

The 1960s as a Landmark of Ukrainian Literary Emancipation (American and French Comparative Aspects)

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Abstract:

The term “global sixtieth” has persisted in historiography since the 2000s denoting the revolutionary movements united by common discontent with the political, socioeconomic, and cultural status quo. Although their national literary manifestations differed, they appear to be interconnected regarding the attempts to establish other political and aesthetic orders, hence counterculture. This comparative article explores the liberation effect of the counterculture of the 1960s manifested in Ukrainian literature contrasted to American and French. It is stated the former pursued double emancipation – from the imposed ideological system, and centuries of national oppression – through popular poetry. In the Free Bloc of ostentatious civil liberty, the 1960s literature is marked as aesthetically and ideologically modernized. American literature expands towards the colonized voices (Black Arts Movement), the gender spectrum (B. Friedan, S. Plath, G. Greer), and the anti-establishment alternatives (Ken Kesey, R. Brautigan, T. Wolfe). A European counterpart is represented by avant-garde tendencies (Tel Quel, Oulipo, Le théâtre de l'absurde) complemented by feminist and postcolonial as well (*écriture féminine*, Afropessimism, *Négritude* reinterpretations). Such “erotics of art” advanced countercultural opposition to the dominant faith and ultimate values of the pre-revolutionary era. In socialistic Ukraine, deprived of the freedom of speech and direct action, the literature field becomes a battlefield for evasive political maneuvering. Instead of introducing new trends, as in the case of the USA and France, the countercultural gesture of Ukrainian “sixtiers” (Mykola Vingranovskiy, Lina Kostenko, Vasyl Symonenko, and more) was to turn to the classic and modernist Ukrainian heritage to revive its threatened discourse. They promoted engaging genres such as lyric poetry and romance, approaching popular leitmotifs as national self-awareness and personal values – themes, deafened under the totalitarian reign of the USSR. By virtue of popular poetry, the sixtiers did a “museum work” of resuscitating Ukrainian identity and preserving it for the

next generations. Thus, paradoxically, the Ukrainian counterculture of the 1960s was regressive aesthetically, but pivotal politically.

Keywords: Ukrainian Literature, French Literature, American Literature, Counterculture, Aesthetics

Commonly, the epoch of the 1960s is considered revolutionary, both in politics and culture. Historiography proves it with the expansion of the term “global sixties” (Zolov, 2020; Dubinsky, 2009; Marwick, 1998) denoting universal tendencies around the world, namely student protests, the radicalization of civil rights movements, political reorientations, and the emergence of the counterculture. The latter has been analyzed in various research in the field of sociology (Yinger, 1984; Roszak, 1969; Gitlin, 1987; Larkin, 1979; Eder, 1990; Featherstone, 1991; Bell, 1996; Foss, 1986; Yablonsky, 1968; Reich, 1970), anthropology (Sahlins, 2005), social critique (Ehrenreich, 2006; Hoffman, 1968; Guinness, 1973), political science (Inglehart, 1990), and history (Lasch, 1979; Braunstein & Doyle, 2002). Although countercultural phenomena were examined by some literary critics (MacFarlane, 2007; Martinez, 2003; Hentzi, 2022; Chandarlapaty, 2009), their analyses clearly lack a comparative aspect. Juxtaposed, diverse literary worlds, especially non-dominant, may contribute to the research of countercultural tendencies in literature, as well as elaborate on its mechanisms and significance. Therefore, using historical and cultural criticism methods, this paper concentrates on the countercultural manifestation of Ukrainian literature, comparing it to American and French contexts. It analyses the political background of the regions, revealing whether the countercultural expression forms, is formed by, or functions along with the political agenda. Such an approach will help us to define the status of counterculture in the 1960s and test the hypothesis of this period being an emancipative moment for Ukrainian literature.

