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From the Plow to the Pen: Public Perception of Ukrainian–Language Writers of Peasant Origin from Dnieper Ukraine at the turn of the 20th century

Od płyga do pióra: postrzeganie pisarzy pochodzenia chłopskiego w Ukrainie Naddnieprzańskiej na przełomie XIX i XX w.

ABSTRACT

The article examines the public response to the phenomenon of the writing practices of a wide range of both prominent and little-known Ukrainian-language authors of peasant origin from Dnieper Ukraine at the turn of the twentieth century. Regardless of the level of education and professional competence, main occupation and place of residence, they tried to realize their intellectual potential and find their niche in the social space of literary production, developing a nuanced self-perception as 'peasants', 'Ukrainian authors', and 'writers'. The theoretical self-perception of the study draws on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'literary field' and his idea about the 'semantic blurring' of the notion of the 'writer'. Using archival and printed sources (ego-documents, censorship records and periodicals), the author analyzes the specific features of the public perception of Ukrainian writers of peasant background through a threefold lens of power relations

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as bearers of a vulnerable social identity in the space of gaining access to cultural production; as representatives of the Ukrainian literary field in the realities of imperial claims to cultural dominance; and as literature producers in relations with cultural agents that shaped their recognition and status as writers.

Key words: Ukrainian peasants, public perception, writing practices, intellectuals, identity

STRESZCZENIE

Na przełomie XIX i XX w. wyzwaniem społecznym stało się zjawisko praktyk pisarskich szerokiego kręgu ukraińskojęzycznych znamienitych i mało znanych autorów pochodzenia chłopskiego z Ukrainy Naddnieprzańskiej. Niezależnie od poziomu wykształcenia, oczystania i kompetencji zawodowych, głównego zawodu i miejsca zamieszkania, starali się oni realizować swoje zdolności intelektualne i odnaleźć własną niszę w społecznej przestrzeni twórczości literackiej. Podstawą teoretyczną artykułu jest koncepcja „pola literackiego” Pierre'a Bourdieu oraz jego wyobrażenia o „rozmyciu semantycznym” pojęcia „pisarz”. Na podstawie źródeł archiwalnych i drukowanych (egodokumentów, dokumentów cenzury i periodyków) autorka analizuje osobliwości publicznego postrzegania ukraińskich pisarzy pochodzenia chłopskiego przez potrójny pryzmat stosunków władzy: jako reprezentantów wrażliwej tożsamości społecznej w przestrzeni uzyskania dostępu do produkcji kulturalnej; przedstawicieli ukraińskiego „pola literackiego” w realiach imperialnych roszczeń do dominacji kulturowej; twórców literackich w relacjach z agentami kultury, którzy decydowali o ich uznaniu i statusie pisarskim.

Słowa kluczowe: ukraińscy chłopi, postrzeganie publiczne, praktyki pisarskie, intelektualiści, tożsamość

INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the 20th century, the emergence of a whole generation of authors of peasant origin in Dnieper¹ Ukraine provoked public outcry. Contemporaries could categorize them as ‘writers’ or ‘peasants’ and emphasize their social status or professional affiliation, their amateurism or professionalism, yet they could not ignore the phenomenon of peasant writing practices and these authors attempts to find a place of their own within the space of literary production.

The extensive historiography on the life and works of well-known Ukrainian writers of peasant origin is represented by synthetic overviews

¹ Dnieper Ukraine (Naddniprianska Ukraine) – conventional name of the part of Ukraine that belonged to the Russian Empire at the turn of the 20th century. Eastern Galicia, Transcarpathia, and Northern Bukovyna were parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at that time.

of the history of Ukrainian literature² and numerous studies of individual authors, among which studies deconstructing the canonized images of Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861) and Ivan Franko (1856–1916)³ as symbolic representatives of the 'downtrodden class' and the 'oppressed peasant (stateless, plebeian, etc.) nation'⁴ are particularly noteworthy.

Using Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the 'semantic blurring' of the notion of the 'writer' (whose definition depends on the 'relations between agents and institutions' that occupy dominant positions in the 'field of cultural production'), attention is drawn to the writing experience of a much wider range of agents in the Ukrainian literary field⁵. Since the last quarter of the 19th century, Ukrainian intellectuals have been collecting and publishing information about 'people's poets', 'peasant poets', 'samobyties' and 'samorodoks' (used metaphorically for naturally gifted, self-taught writers)⁶. In modern historiography, little-known and completely anonymous Ukrainian writers of peasant origin appear in research on mass commercial publications (in particular, *lubok* books and pictures)⁷.

A special place in this regard is held by the project of the literary critic and bibliographer Mykola Plevako (1890–1941), who between 1924

² See, inter alia: С. Єфремов, *Історія українського письменства*, Київ 1995; В. Радзікевич, *Історія української літератури*, vol. 3, Детройт 1956; Д. Чижевський, *Історія української літератури*, Київ 2003; Н. Петров, *Очерки истории украинской литературы XIX столетия*, Київ 2008; *Історія української літератури XIX століття*, vol. 3, ed. М. Яценко, Київ 1998; В. Качкан, *Хай святитися ім'я твоє: історія української літератури і культури в персоналіях (XIX–XX ст.)*, Львів 2002; *Історія української літератури: у 12 т., ed. В. Дончик*, vol. 9(1), *Література кінця XIX – початку XX (1890–1910-ти роки)*, ed. О. Бартко, Київ 2023.

³ Г. Грабович, *Шевченко, якого не знаємо: (з проблематики символічної автобіографії та сучасної рецензії поета)*, ed. В. Дивнич, Київ 2000; Я. Грицак, *Пророк у своїй Вітчизні. Франко та його спільнота (1856–1886)*, Київ 2006; Я. Грицак, *Іван Франко – селянський син?*, "Україна: культурна спадщина, національна свідомість, державність" 2006–2007, 15, pp. 531–542; Т. Гундорова, *Франко не Каменяр. Франко і Каменяр*, Київ 2006.

⁴ Я. Грицак, *Пророк*, p. 245.

⁵ П. Бурдье, *Поле литературы*, "Новое литературное обозрение" 2000, 45, pp. 22–87, <http://bourdieu.name/content/burde-pole-literatury> [access: 7.05.2024].

⁶ "Рідний Край" 1908, no. 23, pp. 7–8; no. 29, p. 11; 1909, no. 16, p. 6; "Рідний край і Молода Україна" 1912, no. 10, pp. 9–12; "Сніп" 1912, no. 40, pp. 4–5; "Киевская Старина" 1904, no. 4, pp. 43–45 and next.

⁷ Т. Гундорова, *Транзитна культура. Симптоми постколоніальної травми: статті та есеї*, Київ 2013, pp. 255–382; Т. Кароєва, *Підприємці в забезпеченні україномовного читання у російській імперії 1881–1916 pp.*, "Україна Модерна" 2015, 22, pp. 93–115; V. Voloshenko, *Cheap Print for the Ukrainian People: Lubok Books, „Little Russian Literature”*, and „Literature for the People”, in: *Cheap Print and the People: Popular Literature in the European Perspective*, eds. D. Atkinson, S. Roud, Cambridge 2019, pp. 223–251.

and 1934 compiled files for a dictionary of Ukrainian writers⁸. He understood the definition of a 'Ukrainian writer' broadly, collecting biographical and bibliographic information about prominent and obscure⁹ Ukrainian-language authors who produced literary works in various genres, and who were active in journalism and scholarship, regardless of their place of residence or primary occupation. Having fallen under Stalin's repression in 1938, the scholar was unable to complete this work, and his extensive archive has only been partially published¹⁰. M. Plevako's correspondence with villagers and autobiographies he collected, as well as other ego-documents of participants in the literary process, censorship documents, and periodicals remain significant sources of information about the public reaction to peasant writing activity.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the specific features of the public perception of Ukrainian writers of peasant background through a three-fold lens of power relations as bearers of a vulnerable social identity in the space of gaining access to cultural production; as representatives of the Ukrainian literary field in the realities of imperial claims to cultural dominance; and as literature producers in relations with cultural agents that shaped their recognition and status as writers.

Using archival and printed sources (ego-documents, censorship records and periodicals), the author analyzes the specific features of the public perception of Ukrainian writers of peasant background through a three-fold lens of power relations as bearers of a vulnerable social identity in the space of gaining access to cultural production; as representatives of the Ukrainian literary field in the realities of imperial claims to cultural dominance; and as literature producers in relations with cultural agents that shaped their recognition and status as writers.

⁸ Л. Гарбар, Плевако Микола Антонович (27.11.1890–11.04.1941) – український літературознавець, бібліограф, <http://www.nbuv.gov.ua/node/2632> [access: 3.02.2024].

⁹ For example, in 1929 a schoolboy, Maksym Labunko, responded to M. Plevako's request that he had heard of only one poet in his area. Svyrydon Kirichenko composed poems, put them into music, and sent them to Kharkiv for printing. However, after he was taken prisoner in 1920, there was no news about him. See: Національної бібліотеки України імені В.І. Вернадського [hereinafter: NBUV], Інститут рукопису [hereinafter: IR], fond 27, sprava 405, p. 1.

¹⁰ To date, the largest number of autobiographies from M. Plevako's collection is published in: *Самі про себе: Автобіографії українських літераторів 1920-х років*, prep. Р. Мовчан, Київ 2015. This article considers autobiographies both by those who were established as writers before 1917 and by those who still were not. One of the peculiarities of these documents is that they were written in the political situation of the USSR, with the authors emphasizing their peasant or working-class origins.

THE RESEARCH AND ITS RESULTS: PEASANTS IN THE TRANSFORMED SOCIAL SPACE OF RECEIVING 'OPEN POSITIONS IN THE CULTURAL FIELD'¹¹

After the abolition of serfdom in the Russian Empire (1861), the life of Ukrainian peasants was affected by the phenomena of landlessness, social stratification, urbanization, development of national movements, etc. They faced the challenge of finding new sources of income, served in the army, and participated in wars and the revolutionary events of 1905–1907. Public influence on the reform of the educational system, the spread of literacy, and the growth of the book market led to an increase in peasant readership and a transformation of the peasants' role in the consumption and production of culture. These changes occurred within the historically specific social structure of society, which preserved traditional patterns of access to the cultural sphere for representatives of different classes and their participation in cultural production (for example, in the case of rural icon painting schools).

