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The *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* (formerly *Journal of Ukrainian Graduate Studies*) is published semiannually, in the spring and fall, by the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies. Annual subscription rates are \$6.00 for individuals and \$8.00 for libraries and institutions. Cheques and money orders are payable in Canadian or American funds only to *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*. Please do not send cash. Subscribers outside Canada: please pay in U.S. funds.

The *Journal* publishes articles on Ukrainian-related subjects in the humanities and social sciences. The criterion for acceptance of submissions is their scholarly contribution to the field of Ukrainian studies. The *Journal* also publishes translations, documents, information, book reviews, letters and journalistic articles of a problem-oriented, controversial nature. Those wishing to submit manuscripts should observe the guidelines on the inside back cover.

Manuscripts, books for review, and all correspondence regarding subscriptions, changes of address, and editorial matters should be sent to: *Journal of Ukrainian Studies, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, M5S 1A1.*

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Typesetting by Harmony Printing Limited, Toronto, Canada.

Printed by the University of Toronto Press.

ISSN 0228-1635

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Walter Smyrniw

THE THEME OF MAN-GODHOOD IN OLES BERDNYK'S SCIENCE FICTION

Ваша теза про безсмертя Людини в плоті — богохульство! Ви ставите під сумнів існування душі, боготворите Людину!
Чи не краще самими стати Богами . . . , ніж чекати милості невідомого Бога? Перед людством — прекрасний шлях!
“Поza часом і простором”

Two major tendencies have evolved in the science-fiction genre since the nineteenth century. One entails an emphasis on the developments in science and technology, and the other, an accentuation of the physical and psychological evolution of man or other life forms in advanced technological environments. After the appearance of Mary Shelley's notorious *Frankenstein* (1818), due attention was paid in Western science fiction both to the marvels of scientific and technical progress and to the various consequences that it could have on living beings and their societies. This trend can be observed in the science-fiction stories of Edgar Allan Poe, in the scientific romances of Jules Verne, in the most diverse and imaginative science-fiction works of Herbert George Wells and also in the writings of both major and minor science-fiction authors of the twentieth century.

Ukrainian science fiction underwent a somewhat different course of development. Since its beginning in the 1920s, Ukrainian science fiction was under the hegemony of science and technology till the early 1960s. The foremost representative of this trend was Volodymyr Vladko, who is hailed as the Dean of Ukrainian science fiction by Soviet critics. Vladko's preoccupation with developments in science and technology can be discerned from the very titles of his works: "Raketoplan S-218" (Rocketplane S-218), "Chudesnyi henerator" (A Marvelous Generator), "Blyskavka v poloni" (The Captured Lightning Bolt) and *Idut robotari* (The Robots are Coming). Vladko not only wrote a number of such

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stories and novels during the 1930's, but revised them during the next two decades in order to update them with new developments in science. Vladko was very concerned about the scientific accuracy in his writings, but he paid very little attention to psychological verisimilitude. Consequently, for several decades the actions of the robots in Vladko's science fiction were much more credible than the behavior of human personages.

During the 1960s, Vladko finally realized the psychological inadequacies in his writings and endeavoured to rectify them. His efforts to develop various human problems were, however, much too meagre and came too late, for in the 1960s Vladko's writings were eclipsed by the science fiction of Oles Berdnyk.

A prolific and a much more talented writer than Vladko, Berdnyk did not abandon the scientific and technological notions. On the contrary, in his stories and novels he introduced a greater diversity of scientific concepts than any previous Ukrainian author. But unlike Vladko, Berdnyk succeeded in depicting the actual and the hypothetical achievements in science and technology in relation to various problems of human existence. Moreover, Berdnyk explored further the notion of evolution in respect to individual beings and societies than any previous Ukrainian science-fiction writers.

In this endeavour Berdnyk achieved his greatest success in his most accomplished novel *Zorianyi korsar* (The Star Corsair, 1971). He describes there a somewhat unusual assignment which is given to a Universal Robot during a flight to another galaxy. As the crew of the starship perishes from an unexpected exposure to radiation, a dying mother orders one of the robots to take care of her infants. This is an extraordinary task, even for a Universal Robot. In order to look after the newborn twins, who had been protected during the accident by the special radiation shields of their nursery, the navigational robot had to modify his own program substantially. To carry out the assignment, the robot first of all had to reconstruct his own body to gain the means of mobility (being a navigational robot, he was bolted to the floor). And thereafter he had to assume the role of a nurse and learn quickly how to feed the infants, change their diapers and even caress them. Later the robot became a teacher and provided the twins with a thorough education not merely in science and technology, but in arts and humanities as well. And eventually the Universal Robot, whom the boys called affectionately Urchyk, became a companion of the adult explorers of space who established contacts with various forms of life in another galaxy.

By way of this episode Berdnyk presents simultaneously the

stages of growth of the human twins and the various stages of development of the mechanical companion. In order to fulfill the different roles, the robot not merely acquired new programs by obtaining diverse information from the memory banks of the starship, but also learned how to use the knowledge in solving many unpredictable problems that arose during the rearing of infants in outer space. Inevitably the learning process enabled the robot to think independently and not merely to solve practical problems, but to engage in philosophical speculations, even about such a complex and puzzling phenomenon as love. But the development of the Universal Robot is not confined to the expansion of mechanical intelligence. His body also underwent several complex changes. The robot realized that his cold, metallic body frightened and repelled the children. Hence he manufactured for himself a new body which was mechanical in nature, but nevertheless had the appearance, the soft texture and the temperature of a normal human body. Eventually the robot wanted to acquire a real human body so that he would be able to experience not only the rational, but also the emotional substance of love. The twins helped him to realise this by producing for him a chemical humanoid body into which they transferred the memories and the intelligence of their former mechanical friend.

At this point the reader is left wondering whether the love affair of the former robot would culminate in a consummated marriage and whether he would become the father of new descendants. Whereas the progenitive abilities of the Universal Robot are not illustrated, there is no doubt whatsoever about the fact that by way of this witty episode the author endeavoured to outline the possibility of a self-directed robotic evolution.

For avid readers of science fiction it is not difficult to discern that, like many other writers in this genre, Berdnyk resorts to depictions of robots in order to raise certain questions about human existence. The portrayal of robotic metamorphosis in *Zoranyi korsar* is, of course, relevant to man's own evolution. If advances in science facilitate the creation of a mechanical entity that can evolve into a humanoid being, would it be possible to alter the evolution of man or other biological beings with the aid of an advanced knowledge of genetic engineering? If this were possible, how should the scientifically directed evolution be realized, and what should be the ultimate goal of this evolution? Berdnyk entertains these notions not only in *Zoranyi korsar*, but also in a number of his previous science-fiction works.

The first three books published by Oles Berdnyk between 1957 and 1959 were in the main devoted to various science-fiction

adventure tales.¹ Some of them were quite entertaining, but devoid of depictions of complex technology or of bold ideas about the future way of life. A noteworthy exception is Berdnyk's story "Poza chasom i prostorum" (Beyond Time and Space, 1957). Although briefly, the author outlines therein both the necessary technology to build a starship that would travel to another solar system faster than the speed of light and the possible evolution of man into a godlike being. Henceforth these notions recurred quite regularly in Berdnyk's subsequent works, mainly in his novels which were more suitable for detailed postulations of technical and evolutionary developments among living beings.

