

IS AN ANTHOLOGY OF UKRAINIAN LITERATURE POSSIBLE AND SUITABLE?

1.

The first issue I discuss concerns the opportunity and the utility of preparing an anthology of the Ukrainian literature for the Italian public, or more generally for foreign, Western readers. The genre “Anthology” is not really popular in our time. Moreover, such an enterprise needs a huge amount of time and money, and a considerable effort of many persons. I ask myself whether it is not more reasonable to translate single works of the best known authors.

However, this latter solution does not substitute or exclude the former. The Italian culture, and the Western European as well, find themselves in a position which is very similar to that one which characterized the European countries after WW1. New states have been created, the peoples leaving in these new states feel the will and necessity to make themselves better known to the others. Moreover, the extension of the European Union makes the need greater to have more information about the new countries in Eastern Europe.

Certainly, this is not the best period to face the difficulties to organize a big anthology comprehending the works of the whole period of development of the Ukrainian literature. We have only very few specialists who are able to chose and to translate the texts. Shortage of money in universities makes all academic projects difficult. Printing houses are not willing to put in the market a product which is certainly not really profitable.

In spite of all these difficulties, however, I consider that – from the cultural point of view – it would be suitable to publish a large anthology of the Ukrainian literature to be put near the anthologies of Russian, Polish, Czech, Hungarian or other literatures, which were published in the 1960s and 1970s, or even to those partial anthologies which were published already in the 1930s. If in the present time economic, political and social issues reasonably occupy the main place in international contact between Western Europe and the newly created Eastern-European countries, it is to be stressed that – in the middle or long term – a better knowledge of the tradition and culture of each of these countries would help to establish fruitful relationships and a sound

cooperation in Europe.

2.

If we accept the principle that it is useful to prepare such an anthology, the main question arises, which will be the “canon” of this literature. The first consideration to be stressed is that the choice of the “canonic works” to be included is different according to the reading public the anthology is addressed to.

The first question concerns the literature before Romanticism. It is a well known fact, that the inclusion of Kyjivan Medieval literature into the “canon” of Ukrainian literature is among the most actual issues of contemporary literary criticism in Ukrainian milieu. It is also among the most debated issues in foreign Medieval studies about Rus’. Similar is the problem with Renaissance and Baroque writers who are generally included in the Polish “literary canon”, but are of Ruthenian origin and show a more or less strong influence of the local, Ukrainian or Belo Russian culture: Orikhovs’kyj / Arzykhouski / Orzechowski / Orechovius, or Salomon Rysinski or L. Baranovych, just to mention a few examples.

I do not think that it is impossible or not suitable to include Ilarion or the “*Povest vremennykh let*” in a History of Ukrainian literature or an Anthology. However one should be conscious of the conventional character of terminology, and of the complex nature of the literary situation in Medieval Rus’. The term “Ukrainian” does not give an exact definition of the Medieval Kyjivan tradition, but it is out of question that the Kyjivan Medieval heritage represents a patrimony which the modern Ukrainian culture feels as the roots of its self-consciousness. The same happened for the Russian literature. In my opinion modern Russian literature is as distinct and far from Medieval literature of Ancient Rus’ as the modern Ukrainian literature is from it. The inclusion of Kyjivan literature of the 11th-14th century into the canon of Russian literature is as conventional as – or even more conventional that – its inclusion in Histories of Ukrainian literature today.

What I certainly would not accept, is that one “canon” eliminates the other. I do not agree with an interpretation which aims at making of the Medieval heritage an exclusive “ownership” of one “nation” to the exclusion of another “nation”. Here I use the term “nation” in the modern sense: patriotic feelings were present also in the Medieval culture, but the idea of nation hardly existed in the Kyjvan period (or it indicated the whole ethnic group of the Slavs). There is no doubt that regional differences were strong: the culture of the Novgorodian, Kyjivan, Tverian, Rostovian, Moscovian areas had their specificity, and they deserve to be examined and

acknowledged. There is no doubt either that the unified Muscovite culture (beginning with the 15th century) presented many deep differences if compared with the Ruthenian culture. However, I do not feel it unbecoming if Russian literature begins with Ilarion, the “*Povest’ vremennykh let*”, the Novgorodian Chronicle and Kyryl Turov’skyj, and if modern histories of Ukrainian literature describe the Church Slavonic texts by the same authors as well and consider them as the beginning phase of the Ukrainian written culture.