Transformations of the social space blurred and challenged the understanding of the term 'peasantry'. In 1910, Oleksa Kovalenko (1880–1927) was listed as a 'peasant' in the documents of the Kyiv Judicial Chamber¹². Designating someone as belonging to a particular estate was an important marker of personal identification for the authorities. He was indeed born into a peasant family. However, the future writer actively engaged in self-education, and from the age of 16 he embarked on a course of changing his place of residence, occupation, and social status.

In 1896, he worked as a *pysar* (scribe, clerk) in the local administration, and from 1897 he held official positions in railway administration in Cheliabinsk (he was exiled to Siberia for participating in the revolutionary movement), and later in Kaluga. O. Kovalenko made his debut in Ukrainian literature in 1900 with a poem published in "Literaturno–Naukovyi Vistnyk" ("Literary and Scientific Bulletin") (1898–1932) in Galicia. From 1903 he lived in Kyiv, and until 1910 he was known in the Ukrainian intellectual milieu as the author of several poetry collections and a translator¹³.

Stating the fact of birth in a peasant family could have multiple connotations. Writers' autobiographies reveal the complex intertwining

¹¹ П. Бурдье, *op. cit.*

¹² Центральний державний історичний архів м. Києва [hereinafter: ЦДІАК], фонд 317, опис 1, справа 5352, р. 3.

¹³ В. Оліфіренко, С. Оліфіренко, Слобожанська хвиля: Навчальний посібник-хрестоматія з української літератури Північної Слобожанщини, Донецьк 2005, р. 102; І. Ситий, Коваленко Олекса Кузьмич, in: Енциклопедія Сучасної України [Електронний ресурс], eds. I. Дзюба et al., Київ 2005, <https://esu.com.ua/article-8312> [access: 27.05.2024].

of their social backgrounds. At the turn of the 20th century, 'peasants' did not necessarily engage in farming on their own land plots: they could be hired on large farms, or live in the countryside but seek additional income through crafts, trade, or cultural activities. Oleksa Varavva (1882–1967) defined his parents' social status as 'townspeople – grain growers' who worked on other people's farms. His great-grandfather was a *chumak*¹⁴, and his grandfather earned his living through fishing¹⁵. The father of Oleksandr Vedmitskyi (1894–1961) was a 'proletarianized peasant' in the suburbs of Pryluky; he left his village and became a hired hand¹⁶. The father of Oleksandr Kopylenko (1900–1958) was also forced to 'give up farming' because 'the land yielded nothing', and eventually became a railway worker¹⁷.

Certain writers had relatives who, in previous decades, had access to education or were involved in cultural production. Petro Vashchenko's (1896[1898]–1928) parents were 'from families of former serfs', but his grandfather's brother worked as a servant in the landowner's court¹⁸. Valerian Polishchuk (1897–1937) also wrote that his parents had been serfs. It is noteworthy that one of his great-grandfathers was an emigrant from France, yet he nonetheless became a serf. Polishchuk's paternal grandfather served for a time in a manorial court ('was more or less developed', participated in the Polish uprising of 1863). His mother's father and grandfather worked as gardeners on rural estates¹⁹. Vasyl Chaplia (1900–1990) defined his father's social status as a 'peasant', but specified that he had been a popular icon painter in his area²⁰. Hryhorii Kovalenko (1868–1937) was born into a peasant family in which 'the old Cossack tradition, education, and culture were not interrupted, and the grandfathers were lovers and connoisseurs of church learning and Ukrainian poetry'. His family had long maintained the tradition of painting. His parents preserved an autobiography written by his grandfather²¹.

Grain cultivators in Ukrainian villages could be descendants of not only former serfs, but also Cossacks who, during the times of serfdom, preserved their personal freedom and a distinct social identity. Oleksa

¹⁴ *Chumaks* – wagoners and traders common in Ukraine from the 17th to the mid-19th centuries.

¹⁵ *Сами*, p. 70.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 78.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 235.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 67.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 319, 323.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 354.

²¹ О. Юрінко, Григорій (Грицько) Олексійович Коваленко, in: *Зневажена Клю*, ed. Ю. Данилюк, Київ 2005, p. 257.

Dikhtiar (1886–1936) in various versions of his autobiography defined himself either as the son of a Cossack or as the son of 'Ukrainians who lived from farming, renting and buying up the lord's land'²². Mykhailo Dry-Khmara (1889–1935) wrote in 1929 that his mother came from a wealthy Cossack family, and his father was a peasant (he did not dare to admit that his father was a *pysar*). The future philologist had the opportunity to graduate from the Pavlo Halahan Collegium and Kyiv University²³. Serhii Zhuk (1885–1969) mentioned that his grandfathers were of Cossack origin and owned their own farms. In 1886, his father moved the family to the town of Kobeliaki, where he held official positions. In 1889, S. Zhuk's father died, and his mother raised five children on her own. The future sculptor and poet graduated from a real school with his brother's financial support, and then studied at his own expense at the St. Petersburg Psycho-Neurological Institute²⁴.

Not all descendants of serfs and Cossacks remained in the villages. Increasingly, they moved to cities for permanent or temporary work, finding new opportunities to change their social status. The above-mentioned P. Vashchenko was 'drawn to the city' already in his teenage years²⁵.

Some Ukrainian writers were born into mixed marriages (born into both formal and informal unions). The mother of Volodymyr Samiilenko (1864–1925) was a former serf who worked as a maid in a landowner's family, knew how to play the piano and was 'very capable in all sciences'. The writer was born from her unofficial relationship with the landowner Ivan Lisevych, even though in 1925 he noted that he had been born 'into a peasant family'. Indeed, until the age of ten, he lived in the 'poor peasant home' of his mother's family, yet he knew three foreign languages and graduated from Kyiv University. He 'began publishing in 1886' and worked for Ukrainian periodicals in Galicia and Dnieper Ukraine²⁶. Mykola Voronyi (1871–1938) recalled that on his father's side he was from 'simple peasants', but his grandfather had spent 25 years in the army and then worked as a coachman. The writer's father 'was already a townsman', often changing professions, and his mother was a descendant of the rector of the Kyiv-Mohyla Theological Academy Prokopii Kalachynskyi (1697–1702)²⁷.

²² *Самі*, pp. 168–172.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 184.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 199–203.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 67–69.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, pp. 369–372.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 104–127.

Peasants could rely not only on their own efforts and family support to pursue opportunities to realize their intellectual abilities. In the second half of the 19th century, ideas about emancipating peasants and promoting their education through the establishment of educational institutions and development of popular print culture became increasingly widespread. These ideas were fruitfully implemented in the activities of *zemstvos*²⁸ and cultural societies. Beginning in the 1880s, the literary activity of peasants attracted growing public attention. The creativity of people of peasant origin was popularized. For instance, in 1904 a list of books intended for public reading at literary evenings included the Russian-language story *Zlaia nevestka* (The Wicked Daughter-in-Law), written by a certain 'peasant Zhurov'²⁹. In 1913, officials of the Kharkiv Zemstvo included in their programme such works as *Poety iz naroda* (Poets from the people), *Narodnyi poet Al. Vas. Koltsov* (People's Poet Al. Vas. Koltsov), *Poet pakhar* (Poet Plowman), and *Poety–krestiane – Surikov i Drozszyzyn* (Peasant poets – Surikov and Drozhzhyn)³⁰. In 1897, at the meeting of the *Obshchestvo liubitelei russkoi slovesnosti* (Society of Lovers of Russian Literature) in St. Petersburg, the speaker Ivan Ivanov emphasized support for people's poets as talented representatives of the people and their spokesmen. In his view, the brilliance of the people's poets' genius reaffirmed the right of the masses in general to 'dignity and all human rights'³¹. Public attention to the figures of writers from among the people was tended to encourage further peasant creative expression. At the same time, activities aimed at involving peasants in literacy were increasingly becoming politicized in the context of competition for the peasantry as a social support base for political movements.

As such ideas gained popularity, adherents of *narodoliubstvo* (people-loving) of various social origins considered it their duty to join 'people's' publishing and cultural-educational societies. Thus, in 1900, among the members of the *Blahodiinne tovarystvo z poshyrennia deshevych i zahalnokorysnykh knyh dlia narodu* (Charitable society for the distribution of cheap and generally useful books among the people) (1898–1918), founded on the initiative of General Mykola Fedorovskyi, were Sofia Dragomirova, the wife of Kyiv's General-Governor; Gottfried Murken, the owner of the Neva brick factory, and his wife Evgenia; Prince David Zhevakhov; Princess Lidia Bariatynska; and Prince Volodymyr Bariatynskyi, among

²⁸ *Zemstvo* – an institution of local self-government in the Russian Empire (1864–1917).

²⁹ ЦДІАК, фонд 707, опис 227 (рік 1904), справа 14, п. 349.

³⁰ Каталог книг и учебников разных изданий, имеющихся в продаже книжного склада Харківського губернського земства, Харків 1913, pp. 22, 43, 56, 85, 109.

³¹ "Літературно-Науковий Вістник" 1901, no. 15, pp. 1–2.

others. The inclusion of such individuals in the society and its vague name and objectives (it was supposed to contribute to the religious, moral and economic growth of the 'Malorosian people'³²) helped to obtain the official permission to establish this essentially Ukrainian publishing house³³.

The activity of some members of similar societies remained purely declarative; about half of them did not even pay membership dues. Nevertheless, it was evidently important for them to see their names on the membership lists and to publicly present themselves as 'friends of the people'. The aforementioned I. Ivanov pointed out that defenders of opposing views often spoke on behalf of 'the people', while the people could remain 'dark and vague' for them³⁴.

