

# 'Tis Eighty Years Since: Panteleimon Kulish's Gothic Ukraine

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"Little Russia (Malorossia) for Russia, in a literary sense, is the same as Scotland is for England; it is awaiting its Walter Scott, awaiting him with love and will be able to give him his due appreciation."<sup>1</sup> This hope, expressed in the St. Petersburg journal *The Finnish Herald* in 1846, was somewhat misplaced, as the "Ukrainian Walter Scott" had already entered the literary scene: three years earlier, Panteleimon Kulish (1819–97), perceived by contemporaries as the Ukrainian incarnation of the Scottish novelist, published his first historical novel *Mikhailo Charnyshenko, or Little Russia Eighty Years Ago* (*Mikhailo Charnyshenko Ili Malorossiiia vosem' desiat let nazad*). While little known nowadays, this work, written in Russian (with considerable Ukrainian and Serbian linguistic components) and reviewed in most major Russian "thick" journals in the course of the year, was clearly a cultural event of some importance.<sup>2</sup> Overshadowed by Kulish's later and more mature *The Black Council* (*Chorna Rada*, 1845–57), *Mikhailo Charnyshenko* typically receives only a passing mention in Kulish scholarship.<sup>3</sup> As I will demonstrate in this article, however, *Mikhailo Charnyshenko* offers rich material for exploring the author's attempts to negotiate between national mythology and modernity and to come to terms with Ukraine's loss of its political and cultural autonomy in the Russian empire. My analysis will focus specifically on the Gothic mode that pervades the novel. Rather than dismissing this aspect of the work as a tribute to the fashionable western trend, I argue that the Gothic mode serves as a conduit to some of the work's most pressing ideological and historical concerns and dramatizes the split between nation and empire, past and present that haunted Kulish throughout most of his life.

Kulish was not only the author of the first Ukrainian historical novels, but also a prominent folklorist, ethnographer, historian, translator, the first biographer of Nikolai Gogol', and a leading if controversial figure in the Ukrainian

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1. Vasiliï Korenevskii, "Getman Ostrianitsa, ili epokha smut i bedstvii Malorossii, istoricheskii roman XVII stoletii, B 2-kh chastiakh," in *Finskii vestnik: Ucheno-literaturnyi zhurnal* 11 (1846): 6.

2. The novel's reception in the Russian press was for the most part very favorable and even enthusiastic (especially by the Slavophile journal *The Muscovite*), with the exception of Osip Senkovskii's *Library for Reading*.

3. Among notable exceptions are Viktor Petrov's article "Val'ter-Skotiv's'ka povist' z ukrains'koï mynushynny" in Panteleimon Kulish, *Mykhailo Charnyshenko: povist'* (Kyiv, 1928): 5–35; and Ievhen Nahklik's discussion of the novel in his *Panteleimon Kulish: Osobystist', pys'mennyk, myslytel': Naukova monohrafiia u dvokh tomakh*, 2 vols. (Kyiv, 2007), 2:99–104.

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national revival. He idealized the Ukrainian Cossack past at the early stage of his career but denounced Cossackdom as a brutal and destructive force in his later historical studies (albeit not consistently). While promoting vigorously a distinct Ukrainian language and culture, he reconciled himself with the Russian imperial project, whose victim he himself would become. Like his contemporary Taras Shevchenko, Kulish was arrested and exiled for his ties to the Brotherhood of St. Cyril and Methodius (1845–47)—a Kyiv-based secret society that sought political reforms based on Christian moral principles, as well as a Ukrainian cultural revival and national autonomy within a Pan-Slavic framework.<sup>4</sup> Specifically accused at the Brotherhood trial of promoting an “opinion about [the Little Russians] right to a separate existence from the Empire,” Kulish would later advocate the idea of the joining of “Northern Rus’” with “Southern” Rus’.<sup>5</sup> In spite of the Russian government’s persecutions, he remained loyal to the regime and even accepted a high government position in conquered Poland after the 1863 uprising, expressing little sympathy for the Polish nationalist movement while continuing to admire Polish culture. A firm believer in the benefits of cultural enlightenment, he also espoused the ideology of “khutorianstvo,” a Rousseauian idealization of the Ukrainian *khutir*, or homestead, as a spiritual and moral center—and it is on his *khutir* Motronivka where he spent the last years of his life and died. After decades of neglect during the Soviet period on the basis of his “bourgeois nationalist” views, the “Ukrainian maverick” Kulish, to use Andrii Danylenko’s apt formulation, now occupies a firm place in the Ukrainian literary canon.<sup>6</sup>

The same year the call for a Ukrainian Walter Scott appeared on the pages of *The Finnish Herald*, Kulish, who at the time lived and worked in St. Petersburg, wrote in a letter to Moscow-based historian, journalist, and novelist Mikhail Pogodin: “My life is not too bad. However, I do miss Little Russia. I want to go there in the summer but everybody finds it extremely silly. I agree, but what, in this intelligent city, will replace for me my native language and the views of my home country? Walter Scott was not insincere (*ne mutil*) when he told Washington Irving, ‘I’d die if I couldn’t see Scotland for a long time.’”<sup>7</sup>

Kulish’s self-fashioning as a Ukrainian Walter Scott writing nostalgically about his homeland from the imperial capital is clearly more than a literary gesture; likewise the parallel between Ukraine and Scotland drawn in *The Finnish Herald* is not limited to the literary sphere, in spite of the critic’s qualification (“in a literary sense”). The grounds for this comparison (apparently widespread at the time) derive from Ukraine’s and Scotland’s political situations: in both cases, we have a region absorbed by the neighboring state into

4. For a detailed discussion of the history of the organization, see George S. N. Luckyj, *Young Ukraine: the Brotherhood of Saints Cyril and Methodius in Kiev, 1845–1847* (Ottawa, 1991).

5. Luckyj, *Young Ukraine*, 66.

6. This outline of Kulish’s ideology is based on George Luckyj, *Panteleimon Kulish: A Sketch of His Life and Times* (Boulder, 1983); Ivan Tkachenko, *P.O. Kulish: Krytyko-biografichnyi narys* (Kharkiv, 1927); Nakhlik, *Panteleimon Kulish 2*: chap. 1; and Andrii Danylenko, *From the Bible to Shakespeare: Pantelejmon Kuliš (1819–1897) and the Formation of Literary Ukrainian* (Boston, 2016).

7. Fedir Savchenko, *Lysty P. Kulisha do M. Pohodina (1842–1851)*, *Khar’kov* 10 (1929): 19.

a larger entity, ultimately an empire, and yet preserving its distinct national culture.<sup>8</sup> In the age of an intense preoccupation with national uniqueness, moreover, both Scotland and “Little Russia” highlighted the fact that the dominant imperial powers lacked a well-defined national character (*narodnost'*), although they avidly sought it.<sup>9</sup>

The complex question of whether Ukraine could be considered a colony of the Russian empire has been debated by many historians and literary scholars in recent decades.<sup>10</sup> I am siding here with the view articulated by Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern: while not a “classical” colony (distant, racially different, and militarily subjugated) and despite the involvement of the Ukrainian elites in the Russian and Soviet imperial projects, Ukraine, at least in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, was a colony (of both Poland and Russia)—a territory whose “resources . . . were exploited, people economically subjugated and socially oppressed, the elites successfully assimilated, the national-minded discourse shuffled or neutralized, and the culture and language considered uncivilized and scornful.”<sup>11</sup>

The status of Ukraine as both a colony and a province of the nineteenth-century Russian empire is the critical context in which I examine Kulish's first historical novel. Throughout his tumultuous life and career, Kulish tried to negotiate a place for Ukrainian culture and national identity in relation to its various political, spiritual and cultural models and influences, focusing on Russia and Poland but also turning to Islam. Yet his position as a Ukrainian writer in the Russian empire was of primary importance. In his biography of Kulish, Luckyj states: “It is this Russian-Ukrainian coexistence which proved to be the central dilemma of his life.”<sup>12</sup> An important aspect of this dilemma was the conflict between Kulish's Romantic fascination with the Ukrainian heroic past and its rich folk tradition, on the one hand, and, on the other, his deeply-held Enlightenment values and belief in high culture, which he

8. For a detailed comparative discussion of Ukraine and Scotland in their respective imperial contexts, see Stephen Velychenko, “Empire Loyalty and Minority Nationalism in Great Britain and Imperial Russia, 1707 to 1914: Institutions, Law, and Nationality in Scotland and Ukraine,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 39, no. 3 (1997): 413–41.

