

## IRONY IN THE WORKS OF MYKOLA KHVYL'OVY

Myroslav Shkandrij

"Well, he's mad—that he is—and it's the kind of madness that generally mistakes one thing for another, and thinks white black and black white, as was clear when he said that the windmills were giants and the friar's mules dromedaries, and the flock of sheep hostile armies, and many other things to this tune. So it won't be very difficult to make him believe that the first peasant girl I run across about here is the Lady Dulcinea."

*The Adventures of Don Quixote*

Mykola Khvyl'ovy, the greatest Ukrainian prose writer of the immediate post-Revolutionary years, was acutely aware of one trait of the modern ego, its self-consciousness. Almost all his central figures—the narrator in "Ya," Anarkh in "Povist' pro sanatoriynu zonu," Dmytro Karamazov in "Val'dshnepy"—typify the modern ego's uncertainty, its fear of being wrong, of appearing ridiculous, of discovering the truth about itself. It is as though these heroes were searching for their identity in the figures of Don Quixote, Sancho Panza, and Miguel de Cervantes—more precisely, as though they were not sure which of the three they most closely resembled.

The structure of Khvyl'ovy's stories—indeed, of most of his works—seems to shuttle elaborately between the noble illusions of a Don Quixote, the earthy realism of a Sancho Panza, and the humour of a Cervantes. Often the chief interest lies in the struggle of these attitudes within the mind of the hero or heroine. Such an organizing principle is also evident in the selection of characters: an idealistic dreamer, usually a young person, represents the beautiful illusion (Andryusha in "Ya," Khlonya in "Povist' pro sanatoriynu zonu"); a strong-willed cynic, who knows the weakness of the flesh and has an instinct for survival, represents the point of view of the *mishchany* or Philistine (Dr. Tahabat in "Ya," "Karno" in "Povist' pro sanatoriynu zonu," Aglaya in "Val'dshnepy"); and the impotent intellectual, who sides with the ideal but is overpowered by the real, serves as the central character in whose mind the story's conflicts are played out (the narrator in "Ya," Anarkh in "Povist' pro sanatoriynu zonu," Dmytro Karamazov in "Val'dshnepy"). One might also add to the list of recurring characters: the simple soul, usually a quiet, unassuming, and self-sacrificing woman (Maria in "Ya," Sestra Katrya in "Povist'...", Hanna Karamazov in "Val'dshnepy"); the fool (Degenerat in "Ya," Duren' in

"Povist'...", T'otya Klava's husband in "Val'dshnepy"); and the provocateur, usually a sexually attractive woman who has lost her noble illusions and has a compulsive need to destroy the illusions of others (Maya in "Povist'...", T'otya Klava in "Val'dshnepy"). All these character types point to the author's desire to structure the story around the juxtaposition of poet and Philistine, illusion and reality, innocent joy and malicious experience, love and hate. And all these motifs focus attention on the central dilemma of the hero: the debilitating self-consciousness of the potentially active and creative individual.

Yet the author's own self-awareness blocks him from merely portraying the modern ego. His corrosive self-consciousness compels him to intervene continually in his works in order to debunk, demystify, deflate, remind the readers constantly that all perceptions and all desires have to be distrusted. Finally, he cannot resist demonstrating that the work of fiction too is an illusion, nothing but an intellectual game.

All these attitudes, besides being very central in the development of twentieth-century Modernism, were also typical of Romantic irony. Therefore it would not be amiss to take a brief retrospective glance at Romantic irony, not only because it is an attitude that is at the core of Khvyl'ovy's work, but also because it sheds some light on the terms "Romantic Vitaism" and "Active Romanticism" which the author used to describe both his work and that of the twenties as a whole.

Socratic irony has often been spoken of as a method of dissimulation, the purpose of which is to expose ignorance by pretending to seek information. It has been admired as a device for drawing out the full implications of a commonly held opinion, thereby revealing its contradictions and shortcomings. As a didactic tool its purpose was to teach that established codes of religion, morality, justice, and art were often based on faulty premises and had to be rethought. Since it was nobler for an individual to reach an understanding of a question through reflection rather than to adopt conventional notions automatically, irony was the tool by which beliefs were analyzed and false views exposed, by which the social collective's claim to be correct was often shown to be wrong.