Counterculture: Diverse Terminological Approaches

For the sake of terminological clarity, we are to address the variety of definitions of “counterculture” and trace their relevance to our research. There exist two predominant proposals on the countercultural concept:

1. a narrow one, referring to the revolutionary generation of the American 1960s (Roszak, 1969; Reich, 1970; Braunstein & Doyle, 2002; Guinness, 1973; Bell, 1996). For instance, Roszak (1969) defines counterculture as a type of protest worldview characteristic of the late 60s for the children of technocrats (p. 1-42); Reich (1970) implies that counterculture is a youth movement, representing the third type of American consciousness, based on freedom, radical subjectivity, belief in the value of life, and community relations (p. 225-254).
2. a wide one, referring to the general characteristics of dissent, hence a set of ideas opposing the basic culture of society (Yinger, 1984; Goodheart, 1973; Musgrove, 1974; Keniston, 1971; Westhues, 1972). Musgrove (1974) defines counterculture as “a search for new interactional norms in the widening, more diffuse margins of postindustrial societies” (p. 19); Yinger (1984) calls it “a primary element, a theme of conflict with the dominant values of society, where the tendencies, needs, and perceptions of the member of that group are directly involved in the development and maintenance of its values” (p. 23); Westhues (1972) proposes his view of the counterculture as “a set of beliefs and values which radically reject the dominant culture of a society and prescribe a certain alternative” (p. 9-10).

While the first, narrow theoretical proposal, is valid in our take on the landscape of the American 1960s, the second one is relevant for the cases of France and Ukraine as well, for countercultural activity, as we prove next, did take place there despite its terminological absence. Therefore, it is worth using a wider conceptualization frame of counterculture since it would work for all the instances in our focus. It seems the Westhues’ definition can be applied as the literary manifestations of the countercultures we are dealing with are demonstrated in undermining the dominant literary prescriptions, and suggesting alternatives by reforming content (Kay et al., 2006; Wyatt, 2018; Tarnashynska, 2014) experimenting with the form (Gray,

2012; Coward 2004; Hrymych, 1993) and reconfiguring the canon (Wyatt, 2018; Coward 2004; Hollier et al., 1989; Batenko, 2003). However, the status of counterculture is inevitably bound to the political (as well as economic and ideological) status of a state. For this reason, below we intend to analyze how protest activity that touched upon socio-political issues is connected to the countercultural field (in our case, literary). Consequently, we are to examine the political and cultural interrelations of the 1960s.

The Character of Counterculture in the USA and France

In the 1960s, the USA occupied the position of the first world power and fought for political hegemony and influence, which is visible in its interests in Latin America, Vietnam, and participation in the Cold War. Affected by the limitation of civil rights, the threat of nuclear war, compulsory ROTC, the draft, and the Vietnam War (Phillips, 1985) youth society cultivated protest moods and was engaged in various anti-governmental, anti-establishment, pro-peace, and alternative movements. There, the conditions of a democratic state, affluence (Judis, 1998) supplemented by America's major role in world relations opened the opportunity for a "healthy" political protest to prosper, meaning the one that sabotaged the status quo and led to progressive changes. For instance, the antiwar movement laid the foundations for the enactment of the 26th Amendment in March of 1971, which extended voting rights to 18-year-olds (Schamel, 1996); the civil rights movement resulted in the enactment of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that prohibited racial discrimination in voting, as well as initiated many extensions of rights for women and queer people.

Aesthetics cannot function separately from the political world (Ranciere, 2004). For the aforementioned reasons, general aesthetic flow in America was altered jointly with the political one: writers who identified as countercultural laid progressive directions before the literature and expanded its margins. The fiction of the 1960s diverted into undermining the traditional values system, culturizing the "uncultured," legitimizing the subversive, and introducing hitherto marginal discourses into the masses. Richard Fariña, Richard Brautigan, Ken Kesey, Hunter Thompson, Diana di Prima, and Joan Didion talked about experiences unacceptable for American society, raised on post-war values: narcotic, psychopathic, migrant, suicidal, in general – borderline experiences. In this way, representatives of the

counterculture dissected orthodox literary principles of America, namely the ideological foundations of blind patriotism, established social and gender roles, materialism, and the idea of the “American dream.”