9. See, for example, the review of Gogol's “Dikan'ka tales” that opposes the “distinct physiognomy” of “Little Russians” to the lack of discernable “elements of the Russian character proper.” [Ushakov] *Severnaia pchela* 119–20 (1830), no pagination. Katie Trumpener observed a similar tendency for the British Empire in her *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton, 1997), 15–16.

10. For a relatively recent discussion, see “Critical Forum on Ukraine” in *Slavic Review* 74, no. 4 (Winter 2015): 695–737. For a nuanced historiographical overview of various approaches to Ukraine's “colonial question,” see Stephen Velychenko, “The Issue of Russian Colonialism in Ukrainian Thought: Dependency Identity and Development,” *Ab Imperio* 1 (2002): 323–67. George Grabowicz has convincingly argued in favor of the applicability of the colonial paradigm to Ukraine, while also observing that in Ukrainian history the colonial model merged with the provincial one. George G. Grabowicz, “Ukrainian Studies: Framing the Contexts,” *Slavic Review* 54, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 674–90.

11. Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Anti-Imperial Choice: The Making of a Ukrainian Jew* (New Haven, 2009), 14. I will be using the term “colony” and “colonial” in this sense throughout this article, while being fully aware of the complexity of the issue from a historiographical point of view.

12. Luckyj, *Panteleimon Kulish*, 10.

associated with Russian (and at times Polish) influences.<sup>13</sup> At the level of ideology, this conundrum translated into a split between his ideals of Romantic nationalism and his alignment with the dominant imperial culture. While Kulish's disavowal of his Romantic nationalist views is typically associated with the later period in his career, I will argue that his ambivalence about Ukraine's heroic past and its current status in the Russian empire can already be observed in his first novel. As I will show below, moreover, it is particularly the Gothic stratum of the work that yields a more nuanced insight into the author's complex position.

While the heyday of the "classical" Gothic novel—as exemplified by works of Horace Walpole, Ann Radcliffe, Matthew G. Lewis, Charles Maturin, and many others—is usually dated between the 1760s and the 1820s, the Gothic tradition, with its emphasis on the irrational, demonic, mysterious, and fantastic and its privileging of medieval castles, exotic locales, and haunted landscapes continued to exercise its influence throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> Recent scholarship on the Gothic in both western Europe and the Russian empire (including Ukraine) have traced the remarkable persistence of the Gothic mode—a deployment of recognizably Gothic tropes and narrative techniques in connection to the dominant Gothic themes of irrationality, transgression, and past history haunting the present—even in the genres, which, like the historical novel, are typically viewed as alien to the Gothic.<sup>15</sup> These studies, more importantly, have demonstrated a continuing relevance of the Gothic mode in its ability to address some deep cultural anxieties and historical traumas, from the crisis of the Enlightenment and the disintegration of post-reform Russian society to the violence of Ukrainian uprisings and the threat to the Ukrainian language posed by Russian imperial policies.<sup>16</sup> While Ukrainian and Russian writers' engagement with the Gothic legacy has manifold implications, I am particularly interested in the imperial context of such an engagement. In the analysis that follows, I hope to demonstrate that

13. Myroslav Shkandrij points out this paradox in the context of Kulish's contradictory attitude to popular uprisings. See his *Russia and Ukraine: Literature and the Discourse of Empire from Napoleonic to Postcolonial Times* (Montreal, 2001), 182.

14. The body of research on Gothic fiction in western Europe and America is quite extensive, and scholars of Russian and Ukrainian literatures have recently turned to this neglected literary tradition as well. For an overview of the secondary literature on the Gothic, see my introduction to the forum "Rethinking the Gothic in Ukraine," *Slavic and East European Journal* 62, no. 2 (June 2018): 247–54. Hereafter the journal is cited as *SEEJ*.

15. The supposed ahistoricism of Gothic fiction has been contested by a number of scholars, from Mikhail Bakhtin to Robert Mighall, who claims that "the 'Gothic' by definition is about history and geography." See his *A Geography of Victorian Gothic Fiction: Mapping History's Nightmares* (Oxford, 2003), xiv.

16. For recent works on the Ukrainian Gothic, see Svitlana Kryś, "The Gothic in Ukrainian Romanticism: An Uncharted Genre" (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2011); "Between Comedy and Horror: The Gothic in Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko's 'Dead Man's Easter' [1834]," *SEEJ* 55, no. 3 (October 2011): 341–58; "All-Time Sinner or National Hero? Language and Politics in Oleksa Storozhenko's Ukrainian Gothic," *SEEJ* 62, no. 2 (June 2018): 293–317; Roman Koropecyk, "Toward a Cossack Gothic in Slavic Romanticism," *SEEJ* 62, no. 2 (June 2018): 255–71; and Robert Romanchuk, "Mother Tongue: Gogol's *Pannochka*, Pogorel'skii's *Monasteryka*, and the Economy of Russian in the Little Russian Gothic," *SEEJ* 62, no. 2 (June 2018): 272–92.

the interaction of various Gothic registers in *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*—the fantastic, the Walter-Scottian “historical” Gothic, and the Gothicized ethnic Others—create a complex and highly ambivalent picture of the Ukrainian subdued colonial present haunted by the ghosts of its glorious autonomous past.

### 'Tis Eighty Years Since

Kulish's familiarity with and admiration for Scott is well documented, and the Scottish writer's noticeable influence on Kulish's historical novels has been a subject of several studies.<sup>17</sup> While scholars diverge on the question to what extent *Mikhailo Charnyshenko* follows the Walter Scottian model of the historical novel, Kulish's engagement with Scott in this work is rather explicit, for its very title, *Mikhailo Charnyshenko, or Little Russia Eighty Years Ago*, invokes Scott's *Waverley, or 'Tis Sixty Years Since*—with its emphasis on the change between “then” and “now.” More specifically, the title of Kulish's novel takes us back to 1762, the short reign of Russia's ill-fated emperor Peter III and his aborted campaign against Denmark, whose goal was to restore the Schleswig region to his German Holstein-Gottorp Duchy. The war plan never materialized because of the coup that ended Peter's reign and life and brought Catherine II to the throne. As described in Kulish's primary source for the novel, *Istoriia Rusov ili Maloi Rossii* (The History of the Rus' or Little Russia), Peter formed a Ukrainian Cossack regiment for his army where young people were lured by the recently-converted calculating Jew, colonel Kryzhanovskii.<sup>18</sup> The novel's title protagonist, Mikhailo Charnyshenko, joins the Cossack recruits, in spite of the objections of his father. The hero's disobedience of his father's ban on serving in the Russian army causes the latter's wrath, and eventually, when Mikhailo unintentionally burns down most of his father's house, the old Charnysh publicly denounces and curses his son. It is the father's curse that is responsible for the subsequent series of misfortunes occurring to the protagonist—his capture by blood-thirsty exotic Serbs, the tragic death of his beloved Katerina killed by Mikhailo's passionate new Serbian lover, and his own death, followed by his father's demise ten years later.

17. See, for example, Borys Neiman, “Kulish i Val'ter Skott,” in *Panteleimon Kulish. Zbirnyk prats' Komisii dlia vydavannia pam'iatok novitn'oho pys'menstva. Ukraïns'ka Akademiia Nauk. Zbirnyk istorychno-filolohichnoho viddilu* 53 (Kiev, 1927): 127–56; Viktor Petrov, “Val'ter-Skotivs'ka povist' z ukraïns'koi mynuvshynny”; Romana Bahrii, *Shliakh sera Val'tera Skotta na Ukraïnu (“Taras Bul'ba” M. Hoholia i “Chorna Rada” P. Kulisha v svitli istorychnoi romanistyky Val'tera Skotta)* (Kyiv, 1993). Kulish became familiar with Scott's novels, which he read in French translation, in 1841 (Tkachenko, *Kulish: Krytyko-biografichnyi narys*, 13).

