

Title: What Is Little Russian Literature?
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Little Russian literature (*malorossiiskaia literatura/slovesnost'*), a category supposed in the 1830s, is basically a negative one, lacking positive traits. The term “literature” was rarely, if ever, used for it, except in naysaying formulations such as “supposed (*mnimaia*) Little Russian literature” or “is Little Russian literature possible today?”; critics preferred terms such as “Little Russian scenes” or “jokes” (*zharty*), while writers used specific generic terms (*malorossiiskaia byl'*, *nebylitsa*, *poviest'*, *predanie*, *vecher*, etc.). Yet the critics knew who wrote it: poets from Kotliarev'skyi to Hulak and Hrebinka, dramatists from Kvitka to Topolia, and — the crux of this literature and the focus of this paper — prose writers from Narezhnyi to Gogol, including Somov and Pogorel'skii. As George G. Grabowicz and Taras Koznarsky have demonstrated, critics such as Nadezhdin, Polevoi, and Senkovskii considered this literature to consist of Little Russian scenes that were naive, ethnographic, humorous, and avoided serious themes such as history, geography, antiquity, and philosophy — i.e., imperial (Russian) discourses. They felt it to be distinct from its Russian counterpart, whether due to its difference as such, its national specificity (*narodnost'*), or — tellingly — its fun and/or unpleasantness.

In the 1840s, due to the interventions of Belinskii, Shevchenko, and others, Little Russian prose became the “remainder” of both Russian and Ukrainian canon formation: its writers either fell out of both literatures or (what amounts to the same thing) were claimed by both literatures, in a gesture that negated their opposition. Russian literature underwent a programmatic forgetting of all Little Russian prose writers except for Gogol, who was located at the origin of Russian prose (Belinskii); nascent Ukrainian literature initially rejected all writing in Russian (Kostomarov) — the language of Little Russian prose — but soon allowed for an exception in Gogol (Shevchenko; cf. also Kulish). On the basis of the preceding observations, this paper will attempt to interpret Little Russian prose as a *psychoanalysis* (Lacan): before Belinskii and Shevchenko, as a *locus of transference*; for Belinskii and Shevchenko, as a new *master signifier*; and after Belinskii and Shevchenko, as *object a*. Russian and Ukrainian literatures are thus “recognized” — transferentially, structurally, and phantasmatically — and destabilized by Little Russian literature, which is located in the place of the Other for both these literatures.

The repression of Little Russian prose suggests that it functioned in the (re-)formation of (especially) the Russian canon as a *vanishing mediator*: “a catalytic agent which permits an exchange of energies between two otherwise mutually exclusive terms” — here, (Ukrainian) *narodnost'* and (European) universality — and “which can be dismantled and removed when its usefulness is over” (Jameson). This dialectical approach identifies and historicizes antagonisms in Russian canon formation while insisting on the qualitative transformation of Little Russian prose itself, from element to structuring function, at its very moment of intervention in/disappearance from this formation: that is to say, Gogol's occupation of the leading place in Russian literature by 1835 (cf. Belinskii's *O russkoi povesti i povestiakh g. Gogolia*) is the *negation* of his 1829 observation to his mother that “everything Little Russian occupies everyone here [in St. Petersburg].”

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