Therefore, the socio-economic and geographical privilege of the USA enabled counterculture to function both out of political change and as a trigger for it, in a kind of tandem. Socio-political intentions such as sexual freedom, psychedelic, anti-war, ecologic, and legalization movements were inscribed into the literary attempts to enlarge the topical spectrum, introduce new narrative techniques, and liberate discourses. The brightest instance of the interconnection of political and countercultural expression is the reconfiguration of the literary canon when poetic anthologies started to include women such as Gwendoline Brooks, Elizabeth Bishop, and Katherine Enn Porter, and popular magazines – print the works by the representative of Black Arts Movement (Fox, 1998).

A curious effect that came of the countercultural embrace of society and its comprehensive discursive presence was its infusion into mass culture. During the 1960s, the books by Richard Brautigan, Diana di Prima, and Joan Didion never reached the publishing success of more established writers such as Arthur Hailey or John Updike (Hackett et al., 1977) but did affect the cultural area a lot. Norman Mailer admitted his “literary father” was William Burroughs (Kaufmann, 2012), Alen Ginsberg got famous (Kostelanetz, 1965), Joan Didion wrote for Vogue (Didion, 1961), and New-York Times brought long-term success to Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road* (Pace, 1999).

France, a similar hegemonic structure in Europe, was losing colonies, namely Indochina, Tunisia, Marocco, and Algeria. The country stepped into “les trentes glorieuses,” the explosion of economic growth and consumer affluence (Fourastié, 1979). Under Charles De Gaulle, it played a leading role in building an alliance of capitalist countries in Western Europe, though aimed at balancing the power relations of the so-called “West” and “East” worlds by, for instance, recognizing Communist China (*The New-York Times*, 1964). Despite the fortunate living conditions, the French people of the 1960s experienced harsh societal and cultural struggles. They were manifested in quasi-benign dictatorship coming from the government, for instance, the control over media (television and radio) (Brizzi, 2018), lack of autonomy in the universities (Wright, 1995), poor working conditions, poli-

ce arbitrariness (Jackson, 2018), and the shift in the class structure (Ross, 2004).

Consequently, the imperialistic position of France was questioned by the greatest protest of the 1960s – the revolt of 1968. We should add that, similarly to the USA, such a revolutionary outburst was possible due to the developed economic basis of France, its predominance over colonized lands, and the adjustable nature of its politics. The historians still doubt the significance of the political results of the May events, though there certainly were some, such as subsequent De Gaulle's resignation, wage increase and shortage of a working day, and the extension of rights for women (Polychroniou, n.d.). Most agree, however, (Kauppi, 2010; Wolin, 2018) on the cultural and aesthetic change it brought. Wolin (2018) stated that the core of these revolutionary events was cultural: the sixty-eighters "sought to overturn ossified organizational mold, the boredom of existence, and unmask new forms of control over everyday life" (p. 56). Therefore, contrastingly to the USA, protest activity sprang up from the aesthetical root, from the idea to reshape what was taking on monstrous forms of conservatism and representational crisis.

Interestingly, in France, the very notion of "counterculture" "did not exist until the early 1970s" (Rolland, 2010). As French rioters were foremost concerned to transform aesthetics and culture, a search for alternatives had grown to be a mainstream tendency, especially in literature. First, a new artistic avant-garde approached the cultural scene: a new theater, a new novel, and a new wave in cinematography, where the very "novelty" implied reinterpretation of the past and being counter-. Samuel Beckett, Michel Butor, Alain Rob-Grier, Claude Simon, and Margaret Duras overturned the semantic dominants of artistic writing by rejecting omnipresent authors occupying French tradition and developing new ways of writing based on fragmentation, fluid chronology, and neutral narrators. Like the US, such countercultural innovations quickly gained the attention of readers and critics: *nouveau roman* became so popular that some well-established writers, for instance, Jean-Marie Le Clezio, were happy not to be associated with it (Sert, 2020). Additionally, the early 1960s marks the peak of the theatre of the absurd, where Jean Genet, Eugene Ionesco, and Arthur Adamov also brought the idea of experimental expression forward, parallel with Oulipo and *Tel Quel*. Furthermore, the concept of being different rose to such an extent that there appeared a whole constellation of banned and censored

writers, such as Patrick McAvoy and Nicolas Genka, who were too bold to write about sexual freedom, alternative ways of living, and elaborate on the experiences of the lowest ranks of society. Finally, the era of the 1960s influenced feminist writing (*écriture féminine* was initiated in the early 1970s) and developed francophone literature by nonwhite writes.