18. The *History* circulated in manuscript form among Russian and Ukrainian intellectuals starting at least in the mid-1820s and was believed to be written by generations of Orthodox monks and edited by the Mahilioŭ Archbishop Heorhii Konyskii in the 1760s. It was established already in the late 1840s that many “facts” presented in this work are largely fictitious; its authorship is still open to debate. For a detailed discussion of the *History* and its key role in creating Ukrainian national mythology, see Serhii Plokhyy, *The Cossack Myth: History and Nationhood in the Age of Empires* (Cambridge, Eng., 2014). At the time of writing *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*, Kulish still clearly trusted *The History* (he mentions it as his source in part 3, 190). A few years later, however (and among the first), Kulish became skeptical about the credibility of *The History* (Nakhlik, *Panteleimon Kulish*, 2:42).

What exactly is at stake for Kulish in adopting the Walter Scottian temporality, the “eighty years ago”? Bahrij, who emphasizes the Gothic aspect of *Mikhailo Charnyshenko* over its Walter-Scottian elements, claims that the historical setting in Kulish’s novel is not significant per se—rather, the military campaign serves here as essentially a pretext for the hero’s leaving the parental home and embarking on his adventures. I would argue, however, that the historical context of the novel is far from being a purely formal device unrelated to the novel’s problematics. In fact, the choice of this rather obscure historical episode is strategic on Kulish’s part for at least two reasons. First of all, the very irrelevance of this military campaign to the Ukrainian subjects of the empire enables Kulish to question his young protagonist’s uncritical and ahistorical acceptance of the heroic ethos of the past. Secondly, it allows the writer to set his novel just on the eve of the beginning of Catherine II’s rule, during which any remnants of Ukraine’s autonomy within the Russian empire would come to an end with the abolition of the Hetmanate in 1764 and the razing of the Zaporizhzhian Sich in 1775.

In the concluding chapter of *Waverley*, Scott explains that it is Scotland’s loss of its unique culture and autonomy in the aftermath of the suppression of the Jacobite uprising described in *Waverley* that set him to “the task of tracing the evanescent manners of his own country.”<sup>19</sup> As made clear in the opening of *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*, Kulish pursues a very similar goal of reconstructing a national life that has vanished, if not without a trace. It is above all the ideological subtext of *Waverley* and its relevance to the Ukrainian situation—the historical-political parallel between Scotland’s absorption by England and Ukraine’s dissolution in the Russian empire—that attracts Kulish to the Scottian model, in addition to its Romantic and ethnographic appeal.

What is Kulish’s “Little Russia of eighty years ago” like? The novel’s opening nostalgically evokes this relatively recent past when Ukraine still lived “its own distinct life” and when “its memories, interests, customs, dress, way of life and poetry were purely national (*narodnye*).”<sup>20</sup> It is presented as “an entirely different world,” with its authentic clothing, contrasted with the contemporary westernized dress, the pure Ukrainian language (as opposed to the current “barbarian” mixture of Russian and Ukrainian), poetic folk songs, and its “magic” (*divnaia*) heroic history. This world, however, is irrevocably lost:

You cannot help but ponder over the destiny of this extraordinary people (*narod*), which has appeared in a miraculous way like a lush flower among hostile elements, flashed with a remarkable blaze of glory, announced itself to the entire world; but it did not have enough energy for simmering life, and

19. Sir Walter Scott, *Waverley, or 'Tis Sixty Years Since* (Edinburgh, 1862), 318.

20. Panteleimon Kulish, *Mikhailo Charnyshenko Ili Malorossiiia vosem' desiat let nazad, Chast' Pervaia* (Kiev, 1843), 7–8. Throughout this article, quotes from the novel will be given from this edition with the part and page numbers provided in footnotes (for example, 1:7–9). All translations from the novel into English are mine. Since this novel was originally published in Russian, I use Russian transliteration when citing the novel and referring to its characters; otherwise Ukrainian proper names are transliterated from Ukrainian.

it bowed its head prematurely; it disappeared *like a supernatural apparition*, almost before our very eyes.<sup>21</sup>

In other words, the “eighty years ago” refers to the last period of Ukraine’s relative political autonomy and, most importantly, its cultural and national specificity before its (often fraught) assimilation of Russian imperial culture. Essentially it is the moment before the death—or, as Kulish puts it in more Gothic terms, the ghostly disappearance—of the nation. However, as the quote above suggests, this ghost-like disappearance is closely linked to the no less elusive and phantasmagorical appearance of the *narod*. The nation’s very existence is thus so brief and fleeting that it acquires a quasi-supernatural quality. Kulish, however, attempts to capture this ghost, to reconstruct this forever lost world through studying its folklore and ethnographic evidence. His novel is thus presented as “the last page from the history of such a magic (*divnyi*) phenomenon,” as he invites his readers to “hear the echo of its ancient, mighty, and miraculous life . . . in these, already poor, remnants of its magnificent past.”<sup>22</sup>

Kulish’s antiquarian project of restoring the historical past is a recognizable anti-imperial nationalist strategy identified by scholars of the British Empire.<sup>23</sup> The fictional storyline of *Mikhailo Charnyshenko* is accompanied by an impressive scholarly apparatus, with extensive ethnographic and historical notes and citations of documentary sources. At the same time, as we have seen, Kulish persistently refers to the Ukrainian autonomous past as a ghostly, phantasmagorical bygone era—a feature not found in *Waverley*, where ghosts are restricted to the Highlanders’ superstitious imagination.

These two seemingly conflicting temporalities, “antiquarian/historic” and “fantastic,” are expressed in the novel by two Gothic modes—what I term “the Walter-Scottian Gothic” and the “supernatural Gothic.”<sup>24</sup> While the former finds its expression in Kulish’s fascination with ruins, towers, Gothic architecture, medieval allusions, and his propensity to draw parallels between the Ukrainian Cossacks and west European knights, the latter is associated in the novel with the imagery of ghosts and apparitions, folkloric motifs, and infernal forces.<sup>25</sup> The interplay of various Gothic traditions in the

21. Kulish, *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*, 1:11–12. My emphasis.

22. *Ibid.*

23. See Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism*, 24.

24. On the relationship between Walter Scott’s novels and the Gothic tradition, see Fiona Robertson, *Legitimate Histories: Scott, Gothic, and the Authorities of Fiction* (Oxford, 1994) and Robert Ignatius Letellier, *Sir Walter Scott and the Gothic Novel* (Lewiston, NY, 1994).

25. The analogy between the Zaporizzhian Sich and western knightly orders was drawn by late eighteenth-century western historians as part of their quest to “normalize” Cossackdom, previously perceived as barbarous. See Vitalii Kiselev and Tat’iana Vasil’eva, “‘Strannoe politicheskoe sonmishche’ ili ‘narod, poiushchii i pliaushchii’: Konstruirovaniie obraza Ukrainy v russkoi slovesnosti kontsa XVIII—nachala XIX veka,” in A. Etkind, D. Uffelman, and I. Kukulkin, eds., *Tam, vnutri: Praktiki vnutrennei kolonizatsii v kul’turnoi istorii Rossii* (Moscow, 2012), 494. The Russian imperial historian Apollon Skal’kovskii, a Ukrainian by origin, popularized this parallel in the nineteenth century. Kulish invokes this idea in his polemics with Senkovskii over the latter’s views on Ukrainian history (“Otvēt G. Senkovskomu na ego retsenziuu ‘Istorii Malorossii’

novel contributes to Kulish's complex portrayal of Ukraine, which seems gone but not quite. Rather, like a ghost, it is at the same time alive and dead, present and absent, historically specific and a-temporally symbolic, belonging to the past and yet haunting the present.