The range of ideas about the peasantry's place in society was broad. Even at the beginning of the 20th century, debates continued about the need to educate peasants and the scope of such education³⁵. Alongside emancipatory initiatives and ideas of *narodoliubstvo* (and even with their passive support), discriminatory practices and contemptuous attitudes towards peasants are observed, sometimes reaching manifestations of 'class racism'³⁶. Dmytro Kovalenko-Kosaryk (1901–1931) recalled how a school teacher 'tried to make us monarchists and taught pupils to hate *muzhyks*³⁷'. Another writer of peasant origin, Mykhailo Ivchenko (1890–1939), already in the position of a statistician with the Poltava *zemstvo*, had to confront the arrogance and swagger with which government officials mostly treated peasants³⁸.

One of the most talented Ukrainian writers of the 1920–1930s, V. Polishchuk, recalled the ambiguous attitude towards him as a *muzhyk*

³² In 1876–1905 the term 'Malorosia' ('Little Russia') was an alternative name for Ukraine (while the latter itself was forbidden). This term could be used neutrally or negatively to emphasize the inferiority and provinciality of Ukrainians and to embody the teleological idea of the merger of the Ukrainian and Russian peoples in the 'all-Russian nation'. The term 'Malorosian' was also used to define the Janus-faced identity of those Ukrainians who combined loyalty to Ukrainian traditions and the imperial state.

³³ В. Волошенко, „Велика кишеня”: мережева громадська взаємодія у фінансуванні українських просвітницьких видань Наддніпрянщини (1894–1905), in: *Товариство „Просвіта”*: в обороні української ідентичності, духовності та культури (до 150-літнього ювілею), ed. I. Орлевич, Львів 2019, pp. 79–81.

³⁴ "Літературно-Науковий Вістник" 1901, no. 15, pp. 1–2.

³⁵ See more: V. Voloshenko, *Changes in Peasant Children's Reading Practices and Living Conditions in the Dnieper Ukraine at the turn of the 19th–20th*, "Studia Historiae Oeconomiae" 2023, 41, 2, pp. 8–10.

³⁶ П. Бурдье, *op. cit.*

³⁷ *Muzhyk* – literally 'man', one of the terms used to refer to peasants.

³⁸ NBUV, IR, fond 27, sprava 1095, p. 19.

during his studies. He gratefully remembered the free Latin classes from the inspector of the Lutsk Gymnasium, who himself came from 'simple Chernihiv Cossacks', and wanted to help him prepare for admission to the gymnasium. In turn, V. Polishchuk's father (who sold a cow and part of their land allotment to hire additional tutors) urged him not to forget *muzhyks* after his schooling. V. Polishchuk recalled how 'our *muzhyks* fought hellishly for learning' at the gymnasium, where they 'were persecuted worse than Jews'. He also faced a contemptuous attitude towards himself outside the gymnasium. As a tutor to a priest's son, he had to listen to the indignation of his student's mother: 'How can you, a *muzhyk*, study better than my son?'.

In 1913, he received a *zemstvo* scholarship and was able to support his brother, who thus also gained an opportunity to study at the gymnasium³⁹.

The son of a 'hired peasant', later prominent playwright Mykola Kulish (1892–1937) treated his benefactors differently. He was grateful to the intelligentsia of the village of Chaplynka, who raised money for his studies at the Oleshkiv People's School. The money lasted him for some time, but then he had to live on the 'handouts of the bourgeois' of the Oleshkiv Charitable Society, whom he hated. Feeling like a 'plebeian', he began to admire social democratic ideas; at school he had already become known as a 'rebel' who 'provided examples of a stupid *muzhyk*'s tone'. In 1908, with the support of 'some young teachers' M. Kulish enrolled in a gymnasium, which in 1913 was closed 'by the higher authorities, because the sons of cooks, coachmen, and *muzhyks* studied there'⁴⁰.

One form of social discrimination against the peasantry in access to culture was the legally established separation between 'common people's reading' and 'general reading' from 1848. Accordingly, the concept of 'people's literature' was distinguished from 'literature' and defined as 'a set of works accessible in terms of content and form to the understanding of the broad masses of the people or those intended for the purpose of enlightenment'⁴¹ (editions 'accessible to understanding' were considered *luboks*). Enlightening 'literature for the people' varied considerably in its approach to composition. However, according to the Russian book critic Nikolai Rubakin (1862–1945), the 'doctrine of special literature for the people' itself, was a relic of views regarding the division of the people into 'white and black bone': 'rough, dark, uneducated' representatives of 'black bone' were allegedly unable to perceive 'subtleties of aesthetics'

³⁹ Сами, pp. 320, 323, 333–335.

⁴⁰ Ibidem, pp. 259–261.

⁴¹ Ф. Брокгауз, И. Ефрон, Энциклопедический словарь. Современная версия, Москва 2002, p. 396.

and 'rise to abstract judgments'. This doctrine also underpinned the often-unacceptable instructional tone of certain educational works, and the idea that 'naive, childishly simple-minded people' required special literature. Even some intellectuals who cared about people's education equated minds of peasants with those of children. They presented 'ABC truths' to the peasants in a childlike form. Catalogues of 'books for children's and popular reading' appeared, disregarding the difference 'between a peasant's formed worldview and the judgements of a child'⁴². N. Rubakin proposed differentiating readers not on the basis of their social status, but according to their educational level⁴³.

One of the goals of Russian intellectuals producing special literature for the people was to contrast it with *luboks* as harmful 'mental fodder' and lower-class literature⁴⁴. Modern historians of reading, on the other hand, emphasize the role of such mass publications as the main reading material of the working classes⁴⁵. According to literary critic Jeffrey Brooks, such literature in the Russian Empire was largely 'formulaic'. The growth of the number of readers and the emergence of 'literature for the people' occurred rapidly, so neither the existing forms of literature nor Western models suited the readers: 'The first authors were forced to create new literary formulas, taking into account the capabilities and tastes of readers. Over time, these formulas persevered, and readers learned them well'⁴⁶. *Lubok* publishers were known for their 'lower-class' background and low level of education⁴⁷: 'no education, and only monetary interests'⁴⁸. For the 'composition' of books, they hired authors of plebeian origin who adapted the available literary material to suit 'new readers'. The most famous Russian *lubok* author was the peasant Ivan Ivin, whose books were distributed in larger circulations than those of Leo Tolstoy⁴⁹.

It is worth noting that when N. Rubakin wrote about 'people's writers' he was interested in authors working with education-oriented publishing

⁴² "Северный Вестник" 1891, no. 4, p. 113.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

⁴⁴ For more, see: С. Ан-ский [Ш. Раппопорт], *Очерки народной литературы*, С.-Петербург 1894.

⁴⁵ M. Lyons, *New Readers in Nineteenth Century: Women, Children, Workers*, in: *A History of Reading in the West*, eds. G. Cavallo, R. Chartier, Amherest 1999, pp. 313–344.

⁴⁶ Д. Брукс, *Грамотность в России, 1861–1928*, in: *Чтение в дореволюционной России*, vol. 1, prep. А. Рейтблат, Москва 1991, p. 90.

⁴⁷ So, for instance, Timofei Gubanov, a man of Russian peasant origin, who opened a *lubok* publishing house in Kyiv, was illiterate. See: С. Петров, *Книжкова справа в ієві*, Київ 2002, p. 136.

⁴⁸ "Зоря" 1889, no. 2, pp. 33–34.

⁴⁹ А. Рейтблат, *Лубочная книга*, Москва 1990, pp. 5–6.

houses, not commercial ones⁵⁰. I. Ivin's *lubok* texts had no chance of being published in Russian magazines, but their editors were interested in him as a 'peasant' who shared his observations about publications popular in the rural milieu⁵¹.

Beginning at least in the late 1870s, *lubok* publishers began producing books and pictures with a Ukrainian component. It is not known whether they always turned to ordinary authors of Ukrainian origin, but, for instance, the compiler of one of the *lubok* collections *Malorossiiskie pesni* (Malorosian songs) (Moscow, 1889), was an author with the Ukrainian surname Hryshko Ostapenko⁵². Ukrainian activist, writer and publisher Borys Hrinchenko (1863–1910) noted that *lubok* publishers hired 'all kinds of people' who did not care about education, but instead 'spoiled Ukrainian folklore' and stole and altered the works of Ukrainian writers⁵³.

UKRAINIAN AUTHORS OF PEASANT ORIGIN IN THE IMPERIAL POLITICAL SPACE

Authors of peasant origin who decided to become Ukrainian writers risked falling into the force field of not only class relations but also national-imperial tensions. In the situation of 'cultural colonialism'⁵⁴, 'the self-proclaimed role' of Russia as a 'modernizer and civilizer'⁵⁵ in the Ukrainian case was supplemented by claims that the Ukrainian language did not exist and that Ukraine was no more than 'Malorosia'. In the sphere of print, this manifested both at the level of censorship control and in publishing practices. In 1872, Nazarii Shybitko identified himself as a 'Ukrainian Cossack'; in 1886, however, his next book was published with the signature *Malorosian. Samobyt. Shubytko.* S. Zhuk recalled that his first printed work was a Russian-language theatre review (1902), under which the editor replaced the signature 'Ukrainian' with 'Malorosian'⁵⁶. Responding to consumer demand, the Moscow *lubok* publisher – Yevgenii Gubanov

⁵⁰ Н. Рубакин, *op. cit.*

⁵¹ "Русское Обозрение" 1893, no. 10, pp. 768–783.

⁵² "Киевская Старина" 1905, no. 6, p. 216.

⁵³ "Зоря" 1889, no. 2, pp. 33–34.

⁵⁴ М. Павлишин, *Козаки в Ямайці: постколоніальні риси у сучасній українській культурі*, "Слово і час" 1994, 4–5, pp. 65–71.

⁵⁵ M. Tlostanova, *Between the Russian/Soviet Dependencies, Neoliberal Delusions, Dewesternizing Options, and Decolonial Drives*, "Cultural Dynamics" 2015, 27, 2, p. 272.

