviet society (qtd. in Il'nyts'kyi, *Drama* 18; Risch 123). Bichuia referenced Pavlychko's sonnet by making both the verb "zdokh" and the theme of hypocritical sorrow over the dictator's death key in her own text. Yet if Pavlychko's work concludes with the simple assertion that "the prison still stands," Bichuia's story is an extended philosophical meditation on the nature of the Soviet system as a "prison." The analysis of the regime that Bichuia presents in "The Stone Master" leaves no stone unturned (pun intended): certainly, it blames the imperial centre and its rulers, but it also criticizes the local elites, including Bichuia's circle of creative intelligentsia. It suggests important ethical questions about the very possibility and the cost of a writing career under this regime. In this sense especially, the choice of Pavlychko's work as this story's intertext is not accidental. Pavlychko's resounding "zdokh," written back in 1958 by a writer from the rebellious Western Ukrainian periphery, was meant as a gesture of resistance to the regime and became one reason why his collection was hastily banned upon its initial release. Yet as Risch pointed out, "[b]anning the book turned it into a bestseller" and ultimately propelled its author to literary fame (123). As a true "knight of the pen," to use Petrenko's metaphor, Pavlychko wrote in real life what Bichuia's female narrator did not dare put on paper in the fictional world of the story.

"The Stone Master" captures what I call, after Serguei Oushakine, "the discursive monopoly" of the Soviet regime—the fact that the regime reserved for itself and the subject positions authorized by it the exclusive right to produce authoritative discourse, which it refused to share with any other participants in the discursive field (214). Bichuia depicted the

functioning of this discursive monopoly in stagnation era Western Ukraine and its impact on her female writer-narrator through the narrator's recurrent nightmare, variations of which occur in the beginning, the middle, and the end of "The Stone Master." It is worth looking at the first variation of this dream in its entirety:

> A trampled green field extends between *me* and *the podium,* which was made of rough rust-coloured planks hastily hammered together, and *the man behind the podium, holding a microphone in his hands*, exclaims something, shouting at the top of his voice, *but I don't hear a word, and this is all because someone has spread out such a boundless green expanse between us and also because of the fact that the microphone he's holding is not plugged into anything*; the cord droops, stretches out, and recoils like a long black snake, and maybe the man is even hissing like a snake, and although I understand that the man cannot hiss, I keep thinking that his voice is that absurd hissing, and there is not another soul in the vast green space—only I and that man who stands behind the podium holding the microphone, although it makes no sense to hold it because nothing can be heard anyway. (Emphasis added; "The Stone Master," 32)

The man at the podium in this nightmare is both an agent and a symbol of the Soviet regime's discursive monopoly. The man is fittingly not any specific, recognizable individual because it is his position at the podium rather than his person that endows him with the power to speak on behalf of the regime. Soviet visual propaganda (photos, monuments, posters, etc.) produced many stock images of a man (and very rarely of a woman) at a podium, their style depending little on whether the man was Lenin, Stalin, or some nameless Soviet hero exhorting the Soviet people to one thing or another.

Although the man occupies a position authorized by the regime, his efforts at influencing Bichuia's narrator with his discourse appear futile: she cannot hear a word he says because of the space between them and the fact that his microphone is not plugged in. I read the "boundless green expanse" between the narrator and the speaker as representing the distance between the Soviet centre and its periphery—in this case, one of the Soviet westernmost borderlands that historically proved to be particularly resistant to heeding the ideological messages of the Soviet metropole. The most interesting detail of this dream—the unplugged microphone—seemingly suggests that the regime has lost its discursive effectiveness. However, I think a more accurate interpretation of this image is Alexei Yurchak's theorization of the transformations that occurred in the Soviet authoritative discourse in the post-Stalinist era. While Stalin served as an external "master" of Soviet ideological discourse during his life, often personally directing and correcting its content, after his death, this