### Fathers, Sons, and Gothic Ruins

Differing attitudes to the past are, in fact, at the heart of the principal conflict of the novel between Mikhailo and his antiquarian father, the Cossack lieutenant (*sotnik*) Charnysh. Their past, of course, is even more removed from Kulish's time—it is the era of Ukrainian Cossack uprisings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, the tension between the “antiquarian” and the “fantastic” perception of the past, which marks the narrator's temporality, is observed at the characters' level as well. The elder Charnysh, retired from service after a series of injustices committed by the “Russian courtiers who were ruling Little Russia,” dedicates himself to collecting Ukrainian songs, legends, chronicles, and other “remnants of antiquity.” This semi-scientific project nonetheless bears a stamp of the supernatural:

Lieutenant Charnysh dedicated himself to his study with some kind of a warm faith. The more he penetrated into the spirit of the traditions, songs, chronicles, and other various remnants of the old times, the greater the charm with which past ages and events appeared to him. Having focused all his talents on one point, he created for himself a separate fantastic world, in which his soul found light and in which he found a substitute for the society he had forsaken forever. The brave knights of Ukraine . . . were alive in his imagination.<sup>26</sup>

For all his fascination with Ukraine's glorious past, old Charnysh is aware that “Little Russia has already lived its term” (*otzhila uzhe svoi vek*), and he is skeptical about transferring this heroic ethos into the contemporary historical setting.<sup>27</sup> This is why he disapproves of military service in the corrupt imperial army and strongly supports his son's civil career at the Little Russian Collegium. Old Charnysh thus acknowledges the irreversibility of time and “the otherness of his object of nostalgia from present life and [keeps] it at a safe distance”—a pre-condition for Romantic nostalgia, according to Svetlana Boym.<sup>28</sup> Mikhailo, by contrast, fails to acknowledge the otherness of the past, violates this distance, and attempts to reenact the heroic past of Ukraine in its imperial present.

The novel is often read as a religious-moral tale with a Gothic twist—a disobedient son castigated by his father's curse; yet the punishment the hero receives for his career choice seems rather severe, even by the standards of the Gothic genre. Critics have interpreted Mikhailo's “guilt” precisely in terms

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Markevicha,” *Moskvitianin* part 3, no. 5 (1843): 164; and through references to “crusades” and “knightly orders” in *Mikhailo Charnyshenko* (1:87 and 3:75). This tendency continues in *The Black Council*.

26. Kulish, *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*, 1:50–51.

27. *Ibid.*, 1:49–50

28. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, 2001), 13.



of a conflict of temporalities. Petrov points out that Kulish deliberately sets his novel *after* the era of heroic military battles in order to portray Mikhailo's romanticization of war and Cossacks as already outdated and even harmful. The critic justly sees here the kernel of Kulish's future disillusionment with *kozachchyna*.<sup>29</sup> Nakhlik suggests that "from the point of view of Kulish the *kul'turnyk* (enlightened populist), Mikhailo's guilt and misfortune come from the fact that he did not understand the difference between the epochs: instead of the activity appropriate for modernity (governmental or "antiquarian. . ."), he became fascinated by the old, military type of behavior."<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, as Petrov reminds us, the didactic folkloric theme of disobedience to one's parents and abandonment of the parental home had particular relevance in Kulish's time: the rise of the Ukrainian national (*narodnyts'kyi*) rebirth movement in the 1840s was accompanied by the rhetoric of going back "home," to the ancestors' culture, to one's fathers and roots. Petrov offers a rather extreme reading of this theme in the novel, interpreting Mikhailo's disobedience of his father as a manifestation of his rootlessness, a vain pursuit of glory and rank, or even as a betrayal of Ukraine's national interests characteristic of the Ukrainian nobility of the late eighteenth century.<sup>31</sup>

What we should remember, however, is that it is not Mikhailo's disobedience alone but his (albeit unintentional) burning of his father's house that causes the fateful curse. The house, where Mikhailo arrives in order to inform his father of his decision to enlist in the army and to collect his armor, becomes a locus of the novel's conflicting temporalities and nostalgic impulses. As we learn from a long narrative digression, this house was intended by Mikhailo's ancestors to be an exact replica of the house of Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi in Subotov, the hetman's residence and hypothetical birth place.<sup>32</sup> The project was successfully accomplished by Mikhailo's father, who happened to come across the draft of Khmel'nyts'kyi's house. This more direct relation to history and origins is contrasted to the narrator's temporality, that of the Ukraine "eighty years since." Characteristically, while contemplating the house, the narrator separates his perspective from that of the protagonist, noting that this building, full of historical meaning for him (a Ukrainian intellectual of the 1840s), does not hold nearly the same significance for the young hero from the 1760s who lacks the distance from and the reverence for this "antiquity" (*starina*). Moreover, he also detaches the temporal plane of his narrative from

29. Petrov, "Val'ter-Skotivs'ka povist'," 20–21.

30. Nakhlik, *Panteleimon Kulish*, 2:104.

31. Petrov, "Val'ter-Skotivs'ka povist'," 6–10.

32. Khmel'nyts'kyi, the leader of the 1648 Ukrainian Cossack uprising against the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, in the course of which thousands of Jews and Poles were massacred and which resulted in a 1654 treaty with Muscovy, is a highly controversial historical figure, whose reputation ranges from that of a national hero to a demonic antagonist. For competing cultural narratives on Khmel'nyts'kyi, see Amelia M. Glaser, ed., *Stories of Khmelnytsky: Competing Literary Legacies of the 1648 Ukrainian Cossack Uprising* (Stanford, 2015). While the references to Khmel'nyts'kyi in *Mikhailo Charnyshenko* are invariably positive, later historical works by Kulish paint a much more critical picture, accusing the hetman of self-aggrandizement and Machiavellianism. See George G. Grabowicz, "Apotheosis, Rejection, and Transference: Bohdan Khmelnytsky in Polish, Russian, and Ukrainian Romantic Literature," in Glaser, *Stories of Khmelnytsky*, 86.

Mikhailo's: while the narrator apologetically keeps his readers waiting by the gate, the hero, we learn, has already made his way through the house. "But," the narrator says, indulging in what Boym terms "reflective nostalgia," "we can't follow him so quickly: everything stops us in this house, a sample of the taste and a monument of the daily life (*byt*) of our ancestors. We want to prolong the sweet feeling aroused in us by these antiquities: more than history, more than chronicles and songs, they tell us about those miraculous ages which once were and can never be again."<sup>33</sup>

The gate, leading to the house, is described through abundant Gothic references, invoking a (supposed) medieval past of knightly battles. Even more importantly, the gate is presented as a remnant of a ruin, even before the house is destroyed by fire: "It seemed to be a fragment (*oblomok*) of a Gothic tower that had remained from some Gothic castle; the moss and wild grass covering it completed the resemblance."<sup>34</sup>

While critics have interpreted Kulish's recurrent allusions to Gothic architecture as an influence of translated western novels, I contend that this description points to the symbolic function of the house *as a ruin* in its nineteenth-century sense, as discussed by Peter Fritzsche. Fritzsche observes a critical shift in the function of the ruins in the early nineteenth century, compared to the eighteenth century when the ruins invoked the generic European cultural legacy, a universal set of meanings, and continuity between the past and the present. In the nineteenth century, by contrast, they began to signal a temporal rupture between the imperial present and a unique but never-fully-accessible national past.<sup>35</sup> While Fritzsche derives these conclusions from the case of Germany in the wake of the French revolution and during the Napoleonic wars, the situation seems to be very similar and even more extreme in Kulish's Ukraine under Russian dominance. The rift between the past and present is particularly dramatic here, for Ukraine is portrayed in the novel, as we saw earlier, essentially as a ghost, a nation with a rich if fleeting past but no present. The burning of the house thus symbolically dramatizes the coming rupture and turns the building literally into a modern ruin, or even "the ruin of a ruin," "the hallmark of modernity," to use Fritzsche's formulation.<sup>36</sup>

The notion of the ruin, I would argue, connects the two ostensibly separate temporalities and Gothic modes in the work. An antiquarian fragment of the historical past, a piece of material evidence about a bygone time, the Gothic ruin acquires ghostly, fantastic connotations because of the seemingly insurmountable gap between Ukraine's colorful autonomous past and its subdued provincial present. And yet, paradoxically, because of the presence

33. Kulish, *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*, 1:86. This type of nostalgia, according to Boym, focuses on *algia* (pain) and "lingers on ruins rather than the restoration of the monument of the past"—unlike old Charnysh's "restorative nostalgia," a type of longing that "puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild [quite literally, in this case—V.S.] the lost home." Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 41.