⁵⁶ Самі, pp. 199–203.

produced Ukrainian-language works, but believed that the '*khokhol*⁵⁷' language' had to be 'processed' so that it could be understood by Russian readers, and ideally should disappear altogether⁵⁸. In some instances, *luboks* contained so many imitations of Ukrainian words that it gave rise to the statement: 'How strange and incomprehensible is this language composed by Malorosians!'⁵⁹.

Many writers admitted in their autobiographies that their first literary works were written in Russian: they did not have the opportunity to freely acquire knowledge in their native language. Ukrainian-language schooling was prohibited. The authorities only allowed the opening of *Prosvitas* (Enlightenment) (Ukrainian societies for popular enlightenment) in 1906, but their activities were limited. Even the ability to read texts by Ukrainian writers was minimized. Since the implementation of the Valuev Circular (1863) and the Ems Decree (1876), activists of the Ukrainian movement had to make significant efforts to publish Ukrainian books, yet the establishment of state control over the distribution of printed products in rural areas rendered these publications hardly accessible to peasants. An important role was played by the partial lifting of the restrictions on Ukrainian theatre performances, which the Ukrainian movement achieved in 1881. Ukrainian literary critic Serhii Yefremov (1876–1939) stressed the value of this achievement 'for the education of the Ukrainian public, for the preparation of future readers of our literature and press, for the spread of Ukrainian awareness'⁶⁰; in his view, 'the theatre had become a powerful assistant to literature, because it had gone down to meet the public, seek it out, and go where the book could not reach'⁶¹.

Novice writers who focused on mass commercial publications reworked folklore, recounted life stories seen or heard, told anecdotes of everyday life, and imitated well-known literary works or combined elements of them. An author calling himself 'Cossack Ye. S. Kopyl' borrowed a 'bloody' murder plot from a story by Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko (1778–1843). Hryhorii Pavlenko-Pavlus combined a reworking of Shevchenko's *Kateryna* with anecdotes from 'rural life'. In the *lubok* songbook *Oi, za gaiem, gaiem* (Oh, There Behind the Grove) (1901), only one folk song was included; the remaining works were by 'people's poets' Denys Pygulin and Kyril Andriichuk, who described their love adventures⁶².

⁵⁷ *Khokhol* – exonym, a derogatory Russian name for Ukrainians.

⁵⁸ "Зоря" 1893, no. 11, pp. 340–341.

⁵⁹ "Кіевская Старина" 1905, no. 4, pp. 9–11.

⁶⁰ С. Єфремов, *Про дні минулі (спогади)*, Київ 2011, p. 366.

⁶¹ *Idem, Iсторія*, op. cit., p. 501.

⁶² V. Voloshenko, *Cheap*, pp. 236–237.

In the 1890s, censors recorded the birth of 'a new type of writers from the common people', sceptically evaluating the quality of their literary production: 'Their works, in addition to their glaring illiteracy, which sometimes reaches the point of meaninglessness, differ in that the authors do not rise to objective creativity, but are engaged in exposing small facts that relate to the writers themselves or a small circle of people close to them'⁶³. At the same time, censors routinely allowed such texts to be published, even those that were frankly illiterate. Thus, in 1901, censors approved for publication Roman Pustohvar's poems that were difficult to even understand⁶⁴. On the other hand, texts that exposed social inequality or contained 'dreams of a free Ukraine' were considered 'inconvenient in terms of censorship'⁶⁵. According to S. Yefremov, works of Ukrainian fiction "were not banned as a matter of principle, but everything marked by talent and independence hopelessly disappeared in the censorship archives and only home-spun products of talentless poets passed through the censorship bars, as if to make it more convenient for official commentators to cite them as examples of the poverty and insignificance of all Ukrainian literature"⁶⁶. In 1902, head of the Olexandrivsk (Zaporizhzhia) *zemstvo* bookstore (born in the Russian city of Kostroma) was convinced that only funny stories could be told in Ukrainian⁶⁷. In 1913, Ukrainian writer and politician Volodymyr Vynnychenko (1880–1951) noted the role of '*khokhol* anecdotes' in shaping attitudes towards the Ukrainian language portraying it as a 'peasant woman'⁶⁸.

Comparison with the peasantry was used as a putdown for everything Ukrainian. For many 'educated Russians', the Ukrainian language was considered 'the language of *muzhyks*, slaves'⁶⁹. D. Kovalenko-Kosaryk's teacher called Shevchenko a 'fool-*muzhyk*'⁷⁰. According to the bibliographer Volodymyr Doroshenko (1879–1963), even for Russian democrats, this Ukrainian poet expressed the protest 'not of the nation, but of the disenfranchised, offended lower class'⁷¹. The Swiss historian Andreas Kapeller argues that the Russian government and public failed to recognize the identity of the Ukrainian language and culture. Until

⁶³ ЦДІАК, фонд КМФ 19, опис 1, справа 21, п. 88.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 226, 287.

⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 227.

⁶⁶ С. Єфремов, *Історія*, p. 500.

⁶⁷ "Літературно-Науковий Вістник" 1902, no. 18, pp. 36–37.

⁶⁸ "Маяк" 1913, no. 41, p. 10.

⁶⁹ "Літературно-Науковий Вістник" 1901, no. 15, pp. 1–2.

⁷⁰ Самі, pp. 242–243.

⁷¹ "Літературно-Науковий Вістник" 1901, no. 15, pp. 1–2.

the early 20th century, Ukrainians were mostly treated as Malorosians loyal to the empire or ridiculed them as simple, uncultured peasants, *Khokhols*, casting Ukrainian culture as provincial and rural, and Ukrainians as an 'uneducated, inferior peasant people'⁷².

Against imperial pressure, peasant representatives had opportunities to become part of the Ukrainian literary process (not the Russian or Malorosian one). Support for their literary activity could be purely cultural or also political in nature, and took place in the context of *narodoliubstvo* and ideas about the need to form a Ukrainian intelligentsia. Mykola Kostomarov (1817–1885), a public figure since the 1840s and eminent historian, emphasized that raising the educational level of the people should result in 'a group of nationally conscious intellectuals who, in combination with the nobility, will continue to fight for the cultural development of Ukraine'⁷³. Mykhailo Drahomanov (1841–1895), a leading figure of the Kyiv *hromada*⁷⁴, also defended the idea of educating a Ukrainian intelligentsia to direct its forces towards cultural and organizational work among the common people⁷⁵.

From the 1880s to the early 1900s, the expansion of institutional support for Ukrainian authors, regardless of social origin, was especially promoted by Ukrainian activists associated with the *hromadas*. They contributed to the publication of some works by writers from the peasantry in Galicia. With their involvement, Galician journals discussed works printed by various types of publishers in the Russian Empire (due to the Russian government's ban on Ukrainian periodicals until 1905). Moreover, from the mid–1890s, permanent Ukrainian publishing houses were founded in Chernihiv, Kharkiv and St. Petersburg; by the early 1900s, representatives of the St. Petersburg Hromada had taken over management of the *Blahodiine tovarystvo z poshyrennia deshevych i zahal-nokorysnych knyh dla narodu*. From 1900 onward, the spread of Ukrainian–language publications were also facilitated by Ukrainian political parties. In particular, since 1908 the *Tovarystvo Ukrainskykh Postupovtsiv*

⁷² А. Каппелер, *Мазепинці, малороси, хохли: українці в етнічній ієпархії Російської імперії*, "Київська Старовина" 2001, 5 (341), pp. 1315.

⁷³ О. Гончар, *Микола Костомаров: постать історика на тлі епохи*, Київ 2017, p. 117.

⁷⁴ *Hromadas* – national and cultural societies of the Ukrainian intelligentsia during the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, whose activities were primarily cultural and socio-political. The first such societies emerged in Kyiv and St. Petersburg in the 1850s, and more were later founded in Poltava, Kharkiv, Odesa, Chernihiv, and other Ukrainian cities.

⁷⁵ О. Аркуша, *Український національно–політичний рух у Галичині наприкінці 80–х рр. XIX ст.*, "Україна: культурна спадщина, національна свідомість, державність" 1997, 3–4, pp. 119, 134.

(Society of Ukrainian Progressives) (1908–1917) was notable for its coordination of Ukrainian cultural work. New platforms for publicizing the works of Ukrainian-speaking writers in Dnieper Ukraine appeared from 1905 alongside the increase in the number of Ukrainian publishing houses and establishment of Ukrainian periodicals.

There were many cases of personal support for talented people from the peasantry. In the 1880s, the publication of information about Musii Kononenko (1864–1922), the son of a former serf, caused a wide public outcry. Due to financial difficulties, the boy was able to study for only two winters. As a teenager, he was left fatherless, and in 1880 his relatives sent him to work in Kyiv. M. Kononenko's poetic abilities were noticed by members of the Kyiv *hromada*, who insisted that he receive a better education, and find a more suitable occupation, and helped him publish his poem *Neshchasne Kokhannia* (Unhappy Love) (1883)⁷⁶. The introductory article to the publication was written by the publisher of the Kyiv *hromada*, Luka Ilnytskyi (1844–?), in which he expressed concern that the author's social position did not contribute to the development of his talent, and expressed hope that the public would notice the capable, self-taught man of the people⁷⁷. In 1887, the activist of the Odesa *hromada*, bibliographer Mykhailo Komarov (1844–1913) was concerned that in the process of preparing for the teachers' exam M. Kononenko was conscripted to the army, and Ukrainian literature might lose a poet⁷⁸. However, eventually M. Kononenko succeeded in establishing himself as a writer and publicist, an activist of the Ukrainian political and cooperative movement⁷⁹.