Summing up, French literature of that period was in the process of finding new paths, practicing Deborian “detournement.” Every this and that emerging literary event was in a way countercultural since it was against sameness. Such a race to differ and to fight boredom was a manifestation of the main prescription of the sixty-eighters: they felt that only an ethos of total contestation could recapture a fully alienated lifeworld. Therefore, France of the 1960s was predominantly a project of countercultural aesthetics.

Countercultural World in Ukraine of the 1960s

In the case of Ukraine, counterculture took a totally different shape than in its approximately democratic “first-world” counterparts. Under the soviet reign of a totalitarian outline, the only allowed way of expression, both political and cultural, was defined by the socialist framework. In other words, a total absence of freedoms pushed Ukrainian literature to be a battlefield for evasive political maneuvering, fighting back its right to exist. Hence, counterculture here may be seen as anything establishing Ukraine as an independent aesthetic field, not the one subaltern to a “greater” national, cultural, or ideological formation. The reason for these processes needs some historical background.

Ukraine is known to be torn between different state entities up until its independence in 1991. In the 1960s, its territory belonged to the Soviet Union under Russian dominative reign. Thus, Ukraine was trapped in a factual state of colonization (Thompson, 2000). The latter extends from the Valuyev Circular of 1863, which stated that “a separate Little Russian language never existed, does not exist, and shall not exist, and their [Ukrainian’s] tongue used by commoners is nothing but Russian corrupted by the influence of Poland” (“Valuyev Circular”, n.d.) and the Ems Ukaz which 10 years later completely prohibited the use of the Ukrainian language in open print (“Ems Ukaz”, n.d.). More recent events prove the same: for instance, the phenomenon of the “executed renaissance,” persecuted intellectual elite of the 1920s-1930s, repressed in 1937 by the Stalinist authorities for ideological

(national) and cultural diversity. According to the statistics, 192 writers were executed or exiled to the camps with possible subsequent execution or death, 16 – disappeared, and 8 – committed suicide (Lavrynenko, 2004). Throughout the next Stalin years (1937-1954) it was impossible to write anything stepping away from the established rules of socialist realism comprised of the following: revolutionary romanticism, party-mindedness, ideological content, class content, and “truthfulness” (Robin, 1992). Native for the French writers “race to differ” was impossible as it was inevitably accompanied by persecution for distinction. Therefore, the aesthetic condition of Ukrainian literature until the late 1950s was destitute: most Ukrainian writers of the past were banned, so the literary succession was disrupted, the content was controlled, and formal experiments were perceived as an abnormality. The retrograde character of Ukrainian literature of that period is highlighted by the fact that nowadays there is no single text of Ukrainian writers of 1937-1954 studies as a part of the national school program (Navchalni, n.d.).

In 1956 the Soviet Union went through the so-called de-Stalinization, the destruction of Stalin’s image and influence. Many restrictions were taken away, and the writers finally could publish and spread their word, though there still was the “state control over the sale and use of breeding equipment, targeted operational measures and constant ‘quality expertise’” (Danylenko, 2014, p. 17). Then, having a reasonable space to breeze, for a brief period of about ten years, a form of Ukrainian counterculture appeared until it was suppressed again in 1965 when Brezhnev came to power.

What was the characteristic of such a counterculture? Most importantly, for obvious reasons of the metropolitan oppression, it could not be separated from direct political action (Tarnashynska, 2019): anti-totalitarian and pro-Ukrainian leaflet spreading, organized readings, closed discussions, and self-publication circulation, manifestation, and auctions in front of the monuments of Taras Shevchenko, anti-Soviet rhetoric, gradually pushed public gatherings (Danylenko, 2014, p. 227). Historical continuity forced Ukrainian writers of the 1960s to Adornian negativity (Adorno, 1966), to the constant state of political protest (Korohodskyi, 2009, p. 49). However, the Ukrainian counterculture differed from the USA and France versions in an aesthetical sense. First, access to publications that could serve as world cultural heritage was still restricted due to constant check-ups, so there was no free intercultural dialogue, as in the case of the USA and France. Second,

