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## Volodymyr Vynnyčenko as Diarist, Historian and Writer. Literary narratives of the "Ukrainian Revolution"

Volodymyr Vynnyčenko was an acclaimed writer at the time of his inauguration as head of the Ukrainian state in 1918. He firmly believed in the possibility of combining political independence with a just social order. When the Bolsheviks established the Soviet Ukrainian Republic in 1919, he left the country. For a short time, he offered his service to the new government and hoped the state would develop into a national communist system. Among all available options, the Bolsheviks seemed to provide the best perspectives for a socialist Ukrainian state. For quite a long time, Vynnyčenko was convinced of the following syllogism: The Ukrainian nation is comprised of proletarians. The Bolsheviks are the natural advocates of the proletarian cause. Hence they must also support the Ukrainian national cause (Gilley 2006: 513, 518). However, the situation turned out to be more complicated. Gripped by disappointment, Vynnyčenko eventually declared his dissolution with politics, and announced his intention to live on as a writer. However, in 1935 he stressed his inability to separate political views from his literary and artistic activities (Stelmashenko 1989: 260).

Undoubtedly, the main event in Vynnyčenko's adventurous life was what he called the "Ukrainian revolution". This rather fuzzy concept encompasses the dramatic events from 1917 to 1920. Those years bore witness to the abdication of the Tsar, various short lived state projects in Ukraine, foreign interventions, a brutal civil war and, finally, the establishment of a Ukrainian Soviet republic, which some leftist patriots came to see as the granting of statehood to Ukraine. Vynnyčenko dedicated his entire young adult life to the Ukrainian cause. In several of his writings, he tried to come to terms with this ambitious project and its eventual failure. Interestingly enough, Vynnyčenko chose to represent the "Ukrainian revolution" in very different literary genres. He constantly kept a diary in the firm belief about his witnessing a historically decisive epoch and his own crucial role within it. Apart from his autobiographical writings, he authored a play under the title *Between Two Powers* in the summer of 1918. In this play, he couched the fault lines of the emerging Ukrainian nation into a family drama. Shortly afterwards, following his initial emigration to Austria, he penned an epic "History of the Ukrainian Revolution". It took him a mere six months to write the three volumes. For this opus magnum, he chose the proud heading *The Rebirth of a Nation*. Vynnyčenko structured the historical events into four periods: The Central Rada, the Hetmanščyna, the Directory, and the Otamanščyna (Vynnyčenko 1920, I: 11). Roughly at the same time, from 1919 to 1923, he wrote an allegorical short novel with the title *Across the Line*. Here, an intellectual without

political allegiances becomes embroiled in the turmoil of the Ukrainian Civil war and comes to the conclusion that life stands above all party business.

In my paper, I will analyze how the shift in genre impacts Vynnyčenko's narratives of the events in Ukraine between 1917 and 1919. Specifically, I focus on the ideological content in Vynnyčenko's accounts: to what extent does the possible range of individual action depend upon the narrative representation of circumstances? Is there such a thing as historical teleology? How does the historical and revolutionary consciousness of the protagonist determine his biographical choices and his political behavior? How does the choice of a specific literary genre influence the narrated plot?

### 1. *The Superman as Nation Builder in the Diary*

At a first glance, tragedy seems to be the main genre of Ukrainian history in Vynnyčenko's conceptualization. Famously, he wrote on May 5, 1918 in his diary:

Who wants to read Ukrainian history has to take bromine – it is to such an extent a tragic, senseless, clumsy history, to such an extent a painful, horrible, bitter and sad read, how this unhappy, humiliated and downtrodden Nation was attacked during its existence as a state (or rather: as a substate) from all sides: from the Poles, the Russians, the Tatars, the Swedes. The whole history is an uninterrupted series of insurrections, wars, arsons, famines, attacks, military coups, intrigues, fights and briberies. Does not the same happen now? (Vynnyčenko 1980: 285)

A little later, Vynnyčenko became even more explicit and noted “the history of unhappiness already wrote many pages with our own hands” (Vynnyčenko 1980: 314, 362). In these diary entries, Vynnyčenko echoes the winged word from Hegel's preface to his influential *Philosophy of History*: “history is not the soil in which happiness grows. The periods of happiness in it are the blank pages of history” (Hegel 1975: 79). From this point of view, happiness is only possible when nothing happens. History – according to Hegel – is linear and will, eventually, come to an end. For Hegel, the course of history terminates as soon as freedom is ensured for all mankind in a peaceful community of sovereign nation states. Hegel's apology of the state was often misunderstood as bowing down to Prussian autocracy. However, the most important category in Hegel's philosophy of history was freedom. The state could only be justified insofar as he ensured the individual exercise of freedom. For Hegel, the main task of the state lay in the purposeful organization of private and public life in an enlightened society.