Alongside M. Komarov, the life path and creative achievements of M. Kononenko were discussed by B. Hrinchenko⁸⁰ and literary critic Omelian Ohonovskyi (1833–1894)⁸¹ in the Galician "Zoria" ("Star") (1880–1897). 'Horlytsia' (a pen name) published a poem – dedicated to the poet who knew 'well the bitter fate' of the people and could speak 'sincerely' about it⁸². Information about M. Kononenko also appeared in the columns of the Russian-language Kyiv newspapers "Zaria" ("Dawn") (1880–1886) and "Kievljanin" ("The Kyivan") (1864–1919)⁸³. The publishers of these

⁷⁶ "Зоря" 1887, 2, pp. 35–36.

⁷⁷ Л. Ільницький, К поеме „Нещасне Кохання”. От издателя, in: *Нещасне кохання. Скомпонував крестьянин М. С. Кононенко. Поэма*, Киев 1883, pp. I–II.

⁷⁸ М. Комар, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–36.

⁷⁹ В. Марочко, Кононенко Мусій Степанович, in: *Енциклопедія історії України*: у 10 т., vol. 5, ed. В. Смолій, Київ 2009, p. 32.

⁸⁰ "Зоря" 1889, no. 2, pp. 32–33.

⁸¹ "Зоря" 1893, no. 11, pp. 215–217.

⁸² "Зоря" 1889, no. 5, p. 79.

⁸³ О. Огоновський, *op. cit.*, pp. 215–217.

periodicals did not have Ukrainophile sympathies and drew attention primarily to the poet's peasant origin. It should be noted that the covers of his first two books bore the inscription 'Composed by the Peasant Musii Kononenko'. Emphasizing the author's social status appears to have been a strategy for obtaining censorship permission to print a Ukrainian-language book under conditions of public interest in the work of a spokesman for the people.

Under different political conditions, the life story of Klym Polishchuk (1891–1937) received broad media coverage. In 1906, Ukrainian periodicals widely reprinted an article that had appeared in 1905 in the local newspaper "Volyn" ("Volhynia") (1882–1918) about a capable orphan who wrote 'good poems', had the ability to learn, but lacked the opportunity to realise it. After that, Ukrainian intellectuals began to assist him with books and guidance. The member of the *Blahodiine tovarystvo z poshyrennia deshevych i zahalnokorysnych knyh dla narodu* Yukhym Hrebiniuk (1854 [1852]–1912) was particularly supportive. At Hrebiniuk's insistence, K. Polishchuk moved to St. Petersburg to study at the School of Art and Drawing in 1907–1909. At the same time, he began publishing articles in the Ukrainian newspaper "Rada" ("Council") (1906–1914) and the magazine "Ridnyi Krai" ("Native Land") (1905–1916), and then in other periodicals of Dnieper Ukraine and Galicia. In 1909, he sought advice on the nature of literary work from the writer Hanna Barvinok (1828–1911). Soon, in 1912 K. Polishchuk himself took the initiative to establish in Zhytomyr a Ukrainian magazine promoting 'new literary directions'. In 1913, he founded the publishing house *Sterni* (Stubble) with the intention of publishing books by 'young writers'⁸⁴.

Acquaintance with Hryhorii Sherstiuk (1882–1911) was of decisive importance for the political self-determination and professional development of Spyrydon Cherkasenko (1876–1940). This public activist and academic helped the neophyte learn the history of Ukrainian literature and the Ukrainian political movement. Later, they jointly founded the pedagogical magazine "Svitlo" ("Light") (1910–1914) and the publishing house *Ukrainskyi Uchytel* ("Ukrainian Teacher") (1906–1912)⁸⁵. It took a long time for the aspiring writer to learn that the lawyer, writer, and political figure Serhiy Shelukhin (1864–1938) was unable to publish his poems in Odesa due to censorship constraints but sent them to Galicia, where they were published in 1904 in the "Literaturno-Naukovyi

⁸⁴ *Самi*, pp. 355–356.

⁸⁵ Mykola Dmytriev (1867–1908), one of the founders of "Ridnyi Krai", and the writer Panas Myrnyi (1849–1920), who were connected with the hromadas, also took part in the establishment of this publishing house.

Vistnyk". The poet Mykola Cherniavskyi (1868–1938) not only advised S. Cherkasenko on sources for learning the literary Ukrainian language but also managed to publish his poems in the almanac for 'young Ukrainian writers' *Persha Lastivka* (The Early Swallow) (1906). From 1906, S. Cherkasenko began producing Ukrainian textbooks (the first was commissioned by the *Blahodiine tovarystvo z poshyrennia deshevych i zahalkorysnych knyh dla narodu*) and contributing to Ukrainian periodicals⁸⁶. During the same years, Oleksa Dikhtyar (1886–1936) began publishing his works in Ukrainian periodicals. The future writer graduated from the Novo-Buh Teachers' Seminary (where H. Sherstiuk and S. Cherkasenko had previously studied) in 1905 he was the leader of Ukrainian political club there. O. Dikhtyar began his literary career under the guidance of P. Myrnyi, M. Dmytriiev, and H. Kovalenko. While studying at the Poltava Teachers' Institute, he received a scholarship a scholarship from the Poltava *zemstvo*⁸⁷.

In 1910–1915, while working in the Poltava *zemstvo*, M. Ivchenko took 'first serious steps in social work and Ukrainisation'⁸⁸. He began his career as a journalist among the Russian intelligentsia in Stavropol, and then focused on the 'prospects of Russian writing for the general public', which 'pleased the young heart with hoped-for glory'. Returning to Ukraine, during expeditions to collect statistical data for the *zemstvo*, M. Ivchenko interacted extensively with peasants. Feeling that he himself was 'bone of their bones', he became 'ashamed to hold on to his Russian heritage'. Moreover, in Poltava the future writer became part of the Ukrainian intellectual milieu. The changes in his worldview were influenced by his colleagues at the Statistical Bureau: ethnographer and member of the Kyiv *hromada* Oleksandr Rusov (1847–1915), member of the *Tovarystvo Ukrainskykh Postupovtsiv* Hryhorii Rotmistrov (1864–1940), historian and ethnographer Lev Padalka (1859–1927), and others⁸⁹. M. Ivchenko joined the work of spreading Ukrainian literature among the peasantry and seeking out 'persons of value for the public', and became a contributor to Ukrainian periodicals. He began writing short fiction in 1914. His first printed literary work was an essay published in 1916 in the magazine "*Promin*" ("Sunbeam") (1916–1917), edited by V. Vynnychenko⁹⁰.

S. Yefremov recalled the support given by the Ukrainian public activist and philanthropist Yevhen Chykalenko (1861–1929) to the 'newly

⁸⁶ *Cami*, pp. 431–432, 434.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 168–169.

⁸⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 221, 224.

⁸⁹ NBUV, IR, fond 27, sprava 1095, p. 19.

⁹⁰ NBUV, IR, fond 27, sprava 405, pp. 16–17, 22–23.

discovered tillers of the native soil' (now more metaphorically than literally) Archyp Teslenko (1882–1911), Stepan Vasylchenko (1878–1932), and Oleksandr Oles (1878–1944)⁹¹. For O. Oles himself, a trip to Poltava to attend the unveiling of the monument to the classic of modern Ukrainian literature Ivan Kotliarevskyi (1769–1838) in 1903 was memorable. The young poet was greatly affected by his acquaintance with B. Hrinchenko, the prominent Ukrainian poetess Lesia Ukrainka (1871–1913), and other Ukrainian cultural figures. After this trip, he finally chose Ukrainian as the language of his work. In 1904, O. Oles met Oleksandra Efymenko (1848–1918), the famous historian and member of the *Kharkivske Tovarystvo Hramotnosti* (Kharkiv Literacy Society) (1869–1920), who encouraged him to publish poetry. His debut poem was published in the Odesa almanac *Bahattia* (Bonfire) (1905). In 1907, O. Yefymenko found a publisher in Petro Stebnytskyi (1862–1923), one of the leaders in the *Blahodiine tovarystvo z poshyrennia deshevych i zahalnokorysnych knyh dlia narodu* and the St. Petersburg hromada. In the same year, the first collection of poetry by O. Oles was published⁹².

Another activist of the *Kharkivske Tovarystvo Hramotnosti*, historian Dmytro Bahalii (1857–1932), supported the adult (at the time of meeting him) 'peasant poetess' Marusia Volvach (Volvachivna) (1841– around 1910) in her desire to study, and also helped her publish her poems. For assistance in distributing her books, she turned to B. Hrinchenko. However, in 1903, in a letter to Ivan Franko, she complained that she lacked the kind of support from intelligentsia that, in her view, was enjoyed by Shevchenko⁹³.

By the beginning of the 20th century, Shevchenko's name was already so well known that many people tried to copy his style of writing and interpret his stories. New writers 'saw in his biography a model for fashioning their own identity'⁹⁴. After 1905, with the development of Ukrainian journalism and expansion of the cultural activities of cooperatives, *Prosvita*, and Ukrainian parties, the popularization of his personality and work gained new momentum. Articles and books about him not only familiarized the readers with the 'life and deeds' of a peasant poet who 'faithfully and sincerely described the people's life' and sought to bring

⁹¹ С. Єфремов, *Про днi*, p. 508.

⁹² Л. Гарбар, Олександр Олесь (1878–1944): співець української души, <http://www.nbuv.gov.ua/node/6321> [access: 3.02.2024].

⁹³ І. Лисенко, *Маруся Вольвачівна*, in: *Маруся Вольвачівна – незаслужено забута українська письменниця: Вибр. твори*, prep. І. Лисенко, Київ 2008, p. 3–17.

⁹⁴ Ukrainian historian Yaroslav Hrytsak thus describes the influence of Ivan Franko, but it was no less true of the social significance of Shevchenko. See: Я. Грицак, *Пророк*, p. 12.

enlightenment to the Ukrainian masses. They taught readers to honour the 'bequests' of Shevchenko as a national figure, the 'apostle of truth and learning' who contributed to the 'sincere tilling of the native Ukrainian language'⁹⁵. These lessons were earnestly internalized by readers in one of his poems, M. Plevako's correspondent Oleksa Matienko from the village of Dubativka described Shevchenko as 'our great poet' who 'forged the Ukrainian language' and suffered much grief and died for the Ukrainian people⁹⁶. During 'evenings of remembrance' for Shevchenko, organized for peasants, participants recited his poems, staged plays by Ukrainian playwrights, and had the opportunity to demonstrate their own literary talents⁹⁷.