Shliakhy tytaniv (The Ways of the Titans, 1959), Berdnyk's first major novel, contains an enthusiastic acclaim of scientific and technological progress. This novel offers vast pleasures for the science-fiction devotees who are fond of sophisticated space technology. Such notions as matter-antimatter propulsion systems, an entire planet made up of antimatter with the necessary technology to prevent a starship from exploding on landing on this planet, various antigravity devices and gravitational propulsion modules, the production of a vast number of indestructible war machines that are capable of annihilating all life forms in an entire galaxy and are controlled by the will of a single scientist—all of this may impress and entertain the readers of this novel. But the above-mentioned developments are quite rudimentary in comparison to the achievements outlined in the concluding part of the work. There Berdnyk describes how the various advancements in science made it possible to achieve immortality and even "resurrection" of the dead (providing the body of the deceased had not decomposed). An equally impressive technological innovation was the "neutralization of space," which made it possible for starships to travel in a few seconds to another solar system, situated some 10,000 parsecs from earth.²

The descriptions of the real and imagined scientific developments in *Shliakhy tytaniv* are so detailed that the author deemed it necessary to elucidate the scientific terminology in footnotes. From these descriptions it is quite plain that Berdnyk endorses the notion of scientific and technological progress, but with certain

¹ *Poza chasom i prostorum: fantastychni povisti ta opovidannia* (Kiev, 1957); *Liudyna bez sertsia: fantastychno-pryhodnytska povist* (Kiev, 1958); *Pryvyd ide po zemli: naukovo-fantastychna povist* (Kiev, 1959).

² A parsec is a unit equalling 3.26 light years that is used to measure interstellar space; the speed of light is 300,000 km. per second.

reservations. In a chapter entitled "Tsarstvo zaliznoho dyktatora" (The Kingdom of the Iron Dictator) Berdnyk advocates that advancements in computer technology must not reach such a point that all thinking processes are passed on to the machines, because this can lead to a situation where an electronic machine will become an absolute dictator over humanoid life forms. Human development, maintains Berdnyk, must keep pace with all technical innovations. Hence he outlines in the novel how wisely and well the men of the future utilize the scientific discoveries for the welfare of all living creatures. Their achievements are certainly impressive, especially the process that can rejuvenate all the cells of one's body and thus provide perfect health and virtual immortality. But there are certain limitations in the sphere of biological development. Even when the Homo sapiens has learned how to take perfect care of his body, even in the distant future he will require food in order to survive. The only significant progress in this sphere was a change in eating habits. The men of the future stopped eating the flesh of dead animals and derived their sustenance from vegetables and synthetic foods. The dependence on food was modified somewhat, but certainly not eliminated. Consequently, man still appears as a finite being in the highly advanced technical society.

In his next novel, *Strila chasu* (The Arrow of Time, 1960), Berdnyk dwells once again on the problem of biological limitations in the context of advanced science and technology. A young student, Vasyl Horovy, is fully convinced about the endless progress in science. Confidently and even arrogantly he states: "Isn't man discovering more and more secrets in nature? And knowledge has no end! Hence mankind is as omniscient as God, for there is no secret that we will not be able to unravel some day."³ Horovy also believes in an unlimited evolution of man himself and that this eventually will transform the Homo sapiens to such an extent that he will become a godlike being. A journey to a highly advanced alien civilization quickly invalidates these presumptuous notions. When Horovy reaches a strange planet, he is both dazzled by the marvels of a highly advanced science and technology and astounded on being told by the alien host that biological evolutions do not continue indefinitely. The alien illustrates this by an analogy to human development: "No vessel can be filled continuously. To an extent man is also a vessel. He represents the highest branch in the evolution of the animal world. But all branches must develop

³ Oles Berdnyk, *Strila chasu* (Kiev, 1960), p. 36.

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according to the laws of nature. Are you familiar with biological dead ends? They confirm the stagnancy prevailing in matter. In any world man will come inevitably to a biological dead end, as had formerly all his non-intelligent predecessors and ancestors.”⁴

Horovy learns how the alien civilization coped with the problem of overcoming a dead end in its evolution. These beings became aware that further development would be impossible as long as they had to derive nourishment from various food chains. They searched for a radical means to free themselves from this dependence, and after a century-long effort they found out how to obtain their energy not from plant- or animal-based foods, but directly from their sun. These living beings were able to exist on solar energy because their scientists produced a device that was implanted into their bodies and thus transformed the energy of the sun directly into biologically useful energy. This led to many changes and rapid developments in the realm of knowledge and their mode of life. But even this extraordinary escape from an evolutionary dead end did not result in immortality, omniscience and omnipotence, the minimum prerequisites for godhood. During his second visit to this galaxy, Horovy discovered that even these highly advanced beings were unable to escape death and to avert an unexpected catastrophe from outer space.

Through further development of the plot, Berdnyk shows in *Strila chasu* how the various advancements in science enabled mankind to conquer space and even to travel through time in order to contact intelligent beings in distant galaxies. But even with the aid of highly advanced science and technology, man is still unable to control all developments in space. Therefore, when the sun of our solar system began to die, even the advanced future Homo sapiens did not have the knowledge nor the power to replenish its energy. In order to prolong life on Earth, the planet had to be moved to another solar system. By way of these episodes the author points out how unfounded and near-sighted were the conjectures about the omniscience and omnipotence of science that had been made by such twentieth-century proponents of scientific progress as Vasyl Horovy.

With greater boldness and imagination than previous Ukrainian science-fiction writers, Oles Berdnyk postulated in his first two novels a number of complex and intriguing problems in regard to the question of ultimate developments in biology and technology. His third major work, *Dity bezmezhzhia* (The Children of

⁴ Ibid., p. 81.

Infinity, 1964), is certainly no less daring and no less imaginative than his previous novels. In contrast to his preceding writings, the various technological gadgets and developments recede, however, into the background. Instead the author places the emphasis on philosophical questions and on man's psychological potentials. In the very beginning of *Dity bezmezhhia*, Berdnyk discounts the notion that there was a creator of the universe. The reader is assured that "no one has created either matter or life. It has always existed in the realm of infinity. More than that—it comprises the essence of the universe. It's impossible to speak of the universe, of an existence without matter. If matter did not exist, there would be no universe either. What has a creator to do with all of this?"⁵

The adherents of materialistic philosophy would no doubt be appeased by the above statements, but their comfort would be short-lived. They would be very disheartened on encountering in Berdnyk's novel statements to the effect that in the future the major developments will not entail a technological evolution, but primarily an internal, a psychological development of man,⁶ and therefore "where one can do without cumbersome technology, it must be abandoned."⁷ Throughout the novel the author seeks to demonstrate the "enormous" strength of man's "psychic energy" and asserts that "when mankind will be able to gain complete control over this flow of energy, it will become almighty."⁸ Berdnyk outlines a major breakthrough in the experimentation with man's psychic potential. With the aid of a device called the "cerebro-psychic concentrator," some individuals learn how to transmit their psychic impulses through space, and eventually they even manage to create a "psychic double" of themselves that they can project to other places. The objectives and the advantages of this development are most apparent. By being able to transmit one's "psychic double" instantly to any point in space, the traveller would be able to penetrate into all hostile environments of space, including the centre of our sun, which, incidentally, is visited by two of the brave psychic travellers of the novel. As these psychic transmissions are instantaneous, the enormous intergalactic distances and the very infinity of space would no longer be obstacles to the psychic space traveller. And the dire problem of relativity,

⁵ Oles Berdnyk, *Dity bezmezhhia* (Kiev, 1964), p. 16.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

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which prevents one from returning to one's own time period after a very lengthy journey through space, would also be solved.

Whereas it is not difficult to discern that the ultimate purpose of man's psychic evolution in *Dity bezmezhzhia* entails the final conquest of space and time, it seems hardly possible to grasp the laws and the modus operandi of this development. Indeed, this novel contains many notions that, shrouded by mysticism, seem as nebulous and incomprehensible as the distant stellar systems of the Milky Way. In spite of this, it is possible to surmise, especially from the epilogue of the work, that Berdnyk endeavoured not merely to postulate how the power of the human mind could lead to a further stage in the evolution of the Homo sapiens, but also to depict such notions as "transmutation" of the human body and "transfer of consciousness," which would in turn facilitate travels "to other stars without rockets" and the "penetration of other dimensions."⁹ Moreover, after *Dity bezmezhzhia* the notions pertaining to the infinite power of the human mind became the focal point of Berdnyk's writings.

On reading Berdnyk's works in a chronological order, one inevitably not merely becomes aware of his consistent preoccupation with the notions pertaining to the actual and the hypothetical developments in science, technology and life itself, but also notes his serious concern about the ultimate results and the final consequences of scientific and evolutionary processes. In view of this, it is not surprising that the very word "teleology" appears in a number of his works. Therefore it is quite consequential that Berdnyk chose to utilize the teleological premise in *Zorianski korsar* to depict and to assess the consequences of scientific and biological developments. And on reading Berdnyk's most accomplished work, one cannot avoid being delighted by the fact that the author presents a more detailed and a much more lucid account of these developments.