There are clear commonalities and differences between Hegel's and Vynnyčenko's conceptions. Vynnyčenko shared Hegel's view that each nation should have a state. However, Vynnyčenko inverted Hegel's conception. Hegel, to be sure, cared little about nations. He used the term nation in his *Philosophy of History*, albeit occasionally. Nation, as understood by Hegel, served as a synonym for a ‘people’ who inhabit a geographically demarcated territory. For Vynnyčenko, the building of the Ukrainian nation was tantamount;

the Ukrainian state was secondary. At different points in the revolutionary development in Ukraine, he opted for various political forms of organization for his nation. It could be either a federation with Russia, an alliance with Germany, or an independent state. Important was for Vynnyčenko the cultural and social dimension of the nation that had to reach a new level of self-awareness. Statehood was only a means to gain nationhood. In the future, the nation could exist in any form of statehood so long as the autonomy of the Ukrainian nation was guaranteed. Both Hegel and Vynnyčenko believed in the self-propelling course of history. The management options for single individuals were, in their view, heavily limited. History just happened, nations came into being, and states emerged when the time was mature. Of course, single individuals had to organize political processes. But the mere will of a political leader to create a state or a nation was not enough. Maybe this fundamental trust in the necessary historical evolution, by way of an ever-growing self-awareness of the nation, was the reason why Vynnyčenko resigned from his administrative duties quite quickly. Most probably, Vynnyčenko acquired a certain knowledge of Hegel's philosophy of history by reading Marx's critique of Hegel. Vynnyčenko shared Hegel's and Marx's the conviction that history neither could, nor should be sped up. On the contrary: such interferences would yield tragic and sometimes counterproductive results. Marx's negligence for the state, which would wither away once communism had been established, may have influenced Vynnyčenko's views on the subordinate importance of the state. A major departure from Marx consists in Vynnyčenko's high esteem for the nation. According to Marx, the nation was a bourgeois invention that prevented the proletarians of all countries from uniting against the exploiting classes. Vynnyčenko believed that communism was only possible within the framework of a highly developed national consciousness that included social awareness. Basically, Vynnyčenko borrowed from Hegel and Marx what he deemed fit for his own views. He was especially keen on the topic of historical teleology, be it in terms of freedom (Hegel), or social equality (Marx). Moreover, he added a heavy dose of voluntarism and decadence to the rationalistic systems of the two German philosophers.

Vynnyčenko oscillated between Marx and Hegel, and thereby created a contradictory unity of both political philosophies. He stressed the importance of the nation and the revolution at once. To complicate things further, Vynnyčenko even added one more thinker to his idiosyncratic ideological mix. Friedrich Nietzsche helped explain the role of 'great men' in history – and Vynnyčenko clearly thought of himself as being that – a great man. Nietzsche, of course, was not a good advocate for socialism. Instead, he developed a shrewd conception of the cultural nation that came very close to Vynnyčenko's ideas. As a young writer, Vynnyčenko was fascinated by Nietzsche and even translated *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Also, Vynnyčenko's notion of 'honesty with oneself' may go back to Nietzschean inspirations (Soroka 2012: 26f.). Nietzsche was a German patriot and even volunteered for the Prussian army in the war against France in 1870. At the time, he was already a professor at the University of Basel and had renounced Prussian citizenship. Nietzsche thus had the possibility to abstain from such a military engagement. In 1874, Nietzsche published his famous essay *On the Use and Abuse of History for Life*. Above all, Nietzsche criticized Hegel

for his concept of the ‘global process’, which necessarily envisions the end of history. Hegel identified this trope with the Napoleonic epoch and his own life as a professor in Berlin, the capital of the mighty kingdom of Prussia. Nietzsche deplored the consequences of this conception: Everybody born after Hegel was degraded to be an epigone whose only capacity was to wait for the final embodiment of the perfect state. Contrary to Hegel, Nietzsche worshipped the “great men” who were able to stand up against both the rational power of reality as well as the universal force of Hegel’s history. Conversely, Nietzsche held the masses in utter contempt:

The masses seem to be worth notice in three aspects only: first as the copies of great men, printed on bad paper from worn-out plates, next as a contrast to the great men, and lastly as their tools: for the rest, let the devil and statistics fly away with them! (Nietzsche 1910, II: 84)

For Nietzsche, the German nation still needed to be forged. Optimistically, he maintained that one hundred men, “brought up in the new spirit, efficient and productive”, may suffice to create a new German culture – just as the Italian Renaissance was “raised on the shoulders of such another band of one hundred men” (Nietzsche 1910, II: 19). Of course, Nietzsche considered himself to be one of these few men who were able to create a German nation that would go beyond the only superficial and opportunistic foundation of the Reich in 1871. Nietzsche’s idea of a superman in the form of a ‘lightning’ from the cloud of mankind appealed to Vynnyčenko, too. Not without vanity, he cast himself as one amongst the few who were truly able to build the nation. He shared with Nietzsche the conviction that God had died. After that discovery, the idea of human immortality was also dead, and in need of modernization. Vynnyčenko saw a solution in personal ambition – only fame would secure the after-live of a mortal individual (Vynnyčenko 1980: 361). However, such fame was not easy to achieve, and came at a high cost. In a diary entry from 16 October 1917, he stressed his own toiling:

Oh Lord, what a horrible and difficult thing is the rebirth of national statehood. How will it appear in a historical perspective as easy, obvious, natural, and how difficult, with how many superhuman efforts, ruses, with which despair, fight and derision we have to haul the bricks of statehood and to lay them in order to build a house in which our descendants will live so comfortably (Vynnyčenko 1980: 274).

That the common people would remain blind and ungrateful was a bitter insight, and a happenstance that soon turned out for the worse. Towards the end of 1918, Vynnyčenko lamented the passive and foolish nature of the Ukrainian masses. Gloomily, he noted in his diary:

We do not have a nation. There is an unenlightened people that is separated from all historical remedies. We want to turn it into a nation, but it leers at our manipulations and snarls angrily (Vynnyčenko 1980: 309).

One month later, he set out to explain the popularity and success of the Bolsheviks with their coarseness and their lack of education. Both the notions of ‘nation’ or ‘state’ seemed to be completely foreign to the underdeveloped consciousness of the Ukrainian peasants and workers. In Vynnyčenko’s view, Ukraine was not yet ready to embrace Marxism, which actually purported to be a blueprint for the future development of any revolutionary history:

They know and recognize the Bolshevik in themselves, but the nation or the state is something abstract, something too big (Vynnyčenko 1980: 312).

This entry shows that Vynnyčenko basically shared the Hegelian idea that the historical process would eventually bring about a nation-state and ensure general freedom. However, by early 1919 this time had not yet come for Ukraine. On 10 February 1919, Vynnyčenko clearly formulated the dilemma Ukraine was facing:

If Ukraine joins the Entente, it will be subjugated by the reaction. If it joins the Bolsheviks, it will perish in anarchy. And if Ukraine will stand for itself, it will die from helplessness and poverty. In any case, it will eventually fall prey to the “one and indivisible” [sc. Russia, U.S.] (Vynnyčenko 1980: 321).

In the summer of 1919, Vynnyčenko was convinced of the Whites’ victory in the civil war, and that Ukraine would remain the last retreat of the Bolsheviks until Ukraine was to become part of an imperialistic Russia, again (Vynnyčenko 1980: 359).

And yet, by 1920, when the Reds had achieved victory, Vynnyčenko returned to his Nietzschean conviction that great men, such as himself, could influence the course of history. He embarked on a diplomatic mission to Moscow and Kharkiv to negotiate his participation in a Red government. He even talked to Trockij personally. Nothing came of this, and Vynnyčenko preferred to emigrate for good. He first emigrated to Austria, and later on to France. He also fell out with the members of the former Ukrainian government. He called Mykhajlo Hruševskij a “jealous, dishonest old fogey”, and Symon Petljura a “donnish manikin, avid for glory” (Vynnyčenko 1980: 316).