34. Kulish, *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*, 1:57.

35. Peter Fritzsche, *Stranded in the Present: Modern Time and the Melancholy of History* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004).

36. *Ibid.*, 102.

of the ruins (both literal and symbolic), this past never fully recedes—just as ghosts reappear to haunt the sites of national traumas. In fact, Fritzsche explicitly compares ruins to ghosts as “the residue of historical disaster” that “possessed a sort of half-life,” as well as “a testimonial power” to speak through history.<sup>37</sup>

Kulish appeals precisely to this testimonial power of ruins when describing an epic battle between militant Serbs and local Ukrainian lords and anticipating his reader’s doubts about the possibility of these heroic—but also bloody and violent—events taking place in the relatively recent past:

Perhaps some of my readers . . . will not believe that under Russian rule such violence could be happening with impunity only eighty years ago, and they will ascribe all of this to the play of my imagination. But . . . is it possible that all these redoubts, ruins (*razvaliny*), names, and legends have popped up by themselves like mushrooms after the rain? Is it possible that the folk imagination, out of nothing better to do, invented beliefs that are alien to the contemporary daily life (*byt*) of Ukrainian peasants?”<sup>38</sup>

As typical of Romantic antiquarian practices, physical ruins’ value as a historical source here is comparable to that of folklore and ethnography (local toponyms and legends but also Serbian epic songs that Kulish explicitly draws upon in his portrayal of the battle). Thus, the boundary is elided between physical and verbal evidence, the ethnographic and the imaginary, historical and mythological, “Walter-Scottian” and “fantastic.” The interrogatory form of the narrator’s argument, moreover, is not merely rhetorical. It betrays, in spite of his defensive position, the elusive and essentially imagined nature of the Ukrainian past of eighty years before.

The grounds for potential doubts regarding the possibility of such feudal battles and the general chaos in the region is, as the narrator states, the presence of “Russian rule” (the supposed guarantee of order) and the discrepancy between the mores of the time and the “current” way of life in Little Russia. What happens in between, as he reminds his audience, is precisely the unification of the administrative structure of the Russian empire under Catherine II, the destruction of the Sich and the “correct organization of [the Russian government’s] provinces.”<sup>39</sup> As I have already suggested, it is the ultimate colonial moment—the full absorption of Ukraine into the Russian empire—that constitutes the rupture between Kulish’s present and the “eighty years ago” and makes the Ukrainian past open to an imaginative reconstruction.

The narrator’s evaluation of this rupture is highly ambivalent. First, he lauds the “domestication” of wild Ukraine by civilized Russia, which, “having drawn [the Ukrainian heart] closer thanks to the brotherly kinship, began to tame [it] bit by bit by its European measures.”<sup>40</sup> And yet this positive commentary ends with an already familiar nostalgic—and quasi-Gothic—invocation of the last traces of Ukrainian administrative and legal

37. *Ibid.*, 104–15.

38. Kulish, *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*, 3:166.

39. *Ibid.*, 3:168–69.

40. *Ibid.*, 2:106–7.

autonomy, “the shadow of its earlier independence which was about to irrevocably vanish forever.”<sup>41</sup>

Kulish's use of Gothic ruins and the intricate play of temporalities in the novel is an important aspect of his ambivalent portrayal of Ukraine's past and present, but it is by far not the only one. In the two following sections of the article I will show how the insertion of Gothic Others in the novel—the demonic Jew Kryzhanovskii and the uncanny Serbs—problematizes both Kulish's apparent support for the Russian imperial project and his Romanticization of the Ukrainian independent heroic past.

## The Jew

The imperial “Golshtein” campaign, as well as Mikhailo's participation in it, is called into question from the start by the very fact that it is the novel's ultimate Gothic villain, as well as its cultural Other—the converted Jew Kryzhanovskii—who forms the Cossack regiment in Little Russia. Local Cossacks describe the conscription process as an uncanny force that leads to severing family ties; the somewhat comical distortion of the terms “Golshtintsy” and “St. Peterburg” in their speech only emphasizes their cultural and geographical (as well as linguistic) distance from this imperial enterprise: “Everywhere one hears nothing but crying and screaming, for all the young men and boys are leaving their fathers and mothers and are going to some cursed ‘Gostintsy.’ It's even scary, I swear by God! . . . As if some evil (*nechistaia*) force is carrying them to that Petinburch.”<sup>42</sup> This description is clearly influenced by *The History of the Rus'*, where we find a similarly worded narrative: “The local youth, . . . as if by a magic force, rose up and took off in a bird flight from the South to the North.”<sup>43</sup> Notably, Kulish paraphrases what is described as a magic spell in the “chronicle” with more definitely demonic terms—and these infernal characteristics persist throughout the novel in the descriptions of Kryzhanovskii.<sup>44</sup>

Katerina, Mikhailo's beloved, whom Kryzhanovskii also pursues, describes the inexplicable terror that envelopes her upon seeing him. She is positive that his supernatural demonic powers guarantee his full control of Mikhailo's will and the latter's resulting filial disobedience. Katerina quickly convinces her father (who is at first doubtful that Kryzhanovskii can be “some kind of a sorcerer or a vampire”) of the man's diabolical nature; in fact, in the course of this short conversation, Kryzhanovskii is upgraded from “an ominous bird” and “a sinner” to nothing less than “Antichrist” and “the enemy of the Christian race.”<sup>45</sup>

41. *Ibid.*, 2:109

42. *Ibid.*, 1:155.

43. *Istoriia rusov ili Maloi Rossii, sochinenie Georgiia Koniskogo, arkhiepiskopa Belorusskogo* (Moscow, 1846), 251.

44. For a summary of Kulish's complex attitude towards Jews, see Myroslav Shkandrij, *Jews in Ukrainian Literature: Representation and Identity* (New Haven, 2009), 20 and 38–41.

45. Kulish, *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*, 1:139–42.

This conversation clearly frames Kryzhanovskii as a traditional Gothic demonic figure, with a typical overlapping of Jewish/Judaist and vampiric motifs.<sup>46</sup> Critics have commented on the rather cliché character of Kulish's villain—a “ubiquitous,” *deus ex machina* sorcerer figure.<sup>47</sup> I would argue, however, that this “ubiquitous persona” in *Mikhailo Charnyshenko* has a very specific cultural genealogy that goes back to the legendary Wandering Jew who made his most memorable Gothic appearance on the pages of Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* in the 1790s. The main source of the legend is the apocryphal story, which arose in the Near East and eastern Mediterranean, of a Jerusalem resident who denied Christ a brief repose on the way to Golgotha, chasing him away from the steps of his house. The man was punished, as a result, by incessant wandering until Christ's Second Coming.<sup>48</sup> Later in the novel, we learn about Kryzhanovskii's wandering around eastern Europe and his elusive identity: while introduced in the novel as the converted Jew Kryzhanovskii in the service of the Russian empire in the Hetmanate, he is also the evil Jew Lutitsa who betrayed the novel's Serbian character, prince Radivoi, in his battle for the independence of Serbia from the Ottoman Empire; in addition, under the name of Kharlo, he had managed to ruin brave Cossack Shcherbina by betraying his friendship and destroying his family and his home. His characterization as an Antichrist and his indefinite exotic ethnicity (alternatively suggested as Jewish, Montenegrin, or Turkish) also belong to the classical arsenal of the Wandering Jew figure.