discursive regime underwent what Yurchak termed a "performative shift" (13, 24-26). As a result of this shift, "the performative dimension" of any public ideological act became more important than the constative one (24). In other words, the forms of various ideological acts and rituals remained intact while their actual content gradually lost its original significance.[16] Even though no constative meaning of the speaker's address in the dream can be deciphered, his speech act still works as a performance of discursive monopoly: he still occupies a position of power at the podium and still holds the microphone. This performance of power has a contradictory effect on the narrator: on one hand, it seems absurd to her and in a later variation of the dream she begins laughing uncontrollably; on the other hand, the narrator reports being able only to laugh, but not to move, turn around, or say a word, as if she were petrified. This nightmare accurately represents the character of the late Soviet regime after the performative shift: while the content of its ideological discourse was perceived as ridiculous by many, the very shape of the discursive field persisted, continuing to hold the majority of the population in a subordinate position. The nightmare underscores the female narrator's position of powerlessness and silence within this discursive regime.

In contrast to the female narrator's arrested state in the nightmare, her fellow writer friends' ongoing irreverent reminiscing about Stalin's death and their lack of regime-prescribed mournfulness on the occasion looks like a display of counter-discursive speaking power. Yet the ghost of the dictator is hovering behind their backs, and just like in the nightmare, the narrator feels unable to utter another word. She only listens quietly to her friends' stories and laughter. She hears the ghost laughing with them, giving them his permission to mock him. Unlike her companions, the narrator realizes that even these oppositional tales are part and parcel of the same discursive field established under its Master—Stalin. These stories do not escape the regime's discursive monopoly—first, because they do not come from a regime-authorized source (i.e., they are shared in private rather than in an official public setting); and, second, because they do not go beyond speech that revolves around the regime itself (i.e., they are still about Stalin).[17]

[16] Yurchak gives numerous examples of the performative shift occurring in various spheres of life, from *pro forma* voting in Soviet elections to almost automatic production of formulaic party speeches. For a full explanation of the performative shift, see *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More*, Chapter 1.

[17] The latter is another important aspect of the Soviet regime's discursive monopoly that Oushakine does not emphasize in his analysis because of his primary focus on political rather than artistic dissent. The subject position of a writer in the Soviet Union, as defined by Soviet authoritative discourse, has always privileged writing that reflected directly on the regime itself and its leaders.

Stalin's ghost enjoys how the narrator's friends "extend" his life by talking about him and relives his role of the Master by putting on his fake black moustache. The moustache here does not represent Stalin as a historical person, but rather his function as the Master of the Soviet regime with its discursive control—what Bichuia calls "The Stone Master" in the title of her story.

The title itself is an intertextual borrowing: it comes from Lesia Ukrainka's 1912 drama *Kaminnyi hospodar* (*The Stone Master*). Like her famous female predecessor's work, Bichuia's story portrays the contemporary social order's enduring power and immutability through the central symbol of "the stone master." Like the Commander in Lesia Ukrainka's drama, Stalin remains powerful even after death because the system he put into place does not cease to exist. Both Stalin and the Commander appear in the two texts as statues that come alive to ensure that the order over which they had presided remains intact. The image of a statue turned ghost is powerful in these contexts precisely because it communicates both iconic, lasting status from the past (statue) and present, dynamic influence (ghost).

Recent commentators of Lesia Ukrainka's drama have explicated its anticolonial meaning. Oksana Zabuzhko has identified in the drama's "key opposition" of austere, "stony" Madrid to freedom-loving, merry Seville the contrast and conflict between Moscow and Ukraine (401). Myroslav Shkandrij has additionally emphasized the play's dual critique of the imperial rule, symbolized by the Commander, and the shortcomings of the native opposition to it. In his analysis, Don Juan, who represents the Ukrainian oppositional forces, in the end "succumb[s] to the temptations of power and privilege" and thereby "exposes the superficiality of his . . . revolt" (202). Finally, both scholars have also pointed out the drama's exposé of male drive for power: the Commander and Don Juan are alike in that they seek control in both personal and public realms, and Donna Anna simply imitates this dominant masculine model of behaviour—to her own detriment.[18]