Another common feature in Hegel’s and Vynnyčenko’s conceptions is the parallel between individual biography and national history. In his diary, Vynnyčenko presented Ukraine’s difficult political situation as his own personal dilemma. On June 3, 1920, he wrote:

And once again I have here the same tragedy that has been tearing me apart for almost two years. To join the Russian Bolsheviks means to oppress my nation and myself with my own hands. To join Petljura and the reactionary forces means to oppress the revolution, myself, and everything I consider to be good for the whole of mankind (Vynnyčenko 1980: 434f.).

As a result of these Nietzschean reveries about his own role in history, Vynnyčenko did not feel entitled to an intimate life. He was adamant about presenting his marriage as

a public endeavor. He presented his future family (which never materialized) as a primary cell of the Ukrainian nation that yet had to be built. He emphasized the political education as crucial – first he was to raise the national consciousness in his wife. After that, he sought to bring up his children in the national spirit of Ukraine:

My wife is Jewish, but we agreed that our family will be Ukrainian and that we will have children if the mother is prepared to such a degree that the children may be educated as Ukrainians. [...] I want to build for myself such a family that will correspond with my natural destiny and not with the ethical and moral rules (Kul'čyc'kyj 2005: 55).

It was only logical that Vynnyčenko banned – at least theoretically – love and faithfulness from his marriage (Vynnyčenko 1980: 326). He considered his private life to be an expression of his ideal of ‘honesty with oneself’. This approach excluded the romantic tradition of the deliberate separation of the loving couple from society, let alone the nation.

## 2. *The Epic Depiction of the Rebirth of a Nation*

After the failure of the first independent Ukrainian state, Vynnyčenko resorted to reflection. Like Hegel's ‘owl of Minerva’, he began his flight in the sunset of the historical events that could have led to the establishment of a Ukrainian nation state. In his epic work *The Rebirth of a Nation*, Vynnyčenko tried to reconcile with the crucial question about his failed efforts. In the preface, Vynnyčenko reassured his readers that he would eschew all “national” or “party” sympathies, and purported to write the story “in all objectivity” (Vynnyčenko 1920, I: 9). This is, of course, a preposterous announcement. Vynnyčenko's historical account is highly subjective and idiosyncratic. More precisely: Vynnyčenko transformed his subjective experience into an epic text for which he claimed objective validity.

Moreover, Vynnyčenko still pondered the idea of returning to Soviet Ukraine to assume political leadership under Bolshevik rule. In a letter from April 1920, Vynnyčenko searched for possibilities to translate his three volumes into Russian, as well as a communist paper that would print selected chapters from his book in Kyjiv (Kul'čyc'kyj 2005: 213). Several sentences in the *Rebirth of a Nation* are clearly written with the aim to get a political ticket back to Soviet Ukraine. Vynnyčenko went so far as to list the Bolsheviks on the top of a list of possible and desirable options of non-Ukrainian governments (Vynnyčenko 1920, III: 500).

Such strange optimism was grounded in Vynnyčenko's theory that every ‘right wing’ government would be detrimental to the Ukrainian cause, whereas any tendency towards the ‘left’ would also necessarily entail a reinforcement of the national movement. Vynnyčenko argued for an ‘all-sided liberation’ in Ukraine that combined social, national, political, and moral aspects. In Vynnyčenko's view, the Soviet rule in Ukraine would eventually evolve into a national-communist government.

Moreover, Vynnyčenko embedded his theory of the ‘all-sided liberation’ in the Nietzschean impetus of his earlier, modernist period of literary activity. In the first volume of

*Rebirth of a Nation*, Vynnyčenko elevated Bolshevism to the highest form of moral liberation:

But not every Russian member of the intelligentsia is capable of Bolshevism. Because Bolshevism is the most consequent, most severe way of transferring the theories and results of the ‘pure reason’ into daily life, it is the biggest ‘honesty with oneself’. (Vynnyčenko 1920, I: 101f.)

Conversely, the Russian monarchy was the inversion of ‘honesty with oneself’. In his own interpretation of tsarism, Vynnyčenko saw two impostors with the same name at the beginning and the end of Tsarism – Griška Otrep’ev and Griška Rasputin.

The Russian Romanov-monarchy both started and ended with Grishka (*Ibidem*: 24).