The problem of a multiple belonging of literati and their works is equally evident for the 16th-17th century in the Polish Commonwealth. Orzechowski was certainly a good subject of the Polish king and an excellent representative of the Polish and Western European Renaissance culture. To be sure, the culture of the Polish gentry was not only a Polish culture in the modern sense, i.e. expressing the self-consciousness of a modern society based on a common language, a common historical memory, a national state, etc. The Polish gentry had a strong social consciousness (Sarmatism), a strong sense of “political nationhood” (the multinational Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth with his king), an ideological program tending to the conception of “Antemurale” (which developed mainly in the 17th but had its roots already in the 16th century,). Its basic cultural and literary consciousness was the European Humanism which conveyed also the Classical heritage. Orzechowski or Rysinski were Polish as strong as they were European humanists. On the other hand they had a strong consciousness of belonging to an ethno- geographical, cultural and religious tradition which had a different history than the Polish-Sarmatian one. More than a question of literary forms (which were Latin and based on rhetorics), it was a question of mentality, everyday life, customs, folklore, mythical historical memory.

Orzechowski is a typical representative of Polish and European Renaissance literature. However, an examination of his Ukrainian origin probably would help to better understand the peculiar aspects of his literary production, of his mentality, religious thought, social attitude. The case of a personality as L. Baranowicz is not identical, but similar: his literary production remains obscure in many respects because literary criticism did not yet face his works from the different points of view of the Polish, Ukrainian, Church-Slavonic and Muscovite cultures. The examples may be incremented, but this is not the place to do it.

If one looks at these phenomena from a modern “national” perspective, the personalities and works of this period may be considered as belonging not to only one system of ideological and literary components, but to two or more of them. Many literati of the 16th-17th centuries belong altogether to the Polish, the Ruthenian, the Belorussian or the Ukrainian cultures. They belong also to the Lithuanian culture, and

up to some degree to the Czech culture (e.g. Skaryna) and to the Hungarian culture (the court of Mathias Corvin is the best example of a cosmopolitan humanistic milieu). To make my idea more evident I will recall the fact that the Italian writer Callimaco Buonaccorsi belongs to the Italian history of literature as well as to the Polish and the Hungarian history of literature.

I do not conceal that the problem of Medieval literature is somewhat more complicated because the character of the Church Slavonic literary code has a profound distinctiveness from the Renaissance and Baroque literary code of the Ruthenian culture, and of the European renaissance culture. The same happens for the Russian literary culture. However, one should take into consideration that the heritage of Medieval Rus' deeply influenced the literature of all the Eastern-Slavic peoples: Ukraine, Belarus' and Russia as well, up to the modern age. If the Ruthenian literature of the 16th-17th century is so different from the Polish or from other literatures, it is also because the Slavic-Byzantine Orthodox substratum on which the Renaissance and Baroque innovations were grafted was so different from the Latin substratum of Western European cultures. Thus, it makes sense to have a description of the Rus' period when the whole development of the Ukrainian literature has to be reconstructed.

One more fact has to be stressed. The inclusion of a past heritage which belongs to more than one "national" literature gives to this heritage a different function and aspect, because its components are viewed from a new, unexpected perspective. The same authors and works – let's say Kyryl Turovs'kyj or Ilarion, the Kievskij Paterik or Grigorij Camblak, Orzechowski or Rysinski, Baranowicz or F. Skaryna or Wojciech Kojalowicz – receive a different lighting if they are perceived from the point of view of the common Byzantine-Slavic tradition or from the Rus' perspective, from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, from the Belorussian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian or even Czech perspectives, or from the consideration of a generally European, respectively Medieval or Renaissance and Baroque culture. This different perspective, the different lighting of the same phenomena helps not only to understand the work or the author under examination, but also the whole complex of the European literatures in their plurality and in the distinctiveness of each regional variant.

Thus I grow more and more convinced that it is useless and somewhat silly to go on arguing about the creation of a unique and exclusive "national" canon and about the "permissibility" or "not-permissibility" of including in one or the other "canon" authors and works who belong to a region where plurality is the rule.

The main task of literary and philological criticism is to keep within methodologically correct parameters and to avoid the application of modern concepts

and “units of measure” to past times. Works and authors of the past should be investigated according to the rules of their time and to the international context in which they grew and operated. At the same time the function and role they had in the development of the literature of their region or country has to be investigated and described. If we distinguish these two approaches, we will be obliged to acknowledge that the linguistic code and the set of rules of the Slavo-Byzantine Kyjivan culture is deeply different from the Ukrainian literature *strictu-sensu*, but that at the same time it was tantamount in the development of certain ideological and even formal elements of the Ukrainian literature of following centuries.

A major question remains terminology. Here there is no time to face it now. The only solution I see now, is to stop giving symbolic signification to the term and to define each time the conventional meaning we attribute to each of it.

3.