In *Zorianski korsar*, Berdnyk is very sceptical about the contribution of conventional science and technology to evolutionary developments. He manifests this attitude in the depiction of life on the planet Aoda. There the scientists discovered the secret of photosynthesis, and this led to the production of synthetic foods and other necessities. Automated factories made work quite unnecessary, and all the material needs were provided for the entire population of the planet. But this did not further evolutionary developments. On the contrary, by providing unlimited affluence,

⁹ Ibid., p. 352.

science and technology deprived the population of the need and the desire to struggle and to progress. Moreover, the discovery fostered a purely hedonistic existence and a vegetative apathy. Consequently, "evolution came to an anti-evolutionary dead end; it was in a state of a rotary degradation," and in a few centuries "an involution began. The majority of the people were already unable to speak."¹⁰

Berdnyk refrains from emphasizing that scientific progress must lead inevitably to retrogressive and involutory developments. On the contrary, he describes in *Zorianyi korsar* how science gave rise to an alternative development on the planetary system of Ara. The members of this civilization managed to avoid the paralyzing hedonistic decadence that prevailed on Aoda. The people of Ara developed their science and technology to such an extent that no further progress was possible. They achieved not only immortality, but also the means to resurrect the dead. But at the height of its development, this civilization also faced a major crisis. Since no further advancement was possible in life or science, an increasing number of people lost their desire to live and committed suicide. The government, obviously, did not tolerate such actions, and the authorities brought the suicidal maniacs back to life. Nevertheless, the mass suicides led to a dilemma that brought Ara to a state of psychological decline and involution. The scientists of Ara were called to a Congress in order to solve the crisis. But the best they were able to offer was to explode their star system in order to restore an evolutionary cycle in the cosmos. These scientists concluded that death is an essential part of an evolutionary cycle, and that by overcoming personal death they merely postponed the ultimate death of their species.

In *Zorianyi korsar* the evolutionary dilemma is solved not by an ingenious scientist, but by a dissident in the field of science. The discoverer of the new evolutionary approach was the humanoid Aeras, a former teacher of physics on a planet similar to Earth. Aeras examined various scientific and philosophical theories of evolution and found them all unsatisfactory. Next he explored the mystical and occult sciences and dismissed them as absurd. Then Aeras realized that inasmuch as he represents the highest point of evolution among life forms, he must examine himself in order to comprehend the evolutionary phenomenon, for, as he put it, "I am the focal point of knowledge."¹¹ Through further

¹⁰ Oles Berdnyk, *Zorianyi korsar* (Kiev, 1971), p. 99.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

introspection Aeras realized that his ultimate desire was to become omniscient and almighty. He knew, however, that he could not achieve this goal in his present biological form and concluded: "It is essential to disrupt the despotism of the form that was imposed on us by nature."¹² When he attempted to teach his students about the need to become almighty and omniscient, Aeras was obviously declared insane. Fortunately, he was placed in an asylum. The environment of this institution enabled him to refine his theories and to test them through experiments.

During his confinement, Aeras reflected on the laws that pertain to evolutionary developments. On considering the food chains without which many living beings could not survive, he concluded that the dependence on food amounts to a form of bondage. "Why is it necessary to eat someone in order to stay alive?" he queried.¹³ Aeras resolved to discover whether it would be possible to exist without eating. He started to eat less and less, and at times refrained from eating for several days. At first he lost much weight, but eventually broke the habit of eating and "began a conscious assimilation of air, water and sunlight."¹⁴ The conversion to a solar form of energy was a success, and Aeras was able to determine henceforth his own evolution. Eventually he changed into a being that could derive its energy from any source, overcome gravity, and travel not only through space, but even through solid objects. In short, Aeras deviated from the evolutionary pattern of his species by way of a self-directed and self-willed metamorphosis into a demiurge, or man-god.

By freeing himself from the laws of nature, Aeras was able to escape from the asylum. Prior to leaving he recruited a group of disciples who also wanted to attain the state of man-godhood. When the disciples completed their metamorphosis into godhood, they were not content to exist in isolation. As one of them phrased it, "we did not undertake the most difficult trial for our own sake. We wanted to bring our planet to a new path of evolution."¹⁵

The government on Aeras's native planet, Orana, was opposed to such evolutionary changes and stigmatized Aeras and his followers as a gang of pirates. The legal and political establishment was, however, most unsuccessful in persecuting them, for these new beings were, after all, almighty. But in spite of being invincible, the godlike beings did not use force or coercion in their

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 229.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

missionary activities. They adhered to a code that ensured complete freedom for all. Soon the godhood mission spread from planet to planet and to various galaxies. The most zealous missionary was the first disciple of Aeras, who became known as the Star Corsair. He travelled not only through space, but through time as well. Eventually he reached Earth and proclaimed the beginning of the godhood era for mankind.

Inasmuch as *Zorianyi korsar* ends with this proclamation one cannot be certain whether the author considered the Homo sapiens as a worthy candidate for godhood. One could doubt whether humans were sufficiently advanced to undergo a metamorphosis into gods. But Berdnyk outlined this possibility in a work that he evidently wrote prior to *Zorianyi korsar*. Entitled "Apostol bezsmertia" (The Apostle of Immortality, 1970), the story apparently circulated widely among Soviet Ukrainian readers in *samvydav* versions before being published in the West in 1975.¹⁶

The central character of *Apostol bezsmertia* is a young Ukrainian mathematician called Hryhorii. He had been a computer specialist, but had to leave the profession due to an accident that left him paralyzed. While confined to bed, Hryhorii began a hunger therapy when other medical remedies failed. As the therapy brought an unexpected and complete recovery, Hryhorii decided to subject himself to an experiment in order to determine whether it would be possible to alter his whole physiology. Withdrawing to the Carpathian Mountains, he began a sixty day-long fast and strained his mind and will-power to the utmost in order to force his body to assimilate nourishment directly from the sun. The end result of this undertaking was a metamorphosis into a new being. Direct utilization of solar energy eventually made him immortal and omnipotent. But he had no desire to be the sole possessor of infinite power and supreme knowledge. Eager to teach others how to attain it, the new man-god met a traveller in the Caucasus and told him how godhood may be achieved. This man-god achieved some success in his apostleship. His first convert became Valia, his former girlfriend. Equal rights are evidently guaranteed in the realm of godhood.

What inferences can be made from the man-godhood theme in Berdnyk's works? Does it indicate that the author is given to depictions of pure fantasy? Is it based on a scientific premise, or is one justified in stating, as Soviet critics frequently had, that mysticism and magic are a dominant feature of Berdnyk's writings?

¹⁶ Oles Berdnyk, *Zoloti vorota: povisti* (Baltimore, 1975).

Till recent times Berdnyk's portrayal of the metamorphosis leading to mangodhood would surely have been regarded as sheer fantasy. Evolutionary processes were conceived as very stable and subject to their own laws, which could not be manipulated by man. But the most recent developments in genetics, which include not only the isolation of the DNA molecule and the synthesis of a man-made DNA molecule, but also direct intrusions into evolutionary processes by an asexual transfer of genetic material from one cell to another that can then result in the creation of new species of living organisms, make genetic engineering and controlled evolutionary development a real possibility. Moreover, geneticists have isolated recently the human chromosomes that are apparently related to genetic memory. The discovery of the mechanism that would activate this memory pattern could lead to many interesting possibilities, among them the precise recollection of the various evolutionary stages of the *Homo sapiens*.