Romantic irony, in the opinion of the critic Friedrich Schlegel, was also a splendid weapon against philistinism, false rationalism, untrammelled emotionalism, and fossilized thinking. For the Romantics, however, irony was not only a negative power; it was also a revelation of a positive capability: the writer's ability to step outside the world of necessity and to summon up divine powers as creator and poet. The exercise of irony, they thought, offered the most unlimited expression of freedom, the widest prospects for creative endeavour. Through it intelligence became completely self-conscious and gained a glimpse of its infinite possibilities. Control over irony would thus liberate the individual and bring a clearer understanding of the truth.

A striking feature of Romantic irony was its need to remind the reader that the story was a fictional account constructed by an author. By stepping outside the narrative, the Romantics seemed to be demonstrating an aspiration to situate the artist, the supreme creator, at a point outside the world. Such a calculated mental act was the manifestation of a detached and ambivalent attitude to the paradoxical essence of the world—"transcendental buffoonery," in Schlegel's words.

The Romantics felt they had discovered something essentially new, non-Greek, in the concept of irony: the reflective, critical attitude toward the work of art and the artist himself, which could illuminate the working of the mind during the act of creation. One immediate consequence of such an attitude was the idea of literature as play. It became the fashion for the writer ironically to rethink various literary forms, to treat literature as an intellectual game, to enter his work and comment on his literary devices, and to make the production and composition of the literary work the subject of literature. This was, of course, connected to the idea that the human mind was not a passive reflector of the surrounding world but an active creator working according to its own internal laws—a basic tenet of Romanticism.

A second major consequence for literature in adopting the ironic stance was the development of the concept of doubt. Since Kant had shown the limitations of knowledge, the futility of attempting to construct a comprehensive metaphysical system that could reduce everything to a single basic principle, the Romantics had to accept the impossibility of complete knowledge and of total communication, while, paradoxically, recognizing the necessity of striving for both. This kind of ironic attitude had much in common with scepticism in philosophy, with agnosticism in questions of religious belief, and with tolerant relativism in matters political and moral. Towards ultimate mysteries and eternal questions a certain degree of non-commitment and equivocation was to be assumed, toward socio-political complexities a stance of disinterest. But in aesthetic matters, in Schlegel's estimation, irony would liberate more than it would restrain, freeing the artist to hover playfully over the surface of his work, to savour all the paradoxes of his craft, to rejoice in the powers of the intellect and the imagination, and to delight in the artist's ability to poeticize the world.

How closely acquainted Khvyl'ovy was with Schlegel's theory of Romantic irony we do not know. It may have been a second-hand acquaintanceship obtained through the writings of the Russian Modernists, the translations of German authors, and reports of the newest publications and theatrical productions: Ludwig Tieck's *Der gestiefelte Kater* was produced in Berlin in 1921 and Luigi Pirandello's *Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore*, a work that did more than any other to popularize the devices of Romantic irony in the modern theatre, was published in 1921. It may also have been derived in part from the Ukrainian Modernists, in particular, M. Kotsyubyns'ky. Nevertheless, it is

clear from his work and from his polemical writings that Khvyl'ovy was profoundly influenced by Romantic theory. He both considered himself a "Romantic Vitaist" or "Active Romantic" and was strongly attracted to the ironic mode. Furthermore, an argument can be made for the progressive development of this mode as the path taken by Khvyl'ovy's genius.

Friedrich Schlegel saw irony as a counterbalance to the unrestrained feeling of the Storm and Stress period: it cooled the poet's fervour, supplemented it with clarity of vision, presence of mind, and calmness of judgment. A marriage of emotion and intellect was considered important if the world was not to make of the poet a naive fool or a helpless slave. A similar motivation appeared to have prompted Khvyl'ovy to reject his youthful, naively enthusiastic verse of the Revolutionary period, in which the poet wore his heart upon his sleeve, and to search for a more sophisticated form of expression. In the following years he was to mock caustically those writers who remained cast in such an artless mold, perhaps seeing in their earnest, innocent, and self-contented lyrics a reflection of his own literary persona of the Revolutionary years. In fact the famous "Literary Discussion" in Ukraine during the years 1925-1928 was initiated by Mykola Khvyl'ovy with an attack upon a third-rate short-sighted writer who could see in the story "Ya" nothing but an offensive slander of the noble revolutionary activist and a delving into morbid psychology. Khvyl'ovy's critique of hollow rhetoric, sentimentalism, and technical incompetence, with which he opened his attack in 1925, was to be a leitmotif of the entire "Literary Discussion."