Editors of periodicals sought to broaden their readers' understanding of the Ukrainian literary pantheon by promoting the works of both established and emerging authors, including O. Oles, A. Teslenko, O. Kovalenko, Yurii Tyshchenko (1880–1953), and others⁹⁸. Novice writers found models for their own work – for example, D. Kovalenko-Kosaryk admired the works of A. Teslenko, O. Oles, and S. Vasylchenko⁹⁹.

S. Yefremov wrote that Ukrainian 'literary output' was created not only by authors of fiction but also by 'workers in the field of journalism and literary criticism'¹⁰⁰. He noted that already in the first years of its existence, Ukrainian periodicals 'attracted and educated' new cadres¹⁰¹. Writers' autobiographies provide ample evidence that these periodicals became the principal venues for publishing their fiction and journalism. For example, the first printed works of the poet Yakov Mamontov (1888–1940) appeared in 1907 in "Ridnyi Krai". Later, he also published in the "Literaturno-Naukovyi Vistnyk", "Rada", "Ukrainska Khata" ("Ukrainian Home") (1909–1914), and other periodicals¹⁰².

However, publishers and editors did not limit themselves to supporting new journalists and writers. They sought to encourage as many peasants as possible 'to take up the pen' to describe their economic, social and cultural life, attitudes toward current political issues, etc. In this way, newspapers and magazines were to become centres for Ukrainian public

⁹⁵ "Рідля" 1911, no. 7, pp. 223–231.

⁹⁶ NBUV, IR, fond 27, sprava 413, p. 7.

⁹⁷ "Засів" 1912, no. 11, pp. 118–119.

⁹⁸ "Рідля" 1911, no. 7, p. 215; no. 10, p. 279; "Засів" 1912, no. 3, p. 25; no. 10, p. 89; "Сніп" 1912, no. 42, p. 16.

⁹⁹ Самi, pp. 241–246.

¹⁰⁰ С. Єфремов, *Історія*, p. 593.

¹⁰¹ *Ibidem*, p. 571.

¹⁰² Самi, pp. 263–365.

dialogue. Editorial boards called on peasants to become 'readers-staffers' and 'readers-supporters' to ensure their voices were heard and to coordinate efforts to meet their needs. Peasant 'staffers' were to become intermediaries bringing new ideas to their villages and explaining to others 'the benefits of better culture, science, knowledge, and a good book'¹⁰³. According to a correspondent of "Dniprovi Khvyli" ("Dnipro's Waves") (1910–1913), the first such materials appeared in the pages of the "Rada"¹⁰⁴, but they were incidental, unlike the experience of later periodicals. He was convinced that peasants' descriptions of their lives – 'little known to intellectuals' – were valuable to all readers, and therefore proposed creating sections such as 'Grain Growers – Peasants about Themselves' in all Ukrainian popular magazines and newspapers¹⁰⁵.

Without documentary evidence, it is difficult to determine how many reports from 'local peasant correspondents' were in fact written by members of the editorial staff. The peasant readers also expressed doubts about the authenticity of villagers' letters and notes. For example, in 1911, the editors of the bilingual newspaper "Khleborob / Khliborob" ("Grain-Grower") (1907–1918) printed a notice about a suspicious rural reader who decided to clarify this issue directly in the editorial office. Naturally the editors dispelled his doubts and encouraged potential correspondents not to be afraid of writing, assuring them that grammatical errors would be corrected¹⁰⁶. The call to peasants not to be ashamed that 'they are weak in grammar or do not know how to express their thoughts well on paper' was echoed in "Dniprovi Khvyli": 'The main thing is the content'¹⁰⁷.

Readers became increasingly active, and editorial offices were filled with their complaints containing 'tips and wishes, demands and ultimatums, insults and disappointments'¹⁰⁸. Tryfon Tataryn (1886–?) who often identified himself in his articles as a 'peasant', once reproached those members of the reading public who refused to read Ukrainian periodicals because, in their view, these were not written in the same language in which 'Shevchenko wrote his poems'¹⁰⁹.

¹⁰³ "Рілля" 1912, no. 19, pp. 483–485.

¹⁰⁴ This was incorrect, because a section for 'educated correspondents' and articles signed by 'a peasant' were also featured in an earlier newspaper, "Hromadska Dumka" ("Public Opinion"), which was published from January to August 1906. See, inter alia: "Громадська Думка" 1906, no. 79, p. 3; no. 175, p. 3; "Рідний край" 1906, 40, pp. 8–9.

¹⁰⁵ "Дніпрові хвилі" 1911, no. 16–17, pp. 234–236.

¹⁰⁶ "Хлебороб (Хлібороб)" 1911, no. 23, pp. 1322–1325.

¹⁰⁷ "Дніпрові хвилі" 1911, no. 16–17, pp. 234–236.

¹⁰⁸ С. Єфремов, *Історія*, p. 570.

¹⁰⁹ "Дніпрові Хвилі" 1913, no. 5, pp. 73–77.

For authors of peasant background who deliberately chose the Ukrainian language for their literary work, the expansion of publishing opportunities after 1905 opened up access to 'symbolic profits'¹¹⁰ in the form of recognition from the 'general public' or experts. This recognition was important, since the situation regarding economic compensation remained difficult. The Ukrainian publishing industry needed philanthropists. Public fundraising barely covered the costs of publishing and payments to writers were meagre. Many of them worked to improve their professional skills, but could they rely on writing as a 'profession' that could secure their livelihood?

According to Yu. Tyshchenko, in 1909 O. Oles came to Kyiv in search of employment, but 'the remuneration in the editorial offices of Ukrainian publications was miserable': even the "Rada" and "Literaturno-Naukovyi Vistnyk" (the editorial office of the latter was moved from Lviv to Kyiv in 1907) 'could not support a writer or poet on such a salary to provide him with at least a modest living'. At that time, O. Oles had already achieved recognition as a 'first-rate' poet, his collection was read and 're-read by every self-conscious Ukrainian'. Since he 'represented Ukrainians in various circles, during meetings with foreigners and generally everywhere', he was expected to maintain an appropriate appearance and demonstrate 'the opportunity to show his material independence in front of everyone'. Therefore, in 1909–1918 the poet was forced to earn a living as a veterinarian. At the same time, O. Oles took part in the founding of the "Ukrainska Khata", and his works became the 'jewels' of the magazine. He was 'even paid royalties', and was later engaged 'for permanent cooperation with the obligation not to publish his poems in other periodicals'¹¹¹.

For Yu. Tyshchenko, 'professional workers of the pen' were 'people who left an officer's, teachers, or any other life forever'¹¹². However, the example of O. Oles that he cited illustrates the difficulties of pursuing writing as a profession. Many writers had to seek income in other fields, often working as teachers or government officials.

S. Vasylchenko and S. Cherkasenko were among those who had the opportunity to work and earn a living on the staff of Ukrainian periodicals. S. Vasylchenko taught in 1898–1906, before being arrested for participating in strikes. Released from prison in 1908 with a ban on teaching, he supported himself through private tutoring. In 1910, he was invited

¹¹⁰ П. Бурдье, *op. cit.*

¹¹¹ Ю. Тищенко (Сірий), *З моїх зустрічей: Спогади*, prep. О. Сидоренко, Н. Сидоренко, Київ 1997, pp. 76–77, 79–80.

¹¹² *Ibidem*, p. 79.

to head the theatre chronicle department at the “Rada”¹¹³. S. Cherkasenko’s path was similar. After being arrested and banned from teaching in 1910, he was hired at the “Rada”. There he received the same salary as S. Yefremov (3 kopecks per line), but he had to immerse himself in journalism so intensely that he had no time for literary work¹¹⁴.

Many writers (S. Cherkasenko, K. Polishchuk, Yu. Tyshchenko, M. Voronyi, and others) also engaged in editorial and publishing activities. For example, O. Kovalenko became one of the founders of the *Ranok* (Morning) publishing house in 1906, and of the *Kobza* publishing house in 1910; he compiled and published several collections of works by Ukrainian writers and poets.

The category of ‘producers of culture’ born as peasants also included philanthropists. The first self-sustaining Ukrainian publishing house of popular books was founded in 1894 in Chernihiv by B. Hrynenko with the financial support of Ivan Cherevatenko (1865–1893). The son of a former serf who had made a considerable fortune in commerce, himself possessed ‘a talent for writing’ but died at a young age, bequeathing money to fulfil his dream¹¹⁵. Unfortunately, many financial support schemes for Ukrainian writers at the beginning of their literary careers remained unrealised due to insufficient funding. Beginning at least in 1908, the Ukrainian activist and writer Olena Pchilka¹¹⁶ (1849–1930) publicly called for the creation of a society to support ‘helpless authors’ from the people who needed proper education to become ‘good writers’¹¹⁷. Such appeals were not isolated. In 1912, Tykhon Mitrus (1889–1975), a member of the Manuilivka Prosvita, published an article enumerating earlier initiatives to establish a fund to help ‘Ukrainian writers from the people’. The lack of funding prevented the emergence of ‘new Oleses’ who might have appeared if they had been ‘given at least a modest education and the opportunity to live’¹¹⁸.

Efforts by the Ukrainian national movement to support talented peasants did not guarantee their formation as Ukrainian writers with a national outlook. Dmytro Pikhno (1853–1913) is known as one of the leaders

¹¹³ Н. Шумило, *Васильченко Степан Васильович*, in: *Енциклопедія Сучасної України* [Електронний ресурс], eds. І. Дзюба et al., Київ 2005, <https://esu.com.ua/article-32409> [access: 27.05.2024].

¹¹⁴ *Самі*, p. 434.

¹¹⁵ “Зоря” 1894, no. 2, pp. 43–44.