Establishing the provenance of Kulish's hero in the Wandering Jew tradition helps us elucidate his function in the novel, which proves far more complex than that of the structural *deus ex machina* or the stereotypical Gothic villain. As has been suggested in the studies of the Wandering Jew character in British Gothic fiction, this transgressive figure is intimately linked to the deep-set anxieties of the post-Enlightenment era in Europe, ranging from “the nature and parameters of the European national identity” to the doubts and aspirations concerning the process of modernization, rationalism, secularism, and advance of capitalism.<sup>49</sup> One of the greatest nightmares of late nineteenth-century Britain that the recurrent figure of the Wandering Jew embodied, according to Carol Davison, was that of conversion, or “Judaizing England”—not literally but by threatening what were traditionally held as “English” values.<sup>50</sup> Importantly, both Kulish's novel and the “chronicle” emphasize the fact that Kryzhanovskii is a recent convert (*svezhii perekrest*) who is essentially concealing his demonic nature, evil intentions, and Otherness under the mask of a fellow Christian. Unlike the British Empire, however, with its anxiety over a metaphorical conversion, in Ukraine religious conversion could be perceived

46. For a discussion of the vampiric Jew in the Gothic tradition and the role of the blood libel, see Carol Margaret Davison, *Anti-Semitism and British Gothic Literature* (New York, 2004), chapters 2 and 4. On the Jewish blood libel in the east European context, see Eugene M. Avrutin, Jonathan Dekel-Chen, and Robert Weinberg, *Ritual Murder in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Beyond: New Histories of an Old Accusation* (Bloomington, 2017).

47. See Petrov, “Val' ter-Skotiv's' ka povist',” 14.

48. George K. Anderson, *The Legend of the Wandering Jew* (Hanover, NH, 1965), 11.

49. Davison, *Anti-Semitism and British Gothic Literature*, 2 and 9.

50. *Ibid.*, 4.

as a rather real threat, following the Union of Brest in 1596 that submitted the Orthodox population in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Both the *History of the Rus'* and *Mikhailo Charnyshenko* refer to the Union in the most negative terms, associating it with oppressive Polish rule and Jewish exploitation and stressing its destructive role in the history of Ukraine. In *History of the Rus'*, moreover, the Union is described as something that crept in "in a fox skin but with a wolf's throat"; the emphasis on its treacherous nature and deceptive appearance implicitly links it to the "freshly converted" Kryzhanovskii.<sup>51</sup> In Kulish's novel, this connection is made explicit. Upon hearing about Katerina's misfortunes caused by Kryzhanovskii, old Charnysh exclaims:

"What?! . . . Are the Jews and Poles (*zhidy i liakhi*) indeed back in Ukraine? So, did you, father Khmel'nyts'kyi, fight in vain for ten years? Has the cursed Union indeed come back after the Nalivaikos, Pavliuks and Ostrianitsas? . . . I won't put up with Jews taxing Orthodox Christians for the use of their churches! I won't put up with the godless Polish priests traveling around the villages on the backs of the Orthodox priests! I won't put up with the blood-thirsty Polish beasts frying us in copper bulls and boiling Cossack children in cauldrons!"<sup>52</sup>

The appearance of Kryzhanovskii is perceived as a return of the Union and all the evils associated with it. Poles and Jews appear interchangeable in their detrimental impact upon Ukrainian Orthodox identity; in fact, Polish Catholics here acquire vampiric characteristics that are typically the prerogative of the Jews. The Polish origin of Kryzhanovskii's name (from *krzyż*—a cross) contributes to the conflation of the two ethnic and religious groups clearly presented in the novel as the enemies of the Orthodox faith and Little Russia more generally.

The fear of conversion is tied to the problem of identity that leads us to another symbolic aspect of the Kryzhanovskii character. The Wandering Jew of Kulish's novel appears not across various epochs but across space in multiple military conflicts. Given the supernatural connotations of his characterization, he indeed transcends time. Homeless and rootless himself, he is the cause of other characters' displacements—he lures Mikhailo away from the parental house; he causes Katerina to flee from her relatives' home; he provokes the Serbian prince Radivoi's departure from his native land; and, finally, he is responsible for the Cossack Shcherbina's losing his home and family. The fundamental anxiety embodied by Kryzhanovskii, a protean character who changes names, religions, ethnicities, and loyalties, is also the one that dominates Mikhailo's plot—the fear of homelessness and a loss of identity. In a sense, Kryzhanovskii/Lutitsa/Kharlo can be seen as a dark and distorted doppelganger of rootless Mikhailo himself.

Moreover, Mikhailo and Kryzhanovskii are romantic rivals in the novel, competing for Katerina who is portrayed, as Petrov justly observes, as the embodiment of the Ukrainian Volksgeist. Unspoiled by western education,

51. *Istoriia rusov ili Maloi Rossii*, 32.

52. Kulish, *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*, 2:156–57.

she expresses her soul in folk songs and is associated with folkloric supernatural characters. A typical Gothic heroine—an innocent displaced maiden threatened by the novel's ultimate villain—Katerina at the same time is allegorized as the contested nation. Interestingly, both Mikhailo chasing the ghost of heroic Ukraine and Kryzhanovskii, the rootless Jew, pose danger to Katerina (Ukraine) who is threatened by the latter but eventually dies from the hand of Mikhailo's Serbian lover Roksanda.

Kryzhanovskii's attempts to seduce Katerina with his lavish gifts, which appear "as if by magic," and his reputed supernatural power over women parallel his quasi-infernal luring of the Ukrainian youth into the imperial service.<sup>53</sup> In other words, he poses the threat of devilish temptation to the entire Ukrainian nation. *The History of the Rus'* briefly mentions that this historical moment highlighted each nation's most characteristic traits: "When extraordinary circumstances arise, typically the national characters or their dispositions reveal themselves, so, for example, with the Little Russians' enthusiasm for military service, the Jewish (*Iudeiskaia*) inclination for business deals has manifested itself."<sup>54</sup> In his recruiting effort, then, Kryzhanovskii capitalizes (literally) on the very essence of the Ukrainian nation, its proclivity for military heroism.

As the personification of that uncanny force that makes young men leave their home, the recruiter Kryzhanovskii, moreover, embodies the imperial power itself. Significantly, the author of the *History of the Rus'* emphasizes the direction of the recruits' movement "from the South to the North," from Ukraine to St. Petersburg. Ironically, this centripetal force is embodied by the novel's quintessentially homeless and nomadic character.<sup>55</sup> The empire's Other, paradoxically, also becomes the manifestation of its very essence. The threat posed by the converted Wandering Jew in Kulish's novel thus is to turn young Ukrainians into eternal travelers, like himself—into uprooted and nomadic subjects of the Russian empire.<sup>56</sup>

## The Serbs

Kryzhanovskii looms large in Mikhailo's Gothic (and partly prophetic) nightmare where Kryzhanovskii, unresponsive to the young man's plea for protection, pushes him into the abyss with demonic laughter.<sup>57</sup> Notably, Kryzhanovskii appears in the dream surrounded by the mysterious "red *zhupans*"—men in red jackets worn in Poland and Ukraine at the time—who

53. *Ibid.*, 2:140

54. *Istoriia Rusov*, 251.

55. Petrov argues that Kryzhanovskii, with his elusiveness, falsity, and artificiality, symbolizes St. Petersburg in the novel, and in this he sees Kulish's only original contribution to the development of the "sorcerer" type ("Val'ter-Skotivs'ka povist'," 15). The direct link between Kryzhanovskii and Petersburg may be forced but it certainly echoes my conclusion that the rootless character represents the essentially absent imperial center.

56. On Russian nomadic identity, see Ingrid Kleespies, *A Nation Astray: Nomadism and National Identity in Russian Literature* (DeKalb, 2012).

57. Kulish, *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*, 2:93–94. This dream might have been inspired by the final scenes of Maturin's *Melmoth the Wanderer* and Lewis's *The Monk*.

stayed briefly at the same house as the Ukrainian Cossacks and aroused Mikhailo's anxiety. These "red zhupans" turn out to be Serbian fighters for independence who had to flee their native land for fear of persecution and secretly settle in Little Russia.<sup>58</sup> They subsequently attempt to capture Mikhailo and his fellow travelers, thus launching the "Serbian" subplot of the novel, which dominates the narrative until the end. Mikhailo's nightmare, thus, associates the Serbs with the Jew and presents the novel's ethnic Others as a threatening and demonic force. As in Kryzhanovskii's case, however, the boundaries between the national self and the demonic and exotic Others prove highly unstable.