The ironist who emerged in 1923-1924 with the publication of *Syni Etyudy* and *Osin'* was already an artist in control of his material, not one controlled by it (Schlegel's distinction between Romanticism and Classicism). Khvyl'ovy the artist had set himself different goals from the politician, for, in the words of another Romantic, "A commitment to an idea, no matter how beautiful, means a chance of getting stuck in some kind of servitude to the sublime.... If you are lacking in irony, that divine freedom of spirit, then you cannot do justice to the sublime."<sup>1</sup> In his work Mykola Khvyl'ovy uses irony in the self-conscious manner admired by the Romantics: as detached authorial manipulation of material, as self-mirroring, as self-restraint, and as a symbolic imitation of the infinite play of the universe.<sup>2</sup>

In the stories of this period Khvyl'ovy continually intervenes in order to show that literature is a kind of intellectual game being played with the reader. He loves to take the reader into his confidence, asks for advice as to how the plot ought to develop, gives instruction on how unfolding events should be viewed, and shares his artistic secrets. Some chapters are non-existent, others full of clues that lead nowhere. The author delights in exposing the conventions of the literary form, of drawing the reader into his laboratory and displaying to him the very creative process itself.

But running alongside the theme of literature as play is the second major theme of his work: literature as doubt, as a systematic questioning of all human perceptions and desires. This begins with the manipulation of narrative devices in order to advance the story on several levels at once. The straightforward, "realist" narrative is shunned: the point of view constantly shifts; fragments of letters, diaries, and posters appear frequently; and dream sequences, ghostly visions of past Cossack glory, and idyllic fantasies about the future Republic of Communes unexpectedly glide in and out. All this becomes too much for some characters, who at certain points can no longer distinguish between reality and illusion:

Anarkh looked at Sister Katria and suddenly jumped: Is she a phantom too?—Ugh, how stupid!...

—Listen,—he turned to her, rubbing his eyes—what do you think: am I dreaming, or is this...

—Is this what?—Sister Katria rejoined.

—Oh, God! I'm asking you: is it a dream that I'm talking to you, or is it reality?<sup>3</sup>

Or, like Sister Katria, they begin to philosophize:

—Just think...perhaps when I'm somewhere beyond Lake Baikal or North of Lake Baikal, Hegel will appear in a completely different light. And this will be quite understandable, because you cannot in fact say what I am exactly: reality or a phantom. Even if you take hold of my hand and feel my flesh under your thumb, even then you do not have the right to say that at this moment I exist. Perhaps this is just your dream, because you could feel exactly the same thing in a dream... Everything is relative!<sup>4</sup>

Khvyl'ovy's most characteristic device is anticlimax. He almost always mocks his own lyrical flights. He will paint a character or describe an incident and quite deliberately puncture the illusion with an admission that no such person existed or that nothing of the sort occurred; we have simply been taken for a joyful ride. Sometimes, as in the conclusion to "Iz Varynoyi biohrafiiyi," he even proposes more than one ending to a story: a bitter, tragic conclusion, and a happy, successful one. The reader is left wondering which is the more appropriate: is life a terrible nightmare or a euphoric dream?

Another interesting device in Khvyl'ovy for heightening the sense of self-consciousness and doubt is the search for "Platonic forms": the author and the characters are looking beyond the immediate and the individual for eternal and ideal types. Khvyl'ovy makes this explicit in the endings to some of his stories.

For example, in "Kit u chobotyakh" and "Val'dshnepy" we are told that the importance of analyzing the chief characters lies in their representative nature; the hero of the second represents the typical Ukrainian Party intellectual of the twenties, trapped between Communist loyalties and national sympathies. It is precisely because of this almost obsessive search for "Platonic forms" that all Khvyl'ovy's work teems with literary allusions.