¹¹⁶ O. Pchilka was closely associated with the Kyiv Hromada, and was one of the founders and editors of “Ridnyi Krai”.

¹¹⁷ “Рідний Край” 1908, no. 23, pp. 7–8; no. 29, p. 11; 1909, no. 16, p. 6; “Рідний край і Молода Україна” 1912, no. 10, pp. 9–12.

¹¹⁸ “Сніп” 1912, no. 40, pp. 4–5.

of the *Soiuz Russkogo Naroda* (Union of the Russian People) – a far-right monarchist political organization established in 1905 – and as editor of the “*Kievianin*” in 1879–1911¹¹⁹. Some aspects of his biography remain little known. The Ukrainian medical scientist Martyrii Halyn (1858–1943) recalled that this defender of the ‘throne and fatherland’ grew up as ‘a peasant child, taken from the poor home of a *muzhyk* (a Cossack, I think, from Poltava)’ as household help by ‘one of the Kyivan Ukrainophiles’ who, already in Kyiv, noticed ‘some abilities and a love of books’ in the boy and sent him to school at his own expense. Later, D. Pikhno graduated from gymnasium and Kyiv University, attained the rank of professor, but ‘repaid’ his benefactor and ‘all Ukrainophiles’ by becoming ‘the fiercest enemy of Ukrainians’ and a ‘pillar of reaction’, and turning the “*Kievianin*” into ‘a refuge for incessant ‘loyalist’ denunciations of Ukrainians and Poles’¹²⁰.

PEASANTS VS. MASTERS OF THE WORD: FINDING A WRITER’S STATUS

Individuals of peasant origin who attempted to become part of the Ukrainian literary field felt, to varying degrees, pressure experienced ‘(pseudo)literature’ and criteria associated with prevailing notions of a ‘legitimate writer’¹²¹. The ‘cultural agents’ who conditionally ‘controlled access to the status of a writer’¹²² in this field (primarily publishers, editors, and reviewers) had to determine their stance toward various writers, including authors of commercial Ukrainian-language publications and numerous ‘poets from the people’, whose works overwhelmed ‘every Ukrainian editorial office’¹²³.

Ukrainian activists studied the offerings of the Ukrainian-language commercial literary market and reviewed them; in the absence of publishing houses of their own, they made attempts to publish Ukrainian works with commercial presses. To improve the work of Ukrainian publishing societies (after their establishment), they attempted to improve their work by adopting certain commercial methods of book distribution. Their dissatisfaction and resistance were caused by the spread of ‘Malorosian’

¹¹⁹ В. Любченко, *Піхно (Піхно) Дмитро Іванович*, in: *Енциклопедія історії України [Електронний ресурс]*, http://www.history.org.ua/?termin=Pikhno_D [access: 11.06.2024].

¹²⁰ М. Галин, *Сторінки з минулого*, in: Л. Василевський et al., *Спогади*, ed. Р. Смаль-Стоцький, vol. 18, Варшава 1932, pp. 87–88.

¹²¹ П. Бурдье, *op. cit.*

¹²² *Ibidem*.

¹²³ “Кіевская Старина” 1904, 6, p. 150; “Рідний Край” 1908, no. 23, pp. 7–8.

cultural codes in the publications of commercial publishers and the use of works by self-taught writers in the interests of imperial cultural policy (as discussed above). S. Yefremov was outraged that worthwhile Ukrainian publications 'simply drowned among all the junk and rubbish' produced by commercial publishers. The share of 'waste paper' grew 'in dependence and alongside the growth of censorship repression'¹²⁴.

The issue of the literary status of works by *samorodoks* was also addressed separately. S. Yefremov and Volodymyr Durdukivskyi¹²⁵ (1874–1938) agreed that editors were 'bitterly disappointed' in the works of *samorodoks*¹²⁶, among whom there were almost no 'people of at least some ability'. The majority, they argued, were graphomaniacs – 'martyrs of their morbid passion' – whose inflated egos were matched by their lack of reading and their failure to master the craft of writing¹²⁷. O. Pchilka noted with sadness that most of the works of self-taught writers had to be sent 'to the waste basket', because 'there is neither interesting content nor good composition in them; the metre of verse is not maintained [...], even completely crippled words come across'. She had the impression that in the minds of such illiterate writers putting 'their thoughts in lines' were already poetry. Those of them who realised that their poems were unsuccessful would often ask the editors to 'correct what was wrong': 'I am an illiterate person and I do not know how to write what and what mark to put where'. Yet the overall quality of such works was so poor that, after all the corrections were made, the editors had, in effect, become their authors¹²⁸.

Nevertheless, O. Pchilka advocated the most attentive attitude to Ukrainian works written by authors from among the people: although most of their works were 'not perfect', they were the intellectual product of those Ukrainians about whom the intelligentsia 'cared and worried'¹²⁹. The writer never tired of calling on the Ukrainian public to pay attention to 'heartfelt lonely individuals who follow the path of poetry in round-about ways', seeking to write in their native Ukrainian (although almost all of them began by writing in Russian), yet receiving so little response. 'In the field of Ukrainian poetic creativity', such writers, 'people of simple

¹²⁴ С. Єфремов, *В тісних рамциях. Українська книга в 1798–1916 pp.*, Київ 1926, pp. 18–19.

¹²⁵ Both literary critics were involved in the founding of the Ukrainian publishing house Vik (Century) (1895–1918)

¹²⁶ С. Єфремов, *Про дні*, p. 521.

¹²⁷ "Кіевская Старина" 1904, no. 4, pp. 43–45.

¹²⁸ "Рідний Край" 1908, no. 23, pp. 7–8.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*.

birth and soul' were no longer rare, but deserved the same assistance in publishing their first poetic attempts as M. Kononenko, who had once been introduced to the public as a 'poet from the people'. In this 'inattention to the timid singers from the people' O. Pchilka saw a contradiction: 'We, with our books, magazines, seem to want to awaken self-awareness in our people, we would like to develop thought and spiritual work at least in some individuals who stand out'. Finally, 'among those drowsy, deaf and dumb crowds, there are talented souls', yet we behave so coldly'¹³⁰. She explained that the people's poets varied not only in age. Among them were barely literate self-taught persons individuals and school graduates who had 'read something'; poets who knew nothing about the technique of poetry and those who had 'already quite comfortably mastered the verse'; 'reproductions of Shevchenko' and authors whose works displayed a considerable originality in content, images, composition of poems, 'direction of fantasy', turns of phrase, and interpretation of folklore motifs. The editor acknowledged that she felt ashamed to tell 'people's poets in homespun clothes' that their poems could be improved if they studied more, read more, and worked to refine their writing skills¹³¹.

O. Pchilka singled out works in which she sensed a 'living soul' (the presence of a personal opinion, a writer's individuality), even if she understood that their authors had never heard of the theory of poetry. She launched a series of articles in "Ridnyi Krai" in which she described the creative attainments of those authors ('the most ordinary peasants', authors 'in peasant garb') whom she had met personally, supplementing these sketches with samples of their poems. In particular, she once read the poems of the forty-year-old Kornii Hulenko, which he had written down in a small handmade notebook. Those of them that seemed interesting to her displayed 'a good form and great feeling', a 'personal, unborrowed' way of expressing thoughts, and 'pure folk song composition'¹³². In the poems brought to the editorial office by Ivan Rudyi, O. Pchilka found neither talent for verse nor interesting content. However, she felt sympathy for the author, who was deeply distressed by her verdict, since for him poetry was 'the life of his soul'. She asked him to submit more poems, and among them she singled out promising ones that required only minor editing. In her opinion, he could become a good poet if given the opportunity to learn the art of writing¹³³. The 'barely literate' peasant Vasyl Halandyn was also 'not very good at poetry', but in some of his

¹³⁰ "Рідний край і Молода Україна" 1912, 10, pp. 9–10.

¹³¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 10–11.

¹³² "Рідний Край" 1908, no. 23, pp. 7–8.

¹³³ "Рідний Край" 1908, no. 29, p. 11.

poems O. Pchilka noticed a 'living soul'¹³⁴. In the poems of Danylo Koldiazhnyi, 'not young, without any education', she observed many naïve moments, but at the same time noted their sincerity¹³⁵.

In 1905, O. Yefymenko was compelled to publicly defend the decision of the *Kharkivske Tovarystvo Hramotnosti* publishing committee to print Ivan Kalenychenko's pamphlet *Neliudym. Roznova pro te, yak treba v sviti zhyty, shchob buty bahatym* (Nonhumans. A Conversation about How to Live in the World to Be Rich) (1904). She emphasized that the author was a 'real peasant, a grain grower' who wrote in a language 'genuine in its naïve simplicity, which can only be spoken by the people and an artist of genius'. His work was 'the result of personal experience', not an artificial creation¹³⁶.

S. Efremov was not as indulgent in evaluating works of *samorodok* writers, but noted those whom he considered talented. In 1904 he met a 'shy village boy' who had come to Kyiv to buy books and to seek opinions on his stories. After reading his manuscript, the literary critic was impressed by the boy's competent spelling (an unusual feature among 'native writers'), 'beautiful, pure, even fragrant vernacular, distinctive style, interesting content, simple yet profound psychology'. Thus S. Efremov met A. Teslenko and recognized his 'fresh, true' talent¹³⁷, calling him 'the best type of literary *samorodok*'. According to the literary critic, only S. Vasylchenko among his contemporaries possessed the secret of a language comparable to Teslenko's¹³⁸.

In his history of Ukrainian literature, S. Yefremov did not dwell on the social origins of the authors he discussed. For him, their professional characteristics were of primary importance. He wrote about the 'talented' publicist Trokhym Zinkivskyi (1861–1891), 'prominent lyricist' V. Samiylenko, 'priest of beauty, purist of the artistic word' M. Voronyi, the 'outstanding talent of recent years who enjoyed the reputation of a first-rate lyricist' O. Oles, 'playwright, poet and storyteller' S. Cherkasenko, the 'great sound power' of 'our writing' S. Vasylchenko¹³⁹, and others.