These developments in genetics certainly provide a scientific base for Berdnyk's exposition of the man-godhood theme. What is more, Berdnyk is evidently well aware of the recent discoveries in life sciences. In *Zoranyi korsar*, he makes several allusions to genetic memory and offers certain conjectures about the means to activate this memory. Furthermore, Berdnyk advocates in this novel that the evolutionary advancements for all living species involved radical departures from the preceding forms and the previous environment: "Even the lower animals were not afraid to break the law of statics. Fish desired to go out on dry land and were born as amphibious creatures. Their timid relatives are still in the oceans. The lizards wanted to fly, and a multitude of charming creatures—birds—began to soar above the planet. The primeval savage primates raised their heads to the stars—and became humans!"¹⁷ Berdnyk maintains that inasmuch as the non-intelligent creatures took the necessary steps in a transition to a higher form, as a conscious creature man could use his intellect and will-power to elevate himself to a higher sphere of existence by stimulating his genetic memory to recall the previous adaptation procedures and then use this knowledge to transform the human body. Berdnyk even postulates an explanation at the molecular level of the metamorphosis of man into a being capable of directly utilizing solar energy. He states that "our cells and organs have magnetic fields. They have varying intensities, different directions, different beams and polarities," but on learning how to "con-

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

centrate the energies of all the organs and cells into a single complex" man could transmute the cells of his body into a receptor of solar energy.¹⁸

Berdnyk's treatment of the evolutionary notions that could culminate in man-godhood has certainly a bearing on the recent developments in life sciences and technological trends—the current research in solar energy is as well known as our pending energy crisis. Berdnyk's incorporation of these notions into science fiction is indeed very imaginative and thought-provoking. After all, if new discoveries in genetics may enable man to intrude into the evolutionary dynamics and to employ genetic engineering in order to eradicate such problems as genetically inherited diseases, to breed better animals and to raise more crops, would it not be logical for him to attempt to shape his own evolution? And if man were to possess the means to accomplish this, why should he not endeavor to attain omnipotence, immortality and an absolute state of freedom, which thus far was enjoyed only by various deities?

Berdnyk's treatment of the man-godhood theme certainly lies within the realm of scientific probability—and the exploration of various probabilities based on scientific data constitutes the very nature of science fiction. While Berdnyk dwelled on the theme of man-godhood in his novels, stories and even poems, his writings were in the main entertaining and thought-provoking. But in the works published after *Zorianyi korsar* it appeared as though Berdnyk had forgotten that science fiction is based mainly on depictions of scientific probabilities rather than on the portrayal of concrete reality. His subsequent writings began to contain not merely hypothetical and fictional expositions of the man-godhood theme, but pronouncements for a program of actual developments that could lead to an evolution of man into a godlike being. In his essays and letters, Berdnyk began to expound an entire system of man-godhood mythology. These works are imbued with such didactic utterings as "There is but one value for which it is worthwhile to struggle and to face death: *our divine essence*."¹⁹ Berdnyk aimed such slogans not only at his countrymen, but also at all of humanity. In one of his epistles to the people of Earth, Berdnyk declares: "Cosmic Ukraine makes a brotherly appeal to mankind—to begin a New State of Divine Life to which Christ, the Great

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 235.

¹⁹ Oles Berdnyk, *Ukraina sichi vohnianoï* (Baltimore, 1977), p. 19. Berdnyk's italics.

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Teacher of the New Testament, called us in his prayer.”²⁰ On reading many similar appeals, one cannot help but wonder whether Berdnyk is suffering from an apostolic delusion.

There are many things one does not and, indeed, cannot know about the biographies of contemporary writers. But it is a well-documented fact that Oles Berdnyk had written and published seventeen science-fiction novels and a host of short stories prior to being expelled from the Writers' Union in 1973. The theme of man-godhood recurred in a number of his works, but until 1973 Berdnyk presented it with skill, great imagination and even gentle humor. It was not put to the reader didactically and in categorical imperatives as it is in his later essays and letters. As the didactic declarations were published after Berdnyk's expulsion from the Writers' Union and were all printed abroad, often without the consent of the author, one could suspect that either these works may have been written by someone else, or that the harassment and incarceration that Berdnyk faced frequently in the 1970s had a profound effect on his writings and perhaps even on his mental faculties. Subsequent data may, of course, shed more light on the matter, but even at present there is some evidence about Berdnyk's transition from the writing of science fiction to didactic epistles and essays.

On the basis of the attacks on Berdnyk in the Soviet press, one gets the impression that the author started to advocate the need to strive towards man-godhood only after the publication of *Zoranyi korsar*. For example, on 21 April 1972, O. Mykytan censured Berdnyk in *Literaturna Ukraina* for assuming the “role of a preacher” and for propagating various notions about godhood and incorporeal existence. A close examination of pertinent data confirms, however, that Berdnyk began to manifest such tendencies much earlier. Evidently, Soviet literary gendarmes did not become aware of Berdnyk's preaching tendencies until he became a popular public speaker on science fiction, especially at gatherings of university students. But from the very beginning of his literary career, Berdnyk took every opportunity to address his readers directly in the prefaces and afterwords of his major works. In the foreword to *Shliakhy tytaniv*, for example, Berdnyk urges the reader to believe “that Man will become immortal, omnipotent, omnipresent”²¹ Moreover, the style and the tone of these prefaces is very similar to Berdnyk's subsequent didactic essays and epistles.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 32. Berdnyk's capitalization.

²¹ Oles Berdnyk, *Shliakhy tytaniv* (Kiev, 1959), p. 11. Berdnyk's capitalization.

Literary and political authorities evidently failed to notice that Berdnyk used the prefaces as the means to preach to the readers, to plead that they believe that the fiction of his novels will ultimately become a reality of life. From this it follows that throughout the course of his literary career, Berdnyk was persistently preoccupied with the formulation of a mythological system about man-godhood. His essays and letters merely confirm an eagerness to create a religious cult based on a science-fiction premise. Berdnyk not only established this cult, but became its first convert and its first preacher. Obviously, the Soviet authorities could not tolerate this science-fiction creed. It presented a greater threat than the traditional and established religions and provided a serious competition to the sanctioned Marxist-Leninist doctrine, which, incidentally, is also based on a pseudo-scientific premise in respect to man's evolution by way of dialectical materialism. The Marxist-Leninist cult assures the believers of an eventual paradise on earth, but it does not promise them either eternal life or omnipotence.

The official Soviet campaign against Berdnyk's cult of man-godhood was intense, harsh and obviously devastating, but it was never waged directly or explicitly. It was in the main camouflaged by euphemisms, clichés and innuendos. *Literaturna Ukraina* declared that Berdnyk's "preachings are filled with Biblical, Buddhist and Yogic dogmas, as well as the maxims of various charlatans . . .,"²² and later this very paper announced that for some time Berdnyk has been "actively supporting his creative work with public activities, appearing before his readers with dubious, extremely confused pseudo-philosophical maxims."²³ On the pages of *Radianska Ukraina*, Iu. Malanchuk censured Berdnyk for his failure to show how "only communism and the new social order . . . will lead to genuine unity among men" and went on to denounce the author's portrayal of "the demiurges of the new worlds."²⁴ Equally vague and ambiguous about Berdnyk's real activities was the announcement of 15 May 1973 in *Literaturna Ukraina* that the Executive Board of the Ukrainian Writers' Union approved the expulsion of Oles Berdnyk from this Union "for his antisocial acts and deviations from the principles and tasks outlined in the charter of the USSR Writers' Union."²⁵

²² O. Mykytan, "U roli propovidnyka," *Literaturna Ukraina*, 21 April 1972.

²³ *Literaturna Ukraina*, 27 March 1973.

²⁴ *Radianska Ukraina*, 15 May 1973.

²⁵ *Literaturna Ukraina*, 15 May 1973.

From the above-cited examples of the rather obscure ideological rhetoric, it is obvious that all notions pertaining to the cult of man-godhood are regarded in the Soviet domain as both heretical and antisocial activities. And this is the main, and perhaps the foremost, reason for the persecution of Oles Berdnyk in the early 1970s, for the very harassment of the author prior to his notorious letters to every important person on Earth and prior to his involvement with the Ukrainian Helsinki Group.