Almost every character, every scene, and every conflict recall some other literary work. The author himself constantly compares his characters to fictional ones and wonders whether they are Don Quixotes, Prometheuses, Dmitri Karamazovs, Fausts, Ostap or Andriy Bul'bas, etc. Sometimes he seems unsure about which persona his character will assume next, hesitates in developing the plot, appears to stand back and to observe developments with detached curiosity. Khvyl'ovy's characters often have allegorical names which encourage comparisons and contrasts, or remind the reader of other characters in history or fiction: in "Povist' . . .," for instance, Anarkh, the former Makhnovite, is pitted against Karno, the crude, earthy, Party realist. Individuals also have a protean quality, drifting into and out of one literary personage after another. Their characters seem to be perpetually in flux, ephemeral. In the same story Anarkh is associated with Savonarola, Don Quixote, Makhno, Lenin, and even the Fool, who in this story wanders the grounds of the sanatorium occasionally piercing the stillness with a mad cry. In his struggle for self-awareness, for an understanding of his own character and role in life, Anarkh, as it were, tries on these various personae. When he is unable to reach the desired self-awareness, his mental illness progresses rapidly, leading to his suicide. Not only are the Platonic ideal types here an aid to self-characterization for Anarkh, the author's use of them—in particular of Anarkh's continual shuttling from one to another—seems to imply that conventional realist methods of characterization are suspect.

The business of "getting to know" some character, of reducing him to a recognizable dimension, is made more complicated by the fact that he is continually posing, playing roles, hiding behind masks:

Karamazov looked at his friend and suddenly burst into laughter. "Oh, how odd you are! Didn't you notice that I was just playing the fool? Obviously I wouldn't make such a bad actor."<sup>5</sup>

All this tends to produce a kind of "hall of mirrors" effect in which the reader and each character watch the players without being sure whether the image observed is really there. The importance of the image, however, is crucial; in fact, it is usually the image that creates the reality.

Khvyl'ovy's characters are themselves constantly reading other authors, and readily discuss the world of other fictional characters or famed philosophers,

which often seems more real to them than their own. We hear echoes from Plato, Cervantes, Swift, Voltaire, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and a host of others. Each thread is picked up only to be dropped as soon as another association occurs. And yet all these streams seem to flow into one prolonged search for the answer to recurring questions: What is reality? What is the individual? What is history? What is illusion? What is art? And in this world of fiction, the world's great writers and the eternal creations of fiction seem to be looking over the characters' shoulders and participating in the action.

This device of Romantic irony, so reminiscent of Tieck and Pirandello, goes hand in hand with another device that is central to Khvyl'ovy and which is often at the base of his plot structure, especially in his later stories: the destruction of the mass illusion or the popular myth. In a world reminiscent of Gogol, Khvyl'ovy's characters are often the product of a mass psychosis, of how others see them. They are beneficiaries or victims of popular misconceptions. The inspector in "Revizor" is a product of the popular fear of bureaucratic institutions. The pusillanimous Ivan Ivanovych or Stepan Trokhymovych in their eponymous stories are familiar to the reader, but not to their subordinates who consider them wise, dignified leaders. The pompous, giftless, and vulgar Party official Ivan Ivanovych is, for example, keenly aware of the power of the general impression his circle has of him:

"Well, Galaktochka... Ah... what are they saying about me, in general?"

"Where do you mean?"

"Well... in general. In Party circles, so to speak, and... whenever the subject arises."

Comrade Galaktochka looks at Comrade Zhan in a motherly way and says: "What can they say?... They say that you are a very fine worker and an exemplary Party man."

Ivan Ivanovych rubs his hands, goes to the radio loudspeaker and tenderly strokes it with his palm: he is quite pleased by this information. The main thing is to avoid any kind of misunderstanding.<sup>6</sup>

Eventually, of course, the facade collapses, and the delusory nature of the fears and ambitions it has fostered are exposed. The characters emerge chastened, but less gullible and more critical of the world's vanity. Ivan Ivanovych, the conceited Party dignitary is purged and tumbles from his high post into obscurity; Stepan Trokhymovych discovers that the Party authorities are just as incompetent as he is; the Revizor turns out to be a frightened, obsequious, and pathetic careerist. Romantic irony is very much in evidence in the overt manipulation of characters and events and in the ambiguous attitude of the author to his literary progeny. Towards them intimacy alternates with aloofness,

the tenderest affection with mockery, and sympathy with criticism. This again is an attitude that Schlegel praised and one which he detected in the greatest artists: Cervantes, Shakespeare, Goethe.