Griška Otrep’ev was – at least in Puškin’s interpretation – the false Dmitrij who claimed the throne in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, Griška Rasputin gained a fatal influence on the last Tsar Nicholas II and his wife. As soon as the tsarist dishonesty had come to an end, Vynnyčenko saw no need for a separate Ukrainian state. After the February revolution 1917, separatism would even have endangered the democratic and federal cause of those who had toppled the monarchy (*Ibidem*: 44). Instead, Vynnyčenko called for a sustainable national development in a socialist Ukraine: “The autonomy of Ukraine in a federal Russia and the Ukrainization of all realms of life!” (*Ibidem*: 77) At that time, Vynnyčenko was still quite optimistic about the possibility to turn the Ukrainian people into a subject of Hegel’s or Marx’s historical teleology. During the All-Ukrainian National Congress in Kyjiv in April 1917, Vynnyčenko even talked about the “will of the Ukrainian people” (*Ibidem*: 92). Moreover, the congress appeared as the “full-voiced organ of the national will” (*Ibidem*: 93).

Similar to his diary entries, Vynnyčenko stressed the demiurgic dimension of nation building in the historical epic of the *Rebirth of a Nation*, too. His contempt for administrative matters is clearly derived from Nietzsche. Vynnyčenko focused on culture rather than politics:

Our goal was the rebirth of our nationality, the awakening of our people’s national dignity, the sense of the necessity of native forms of development, the creation and preservation of these forms. Statehood was only a means to reach this general goal (*Ibidem*: 257)

In a very indicative sentence, Vynnyčenko even likened himself and his fellow statesmen to gods who initiate a cosmological process: “in fact, we were in these times gods who planned to create a whole new world from nothing” (*Ibidem*: 258). However, their projects were doomed to fail because they only recreated the only kind of state they knew – the tsarist administration.

We knew only one state – the bourgeois, current state with all its outdated agencies and offices. [...] And indeed, how much energy, effort, work, blood and life did we use in

order to create ... not our statehood, but a statehood that was inimical and pernicious to our nation! (Vynnyčenko 1920, II: 108)

This self-criticism probably represents the gist of Vynnyčenko's reflections about the Ukrainian nation. Vynnyčenko drew one single lesson from the lost Ukrainian cause after both the February and October revolutions: "it is a mistake to consider the national question outside of the sphere of the social questions" (*Ibidem*: 327). In the summer of 1917, Russia's petty bourgeoisie, which – according to Vynnyčenko – consisted of Social Revolutionaries, Constitutional Democrats, and Mensheviks, lost its cause because they assumed Russian supremacy over Ukraine. Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks failed because they neglected the Ukrainian national cause in early 1918, because they focused exclusively on class issues.

In hindsight, Vynnyčenko also reproached the Central Rada with blindness for the most pressing issues in Ukraine. He maintained: "The Rada failed because it did not address the Ukrainian proletariat socially and only afterwards educated it nationally" (*Ibidem*: 97). Vynnyčenko went so far as to blame the Ukrainian government for the Ukrainian-Soviet war of 1919, because the government did not care about the lower classes in Ukraine (Vynnyčenko 1920, III: 204). He attributed these failures to his own lack of political education: "We did not know the teachings of Marx and Engels about the state, about its role, character, about the tasks of the revolutionary classes vis-à-vis the state" (Vynnyčenko 1920, II: 107). Certainly, Vynnyčenko considered Lenin's elaboration on the practical significance of the state after the revolution. Lenin argued the revolutionaries should capture the state in order to crush the bourgeoisie. The new state would not be organized democratically, but as a dictatorship of the revolutionary party. The state was to wither away eventually, to be sure, as foreseen by Marx. The enemies of the state, however, had to be eliminated first.

It is precisely this machiavellistic stance that led Vynnyčenko to defend the Bolshevik coup that was radically directed against the bourgeoisie. One should keep in mind, the term bourgeoisie was a very broad notion in Vynnyčenko's view, and included leftist parties like the Social Revolutionaries and the Mensheviks alike (*Ibidem*: 104). However, it would be wrong to highlight only Vynnyčenko's positive statements about the Bolsheviks. Bolshevism was acceptable as a model for political governance immediately following the revolution. To build a Ukrainian nation state, Vynnyčenko insisted, a different approach was needed. Lenin only proposed the Soviet model for a socialist Ukraine, and did not allow for a democratic or even an Ataman hierarchy of power (Vynnyčenko 1920, III: 491). For Vynnyčenko, Trockij's sympathies for a Ukrainian political autonomy were more valuable than Lenin's doctrinarism (*Ibidem*: 496).