Berdnyk's cult of man-godhood is quite incompatible with the official Soviet ideology. However, it is equally unpalatable to the members of major world religions. Most likely they would be irked and provoked by the numerous parodies, by the unreserved ridicule of all who believe in a Supreme Power, which recur as leitmotifs in most of Berdnyk's renditions of the man-godhood theme. A passage in *Zorianyi korsar*, entitled "Sud nad bohamy" (The Trial of the Gods), would no doubt displease all who worship a deity.²⁶ And devout Christians would inevitably be offended by the depiction of the Star Corsair, who appears in the novel as a new saviour, introduces new commandments and bestows on mankind a sacred chalice containing "the wine of immortality."²⁷

The recurring antitheistic assertions in Berdnyk's novels, stories and essays completely invalidate the conjecture about Berdnyk's religious belief that was made recently by Ivan Hrynokh: "Who is Oles Berdnyk? He is an utopian who, on gazing at the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor, was transfigured himself and endowed with charisma, and he became God's fool for the sake of Christ."²⁸ Devoid of substance, this conclusion does not stem from Hrynokh's misreading of Berdnyk's works. It is apparent from the article that he completely ignored Berdnyk's science-fiction writings and derived the above notions from Berdnyk's essays and letters, particularly from Berdnyk's letter to Pope John Paul II.²⁹ To be sure, Berdnyk is experiencing at present the extreme cruelty and servitude that prevails in Soviet penal

²⁶ Berdnyk, *Zorianyi korsar*, pp. 271-8.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 373.

²⁸ Ivan Hrynokh, "Oles Berdnyk (utopist chy kharyzmatyk na obrii drugoho tysiacholittia khrystianstva v Ukraini?)," *Suchasnist*, April 1980, p. 99.

²⁹ Hrynokh is evidently not well acquainted with Berdnyk's science fiction; this is attested to not merely by the numerous inaccuracies in his brief bibliography of Berdnyk's science fiction, but also by his erroneous reference to Berdnyk's novel, which he calls "Zorianyi kosmos." *Ibid.*, pp. 88-9.

camps; but he is not punished there for his belief in Christ or in the Almighty. It is quite plain from Berdnyk's writings that the cult of man-godhood, which he and his few followers have designated recently as "The Brotherhood of an Alternative Evolution," has nothing in common with the Christian creed. Berdnyk should not be hailed, therefore, "as the whip of God, as a fearless prophet."³⁰

Berdnyk's cult of man-godhood, which emerged from a theme in his science-fiction writings, is certainly unprecedented in the history of Ukrainian literature or, for that matter, in the literary developments of the Soviet Union. Many Soviet science-fiction writers have composed works that do entail a number of deviations from the accepted periphery of the science-fiction genre. But no other Soviet author has dared to dwell on a theme to such an extent that it evolved as a mythological system and, furthermore, to promote it publicly as a religious cult.

Berdnyk's involvement with the cult of man-godhood is, of course, unique in the Soviet Union. But in terms of international developments in science fiction, Berdnyk's obsession with the mangodhood theme and cult is neither unusual nor unprecedented. Many Western science-fiction authors have embraced this theme in their works, especially during the recent decades. Moreover, Berdnyk's endeavors to establish a cult based on notions formulated in science fiction were preceded by Ron Hubbard, a former American writer. Hubbard was at first active as a science-fiction author, but decided that greater profits could be derived from religious activities and, therefore, in 1954 launched his science-fiction cult, erroneously called the "Church of Scientology." It has been estimated that the scientology cult has at present about four million followers throughout the world. But, obviously, it has none in the Soviet Union.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 90.

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The *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* is published semiannually, in the summer and winter, by the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies. Annual subscription rates are \$8.00 for individuals and \$10.00 for libraries and institutions. Cheques and money orders are payable in Canadian or American funds only to *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*. Please do not send cash. Subscribers outside Canada: please pay in U.S. funds.

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Manuscripts, books for review, and all correspondence regarding subscriptions, changes of address, and editorial matters should be sent to: *Journal of Ukrainian Studies, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Toronto, Toronto, Canada, M5S 1A1.*

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Typesetting by Harmony Printing Limited, Toronto, Canada.

Printed by the University of Toronto Press.

ISSN 0228-1635

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Marko Pavlyshyn

OLES BERDNYK'S
OKOTSVIT AND ZORIANI KORSAR:
ROMANTIC UTOPIA AND SCIENCE FICTION

The eighth volume of *Istoriia ukrainskoi literatury*, published in Kiev in 1971, gave the following evaluation of Oles Berdnyk:

This prose writer is the advocate of a fantastic literature that is unlimited in its flights [of imagination] and does not shrink from peering beyond the frontiers of probability. But this advocacy in Berdnyk's case goes hand in hand with a marked disregard for the real, life-oriented foundations (scientific, social, moral, and psychological) upon which rests the ideological and aesthetic structure of a work . . . the door is opened to the fanciful, the subconscious, and the mystical, leading the author into ideologically shaky, scientifically unsound conceptions.¹

The judgement was in keeping with what had just happened and would soon happen in Berdnyk's literary career. In 1970 his novella *Okotsvit*, which would have been his sixteenth book, was destroyed in the printery, with the exception of a few copies. A year later his major novel, *Zoriani korsar*, was abruptly withdrawn from distribution. Thereafter Berdnyk's new works appeared only in the underground press. In 1976 his works were removed from the book trade and from libraries; in 1979 he was arrested, tried, and

¹ *Istoriia ukrainskoi literatury*, 8 vols. (Kiev, 1967-71), 8: 484. This and all subsequent translations from Ukrainian texts are my own.

sentenced to nine years' imprisonment and exile for his active participation in the Ukrainian Helsinki Group.²

The facts of Berdnyk's biography, then, identify him as a dissident writer. This paper is concerned with those of his books that stand at the margin of dissidence: the two prose works that at first seemed to the censor to be in keeping with official ideology, but were then recognized, correctly, as a challenge to it. This challenge will be described here as an attempt to posit a *romantic* alternative to the materialist utopia produced by technology and the achievement of communism, which is envisaged by Marxist philosophy. The notoriously imprecise term "romantic" is used here in a narrow and specific sense and means "analogous in philosophical content and aesthetic method to the works of such writers as Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis), whom German literary scholarship has called 'Early Romantics.'"³ I shall argue, first, that Berdnyk is a romantic in his attitude to myth, in the nature of his postulate of humankind's future perfection, and in his derivation of the myth of human secular redemption from national roots; and second, that there are strong historical and social reasons for his "untimely" romanticism.

As a knowledge of Berdnyk's works cannot be assumed, an introductory description of the two books under discussion is necessary.

Berdnyk calls *Okotsvit* a "fairy-tale novella" (*kazkova povist*);⁴ directed (ostensibly) toward children, it is rich in narrative

² For biographical and bibliographical information, see Oleh Kylymnyk and Oleksandr Petrovsky, *Pysmennyky Radianskoi Ukrainy: Bibliohrafichnyi dovidnyk* (Kiev, 1970), p. 28; Jurij Dobczansky, "Oles Berdnyk: A Bibliographical Overview," *Journal of Ukrainian Graduate Studies* 4 (1979), no. 1, pp. 77-83, with a supplement by John A. Barnstead in *Journal of Ukrainian Graduate Studies* 4 (1979), no. 2, pp. 114-15; and the afterword in Oles Berdnyk, *Sviata Ukraina: Esei i lysty*, ed. Bohdan Arei (Baltimore and Toronto, 1980), pp. 205-206.

³ The connection between Berdnyk and European romanticism has been made only once in the critical literature: by M. Dolenho-Klokov in his "Novyi tvir Olesia Berdnyka," afterword to Oles Berdnyk, *Dity bezmezshzia: Roman-feieriia* (Kiev, 1964), pp. 359-63, here p. 360. Dolenho-Klokov draws parallels between the pathos of Berdnyk's novels and the romanticism of Shelley's "Prometheus Unbound." The similarity between Berdnyk's poetic philosophy and that of the "Frühromantiker" in Germany has not hitherto attracted comment.