By all evidence, Ukraine needs today to fulfill its process of nation-building and state-building. The need to create a cultural system permitting to the new nation to identify itself in the memory of the past favors the rising of “nationally centered” parameters. I consider this as a natural phenomenon, a process which other Eastern European countries have achieved one century or more earlier. Western European countries faced the same problem of auto identification much earlier, in the period of Renaissance or in the 17th c. Though such phenomena as the importance given to “*Velesova knyha*” and similar forgeries should be avoided, the reconsideration of many myths and false theories may bring real useful results, both for the establishment of the canon of the Ukrainian literature and for the elimination of “martyrological” emphasis. This is a process which may be painful and may sometimes bring to hostility and lack of mutual comprehension, but it will last only until the new nation and state are firmly established.

To us it is more interesting to stress another point: The fact that the canon which may correspond to a Ukrainian point of view, may differ in several points from the canon which corresponds to the “horizon of expectation” and the cultural needs of the foreign milieu where a History of the literature or an Anthology is intended to circulate.

In view of creating an anthology of the Ukrainian literature, the organizers are confronted with a double need: on the one side to convey to the reader the image of the specificity of this literary heritage, on the other to make it understandable and palatable.

As a newcomer to the knowledge of Ukrainian literature, I can state that since the very beginning I was stricken mainly by the plurality of literary and linguistic codes, by the variety and the multiplicity of stratifications of this literature. It is a well-known fact that the lack of unity in language, system of genre, cultural trends and even political and ideological (religious) belonging is the major problem of the Ukrainian culture in general, of its evolution as a nation and a state today, and of its literature as well.

How to conciliate, in this perspective, the contradictory need to convey the specificity and to maintain the plurality of this culture?

For an Italian, or another Western reader I would begin by including the Medieval Kyjvan period only from the point of view of the perception which later generations had of it, more specifically the generations which represent a first documentary proof of the existence of a “national” self-consciousness. This happens beginning with the religious strives of the end of the 16th c. and the Cossack wars in the 17th century. To convey the idea of a political continuity on the lands of the future Ukrainian state, a continuity which seems to become important in the 16th century, I would give some passages of the Hustyn Chronicle. I would also choose at least two elaborations on the personality of Volodymyr I: an ecclesiastic elaboration of the Church Slavonic “Vita” and a half-popular account of the Legend of Khorsun, as it was published (in Russia) in the 1970s under the (misleading) name of “*bylyny*”. It would be probably attractive to chose also some passages of real “*bylyny*” and of folkloric verses about Volodymyr.

Very important is in my opinion the elaboration of the Kievan Paterik by Sylvester Kosiv and other similar 17th century translations or adaptations of medieval texts. I give it for granted that the reader should be informed by an introductory note that these texts were of Medieval Kyjvan origin, and had a tantamount importance as testimonies of the self-consciousness of the Ukrainians in the first phase of their nation-building.

However, I would not translate the Old Medieval texts, because their representativeness of the peculiarity of the Ukrainian literature is very low, and the literary code is too distant from the most representative Ukrainian literature to be useful for a Western reader.

As to later periods – Renaissance and Baroque – I would try to give the most possible large spectrum of languages, genres and styles used by the authors. Panegyric and occasional poetry of the 16th century should give an idea of the social structure of the Ruthenian lands in the Commonwealth and of the ways of penetration of Western standards in versification, poetics and rhetorical schooling; however, the continuity of Slavo-Byzantine tradition should also be acknowledged through passages from such

texts as Uchitel'noe Evangelie or Peredmowy to the liturgical and other religious books, grammars and similar didactic literature.

That large fragments from the polemic literature of the 16th-17th centuries must be included is beyond discussion. It should be stressed that the texts have to be published in the original language, be it “*rus'ka mova*”, Church Slavonic, or Polish. At this point it is evident that the translation in a foreign language nullifies the language differences. That's why I am absolutely convinced of the necessity to publish an Anthology with the original texts in front of the translation.