In terms of genre, *The Rebirth of a Nation* is in fact an *epos*, or more precisely: it assumes the guise of an *epos*. Vynnyčenko claimed to give an objective account of historical events. At the same time, he chose a compulsive interpretive framework that does not allow for ambiguous interpretations. In doing so, Vynnyčenko established an epic totality that endows even a national tragedy like the loss of an autonomous state with a historical sense.



As is the case in every epic, there is even a promising perspective to overcome the temporary failure: a national communist Ukraine in a free federation with Bolshevik Russia.

### 3. *History as a Family Drama: Between Two Powers*

Much gloomier was Vynnyčenko's look at the Ukrainian revolution in his play *Between Two Powers*, which he wrote in May and June 1918. Vynnyčenko transposed the political cleavages of the time onto a Ukrainian family. Father Slipčenko and two of his sons are staunch Ukrainian nationalists and fight with the free cossacks against the Russian Bolsheviks who occupied Kiev in early 1918. Two of the Slipčenko children, Tikhon and Sofia, however, side with the Bolsheviks. They are no less patriotic than the cossacks but argue the social agenda of the Bolsheviks is worth supporting. Sofia, who just came back to Ukraine after four years as an acclaimed actress in St. Petersburg in support of the local Bolsheviks, explicitly refuses to speak Russian.

Contrary to his rather benevolent treatment of the Bolsheviks in *The Rebirth of a Nation*, Vynnyčenko leaves no doubt about the Bolsheviks being foreign usurpers and villains. They take Father Slipčenko and Marko as prisoners. Sofia hastens to the Bolshevik headquarter and is even ready to offer her erotic services to the Bolsheviks to save her father and brother. The Bolsheviks execute Marko in cold blood. Vynnyčenko increases the melodramatic effect of this situation by introducing a similar micro plot: The Bolsheviks shoot a young student who supports the Ukrainian cause upon which the mother loses her mind (Vynnyčenko 1919: 72). The national intolerance of the Bolsheviks is further illustrated by a Red Army soldier who destroys a portrait of Shevchenko with his bayonet, calling it a "counterrevolutionary icon" of a "Ukrainian mug" (*khokhlatskaja mord*), Vynnyčenko 1919: 82).

The drama poses the question whether it is possible to be a 'Ukrainian' and a 'Bolshevik' at the same time (*Ibidem*: 66). As Sofia's tragic suicide suggests at the end of the play, the answer is negative. *Between Two Powers* is basically a drama of ideas. Its literary power lies less in the general dramatic structure, which is rather obvious, but in the dialogues of Sofia who is torn between her family and her political allegiances. She is a perfect incarnation of Vynnyčenko's ideal of 'honesty with oneself' as she prefers death to a foul compromise.

In *The Rebirth of a Nation*, Vynnyčenko was able – at least for the time being – to overcome the radical ideological differences with his utopia of an 'all-sided liberation'. In the play *Between Two Powers* there is not even the trace of such a solution. The leitmotif, again, is the "cursed, tragic history" of Ukraine, which is dominated by failure, betrayal, and death (*Ibidem*: 52). In a way, the drama follows Vynnyčenko's artistic announcement in a private letter from 18 (5) November 1910: He explicitly wanted to turn philosophical treatises into dramas, just the way Hauptmann and Ibsen did (Kul'čyc'kyj 2005: 60). It is quite indicative that Vynnyčenko pointed to two authors who adhered to naturalism and realism, and who did not come up with their own doctrine. Similarly, *Between Two Powers* was not about promoting a positive ideal. Instead, it was about pointing to the inherent dilemma of Ukrainian patriotism between national and social agendas. One of the bitter truths in Vynnyčenko's theatrical analysis of the situation was the fact that it was not

enough to fight whatever the Ukrainians and the Bolsheviks called the ‘bourgeoisie’: for Slipčenko and his cossacks – not without a chauvinistic undertone – the communist ‘Jews’ and ‘Poles’ from Russia epitomized the bourgeois enemy; for the Bolsheviks all nationalists and capitalists were ‘bourgeois’ (Vynnyčenko 1919: 30).

The choice of genre for the drama implies the absence of an authoritative voice that was able to tell an absolute truth. Vynnyčenko presents Ukraine’s difficult historical situation in a series of dilemmas that remain unsolved. The main literary effect of the play *Between Two Powers* is tragic – there is a fatal historical necessity that dooms the Ukrainian national project to fail.