⁴ Oles Berdnyk, *Okotsvit: Kazkova povist* (Kiev, 1970). Page references after quotations from *Okotsvit* in the text refer to this edition and are prefixed by the initial *O*.

material and simple in structure. There are two parts. The first is set in a Ukrainian village near the Dnieper River. The hero and heroine, both young schoolchildren, encounter two beings from another world; one of them has the outward form of Baba-Yaha, while the other takes the shape of a young girl, a ball of flame, or an eye-flower. The extraterrestrials are from the Planet of Flowers, which is threatened by extinction and can be rejuvenated only by human beings with a deep faith in *kazka*—the fairy tale. Such a quality is possessed by the hero and heroine, who in the course of the second part undergo a series of adventures in quest of the Planet of Flowers. They hitch a ride on a spaceship run by a civilization on Jupiter and, with the aid of a Jovian youth, reach the objective of their wanderings. Their arrival magically redeems the planet, restoring it to life from its sorcery-induced sleep.

Zoranyi korsar is more complex. The narrative has three important time levels and a number of subsidiary ones, not counting the long, self-contained episode that forms the first book of the novel. Hryhir Bova, a young Kiev detective living in about 1980 (level one) becomes aware that he and his soulmate, Halia Kurinna, are incarnations of a group of noble rebels from another, highly advanced but degenerating, civilization on the planet Orana (level two). This information reaches Hryhir at first by way of dreams, in which the story of the rebellion takes shape. Ariman, the tyrant of Orana, had proposed a remedy for the depletion of Orana's psychic energy: he produced an old-fashioned world in primitive three-dimensional space and established there an evolutionary process leading to intelligent beings who live by "contradictions, unrest, revolutions, enthusiasm and depression, sex . . . and yearning for infinity" (*ZK*, 170/64).⁵ That world is the planet Earth (level one), whose psychoenergetic activity Ariman proposed to harvest for Orana's benefit. Against Ariman's exploitative plan a number of Orana's best spirits rose in revolt. They defected to Earth, there to guide evolution in the direction of self-liberation.

In their struggle the rebels are abetted by the Stellar Corsair, a sublimated, disembodied intelligence whose origin lies in a time level that is regarded as archaic even on Orana. At this third level, a conflict had arisen between Kareos, advocate of the social ideal

⁵ Oles Berdnyk, *Zoranyi korsar: Fantastychnyi roman* (Kiev, 1971). A Canadian edition, abridged by the omission of the first of the novel's three books, is more generally available: *Zoranyi korsar: Fantastychna povist* (Toronto, 1981). Quotations from *Zoranyi korsar* in the text are followed by the code *ZK* and page references to the 1971 and 1981 editions, in that order.

of peace, order, comfort, and repose, and Horior, who believed that thinking beings must extend themselves constantly in a never-ending battle to fulfill their own (infinite) potentialities. Kareos was initially victorious, but Horior, who came to be known as the Stellar Corsair, subverted his plans and threatened to gain the upper hand.

The three narrative levels are brought together at the end. Ariman is about to neutralize the rebels by locking some into the nineteenth century and leaving others in the twentieth. But the Corsair rescues them and elevates them to a higher plane of existence, where they may join the struggle to extend the frontiers of human possibility at a more advanced level than that of twentieth-century Earth.

It is clear from the résumés that the two novels contain mythical themes: the origin of worlds and civilizations, their redemption, and conflicts between heroic personalities. Yet Berdnyk, like any modern writer, cannot organize these stories into a myth in the strict sense of that word. Contemporary scholars of myth regard myths as *true* stories—in the sense that, in order to have the status of a myth in a certain society, a narrative must be regarded by that society as literally—not just symbolically—true.⁶ No modern fiction, of course, presents itself to the reader as literal truth. But there is another, romantic, sense in which Berdnyk's novels are mythogenic.

The question of the need for myth in modern rationalist society had been discussed by Friedrich Schlegel in his "Rede über die Mythologie" in the year 1800. When Schlegel laments the absence of a mythology in modern European culture, he means that there is no generally valid, unifying, and creative system of symbols or beliefs. A unifying belief appropriate to the age, however, is about to be found or could be found in the conviction of humankind that it is free to develop the possibilities of human thought and action without limit. This belief Schlegel considers to be at the root of idealist philosophy, whose contemporary popularity he regards as a reflection of the fact that "mankind struggles with all its power to find its own centre."⁷ Whoever understands "the great principles of general rejuvenation and of eternal revolu-

⁶ See Mircea Eliade, "The Structure of Myths," in *Myth and Reality*, transl. William R. Trask (New York and Evanston, 1963), pp. 1-20, esp. 8-11.

⁷ The quotations follow the text of Friedrich Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, transl., intro. and annot. by Ernst Behler and Roman Struc (University Park and London, 1968). Here: p. 83.

tion”⁸ will be able “to recognize and to know the activity of the first men as well as the nature of the Golden Age which is to come.”⁹

It is not, therefore, a set of narratives that Schlegel holds up as the focus of mythical belief, but a philosophical viewpoint: that is what distinguishes his new mythology from the old. The old, traditional mythologies—the Classical and the Indian—are to be used by modern poets as sources of symbols that can make this viewpoint palpable to the senses and the emotions.¹⁰

Like Schlegel, Berdnyk wants a new, secular myth of the future; the *literally* mythical quality of his belief in the reorganization of human life along utopian lines is evidenced by his utterances and actions outside the sphere of literature. In 1976 Berdnyk cofounded an Initiative Council for Alternative Evolution, which called on the United Nations to inaugurate a radical approach to the solution of Earth’s environmental problems: namely, to fund research into means that would convert humans from creatures that eat, and therefore kill, to survive into beings that directly absorb energy from the ether and thus can enter into nonexploitative relationships with the rest of nature.¹¹ Odd and implausible though the objective might be, the fact that Berdnyk formed a committee and wrote declarations in its name is proof that his vision of the future is mythical in the undiluted sense of the concept.

This vision inspires *Okotsvit* and *Zorianyi korsar*, where its literary formulation shows far-reaching parallels with works by romantic predecessors. Like Novalis, Berdnyk develops triadic models of history: a highly civilized past is followed by a diminished present, in which human consciousness is at a low ebb, and which will be followed by a glorious utopian blossoming of human possibilities.¹² In *Okotsvit* the golden age of Earth’s history is the high culture brought from another planet by the first colonizers;

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86-87.

¹¹ “Memorandum Initsiatyvnoi hrupy alternatyvnoi evoliutsii,” dated 7 December 1976, in Berdnyk, *Sviata Ukraina*, pp. 171-76.

¹² For the most complete account of Novalis’s triadic myth of history, see Hans-Joachim Mähl, *Die Idee des Goldenen Zeitalters im Werk des Novalis* (Heidelberg, 1965). A review of the tradition of the tripartite model of history may be found in Walter Veit, “Studien zur Geschichte des Topos der Goldenen Zeit von der Antike bis zum 18. Jahrhundert,” Ph.D. diss., University of Köln, 1961.

the present is dominated by narrow-minded and utilitarian rationalists like the hero's father; the infinitely richer future that awaits humankind if it remains as imaginative and strong-willed as the child heroes is sketched as the more advanced human civilization on Jupiter.

Zorinyi korsar confronts the reader with a picture of the imperfect present on all three time levels. Hryhir Bova is a detective because there is crime in his world—and, as episodes in the novel emphasize, corruption (ZK, 288/179), war (ZK, 122/19), injustice (ZK, 149/44-45, 129/26), illness and death (ZK, 132/28). The temporally removed worlds of Ariman and Kareos are dictatorships posing as paternalistic welfare societies, with abuses that a reader might well interpret as references to such specifically Soviet ills as arrest and banishment for unconventional views (ZK, 163-74/58-68), abuse of psychiatric institutions (ZK, 230-31/123, 224/117, 284-85/177), and the official reconstruction of history to exclude names and events that have become taboo (ZK, 222-23/117). But at each time level there is a past in which the outlines of what Hryhir calls the "cosmic law" (ZK, 118/16) may be discerned. At the most archaic time, that of Kareos and Horior, the cosmic law is represented by a teacher, Aeras, from whom Horior learns to subject matter to his own will, a skill that permits him to act effectively as liberator. For the rebels of Orana, the legend of the Stellar Corsair is an inspiration from the past. In turn, these rebels at first appear in Hryhir's dreams as exemplary figures from a distant antiquity. In all cases, intuitions of a nobler humankind in the past prove to be perceptions of human potential in the present and augurs of human possibility in the future.

