

# Simone Attilio Bellezza. The Shore of Expectations: A Cultural Study of the Shistdesiatnyky

Alessandro Achilli

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**Simone Attilio Bellezza.** *The Shore of Expectations: A Cultural Study of the Shistdesiatnyky*. Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies P, 2019. xxiv, 352 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$37.95, paper.

**Simone** Bellezza's book *The Shore of Expectations: A Cultural Study of the Shistdesiatnyky* offers an important reappraisal of a stage of Ukrainian (cultural) history that has suffered, alternately, from idealization and "underappreciation" (xi). On the basis of a wide range of archival materials, memoirs, and interviews, the author provides an insightful analysis of the *shistdesiatnytstvo* (the phenomenon of the 1960s in Ukraine) as a complex and diverse cultural and political movement to be viewed both as a chapter of Soviet history and as a milestone in Ukraine's struggle for self-determination. In the introduction, Bellezza aptly stresses the importance of analyzing the *shistdesiatnytstvo* anew "in order to achieve a less teleological understanding of the intellectual ferment that animated Ukraine in the 1960s" (xv).

The book—whose title harkens back to Vasyl' Symonenko's 1965 *tamvydav*<sup>1</sup> poetry collection, *Bereh chekan'* (*The Shore of Expectations*)—is divided into three long chapters preceded by an introduction (xi–xxiii) and followed by an epilogue (313–27). Chapter 1 (1–91) explores the origins of the movement from the time of Stalin's death up to 1961. Central to Bellezza's approach is the acknowledgement that literature played a key role in the initial phase of the activity of the *shistdesiatnyky* ("Sixtiers," or the 1960s generation). He gives his readers a glimpse into the poetic debuts of Lina Kostenko and Symonenko (which occurred between the late 1950s and early 1960s), focusing on traits of their poetics as seen within the context of the wider Soviet cultural climate of the *vidlyha* (Nikita Khrushchev's Thaw). Bellezza stresses the ties of the young *shistdesiatnyky* with Russia and their closeness to Russian culture—which impeded neither their awareness of Russification nor their resistance against it. Chapter 1 is particularly rich in archival materials that help shed new light on the intricacies of Soviet Ukrainian literary life during the Thaw; included here are minutes from congresses of the Writers' Union of Ukraine (*Spilka pys'mennykiv Ukrainy*). Amid this complicated set of interrelationships, the foundation and functioning of the Club of Creative Youth (*Klub tvorchoi molodi*) within the framework of the Communist Youth League of Ukraine (*Komsomol*) constitutes a vivid example of the Sixtiers' involvement in Soviet officialdom. Chapter 2 (92–216) covers the years 1961–68, which Bellezza sees as the

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<sup>1</sup> Literally "published there"—a jargon term referring to books by Soviet writers published in the West.

period where the *shistdesiatnyky* “addressed the nation.” In the context of growing political and cultural repressions, the group’s high level of public engagement resulted in their clash with Soviet institutions—a clash to which members and sympathizers of the group reacted in their own ways. Chapter 3 (217–312) is devoted to the repressions and dissent of 1968–73; these events marked the group’s turn toward politics and led to the Soviet state’s decision to silence it.

The book’s inclusion of unpublished archival documents as well as interviews conducted by the author is one of its fortes. It should thus be suitable and interesting both for readers well acquainted with Ukrainian history and culture of the second half of the twentieth century and for those less knowledgeable and seeking a high-quality introduction to that period. The attention that Bellezza devotes to literature and its role in shaping political and cultural self-awareness in Ukraine is another strength of the book. In general, readers will appreciate Bellezza’s unbiased presentation of iconic figures of Ukrainian culture, such as Ivan Dziuba and Kostenko; his objective assessment of their initial involvement in the Soviet project; and, on a more fundamental level, his envisioning of the first phase of the *shistdesiatnytstvo* as part of the Soviet project. At the same time, Bellezza manages to aptly portray the different attitudes and world views of the group’s members, ranging from Valentyn Moroz’s nationalism to Dziuba’s perpetual search for compromise. This allows him to underscore a main factor underlying the failure of the *shistdesiatnyky* as a collective political actor, namely, their lack of a clear and prominent leader—a role that could have been Dziuba’s had he accepted it. Bellezza also sees the group’s absence of solid connections with the Moscow oppositional scene (which also stemmed from the Russian dissidents’ minimal interest in Ukraine’s quest for autonomy) as one of the reasons why the group was not able to transform itself into an effective political platform—at least not until the late 1980s.

If one were to look for shortcomings in this otherwise excellent book, one might perhaps note the somewhat simplistic presentation of the complex literary phenomenon of Vasyl’ Stus’s poetry: Bellezza devotes a few pages to it in the epilogue (see 313–16). Irrespective of the argument concerning the extent to which Stus should or should not be considered a *shistdesiatnyk* (a question that Bellezza chooses not to address), Stus’s poetry deserves a more in-depth presentation than the few brief mentions that it is granted. Readers who approach Bellezza’s work from the viewpoint of literary studies (they will certainly appreciate his rather rare ability to harmoniously combine historical research with literary insights) might also feel that other writers of those years, such as Mykola Vinhranovs’kyi and Ivan Drach, deserve more attention than they are given by the author. That being said, Bellezza specifies in the introduction that he is not interested in providing a description of all

of the group's members. His aim is to understand "the dynamics that transformed a small, cultural 'circle of friends' into a political movement" (xix), and this scholarly goal he perfectly achieves. As he plainly acknowledges toward the conclusion of the book, more work on the *shistdesiatnyky* and their literary, cultural, and political involvements is surely needed. Bellezza's monograph with its combination of archival research, scholarly impartiality, and insightful interpretations, constitutes an excellent starting point for any future inquiry on the subject.

Alessandro Achilli  
*University of Cagliari*

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