After the mysterious visitors precipitously depart, the master of the house, pan Bardak, comments on their elusive identity: "See, here you go: they came, ate and drank plenty, and left; but if you ask me who these guests were, I myself won't be able to tell you. Their dress is not like ours, they pronounce words in a strange way, and all their manners are completely not like ours. Only one thing I know is that they do cross themselves in a Christian way."<sup>59</sup> The Serbs thus are introduced in uncanny terms—not only because of their mysterious and alarming behavior but also because of their quality of being both exotic and Other and yet somewhat recognizable and culturally relatable.<sup>60</sup> Shcherbina is also alarmed by his inability to place the strangers: their itinerant lifestyle seems to suggest an affinity with the Zaporizhzhian Cossacks, "however, by their attire and manners, I can see they're not from Zaporozh'e."<sup>61</sup>

The Serbs' dwelling (which Senkovskii would call sarcastically "the Radcliffian cave of Ukraine") is presented in markedly Gothic terms: the captive Cossacks are led through a gloomy, hilly landscape to a tower built out of the ruins of a former monastery that kept locals away thanks to some superstitious legends associated with it.<sup>62</sup> There they meet their leader who, again, reveals the exotic/familiar dynamics: "His attire was also distinguished

58. In the early 1750s, the Russian government established so-called "New Serbia" and "Slaviano-Serbia"—military settlements in what is now Central and South Eastern Ukraine respectively where Serbs (as well as other Balkan Orthodox believers) of the Austrian empire were invited to form military regiments intended to guard the Russian borders from Crimean Tartars and Ottoman Turks. V. Kubiiovych, ed., *Entsyklopediia ukraïnoznavstva*, 10 vols. (Paris-New York, 1954–1989), 8: 2908. The case of Kulish's fictional Serbs is somewhat different, however—prince Radivoi flees because of his involvement with the Serbian independence struggle and primarily pursues his own revenge.

59. Kulish, *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*, 2:80–81.

60. I am referring here to Sigmund Freud's essay "The 'Uncanny'" (1919), where he demonstrates that the term "uncanny" (*Das Unheimliche*), whose etymology is linked to the idea of being "not like at home," or unfamiliar, unexpectedly overlaps with that of *heimlich*, something homey and comfortable, which nonetheless develops the connotations of unfamiliar and threatening. See Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of Complete Psychological Works*, trans. James Strachey (London, 1953–74), 17: 219–52.

61. Kulish, *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*, 2:115.

62. "Mikhailo Charnyshenko, ili Malorossia vosem' desiat let nazad. Sochinenie P. Kulesha. Kiev, v tipografii Universiteta, 1843, v"—8. Tri chasti, str. 206–190–224. *Biblioteka dlia chteniia* 57 (1843): 63. The journal's review was anonymous but the sarcastic style and the argumentation found in other discussions of Ukrainian history by Senkovskii clearly point to the journal's editor as the author. Because of the immense popularity of



by particular luxury; however, it was not at all like the dress worn by Little Russian gentlemen. One could rather take him for a Turk, if the large golden cross hanging on his chest did not contradict this.”<sup>63</sup>

This uncanny quality of the Serbs’ presence in the novel is reinforced linguistically—above all, through the abundant use of the Serbian language throughout, which is, as a related Slavic language, both somewhat understandable to the Russian and Ukrainian reader and yet not fully comprehensible.<sup>64</sup> The title of the Serbian leader, moreover, linguistically epitomizes the peculiar Otherness this group of characters represents. The subordinates address him as *ban*, which, as Kulish explains in a footnote, means *kniaz’* (prince) in Serbian.<sup>65</sup> The Serbs themselves explain the title to the perplexed Shcherbina: “Our *ban* is just the same *pan* (lord), that you have so many of in Ukraine.”<sup>66</sup> *Ban* is indeed *almost* like a *pan*—just as the Serbs are both understandable and familiar and yet threateningly incomprehensible Others.

To stress the Serbs’ difference, Kulish heavily Orientalizes them. Examples of such Orientalization abound, from Radivoi’s Turkish and “semi-asiatic” attire to his “oriental” hospitality and his status as a tyrant who inspires fear and awe. “The king of beasts among his motley subjects,” Radivoi is repeatedly described as fierce like a lion, bloodthirsty, and crude.<sup>67</sup> His daughter Roksanda (who falls in love with Mikhailo) wears “an Asiatic dress” and is surrounded by divans, which, together with the Oriental aromas, remind Shcherbina “of Crimea and Turkey.”<sup>68</sup> She is described as a typical wild, natural and passionate Oriental beauty and is clearly juxtaposed to the meek and somewhat bland “native” heroine Katerina, whom she eventually kills in an “attack of horrible jealousy and Asiatic vengeance.”<sup>69</sup> Both heroines are closely associated with their native lands—notably, when falling in love with Roksanda, Mikhailo is ready to fight for “sweet Serbia”; while seeing Katerina at the end of the novel makes him realize not just his betrayal of his beloved but also his abandonment of his native Ukraine.<sup>70</sup>

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Radcliffe’s Gothic novels in Russia, critics of the time often used the term “Radcliffian” as a short-cut for “Gothic.”

63. Kulish, *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*, 3:21–22.

64. Some Russian reviewers of *Mikhailo Charnyshenko* criticized Kulish’s extensive use of Serbian (as well as Ukrainian) in the novel, which they clearly perceived as a nuisance. Even *The Son of the Fatherland’s* largely positive review complained that the presence of Ukrainian and Serbian terms makes some passages of the work incomprehensible and turns the novel’s language into a “bizarre mix,” see “Mikhailo Charnyshenko ili Malorossiiia vosem’desiat let nazad. Sochinenie P. Kulesha. Tri chasti, 206, 190, i 215. Kiev, v universitetskoi tipografii, 1845,” *Syn Otechestva* 5 (1843): 22. *The Library for Reading* put it even stronger: “Without respect for the language in which he is writing, the author peppers his style with Little Russian and Serbian conversations, which makes the reading for a Russian both uninteresting and difficult,” “Mikhailo Charnyshenko, ili Malorossia vosem’desiat let nazad. Sochinenie P. Kulesha,” *Biblioteka dlia Chteniia*, 57 (1843): 64.

65. Kulish, *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*, 3:23.

66. *Ibid.*, 3:54.

67. *Ibid.*, 3:43, 3:71–72.

68. *Ibid.*, 3:85–87

69. *Ibid.*, 3:197

70. *Ibid.*, 3:196

If Mikhailo's temporary loyalty to Serbia is largely determined by his romantic infatuation with Roksanda, the Cossack Shcherbina's affinity with the Serbs, stressed throughout this part of the novel, is more complex. With Radivoi and his people, he shares a condition of displacement, a common enemy (the Jew and ultimately an empire), Oriental characteristics, and above all the valorization of military courage. While Shcherbina observes the differences between the Serbian community and the Sich, including the latter's more democratic organization, he wonders whether he has not encountered "another Sech'."<sup>71</sup> Later he is described as a kind of "little koshovoi" (the leader of a Zaporizhzhian Cossack military unit) in this "new Sech'."<sup>72</sup>

The most dramatic moment of Shcherbina's identification with the Serbs comes when he is deeply moved by Roksanda's singing a folk song, whose melody he describes as "somewhat familiar" and invoking some kinship (*chto-to rodnoe*), even though he had never heard it before (3:96). Nakhlik suggests that this affinity reflects the author's views on the solidarity of the Ukrainian and South Slavic peoples in their struggle for independence.<sup>73</sup> This aspect of identification certainly exists but it cannot solely explain the persistent theme of uncanny recognition. It is important to bear in mind that this closeness to the Serbs is attributed specifically to Shcherbina, the Zaporizhzhian Cossack, who represents the nomadic, militant, and masculine ethos in the novel—as opposed to his fellow traveler Cossack Sereda, who is deeply connected with his family and traditional values, and successfully returns home at the end of the novel. The most artistically-successful character in the novel according to unanimous agreement by critics, the colorful, witty, and courageous Shcherbina, nonetheless embodies a questionable set of values, from the point of view Kulish-*kul'turnyk*—military prowess, anarchic love for absolute freedom, and disregard for family ties. Serbs are also portrayed ambivalently in the novel: the narrator is often disturbed by their purported cruelty, militarism, irrationality, "Asiatic despotism," and the lack of legal institutions in their society. Rather than emphasizing the "solidarity" between Serbs and Ukrainians, Kulish, I would argue, portrays the Serbs as the Cossacks' own dark twins, using their subplot as a cautionary tale of the danger of excessive valorization of militant heroism. But the western, "knightly," and democratic Cossacks are just different enough from their Orientalized Slavic "brothers" to preclude a complete identification of the two and to preserve the ambivalence of portraying the Cossack heroic past simultaneously as a lost national ideal and a chaotic and destructive period of Ukrainian history.<sup>74</sup>

71. *Ibid.*, 3:53.