Likewise, Yu. Tyshchenko listed S. Cherkasenko, O. Oles, O. Kovalenko, M. Voronyi, Yurii Budiak (1879–1942) as 'masters of the word'. He described the public enthusiasm that accompanied Oles's appearance

¹³⁴ "Рідний край" 1909, no. 16, p. 6.

¹³⁵ "Рідний край і Молода Україна" 1912, no. 10, p. 12.

¹³⁶ "Кіевская Старина" 1905, no. 7/8, pp. 74–76.

¹³⁷ С. Єфремов, *Про дні*, p. 374.

¹³⁸ Idem, *Iсторія*, p. 582.

¹³⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 511, 520, 579–580, 583.

at a Ukrainian literary soiree in Kyiv. To general applause, the prominent Ukrainian composer, member of the Kyiv *hromada* Mykola Lysenko (1842–1912) personally led the moved poet to the place of honour. The audience recited his poems, and then 'old community members and male and female students' gathered around¹⁴⁰.

Critical assessments were shaped by reviewers' personal tastes as well as by the specific characteristics of individual works by the same author. Franko was among the intellectuals who facilitated the publication of O. Kovalenko's first poems, but later wrote about the low poetic value of some of them¹⁴¹. L. Ilnytskyi, who supported M. Kononenko, at the same time noted shortcomings 'in terms of plot development' in his poetry, 'like with any novice poet'¹⁴². B. Hrinchenko was highly critical about the presence of Russisms in one of M. Kononenko's fairy tales (in contrast to his first poems, written 'in at better' language)¹⁴³. S. Efremov planned to publish A. Teslenko's first stories in the magazine "Kievskia Starina" ("Kyivan Antiquities") (1882–1906). However, they appeared 'incapable' to the editor Volodymyr Naumenko (1852–1919), an activist of the Kyiv *hromada*. In 1906, S. Efremov printed them in "Nova Hromada" ("New Community"), which was edited by B. Hrinchenko¹⁴⁴.

Closely connected with the development of Ukrainian journalism, some of the Ukrainian writers of peasant origin themselves became part of the expert cohort holders of symbolic capital¹⁴⁵. Thus, as early as the 1890s, M. Kononenko reviewed collections of new and established authors in the "Zoria". He noted the use of language, the way characters were portrayed, the 'truthfulness and reality' of images, and the presence of 'national feeling'¹⁴⁶. O. Kovalenko, reviewing a book by Yu. Budiak, focused on its content, language, and presentation and explanation of special terms. In recommending this publication to rural readers, he expressed the hope that it would foster 'trust and respect for the Ukrainian book and the Ukrainian word'¹⁴⁷.

¹⁴⁰ Ю. Тищенко (Сірий), *op. cit.*, p. 76.

¹⁴¹ Н. Тихолоз, *Між батьком та сином (Олекса Коваленко, Іван і Тарас Франки: дискурс взаємин)*, "Сіверянський літопис" 2009, no. 2–3, pp. 183–205.

¹⁴² Л. Ільницький, *op. cit.*

¹⁴³ "Зоря" 1889, no. 2, pp. 33–34.

¹⁴⁴ С. Єфремов, *Про дні*, p. 374.

¹⁴⁵ П. Бурдье, *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁶ "Зоря" 1892, no. 9, pp. 175–176; 1895, no. 17, pp. 257–258.

¹⁴⁷ "Українська Хата" 1909, no. 2, pp. 114–115.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The phrase 'from the plough to the pen' in this article's title is primarily metaphorical, as at the turn of the 20th century the Ukrainian peasantry was a highly differentiated social group. The phenomenon of writing practices among a wide range of Ukrainian-language authors of peasant origin attested to the transformation of the social landscape and the erosion of ideas about peasants' social roles. In their attempts to find a niche in the social space of literary production, these individuals encountered a nuanced public perception of them as 'peasants', 'Ukrainian authors', and 'writers'.

Representatives of various social strata who shared the Enlightenment ethos or ideas of *narodoliubstvo* tried to assist talented authors of peasant origin in obtaining an education, publishing, and promoting their works, thereby creating motivational models for potential followers. In their own way, publishers of commercially successful literary products contributed to the transformation of peasants into active participants in the literary field.

At the same time, while trying to gain access to culture and cultural production, peasants continued to bear a vulnerable social identity, experiencing everyday class contempt as *muzhyks*. The underestimation of their intellectual abilities manifested itself not only in outright cases of humiliation, also in comparisons between peasants and children, as well as in efforts to produce special educational literature tailored for them. Manifestations of paternalistic attitudes and 'class racism' were superimposed on the social processes of peasantry's pauperisation, intensifying their sense of social grievance and protest.

The authorities supported the estate-based approach to education by legally distinguishing 'people's literature' and establishing tight control over book printing and book distribution in rural areas. Ukrainian-language works by poorly educated peasant writers were employed within the framework of imperial cultural policy. As part of the anti-Ukrainian censorship regime, censors approved the publication of such works, and supported the printing of linguistically and stylistically subpar commercial offerings. Such publications were not considered 'useful' and were excluded from catalogues (unlike some Russian-language books by and about 'poets from the people'). Their circulation, however, contributed to the moulding of the 'plebeian, peasant' face of the Ukrainian language, literature, culture, and people. Commercial publishers thus participated in the making of imperial culture 'from below', incorporating elements of Ukrainian culture into it and shaping the identity characteristics of the 'Khokhols' and 'Malorosians' – a process that correlates with the findings of A. Kappeler. At the same time, these semi-literate

publications, which were massively distributed in villages by peddlers, demonstrated that peasants were capable of using their native language to write texts. For their part, Ukrainian activists, when attempting to push Ukrainian manuscripts through the censorship system, emphasized the peasant origins of new authors, thereby shifting attention from the national to the social dimension of their identity.

As a result, authors who chose to write in Ukrainian additionally found themselves in the force field of national-imperial relations, confronting the problem of (un)conscious choice of identity.

The formation of a distinctly Ukrainian identity (not a Russian or Malorosian one) was facilitated by the activities of Ukrainian intellectuals, mainly those associated with the *hromadas*. They acted not only through *zemstvos* and Russian cultural and educational societies. Despite numerous obstacles, they established an institutional basis for the dissemination of the Ukrainian word through the theatre and through the literary output of Ukrainian publishers of books and periodicals. Even in the absence of financial rewards, emerging authors could see the prospect of symbolic profits from Ukrainian literary activity.

Despite the ban on the establishment of Ukrainian educational institutions, Ukrainian activists provided personal support for talented peasants to study within the educational system available in the empire. At the same time, they attended to their protégés' informal education, introducing them to resources for learning the literary Ukrainian language and the history of Ukrainian literature, culture, no and here social and political movements, and integrating them into the Ukrainian cultural milieu. Those writers who internalized Ukrainian cultural values subsequently retransmitted them in their texts and public activities. Some of them became reviewers, editors, and publishers themselves.

Authors of peasant background faced not only the challenges of social and national discrimination. They had to assert themselves as creators of 'literary product' in their relations with the cultural agents that determined their status as writers. While in the 1880s such authors were still rare and the literary aspirations of peasants had to be stimulated, by the early 20th century the editorial offices of Ukrainian publishing houses and periodicals were overwhelmed with submissions from peasants. The risks of refusing to publish their works were connected with the familiar problem of the lack of Ukrainian-language schooling and unimpeded access to Ukrainian literature. Some experts singled out only the most talented authors (highlighting their qualities as professional writers). Others were ready to recognise and support the widest variety of 'people's poets', latching on to any glimpses of literary ability in their works.

The key points emerging from this study are 1) the highlighting of the contradictory nature of public assessments of peasant creativity, influenced as it was by ideological concepts, political factors, and individual perceptions, as well as by the persistence of class stereotypes and their reinterpretation to form a *muzhik* image of Ukrainian culture and of the type of social behaviour undesirable to the authorities ('*muzhik* rebellion'); 2) demonstration of the adjustment of views on peasants and their literary activity through interaction with them in real-life situations and in the practice of charitable work, education, and publishing; in these cases, in place of the stereotypical 'dark', 'downtrodden', 'unknown' peasant masses personalities emerge whose formation was influenced by their individual backgrounds, family traditions of access to culture, ways of changing social status and earning money, trajectories of entering the sphere of Ukrainian-language literary production, goals of literary activity, and awareness of their identity and place in society.

The analysis of the problem using the theoretical approach of Pierre Bourdieu allows authors of peasant origin to be regarded not as an 'unconscious mouthpiece of a social group,' but as participants in the social space of cultural production. An expanded approach to the definition of the concept of the 'writer' draws attention once again to the extensive research conducted by M. Plevako and creates new possibilities for engaging with his scholarly heritage (in combination with other sources) to explore, *inter alia*, the consequences of peasants' involvement in the world of reading and, more broadly, issues concerning the 'intellectual life'¹⁴⁸ of the peasantry, which are scarcely addressed in Ukrainian historiography. Examination of the problems related to the public perception of writers of peasant origin, particularly within intellectual communities, draws attention to the ways in which peasants interacted with other segments of the population at the level of cultural practices.

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Viktoriia Voloshenko – PhD, associate professor, is working on her doctoral dissertation, researching the formation processes of reading practices in the peasant environment of Transnistrian Ukraine at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. She studies the history of the Ukrainian peasantry, reading, the history of popular print culture, issues of national identity and historical memory. Researches the history of socio-political processes in Donetsk region and Luhansk region.

NOTA O AUTORZE

Viktoriia Voloshenko – dr, profesor nadzwyczajny, pracuje nad swoją pracą doktororską, badając procesy kształtowania się praktyk czytelniczych w środowisku chłopskim ukraińskiej części Naddniestrza na przełomie XIX i XX w. Zajmuje się historią ukraińskiego chłopstwa, czytelnictwem, historią popularnej kultury drukowanej, kwestiami tożsamości narodowej i pamięci historycznej. Bada historię procesów społeczno-politycznych w regionie Doniecka i Ługańska.