I will not give here a list of the texts and authors I consider necessary to include: they represent all the various literary genres, parodistic and dramatic literature (school-drama and intemedial), “*dumy*” and other kinds of texts. I consider it compulsory also to include examples of figurative poetry, of homiletic literature and some examples of epistles. All these texts belong to the members of the higher ecclesiastic hierarchy, written in various languages: Polish, Church Slavonic, “*rus'ka mova*”, Latin. They were the expression both of Polish and European baroque scholarship and poetic, and of an orthodox church-culture of Slavo-byzantine origin, which was bound to the supranational ecclesiastic institutions and had different parameters of self-identification with the regional, Ukrainian culture than Cossack chronicle or other kinds of “national” texts. However, the literary works written by these high strata of the Ukrainian culture, some of whom worked many years in the Russian empire, show highly peculiar characters making them an expression of the Ukrainian tradition. This is especially true for the works written in Kyjv, but also for many of the works written in Russia, even if a strong adaptation to the new milieu was compulsory. Hence, besides the panegyrics written for Petro Mohyla or P. Sahajdachnyj, for Mazepa or Vaarlaam Jasyms'kyj, I would include in the canon of Ukrainian literature and in an Anthology also passages of the “*Synopsis*” by Innokentij Gizel', where a pro-Russian inclination is evident in several episodes, and examples from the homilies, the epistles, the theological treatises and the poems which such personalities as Stefan Javors'kyj and Dmytro Tuptalo wrote in Russia. For the sermons of the latter I would rather chose passages from homilies written in Ukraine (which bear an evident Ruthenian linguistic character), but his church-history, the religious poems and the multilingual epistles written in Russia testify both of his Ukrainian origin and culture and of his engagement in the Russian ecclesiastical society. For Javors'kyj I would include the Polish-Latin panegyrics, but also Church-Slavonic homilies and theological works, mixed-language letters to Tuptalo and the Latin Elegy to the books – all works he wrote in Russia, which however bear most evident signs of the Latin-Polish-Ukrainian culture of the author. All these works give evidence of both the supranational character

of the high-literature of Ukraine “between east and West”, and the local, regional tradition. It is not by chance that in the last years research indicates more and more how different was the baroque literature written by Russians and by émigrés Ukrainians (or Belorussians), though all of them followed the same rhetoric and poetic rules, imitated the same models and were – directly or indirectly – schooled by the same teachers.

The problem of the multilingual, multifaceted and multi-layered literature of the Ukraine between the 16th and the 18th century is among the most fascinating, though complex phenomena concerning this geo-cultural area. We know that this specific character continued to be relevant in the 19th century with respect to the Russian milieu where many Ukrainian writers lived and worked. I am convinced that the Ukrainian canon comprehends all these works, together with the more strictly “national” expression of literary activity as the “*dumy*”, the Cossack chronicles, the satirical and parodistic poems, and so on. There is no time here for an examination of other examples. I would like to finish with the consideration that the inclusion in the Ukrainian canon of the mentioned multilingual and multicultural works does not imply their exclusion from other canons. Baranowicz and Javors’kyj belong also to the Polish canon (though in a “peripheral” position). Javors’kyj and Tuptalo belong also to the Russian canon. It is interesting to stress the different functions, which different works of these authors have in the Ukrainian and Russian literature. The trilingual letters exchanged by Javors’kyj and Tuptalo were written following the literary rules of epistolography, but were intended only for a private circulation among friends. From all points of view – of language, style and content – they certainly belong to the core of Ukrainian literature, though they were written in Russia. Javors’kyj’s Latin “*Elegy*” to his books also belongs to the Ukrainian literature, being addressed to the brethren of the monastery he had founded in Ukraine. These works belong certainly to the Russian literature as well, though they occupy there a more peripheral position (especially the letters). On the other hand, the sermons and the encomiastic speeches Javors’kyj wrote and pronounced for the czar in Russia are strictly bound to the Russian imperial policy and society. Hence we have to ascribe them to the core of the Russian literature. They nevertheless belong to the Ukrainian literature as well, since they were built on the set of rules domination Ukrainian high culture and represented much of the historical background of 17th century Ukrainian literature. From this Ukrainian perspective they represent however a “peripheral” manifestation. Similar considerations may be done for Tuptalo’s “*Letopisec*” and for his “*Lives of the saints*”. Both works grew out of the cultural milieu and the scholarly background of kyivan erudition of the 17th century. The first was inspired by the need to instruct the ignorant Russian priests, the second was written partially in Ukraine, partially in

Russia, but it was directed to all the Orthodox readers: the Ruthenians, the Russians and the Balkanians as well. Thus, though they belong to the Ukrainian and to the Russian canons, they represent also a supranational Orthodox Slavonic tradition which had its roots in the Medieval *Slavia orthodoxa* and expressed the ideas of the universal Slavonic Orthodox Church. Hence they belong also to an ideal history of the Church Slavonic literature, beginning with Cyril and Method and being alive still in our days.

I will not enter a domain which I do not know well enough, but I certainly think that a part of the Ukrainian literature written in Russia belongs to both the Ukrainian and the Russian literatures. It will be our duty to find methodological means and the flexibility necessary to examine these phenomena and to build correct parameters for interpreting the place and the function of each work, each author and each period in various cultural complexes and from different perspectives.