72. *Ibid.*, 3:71–72

73. Nakhlik, *Panteleimon Kulish*, 2:102.

74. I am grateful to Tetyana Dzyadevych for the suggestions about the role of the Serbs in the novel as "Eastern" foils for the Ukrainians. The association between South Slavs and Zaporizhzhian Cossacks is made more explicit in *The Black Council* which presents a closely knit pair of friends: the unruly Cossack Kyrylo Tur and Bohdan Chornohor (Montenegrin).

### The Chalice

The final episodes of the novel bring together its various Gothic subplots—the evil demonic Jew is beheaded by Radivoi, meek Katerina is murdered by passionate oriental Roksanda, and Mikhailo's dead body is only accepted by the earth after his father prays to God for his forgiveness. The very final scene of the novel emphatically focuses not on the remaining characters' destinies, however, but on the fate of an artifact. "I would much rather find out," the narrator states provocatively, "who now owns famous Doroshenko's cup" (*Doroshenkova charka*).<sup>75</sup> This magnificent (and even "supernatural") cup appears earlier in the novel during Mikhailo and his friends' stay at pan Bardak's house. Clearly inspired by the golden bear-shaped goblet of the house of Bradwardine in Scott's *Waverley*, the "supernatural" cup in Kulish is also heavily laden with history. The goblet was supposedly a gift from Petro Doroshenko, the Hetman of right-bank Ukraine in the 1660s and 70s—a turbulent period of Ukrainian history after Khmel'nyts'kyi's death, known as *Ruina* (The Ruin). The novel essentially ends with a "lost and found" ad—the narrator playfully invites the readers, in case one of them may own the precious artifact, to send him its detailed and accurate drawing. But he also considers the possibility that "this invaluable wine goblet has already been forged into some silly sugar bowl or a useless coffee pot. Perhaps, I myself, unaware of this, own an item made out of silver that used to be part of Doroshenko's chalice."<sup>76</sup>

The moralistic and tragic ending of Mikhailo's plot is undermined by the playful tone of the final scene, just as the supposed triumph of modernity over Mikhailo's anachronistic heroism is called into question by the "reappearance" of the missing chalice. *Doroshenkova charka* acquires symbolic connotations beyond its significance as an antiquarian object. It figures as a fragment (or a ruin) of a heroic history which has been trivialized by Ukraine's embrace of modernity, with its emphasis on consumerism: "Given the lamentable dissemination of false education, antiquity, in the eyes of the descendants, is negligible compared to a fashion or an accessory shop."<sup>77</sup> Metonymically, moreover, the lost chalice represents that inaccessible and irrevocable Ukrainian past, the Holy Grail that the knights of the novel sought in vain.<sup>78</sup> But this past is tantalizingly revived in the final line of the novel that cites "the most interesting inscription on the edges of the goblet: 'He who will drink this cup at once to the end, is worthy of standing under Doroshenko's *bunchuk*.'"<sup>79</sup> The seeming finality of the ending that seals up the protagonists' destinies in their semi-mystical quest for a lost Ukraine is contradicted by the open-endedness of the chalice episode. Kulish's use of the Scottish

75. Kulish, *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*, 3:202.

76. *Ibid.*, 3:202–3.

77. *Ibid.*, 3:202.

78. I am indebted to Edith Clowes for the suggestion of the chalice's connection to Holy Grail.

79. *Ibid.*, 3:203. *Bunchuk* is a pole with a sharpened top, to which horse or yak tail hair was attached. It was used by, among others, Cossack Hetmans as a symbol of their power. I. Pidkova and R. Shust, eds., *Dovidnyk z istorii Ukraïny* (Kyiv, 1993), 1:76–77.

“cup” motif highlights, once again, the difference between the two writers’ treatments of the past. In stark contrast to the tragic and yet open ending of *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*, with the chalice that may or may not be lost forever, the “Blessed Bear of Bradwardine” is duly recovered at the end of *Waverley*, having been salvaged from the devastation of the civil war, and thus provides a safe closure, along with the hero’s happy marriage and his abandonment of the rebellious Highlanders’ cause. The Scottian “end-of-our-history” perspective, however, is not sustained in Kulish’s novel, where the ghost of heroic Ukraine continues to haunt its colonial present.<sup>80</sup>

The Gothic mode in *Mikhailo Charnyshenko*, as I have maintained, does not appear exclusively because of its widespread popularity; nor do I read it as a kind of Aesopian language, a “safe” literary code for addressing problematic political topics, although it can certainly play this role as well. In this novel—and throughout the Ukrainian and Russian Gothic traditions—this mode functions rather as both a symptom of ambiguity and an alternative discursive space.<sup>81</sup> Kulish’s extensive reliance on the Gothic tropes produces a rich, if contradictory, fictional world where the past and the present are simultaneously alive and where the empire acts as both a benevolent agent of civilization and a demonic homogenizing force. The novel’s ambivalent ideological agenda vividly captures Kulish’s predicament as a Ukrainian writer in the Russian empire—a predicament shared by other Ukrainian and, to a degree, Little Russian writers, such as Nikolai Gogol’ (Mykola Hohol), Antony Pogorel’skii, Ievhen Hrebinka, and Oleksa Storozhenko, caught between lofty ideals of Romantic nationalism and their adherence to the principles of enlightenment, order, and civilization, embodied, however imperfectly, by the empire into which they were born.<sup>82</sup>

80. As James Buzard suggests in his study of English “autoethnographic fiction,” the time setting of *Waverley* places Scott’s narrator (a Lowland Scott) “outside of [Scottish] history,” as it were, allowing him to assume a semidetached perspective on its culture and to “export” it to the English audience. James Buzard, *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth-Century British Novels* (Princeton, 2005), 67.

81. Interestingly, in *The Black Council* Gothic tropes significantly diminish, if not completely disappear, while a more definite ideological model prevails. As Bahrij convincingly argues, the hero there chooses individuality and stability over the chaos of history, shown as a destructive force.

82. See Shkandrij’s discussion of Hrebinka in his *Russia and Ukraine*, 91–95; for an analysis of Pogorel’skii’s ambivalence, see Valeria Sobol, “On Mimicry and Ukrainians: The Imperial Gothic in Pogorelsky’s *Monastyrka*,” *Shhid/Zakhid: Istorykukul’turolohichniy zbirnyk* 16/17 (2013): 369–87; and Robert Romanchuk, “Mother tongue.” Gogol’s problematic national identity is discussed in detail in Edyta Bojanowska, *Nikolai Gogol: Between Ukrainian and Russian Nationalism* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007). Storozhenko’s complex attitude to Russian imperial policies is explored in Svitlana Krysz, “All-Time Sinner or National Hero?.” For an innovative interpretation of the concept of “Little Russian Literature” within the framework of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s theory of “minor literature,” see Roman Koropeckyj and Robert Romanchuk, “Harkusha the Noble Bandit and the ‘Minority’ of Little Russian Literature” *The Russian Review* 76, no. 2 (March, 2017): 294–310.