Not only Berdnyk's scheme of history, but the symbolic expression of his future utopia links him to the romanticism of Schlegel and Novalis. This is not the place to elaborate on the derivation of Novalis's utopian thinking from the epistemological idealism of Kant and Fichte.¹³ Suffice it to say that from Fichte's concept of "productive imagination" Novalis developed the idea that the human self *creates* the objective world in the act of perception. Consequently, humankind could, and in the utopian future *shall*, control the universe through the exercise of will. The notions of Novalis's "magic idealism," as the theory came to be called, lend themselves well to literary presentation through images. The

¹³ A brief but illuminating overview of this exhaustively documented and discussed topic is to be found in Karl Heinz Volkman-Schluck, "Novalis' magischer Idealismus," in *Die deutsche Romantik: Poetik, Formen und Motive*, ed. Hans Steffen (Göttingen, 1967), pp. 45-53.

utopian human being, having control over reality, can exercise unlimited physical self-control, even to the comical point of growing extra limbs at will; because utopian human consciousness penetrates every part of the cosmos, dialogue with plants and animals is possible; and so on.

Such images of human omnipotence and omniscience fill Berdnyk's novels as they do Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802). The most elementary step in overcoming the limitations imposed by matter is to break the cycle of eating in order to live. The advanced creatures from the Planet of Flowers in *Okotsvit* absorb solar energy directly, even when they adopt human form (*O*, 60); in *Zorianyi korsar* Aeras instructs Horior that eating is but a habit (*ZK*, 232/124-25), and Horior learns to do without food, to take conscious control of all his bodily organs, to overcome gravity, to concentrate the energy of his own body in a way that enforces his will on inanimate objects, and to travel through space unaided by technology (*ZK*, 235/127-28). Horenytsia, one of the future-oriented scientists of the twentieth century, foresees

the expansion of our sensations and our minds into the multidimensionality of the world, the conquest of space and time, the growth of the human being from a limited three-dimensional creature, mortal and feeble, into an all-powerful titan, who shall conquer infinity and synthesize within himself all the depths of the Macrocosmos. (*ZK*, 280/171)

In *Okotsvit* the same principle of omnipotence over matter is given more homely, comic realization: Nanti, the child of another planet, astonishes villagers by playfully causing heavy bundles to fly (*O*, 63), producing baskets of berries from thin air (*O*, 89) and, most revealingly, walking on water (*O*, 62). The allusion to Christ links Nanti's minor miracle to the theme of human redemption. (The question of whether Berdnyk interprets redemption in religious terms will concern us below.)

As is the case with Novalis, Berdnyk's utopian future also holds the promise of omniscience for humankind: human consciousness will be expanded, so that the individual will be conscious not only of the self, but of all elements of the cosmos.¹⁴ Horykorin, one of the rebels against Ariman, promises "Instead of a single mind—the whole universe . . . instead of one or two friends—the

¹⁴ On omniscience as an attribute of utopian humankind in Novalis's thought, see Marko Pavlyshyn, "The Topos of the Inexpressible. Poetic Argumentation in Tieck, Novalis and Hoffmann," Ph.D. diss., Monash University, 1982, pp. 257-74.

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whole multifaceted variety of the psychic life of the cosmos" (ZK, 173/67). This conscious identity of self and world implies one of the concepts common to all romanticism: the unity of all natural things with each other and with humankind. Preutopian human beings can perceive this unity intuitively. Thus Halia in *Zoranyi korsar* senses "mysterious connections that link everything in this world to everything else—even people to stones, stars, trees" (ZK, 145/41). Unity manifests itself emotionally in love, which at higher levels of evolution will link all elements of the universe, but which at present is anticipated in interpersonal relationships. For this reason all of Berdnyk's heroes and heroines are joined not only by a common striving to create a new world, but also by love for each other.

Berdnyk illustrates the utopian notion of humankind sharing one consciousness with nature with a number of concrete images in *Okotsvit*. The *okotsvit*, or eye-flower, itself is an element of vegetable nature endowed with perception and consciousness and therefore capable of dialogue with humans. More whimsically up-to-date are the flowers on Jupiter. Not only do they engage in dialogue: because they are part of the single consciousness of the universe, they can provide a questioner with any required information about the natural cosmos. Thus the ancient motif of articulate nature (*natura loquitur*) is united with the computer-age image of the data terminal.

The question of Berdnyk's presentation of the *process* that will lead humankind into utopia is complex. Upon it hinges the issue of whether Berdnyk—at least on the strength of *Okotsvit* and *Zoranyi korsar*—should be regarded as a religious writer.¹⁵

¹⁵ The issue of Berdnyk's religiosity has been the subject of some discussion. On the basis of an analysis of Berdnyk's "Vidkryte druzhnie poslannia" to Pope John Paul II, Ivan Hrynokh argues that Berdnyk's cosmology, his interpretation of Jesus Christ, and his anthropology are essentially Christian, though critical of the church as an organization: "Oles Berdnyk (Utopist chy kharyzmatyk na obrii druhoho tysiacholittia khrystianstva v Ukraini?)," *Suchasnist*, 1980, no. 4, pp. 86-99; and Iwan Hryniokh, "Oles Berdnyk. Utopist, oder Charismatiker am Horizont des zweiten Jahrtausends des Christentums in der Ukraine?," *Mitteilungen* 17 (1980): 70-110. As Hrynokh's articles are exclusively concerned with a single text written eight years after *Okotsvit* and *Zoranyi korsar*, we shall not debate them here except to comment that the "Poslannia" is very different from Berdnyk's novels, and observations based on it cannot be regarded as generalizations valid for the whole of his opus. Nor does Hrynokh make such generalizations, except by implication.

Certainly, Berdnyk's images of the transition have much in common with religious and eschatological notions. When Horior and Gledys move into the Neosphere ("noosfera"—*ZK*, 237/129), they discard their physical form in a manner that cannot but remind the reader of Christian notions concerning the soul's departure from the body at the point of death (*ZK*, 237/130). Explicitly religious vocabulary is used to formulate central concepts: the motto in book two of *Zorianyi korsar* is "In order to be resurrected one must die" (*ZK*, 112/9); and in *Okotsvit* the testing question put to the hero by the interplanetary visitor is "will you not be afraid to die in your present form in order to be resurrected in an eternal, invulnerable one?" (*O*, 39). Nevertheless, these are cases not of Berdnyk's adopting a religious attitude, but of his borrowing religious symbolism to support his essentially secular myth. For although in the neosphere "the notion of birth and death... will be replaced by a process of the eternal regeneration of the individual" (*ZK*, 237/130), this will in no sense be an afterlife in a sphere of the supernatural, but a continued life of struggle and self-overcoming *within* nature, though at a higher level of it. The neosphere is Berdnyk's symbol for the maximum potentiality of individualism and freedom in the world of nature—ideals that belong to the traditions of secularism and enlightenment.¹⁶

Hitherto I have been concerned with the nature and meaning of Berdnyk's mythology; it is time to say something of its origins. Schlegel, in his "Rede über die Mythologie," had formulated a project for a new mythology that would combine the symbolism of numerous old mythologies to serve a new purpose. Just such a romantic combination of mythologies is practiced by Berdnyk, who recognizes the rhetorical value of imparting to his notions, through allusion and association, the aura of familiarity. Consequently, the reader encounters a cosmopolitan medley of symbols, motifs, and allusions. Some are universally comprehensible (the

¹⁶ This interpretation differs from that advanced in Walter Smyrniw's "The Theme of Man-Godhood in Oles Berdnyk's Science Fiction," *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 6 (1981), no. 1, pp. 3-19. Smyrniw correctly asserts that no system of theistic belief can be abstracted from Berdnyk's novels (p. 18). But he underestimates the degree to which Berdnyk's vision is symbolic and therefore reads the works (and particularly the later essays and letters) as dogmatic statements promoting an alternative religion: a "religious cult based on a science-fiction premise" (p. 17). For the same reason Smyrniw chooses for Berdnyk's emphatically anthropocentric view of humanity's future (whose expression in literature *does* involve some religious symbolism) the religiously coloured name of "Man-Godhood."