It was in the years of the great "Literary Discussion," 1925-1928, that Khvyl'ovy's prose began to undergo a change. The dominance of essentially poetic devices—which gave his prose a lyrical, fragmentary quality—began to give way to structural devices more usually associated with prose narrative: a well constructed plot, character development, psychological interest, socio-political contrasts, etc. The use of irony, however, did not diminish, but increased. Whereas in the earlier stories it had often assumed a playful, witty, and flippant tone, and tended to reveal an easy acceptance of human folly in general, now it became more sombre in colouration and all-pervasive, and began to focus on specific targets, to expose and castigate specific vices.

A strong satirical streak emerged in Khvyl'ovy's writings. Bureaucratic snobbery, obsequiousness and servility, hypocrisy, petty ambition, selfishness, and the ubiquitous "poshlist" of Soviet life became the objects of ridicule in stories such as "Ivan Ivanovych," "Revizor," and "Opovidannya pro Stepana Trokhymovycha," published in the years 1929-1931. Some standard techniques of satire are employed: affectation is unmasked; the base character with an inflated opinion of himself is overtaken by bedlam, confusion, or chaos; the mechanical response to situations by the brain-washed, self-demeaning cog is ridiculed; the blindness and hypocrisy of the snob is exposed. And yet the technique is a subtle one which relies on ironic distancing for its effect. Here again clues are dropped as to the author's intentions: "Ivan Ivanovych" begins with references to Jonathan Swift, Voltaire, and anti-utopian literature; the heroine in "Revizor" wonders whether she is a Ukrainian Madame Bovary; Stepan Trokhymovych's philistine happiness echoes Gogol's old-world landowners.

But behind the social satire lies a parody of the representation of these conventions in literature. Khvyl'ovy took pains to explode the naive epistemological assumption on which the "heroic" or "monumental" realism of the official Soviet literature (later "Socialist Realism") was founded. While part of the satirist's attack was aimed at manners and attitudes which were the norm in Soviet life, another part travestied the literary norms. In the works of this period Khvyl'ovy was in fact ridiculing the official VUSPP school of writing—in particular, works such as Ivan Mykytenko's *Braty* (1927), Petro Panch's *Povist' nashykh dniv* (1928), and Ivan Le's *Roman mizhirrya* (1929), which were soon to be granted canonical status—by laying bare the devices and the illusions the school tried to foster.

Take, for example, Ivan Ivanovych in Khvyl'ovy's story of the same name. He is none other than a Party Candide. We are immediately informed that he was expelled from the Faculty of Law for "Voltairianism" and today lives on



Thomas More Street (in the contemporary *Utopia*, of course). In his heart vibrate exclusively "major chords" of "monumental realism," while all "minor chords" and rebellious attitudes are considered by him to be expressions of a "petty-bourgeois impressionism." Just like Voltaire's *Candide*, he continually repeats to himself that we live in the best of all possible worlds until, that is, he is thrown out of the Party and his career is ruined. This is a very obvious travesty of the VUSPP fiction of the day, of its dominant mood and of its positive hero. Moreover, the typical plot of the VUSPP story has the hero making some scientific discovery and thereby raising the material level of the masses. In a transparent parody of this formula Ivan Ivanovych spends the entire winter in study until he invents an electric fly-swatter, which only works, however, when the fly obligingly decides to sit in a designated spot—something, we are told, that does not often happen.