All of these ideas from Lesia Ukrainka's *The Stone Master* are echoed in Bichuia's story. The formidable totalitarian order established by Stalin is formally opposed by the female narrator's circle of male writer friends, who laugh and make merry in their distant periphery. Yet the story shows that this childish laughter presents no real challenge to the system's discursive order. In fact, the narrator refuses to join in the merriment and instead remains silent precisely because she doubts that her friends' talk is effective or even ethical. While occupying the privileged position of a writer in their

[18] For a detailed analysis of Donna Anna's masculine behaviour, see Krys.

society—a position created and sanctioned by the regime itself—the narrator's friends continue to operate within its discursive monopoly even though they think they are rebelling against it. The direct critique of this position is not voiced by the female narrator herself, but by a young teenage daughter of one of the writers, who overhears their conversation and finally remarks: "Instead of talking about him [Stalin] all the time, you'd better hold a séance and summon his spirit. . . [. . .] and ask him in person what he thinks about your present exceptional bravery" ("The Stone Master," 51). The girl's taunt resembles the one by Don Juan's servant in Lesia Ukrainka's play: Sganarelle expresses his doubt that his master would be able to dine boldly with Donna Anna if the now dead Commander were in attendance (627). It is hardly an act of courage to celebrate a ruler's demise well after the fact, especially if at the same time you remain complicit in the oppressive system he has left behind (and if, like Don Juan and Donna Anna, you attempt to use this system to satisfy your own ambitions—something that numerous male Ukrainian writers have done throughout the Soviet era).

Bichuia's story presents no easy exit from the system though. There is a sense that the fear instilled by the Stalinist regime into its subjects will linger for many years to come. Yet in trying to grapple with the regime's legacy, Bichuia's female narrator intuitively seeks out the histories of the subaltern—those who were given no place and no voice whatsoever in the regime. That is why the female narrator repeatedly meditates on the victims of the Stalinist terror, first and foremost the Holodomor. Most of the terror images come to the narrator from accounts of the older generation who personally witnessed them—especially her father. She assimilates her father's experiences as her own, and these terrifying visions continue to impact her even now: "While coming out of my apartment building in Lviv, I was often afraid to look to the side because I knew that back then, in Kyiv, Father saw, right under the gate, a woman in a beautiful embroidered shirt, with beads around her neck—dead from hunger. . ." ("The Stone Master," 44).[19] The story is filled with such images of victims who have been silenced forever, and most of them are women. Whether consciously or not, Bichuia constructs a gendered hierarchy of subjection within the Stalinist system, with Stalin the Stone Master at its very top and female terror victims as the regime's ultimate subaltern at its bottom. Her female narrator's silence throughout the story is at once an acknowledgement of the power of the regime's discursive monopoly, a sign of protest against her fellow writers' complicity in it, and a form of identification with the regime's subaltern, who

[19] The relationship of Bichuia's narrator to the traumatic experiences of her father and his generation fits Marianne Hirsch's conceptualization of "postmemory"—a form of profound connection that the "descendants of survivors . . . of mass traumatic events" establish "to the previous generation's remembrances of the past" (105-06).

cannot speak (Spivak). The latter point is vividly made by another of the narrator's nightmares. In it, she is sent on a mission to some nearby village to write down the songs of the women who wanted their art recorded before they died.[20] When she gets there, the narrator finds no village. Only a toothless, bald female child is sitting in the black snow, and she can tell nothing because she is mute. Horrified by this image of destroyed countryside and its suppressed cultural memory, the narrator is prompted to think about her own art, which, she feels, will also perish without a trace.