#### 4. *Ukraine as the Feminine Ideal of Life: Across the Line*

In 1919, Vynnyčenko set out to analyze the Ukrainian tragedy again. In the short novel *Across the Line*, the protagonist Doctor Verkhodub incarnates a ‘Little Russian’ intellectual who wishes not to have any business with politics, let alone the revolution. In his life, he tries to follow the principle of reason as defined by Immanuel Kant, and the ideal of *ataraxia* (the absolute peace of the soul) as taught by the Greek philosopher Epicurus. The civil war, however, forces him to reconsider this idealistic position. He decides to “cross the line” and teams up with the beautiful “mermaid” Olga who reveals her plan to assassinate a Red commander to the doctor. On their way, both are caught by a Bolshevik sentinel. In prison, their fate seems to be inevitable: They witness the ruthless execution of a Polish count and his wife. Eventually, the doctor and Olga manage to escape. At the end, the doctor understands that neither the Bolsheviks nor the Germans may be trusted. He comes to the conclusion: “now we can save ourselves” (Vynnyčenko 2005: 199).

The title metaphor “across the line” acquires several meanings in the text. First, the literal meaning suggests emigration. Second, ‘crossing the line’ implies the acceptance of death. Finally, the metaphor points to the creation of a new authentic self that does not depend on foreign influences like Kant or Epicurus. Instead, this new creation relies on the personal wealth of life experience.

The choice of the genre for the novel adds a new dimension to Vynnyčenko’s philosophy of history. The dominating consciousness of the novel is its protagonist – doctor Verkhodub. The reader co-evolves in this *Bildungsroman* along with the main hero. Vynnyčenko constructs Olga as a proxy for the feminine ideal of life that does not side with any political or military party. Ukraine itself is at stake – Vynnyčenko highlights this point in a series of romantic depictions of the beautiful Ukrainian landscape.

In his novel, Vynnyčenko takes great pains to give a differentiated picture of the Bolsheviks. There is the ‘good’ party secretary who issues passports for Verkhodub and Olga, and there is the ‘evil’ military commander Jerjemjejev who is alien to all things Ukrainian – revealed in the odd spelling of his name: Єрємєєв.

Vynnyčenko’s particular choice of his hero is indicative. At the beginning, doctor Verkhodub is portrayed as the ‘bourgeois’ par excellence, not even the pince-nez is missing.

At the end, he achieves a new wholeness of life experience, philosophical ideal, and political existence (Hožik 1999: 76). This is certainly an early elaboration of what Vynnyčenko would later call ‘Concordism’ (Hundorova 2010). This very personal philosophy of happiness relied on the ethical behavior of the individual without religious interference. Vynnyčenko conscientiously chose a protagonist who initially is not attuned to the Ukrainian national cause at all: The modest level of the starting point makes the evolution even more impressive.

The use of the novel as a genre turns Verkhodub’s individual fate into an exemplary biographical pattern that may be developed further into a philosophical treatise. And this is exactly what Vynnyčenko did from 1938 to 1945 when he systematized his philosophy of “Concordism”.

##### 5. *Individual Subjectivity and Historical Objectivity*

Vynnyčenko sought to come to terms with the role of the individual in history in several literary genres. In his diary, he kept a record of his own activities that should eventually lead to the establishment of a Ukrainian national consciousness. In his epos, *The Rebirth of a Nation*, he claimed to follow the course of history during the Ukrainian revolution so as to analyze the failure of the Ukrainian state. In the drama, he staged the inner conflict of the Ukrainian nation as a family drama. Finally, in his short novel *Across the Line*, he depicted the evolving autonomy from the perspective of a cosmopolitan, depoliticized protagonist who displayed a contentious learning curve regarding the insight into of the Ukrainian nation.

The role of the individual subject is different in all four genres. In the diary, the subject is in the eye of the historical storm and its range of action is limited by many external circumstances. Even if the subject acts in a heroic way, there is no guarantee of a positive result. In the epos, the individual subject is thrown into the flow of history. Vynnyčenko’s four periods of the ‘Ukrainian revolution’ (the Central Rada, the Hetmanate, the Directory and the Otamanščyna) refer to forms of government as decisive factors. Vynnyčenko hence subdues the role of the subject (and here, of course, he has in mind mainly himself) to systems of political power. In the drama, there is neither a politically engaged subject that may take part in the historical process, nor is there an abstract government. Rather, individual agents who are prisoners of their own ideologies appear on the scene. The tragedy does not come about as the result of the attack of an outlaw on the bourgeois order (as it would be the case in the classic tragedy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century) but as effect of the general lawlessness – everybody is an outlaw and therefore the difference between virtue and crime cannot be recognized any longer. Finally, the novel focuses on the evolving consciousness of the protagonist. Vynnyčenko uses his literary hero as an avatar for his reader whom he wants to educate in this way.