sun and its opposite, darkness), others more obscure. In the dualist system of late Zoroastrianism, Ahura Mazda, or Ormazd, is the spirit of truth, righteousness, and order, while his demonic adversary is Ahriman;¹⁷ hence Berdnyk's tyrant Ariman is opposed by Horior, (the "Korsar"), Horykorin and Horenytsia—all of them linked through the syllable "-or-" to Ormazd. The symbol of the crystal goblet that contains the wine of immortality refers to several cultural matrices: to Zoroastrianism again (where the drink of immortality ushers in the new world at the end of finite time), to Christianity (the Communion chalice), and to European chivalric romance (the Grail). The motif of the rejuvenation of the sleeping kingdom is familiar from the Grimm brothers' tales and from Klingsohr's "Märchen" in Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. "Okotsvit," the flower who is also a woman, is an echo of an Indian motif¹⁸ as well as of Novalis's arch-romantic "blaue Blume." Christian motifs occur: Ariman and the noble rebels against his will constitute an inversion of the creator and the fallen angels. One could expand the list further.

The exoticism of much of Berdnyk's symbolism is balanced by native folklore and national tradition. In *Okotsvit* only those who love and understand folk tales—children—have minds that are open to communication with extraterrestrial beings. Folk anecdotes concerning Baba-Yaha and the magic flower in the novella prove to be true records of visits from outer space, and belief in *kazky* is a prerequisite for futuristic space adventures with higher intelligences. That is why the action is set not in a modern cosmopolitan city with no cultural roots in folk tradition, but in a Ukrainian village whose inhabitants speak half-seriously of the *domovyk* (O, 21) and the *nechysta syla* (O, 21, 26). Those who reject the claims of folk belief out of hand are condemned, in standard romantic fashion, as philistines. The hero's father is such a sceptic; his son transfixes him with the memorable question, "Does man live by borsch alone?" (O, 42).

In *Zoranyi korsar* the national myth of Ukrainian cossackdom provides a frame for the myth of universal human regenera-

¹⁷ See Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London, 1979). The presence of an allusion to ancient Persian demonology was noted by Igor Kaczurowskyj in "Zwei Dichter im Kampf" [Mykola Rudenko and Oles Berdnyk], *Mitteilungen* 17 (1980): 241-63; here p. 263.

¹⁸ Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, in 6 vols., rev. ed. (Copenhagen, 1955-58), items D.212.1, D.212.2, D.212.3, D.431.1, D.621.2.2.

tion. The heroine, Halia Kurinna, has a cossack name: *kurinnyi* is the rank of a Zaporozhian cossack officer. At the conclusion of the novel Halia drinks from a crystal goblet containing the wine of immortality and accompanies Horior to the frontiers of human existence. The wine is the symbolic catalyst of the transformation; therefore its origin, too, must be symbolically relevant. Halia's father, having fallen into a Rip-van-Winkle-like sleep, dreams of attending a banquet with his cossack ancestors. As in Kotliarevsky and Shevchenko, the cossacks are incarnations of vitality, individualism, love of freedom, and even anarchy. They drink from the crystal goblet and give it to Halia's parent, who brings it as a material object into the twentieth century. The goblet episode allegorically advances the notion that the universal striving of humankind for higher levels of perfection is mystically connected to, and draws energy from, the national past. Berdnyk thus alludes to an idea that he later developed more explicitly in the underground press: that the nation is a natural spiritual unit of humankind and will remain so in the utopian future, which will be harmoniously constructed by free and equal "spiritual republics."¹⁹

The position is a romantic one, though less in the spirit of Schlegel and Novalis than of later romantic nationalism. In the context of the theory of the "drawing together of nations," which during the 1970s was the official Soviet view on the future of nations,²⁰ it is provocative in a manner that is separate from the provocativeness of Berdnyk's utopianism in general.

From the evidence marshaled thus far, it is evident that there is ample justification for describing Berdnyk's rhetoric of optimistic individualism as "romantic." There remains the question: why is there so striking and detailed a parallel between the ethos of Berdnyk's novels and that of the Early Romantics in Germany—a parallel that spans 170 years? Whether Berdnyk read or was influenced by Schlegel or Novalis is not known; nor is this a relevant issue. What is important is the fact that Berdnyk's novels, on one hand, and the philosophical reflections and literary works of the Early Romantics, on the other, are critical and oppositional responses to different social and political systems between which, however, there are significant analogies. A standard sociopsychological model is frequently invoked to account for the rise of German idealism and, in its extreme form, the romanticism of Schlegel

¹⁹ See, for example, "Ukrainskym hromadam Zemli," dated 9 May 1974, in *Sviata Ukraina*, pp. 151-55.

²⁰ See Myroslav Prokop, "Na novomu etapi natsionalnoi polityky KPRS," *Suchasnist*, 1983, no. 4, pp. 100-116.

and Novalis.²¹ In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries central Europe was politically backward, the dominant state form being the absolute monarchy—a system that continued to frustrate the aspirations of the culturally dominant middle class. Liberty and the individual's sovereignty over his or her own destiny, which could not be accomplished in the political and economic arena, were postulated, as a form of compensation, in the realms of philosophy and art. According to this model, the omnipotent, creative ego as visualized by Novalis is a consolatory self-image: a project for the realization in a utopian future of what is impossible in the present. The same might be said of Berdnyk in the totalitarian Soviet state: the interpretation of the human condition as unfree leads reactively to a rhetoric that calls for the establishment of the greatest possible human freedom.

Given what we know of the nature and content of Berdnyk's romanticism, it is not surprising that the two works expressing it most provocatively could not be presented to the public in a state that insists on ideological uniformity. What *is* surprising under the circumstances is the fact that *Okotsvit* and *Zoranyi korsar* were even printed. Why did the censor approve them in the first place?

This question can be answered, speculatively, by reference to the rhetorical dimension of literature. An ancient principle of rhetoric states that an orator can persuade an audience best if he convinces it that his point of view is essentially the same as its own.²² It is advantageous, therefore, to present new ideas in the guise of old, familiar ones that are known to be acceptable. This is Berdnyk's strategy. He writes science fiction, a genre in which the postulation of other worlds is an unavoidable necessity, and which is officially regarded as "progressive": "In the age of the building of communism," asserted *Ukrainska radianska entsyklopediia* in the early 1960s, "science fiction (especially books about technical progress and the taming of the cosmos) has considerable epistemological and educative significance, especially among young readers."²³ Furthermore, much of Berdnyk's rhetoric, particularly the

²¹ See, for example, Hans Dietrich Dahnke, "Literarische Prozesse 1789-1906," *Weimarer Beiträge* 9 (1971), no. 11, pp. 68-69, and Gonthier-Louis Fink, "Die Revolution als Herausforderung in Literature und Publizistik," in *Deutsche Literatur: Eine Sozialgeschichte*, ed. Horst Albert Glaser, vol. 5 (Reinbek, 1980), pp. 110-29, esp. pp. 123-29.

²² See Aristotle, *Topica*, 100b.

²³ "Naukovo-fantastychna literatura," *Ukrainska radianska entsyklopediia*, vol. 9 (Kiev, 1962), p. 555.

golden age of the future and the liberation of humankind from all forms of dependence and servitude, does not contradict the Marxist-Leninist view of the future. It is this appearance of conformity that might have initially placated the censors.

But Berdnyk mixes these acceptable rhetorical elements with provocative, ultimately intolerable ones. His utopian human transcends the world of matter, and with it he discards technological progress, the conquest of nature, and work in the sense of material production. The objective of a satisfied, secure, uniform society is rejected as antihuman, and the triumph of humanity is envisaged instead as a triumph of individual will. Because Berdnyk's novels were at the last moment recognized for what they are—challenges to central Marxist doctrines of materialism and collectivism—they could not be permitted to exercise their persuasive power in the public sphere.