Bichuia's story makes the linkage between the narrator's inability/refusal to speak and her silence as a writer most apparent in that central traumatic memory from the narrator's early youth when, unwilling and unable to write either a eulogy for Stalin or a triumphant "Zdokh!" on the occasion of Stalin's death, she ended up writing nothing. In the story's present, the grown-up narrator periodically engages in an honest assessment of her writing career, lamenting that she is unable to write, as well as the lack of understanding for her writing:

> You haven't written anything in a very long time, and it seems to you that the critics' bickering about the things you did write in the past resembles some senseless, wild dance on a still-fresh grave—your very own grave. . . . ("The Stone Master," 40)

This self-addressed passage exemplifies only one of the narrator's several moments of intense scrutiny directed at her "writerly" self. Throughout the story, these are always in the second person, unlike the rest of the narration. This mode of address affords the narrator an honest, critical look at herself while at the same time allowing her to avoid saying "I" and thereby owning up to her painful perceived failure as a writer. She ultimately traces this failure to the environment of discursive monopoly, in which only

[20] The portion of the story that describes this dream and the circumstances that led to it illustrates very well the provincialization of cultural production in Soviet Ukraine—an aspect of Soviet cultural politics mentioned earlier. The reason why the narrator comes in touch with the peasant women is because at the theatre where she works, they are in need of authentic props from the village for the performance of a humorous nineteenth-century populist play about Ukrainian village life. This play fit the Soviet bill for acceptable cultural expressions of diverse Soviet nationalities: its focus on folk costumes and other ethnographic details purportedly showed what Ukrainian culture was all about. The bitter irony captured in Bichuia's story is that while the Soviet Ukrainian urban theatre audiences enjoyed the politically correct "performances" of village life on stage, the real traditional culture of the Ukrainian countryside was being destroyed by collectivization, deportations, the man-made famine, etc.

a very specific kind of writing, focused on the regime itself, would grant an author visibility.[21]

In such an environment, the narrator sees no possibility to be understood or valued even in the future. Perhaps inspired by Marina Tsvetaeva's famous poetic address to her desk ("Moi pis'mennyi vernyi stol!..," 37-39), Bichuia communicates this bleak prognosis in a striking coded image of her narrator's "writerly" self and its creations as a writing desk:

> Your big, old, solid, reliable table. Its two bulky sections support a heavy brown tabletop; the sections' drawers can be moved only with effort, as if they do not want to reveal their secrets to anyone. . . . my table may turn out to be . . . useless later, sometime in the future, to someone who will realize its age, old-fashioned character, and bulkiness, and who will see nothing in its marks, stains, spots, its scratched-off polish, the charm, uniqueness, and mysteriousness of the pattern in its chestnut finish. . . ("The Stone Master," 44-45)

The language of this description points to a similarity between the table's aesthetic details and Bichuia's own writing style that has so many of its own unique "marks" and mysterious "patterns." As one contemporary commentator recently noted, Bichuia's stories, including "The Stone Master," are rarely straightforward but rather consist of cut up and jumbled chunks, which the reader must attend to very closely in order to put them together (Riznyk 139).[22] In "The Stone Master," Bichuia sets up an opposition between the uselessness and probable future destruction of the narrator's writing table and the persistence of the stains from the red wine on the white tablecloth, left behind by Stalin's ghost. While her writing desk is a "mere used-up prop" that was simply a decoration in the "performance" of her life, the red circles from the wine glass on the tablecloth that symbolize Stalin's bloody heritage seem very permanent ("The Stone Master," 51).

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[21] Bichuia shared with me that in her own career, she had at least one very definite opportunity to increase her visibility as an author in exchange for glorifying the Soviet regime in her writing. In the early 1980s, she was issued an invitation by the secretary for ideology of the Lviv Regional Committee of the Communist Party to write a play based on one of Leonid Brezhnev's alleged memoirs for a Lviv theatre. She was promised a literary prize for doing it, as well as awards for the theatre and the actors. Needless to say, she declined the offer (Bichuia, Personal Interview).

[22] In many of her works, Bichuia attempted to write beyond the regime's discursive field, choosing topics to her own liking that usually simply ignored the existence of the Soviet state. Likewise, she opted for a style that eschewed the transparency and plainness of Socialist Realist sloganeering, experimenting instead with fragmentary, nonlinear, and often evasive narration, and complex imagery.

Significantly, the narrator mentions that her writing desk is not entirely her own: only one section of it belongs to her, whereas the rest is still her father's, full of his possessions. Just like her vision of the Stalinist past, her place and stance as a writer is shaped by the heritage of the previous generation. This heritage is full of trauma, but the narrator accepts its burden, even if it dooms her to a traumatic silence. She is persuaded that only the intimate knowledge and memory of this traumatic legacy can help disrupt and destroy the discursive monopoly, and prevent a replay of the totalitarian past in the future.