Most importantly, Vynnyčenko constitutes his historical accounts very differently in the four genres. The diary is the product of a writing subject who, by virtue of his political

vocation (and eventually its office), evolves to stand above the Ukrainian people. The epos relies on the historiosophical authority of the implied narrator. The drama presents highly subjective voices with their personal truths. The novel concentrates on one individual perspective, which undergoes a considerable learning process.

In all four genres, the ideas and wordings from Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche are present. However, there is no deep discussion of the historiosophical treatises of these philosophers (Rudnyc'kyj 1987: 429). The Hegelian idea of a necessary historical process towards a general (or as Vynnyčenko would have it: 'all-sided') freedom underpins the fragments in the diary, the narrative in the epos, and the constellation in the drama. In a quite eclectic manner, Vynnyčenko combines elements from the philosophies of Marx and Nietzsche. Sofia, the tragic heroine from the drama *Between two Powers*, talks about the "re-evaluation of all values" that comes with the Bolshevik revolution. Vynnyčenko adopted Marx's remarks about the role of the state in *The Rebirth of a Nation*, probably because these three volumes were clearly written as a manual for the future. This account was meant to indicate which errors had to be avoided, and which choices had to be made differently. In a way, Vynnyčenko's endeavor may be compared to Nietzsche's life project of a German cultural Renaissance. Finally, the drama *Between Two Powers* is directed in a Marxist vein against all bourgeois defenders of the *ancien régime*. Moreover, the father of the Slipčenko family clearly bears the traits of a Nietzschean superman – although he is also modeled after Taras Bul'ba who is ready to kill his own child for the national cause.

Vynnyčenko's swaying between radical socialist and nationalist positions can also be traced in the four famous Universals of the Central Rada in 1917 and early 1918. Vynnyčenko coauthored all of these Universals one way or another. The first and the second Universal proposed a democratic Ukraine in a federation with Russia. The third Universal basically repeated the Russian decree on the land issued after the October Revolution, and the fourth Universal declared an independent Ukrainian state. The ideological inconsistency of these four documents is mirrored in Vynnyčenko's later literary elaborations. Depending on genre, different aspects prevail in the individual texts.

Vynnyčenko certainly perceived his own biography as being deeply embedded in Ukrainian national history, maybe even as a model for a more comprehensive process of nation building. His personal life reflected the tragedy of his nation. However, he was able to explain his failure as a politician with a higher historiosophical conception that borrowed from Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche in his literary texts. It does not come as a surprise that the result for both his biography and his historical writings was very heterogeneous and even contradictory.

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*Abstract*

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*Volodymyr Vynnyčenko as Diarist, Historian and Writer. Literary Narratives of the “Ukrainian Revolution”*

Volodymyr Vynnyčenko portrayed the “Ukrainian Revolution” in four different literary genres: in his diary, in an historiographic epic, in a drama, and in a short novel. In each of these representations, another aspect prevails. The diary focuses on Vynnyčenko’s personal role in the Ukrainian nation-building project. The epic endows the failure of the independent Ukrainian state with a historiosophic necessity. The drama translates the social and national dilemmas in Ukraine into a family tragedy. The short novel portrays the hero not as an agent in history, but as an evolving consciousness. Behind all four literary elaborations, a quite heterogeneous mix of philosophical sources can be observed. Vynnyčenko shares with Hegel the belief that every free nation should be in possession of a state. He follows Marx in his economic criticism of capitalist exploitation and his contempt for the bourgeoisie. Finally, he reveres Nietzsche for his concept of the irrational will and his appreciation of “great men” in history. It was clear for Vynnyčenko, that he himself was predestined to play an important role in history. However, he used his historiosophic musings in the four literary genres to prove an essential point: the failure of his Ukrainian project was not his personal shortcoming, but must be ascribed to the belated historical development of the Ukrainian nation.

*Keywords*

Vynnyčenko; Ukrainian Revolution; Literary Representation of the Nation; Genre and Narrative.