Khvyl'ovy's purpose seems to have been the education of the public to a more critical reading and to a more profound self-awareness through the revelation of the limits of fiction. Hence the parodistic game played with other texts, other worlds, with the whole idea of fiction as a "reflection of reality." In fact, Khvyl'ovy's ultimate purpose is an attack on the mimetic myth. Through the use of irony, satire, and parody he criticizes the naive views of the representation of nature in art. A naive reader like Don Quixote (a recurring symbol in Khvyl'ovy) takes the fictional world of chivalry to be true, just as Khvyl'ovy's heroes and heroines accept their images of lovers, Party leaders, historical events, the common people, or the artist to be the truth—with disastrous results. Byanka's image of her lover turns out to be completely false in "Sentymental'na istoriya"; Stepan Trokhymovych's impression that a wise leadership is guiding the Party eventually is deflated; Ivan Ivanovych's picture of historical events proves to be totally false since he believed that "they cannot purge members of the Central Committee... that's only for the people... the masses!"<sup>7</sup>

Khvyl'ovy's irony argues for a more sophisticated and complex presentation of the world, for a more self-conscious use of the art of fiction, and, perhaps, for a more ironic, detached, and tolerant approach to life in the face of an increasingly dogmatic official posture in all matters intellectual: politics, philosophy, morality, and art.

Finally, Khvyl'ovy's purpose may have been to illustrate the idea that all literature is essentially deceptive and therefore morally questionable. One of his characters, commenting upon the reflection of life in the local factory newspaper, expresses this doubt in the power of the written word to convey the truth without distortion:

But scepticism kept eating away at me... I took an active part in the women's organization, in meetings of delegates, in editing the town's wall-newspapers, but I constantly thought that our wall-newspaper [*stinhazeta*] was not called

wall-gas [*stinhaz*] for nothing. That's all it was—gas, smoke. A lot of damp straw burning. And the people sit by this illusory bonfire and think: "there's no smoke without fire."<sup>8</sup>

Khvyl'ovy seems to be telling the reader that the simplistic Engelsian and Leninist "refection theory," which served as the epistemological foundation for the crude productions of "heroic" or "Socialist Realism" in the late twenties and early thirties, was far too primitive an instrument to comprehend a changing world. Everything in the later stories ("Ivan Ivanovych," "Revizor," "Zlochyn," "Myslyvs'ki opovidannya dobrodiya Stepchuka," "Z Lyaboratoriyi," and "Opovidannya pro Stepana Trokhymovycha") is built on a contrast between illusion and reality, seeming and being. Nothing is what it appears to be. Khvyl'ovy begins to reiterate the words "son, mara, omana" (dream, phantom, delusion) as though trying to convince us that human reason alone is unable to grasp the whimsical dialectic of life.

In the following passage, which occurs towards the end of "Z Lyaboratoriyi," Spridonova philosophizes on the inscrutable logic of events:

And so here you are at my place!... And, you know, it happened quite accidentally somehow... Well, tell me, did you think you would find yourself at my place? Of course not. Everything in life turns out in a funny sort of way. Not because the principle of causation is broken at every step—as some provincial would say. But because these same causes, which bring us to a place we never expected—these same causes are acted out before our eyes in a hidden manner, and only afterwards do we find them.<sup>9</sup>

Or take the following quotations, all gathered from the "Opovidannya pro Stepana Trokhymovycha," and all pointing toward the limitations of human reason:

Of course we could build the commune without directives, but the point is the nature of our people. Darkest ignorance, I tell you, and you cannot presume that they will think their way through by themselves.

And here Stepan Trokhymovych had a sudden thought: 'Life's like that—you fear it and it is not terrible at all.'

The point is that life is like that: you get ready to go somewhere; you take off; you arrive at the place; and then it turns out that what you were looking for isn't there; it turns out that you didn't ask the right questions, or the right people.

Stepan Trokhymovych tried to wrap his brain around the problem, Stepan Trokhymovych pondered intensely. But all the same Stepan Trokhymovych could not make head or tails of it.<sup>10</sup>

In his awareness of the process of creation and of the dangers of a simplistic fictional portrayal, Khvyl'ovy was very much a twentieth-century writer. For Joyce, Proust, Gide, Kafka, Mann—artists who defined the direction of twentieth-century prose—sense perception was to be doubted, for what appeared to be true was not; and at the same time illusions, one's images of the world, could be as tangible as perceptions of external reality. The impossibility of knowing anything for certain—of even knowing other people well—haunts these authors. Perhaps Proust put it best:

But then, even in the most insignificant details of our daily life, none of us can be said to constitute a material whole, which is identical for everyone, and need only be turned up like a page in an account book or the record of a will; our social personality is a creation of the thoughts of other people.<sup>11</sup>

All these artists mistrust art, are aware of its conventionality, its "literariness," its moral ambivalence. Disturbed by this knowledge, they feel the need for a self-reflective manner; unsure of where they stand, they are concerned with constructing a multi-layered, multi-faceted narrative that would approximate the irreducible complexity of human consciousness. This concern perhaps explains the popularity during Khvyl'ovy's lifetime of the genre of self-parody: the portrait of the artist, the novel within a novel, the text within a text.

One of Khvyl'ovy's last works, "Z Lyaboratoriyi" (1931), is a discussion with the readers concerning a novel in progress. The author decides to write a novel, discusses each chapter with us as it emerges, explains which elements of the work he likes and dislikes, and finally breaks off after only three chapters have been produced. Once it becomes clear to both author and readers that his fiction is no longer acceptable to the regime, the writer then leaves for the Donbas to gather material for a projected new work about the "new" heroes of his day, which is to be written in the "new," "realist" style:

The writer decided to write a novel with living people, that is, with ordinary workers, with collectivists, the labouring intelligentsia, that is to say, a realist novel, which would be read by workers, collectivists, the labouring intelligentsia—all those who under the leadership of the Communist Party were creating the new life and who were looked down upon by our home-grown Marcel Prousts, let us say.<sup>12</sup>

This was, of course, the final irony: the "new" literature was neither "new" nor "realistic," nor contained "living people," nor would be welcomed by workers, collectivists, or the intelligentsia. In fact, Khvyl'ovy would never write his novel because he was incapable of destroying his ironic, critical intelligence. To have done so would have been to crush his social conscience, self-awareness, and sense of self-worth, all of which were intimately connected

with the very meaning and function of literature.

There are dark notes in Khvyl'ovy's last stories. He seems to have premonitions of some great horror and he turns from irony as play to irony as anguished doubt. The "road to consciousness" traversed by his characters is full of disillusionment: conscious ideas are subverted by the unconscious will; visual images do not correspond to reality; the reasons given for actions differ from their deeper motivation; the individual cannot find a vantage-point from which to survey the maelstrom of history.

This sense of unsureness, of bewilderment even, among many writers led to a reaffirmation of the ironic attitude in the twenties. In a decade that witnessed the rising tide of fanaticism, a growing commitment to totalitarian ideologies, and the punishment of dissent with persecution, such a reminder of the limits of human understanding in the ironic prose of T. Mann, Kafka, Proust—in fact, in many of the greatest writers of the century—was not out of place. Playful and yet capable of expressing anguished doubt, tolerant of ambiguity, full of contradiction, complexity, incoherence, and eccentricity—the irony that flourished in the twenties could not, however, be tolerated a decade later by the triumphant mentality that rejected doubt, dualism, and detachment.

#### NOTES

1. Adam Muller, *Kritische, aesthetische und philosophische Schriften* (Neuwied-Berlin: Hermann Luchterhand Verlag, 1967), I, p. 234-5.

2. For an English-language introduction to Schlegel see: Friedrich Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorism*, translated, annotated, and introduced by E. Behler and R. Struc (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1968); or *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, translated with an introduction by Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971). For essays in English on Schlegel as a critic see: Hans Eichner, "Friedrich Schlegel's Theory of Romantic Poetry," *PMLA*, 71 (Fall 1955), 289-305; Rene Wellek, *A History of Modern Criticism, 1750-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

3. Mykola Khvyl'ovy, *Tvory v pyat' okh tomakh* (New York, Baltimore, Toronto: Smoloskyp, 1978), II, p. 222.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 158.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 320.

6. *Ibid.*, III, p. 28.

7. *Ibid.*, III, p. 69.

8. *Ibid.*, II, p. 222.

9. *Ibid.*, III, p. 181.

10. Ibid., pp. 197, 256, 258, 261.
11. M. Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past* (New York: Random House, 1981), I, p. 20.
12. Khvyl'ovy, III, p. 184.