The ending of "The Stone Master" plays out such a return of the terror-filled Stalinist era. In a grotesque scene at a Soviet second-hand shop, the narrator once again encounters a vision of Stalin—this time in the form of a stone bust that seems partly alive owing to the efforts of the shop assistant who decided to resuscitate the creature and make him into her own, private devil. As the head of the bust turns and stares angrily at the narrator, the story ends with the last variation of the narrator's recurrent nightmare about the man at the podium. The green field between her and the man becomes filled with a multitude of people who can apparently hear him. The long cord of the microphone slithers like a snake at the narrator's feet, the crowd gets larger and larger, and it finally swallows up the narrator into its blackness. In this final nightmare, the constative dimension of the man's speech act is restored, and his discourse regains its full influence and authority, which is evidenced by his growing audience. The unavoidable, predatory character of this total discursive monopoly is symbolized by the snakelike cord of the microphone, which now reaches the narrator. The horrific concluding image of the narrator perishing into the crowd signifies that she has become both invisible and voiceless, part of the undifferentiated mass ruled by the regime.

Bichuia's story thus presents both a picture of the still-functioning Soviet discursive monopoly in the stagnation era—with its effects on her generation—and a warning about the possible return of its worst, totalitarian variety. The likelihood of its revival is shown to depend on forgetting or disregarding the terror-filled past and its numerous victims. In light of the present-day resurgence of Stalin's popularity and the state-sanctioned revisionism of the Soviet past in Russia, Bichuia's warning, issued in 1990, seems remarkably prescient.

While developing her strategies of resistance to the Soviet discursive regime, Bichuia's narrator employs silence as a radical way of evading the system's dictatorial power. The danger, of course, is that silence is easily misinterpreted—for example, as a sign of defeat. Perhaps, this is one reason why Bichuia felt compelled to write an entire story about a Soviet-era Ukrainian female writer's silence. In an afterword to a recent edition of her Soviet era novellas, while thinking of her own silence as a writer, Bichuia

spoke of silence as a form of resistance: "It is possible to break the silence, although it does not mean that you have started speaking. Silence is sometimes more eloquent than any word" (Bichuia, "Taka sobi intryha," 334).

With its focus on the silencing of a female writer by a Stalin-established discursive monopoly, Bichuia's story powerfully refutes Holmgren's argument about "the Stalinist system" being "an institutional and iconic enabler of women's writing" (228). Instead, "The Stone Master" suggests that in the Ukrainian periphery, this system ended up greatly hindering women's writing—even if it did not intend to target specifically women authors. My examples from Bichuia's literary career show how various cultural policies and practices of the Soviet metropole combined and played out in the Ukrainian periphery in a way that often thwarted women writers' success and limited their visibility. Stalin's "Friendship of Peoples" discourse circumscribed literary production in the Soviet Ukrainian periphery in multiple ways. Not only did it provincialize Ukrainian literature, it also created tight competition among Ukrainian writers for literary visibility at the all-Union level. Because the metropole invested top-placed Ukrainian establishment writers in Kyiv, all of whom happened to be male, with a decisive say in the competition, women authors' chances to succeed were reduced. On the more peripheral level, and especially in the rebellious Western Ukraine, the regime's ideological pressure turned the process of cultural production into a "masculine" power struggle between Soviet literary ideologues and the creative intelligentsia. Prevailing traditional views of appropriate gender roles often disregarded women writers as potential participants in this struggle and instead segregated them in an ill-defined "women's prose" category. This is not to say that women writers necessarily wanted to follow the "masculine" model of resistance. As Bichuia's case shows, some preferred to formulate their own model. Unfortunately, Bichuia's strategies of resistance further limited her chances to have the kind of literary fame that could have been hers—had she not been a Ukrainian female author writing in the stagnation era Soviet Ukrainian periphery.

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