the aesthetic plane of Ukrainian countercultural literature was mainly functional to the political aim of decolonization. Instead of gestures a la mode USA and France, hence progressive literary evolution, Ukrainian poets (Mykola Vingranovskiy, Lina Kostenko, Vasyl Symonenko, Mykola Kholodnyi and more) practiced lyric poetry, resorted to romances, penetrated by folk, national motives and touching on such topics as personal values, self-awareness, and everyday life. Such poetry was an instrument to influence the political consciousness of the Ukrainians, who were eager to reconnect with their national context after the decades of socialist stagnation. Let us illustrate the thesis with Lina Kostenko's verse "The Sun Rises" (Luckuj, 1969, p. 59):

The sun rises: a bright crimson
Sneaks into my eyes
And is my morning wholesome
Or did I cry in sleep?
The morning's fine.
But nights, those nights!
I dream of you and foreign lands...
The blue eyes cried.
The grey eyes cried.
The black eyes cried.
And all – are mine.

This short piece contains immediately captured allusions to two Ukrainian folk songs: "Nich yaka misiachna" (The night is full of the moon) and "Chornii brovy, karii ochi" (Black brows, brown eyes), widespread and well-known for the readers. Genre-wise, the verse appeals to lyric poetry, greatly shared among the classics, and inscribed in folklore. Thematically, it elaborates on traditional topics such as a connection to nature, patriotic unity, and commonness. Poetry was chosen as means of decolonization for the following factors:

1. material: it is easily spread, learned by heart, reproduced, and reprinted once the restrictions are weakened.
2. social: such poetry greatly touches on national mythology, which has the potential to unify people around local agenda, different from socialist or Russian.

3. ideological: Ukrainian language served as a local weapon against an imperialist language discourse.
4. ontological: writing poetry was a way to revive Ukrainian poetic continuity (Ivan Franko, Lesia Ukrainka, Taras Shevchenko, Olena Teliha, etc).

Since all the aforementioned characteristics undermined official Soviet literary discourse, Ukrainian literature indeed was an alternative and countercultural (Zahoruiko, 2018, p. 60). However, it is clear such poetic practice brings no notable expansion to the literary level. It would be considered an aesthetical “step back” for the inner dynamics of Ukrainian national literature as mainly it comprised of rediscovering the tendencies of the past. However, this shift served as a vehicle for the political aim of decolonization and marked the 1960s as an emancipative time for the Ukrainian literary scene.

Conclusions

The 1960s in America, France, and Ukraine seem to be stapled by J. Ranciere’s concept of dissent (Ranciere, 2015). According to the philosopher, the dominant order in society distributes the sensible, namely determining which individual groups and identities will be recognized to have some form of political importance. Therefore, the 1960s were the times of redistribution of the sensible, when new groups declare their right to exist and show that logic of the dominant order is a logic of inequality and hierarchy. However, the direction/effect/quality of the countercultural activities of such groups depends on the power position of their national entity.

The dissent in the case of first-world countries, such as France and the USA, both presented a radical progressive change in literature. In the USA, political and cultural resistance went hand in hand, complementing each other. Therefore, the 1960s can be regarded as a turning point in the history of American literature. Regarding France, the redistribution of the sensible chiefly affected the cultural arena as its root was mainly cultural. Countercultural tendencies occupy a significant place in the French literature of the 1960s, introducing new approaches to writing. Consequently, we may conclude the 1960s was also a time of literary evolution there. In the case of Ukraine, the redistribution of the sensible went mainly political. Although compared to the socialist order and imposed aesthetical norms, literature

resuscitated by Ukrainian writers was innovative, it brought no crucial development to the literary world of Ukraine. However, it played a compelling role in preserving the native voice of Ukrainian literature, opening doors for its later development in the 1970s-1980s. The sixtiers demonstrated their dissatisfaction with the dogmatic blindness of cultural development and did a “museum work” of preserving local identity through popular poetry.

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