

American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages

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Source: *The Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Autumn, 1963), pp. 251-257

Published by: [American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/305335>

Accessed: 12/06/2014 19:59

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Ukrainian Scholarship in the Soviet Union Today

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I have been invited to speak about the present state of Ukrainian studies in the Soviet Union.¹ Limitations of time make a selective approach imperative. Within the scope of this paper it will not be possible to discuss developments in various disciplines, such as historiography, linguistics, and literary scholarship. Neither would it serve any useful purpose to pile up statistics on higher education, the production of scholarly books, the structure of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR, and so on. Such data may be gathered from reference works which are not difficult to obtain. Moreover, a quantitative method of research is frequently irrelevant in things of the mind, unless the objective facts have been put into a framework of interpretation.

The best I can do, in the time assigned to this paper, is to try to sketch, in a few bold strokes, a brief overall outline of the present condition of Ukrainian studies in the Soviet Union. As a matter of fact, my statements will be largely applicable not only to Ukrainian studies, but also to Ukrainian culture in general.

One word of apology appears necessary at this point. Normally it is desirable not to mix questions of scholarship with those of politics. In countries under Communist rule, however, scholarship and cultural life are not autonomous, but are rather largely determined by political circumstances. In those countries the creative spontaneity of the scholar, the writer, the artist batters itself continuously against powerful pressures exercised by the regime. This necessitates taking into account political aspects of our subject.

I am going to assume that the general nature of the Communist system is familiar to the present audience. This enables us to move directly to the next question: Are there any features which essentially distinguish the situation in the Ukraine from that in other

areas under Communist rule, and particularly from other parts of the Soviet Union? To a superficial observer the USSR as a whole presents a fairly uniform outlook. If, for instance, one opens a Ukrainian scholarly journal published in Kiev, one will find there the same themes, the same ideological assumptions, and even the same turns of speech and phrases that one has previously met in a Russian journal in the same field of studies. Even the size, the quality of the paper and the layout of the two journals will be as similar as eggs laid by the same hen. As all the nations of the Soviet Union live under the same political and economic regime, for all are equally exposed to the same indoctrination; and since material conditions of life are largely uniform throughout the entire USSR, it is easy to think of the whole Soviet population as of one homogeneous mass. National differences, which in this perspective appear simply as differences of language, seem to be of only minor importance.

It is my basic contention that the above view, which is assumed by many foreign students of the Soviet Union, is inadequate. Since the Russian Republic is the largest and the leading component part of the USSR, the peculiar position of Ukrainian scholarship and culture may be most conveniently defined by comparing them with those of Russia. Such a scrutiny will reveal that even apparent similarities may sometimes be, in fact, divergencies: when the same policy is applied in two different contexts, it receives in each case a different meaning. Returning to the previously used example, if a Ukrainian journal looks like a version of a Russian journal, it does not follow that Russian and Ukrainian cultures have an inherent tendency to develop on strictly parallel lines. It rather means that Ukrainian scholars and writers are obliged, under Soviet rule, to imitate Russian models made in Moscow. I intend to indicate several significant points in which the contemporary Ukrainian cultural situation differs from the Russian.

1. We normally expect that in any country its own national culture occupies a dominant position. In France this will be the French; in Italy, the Italian; and in the Netherlands, the Dutch culture; and so on. This rule also applies to the countries of the so-called Socialist Bloc. It is true that the Communist government of a given country will try to reorient cultural life in accordance with the precepts of Marxism-Leninism. Even with this added Marxist twist, however, the dominant culture of Poland is Polish; of Rumania, Rumanian, etc. The instruction of Russian is encouraged in all satellite countries, but it remains an instrument of international communications; and one could not say that it is crowding out the native languages and cultures. As far as the Russian Republic itself is concerned, the dominant position of the Russian language and culture is, of course, unquestionable.

The position of the Ukraine is, in this respect, quite different. Ukrainian culture, even taking for granted that she has to wear today a Socialist dress, is not a mistress in her own house; she has to share this house with Russian culture—the latter actually enjoying

a preferential treatment. The role of the Russian culture in the Ukrainian SSR is not limited to the servicing of the needs of the local Russian ethnic minority; neither can it be properly defined as fulfilling the function of a medium of international communications, comparable to that which English has largely assumed in the Western world, or which German used to fulfill among the nations of the former Austrian Empire. The contemporary Ukraine is characterized by a high degree of bilingualism and (if one may use this expression) bi-culturalism. Official propaganda boasts of the equality of languages and cultures, but one is reminded of the classical formula of the late George Orwell: "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others." An important feature of the contemporary balance of cultural forces in the Ukraine is the growing weight of the Russian trend, as one moves up into the higher brackets on the pyramid of power and prestige. The Ukrainian language, for instance, holds its ground in primary and even secondary education, but the country's universities are strongly Russified.

2. Soviet Russia proudly claims to be the legitimate heir of all the glories and achievements of Russian history. This heritage must of course, be, interpreted in the light of Communist ideology, but a Russian scholar and writer is able to avail himself of the spiritual capital accumulated by his nation in the pre-Soviet period. A worker in the field of Ukrainian culture finds himself in a quite different position. The only elements of the Ukrainian heritage tolerated by the regime are those which conform to the postulate of a Russo-Ukrainian "unshakable, fraternal union;" and as large portions of the Ukrainian tradition in fact contradict this postulate, they have to be either falsified, or else banned and suppressed.

This *Gleichschaltung* extends into all areas of Ukrainian cultural life under the Soviets. Even Ukrainian spelling has repeatedly been "reformed," with the sole purpose of making it adhere more closely to the Russian pattern. In no other field are these manipulations more blatant than in the field of history. The past of the country has to be interpreted in such a way as to demonstrate that all blessings came to the Ukrainian people through the connection with Russia, and all misfortunes through separation from Russia. All Ukrainian leaders who at any time have opposed Russian hegemony, either on the political or intellectual plane, must be execrated as scoundrels and traitors. The positive contributions and inspirations which the Ukraine had received from the West must be minimized or simply denied.

3. One of the specific differences between the two East Slavic nations is the definitely more "European" outlook of the Ukrainian cultural and social tradition. Nevertheless, the Ukraine is today much more strictly isolated from the outside world than is Russia. As anyone interested knows, it is not even possible to order Ukrainian publications directly from Kiev; the orders must be placed with an "All-Union" agency in Moscow. The Russian intellectuals, at least those residing in Moscow and Leningrad, have much better op-

portunities for cultural contacts with the West than do their Ukrainian colleagues.

May I provide an example from my personal experience. I attended, in August 1960, the Eleventh International Congress of Historical Sciences in Stockholm, Sweden. All satellite countries of Eastern Europe were represented by delegations of about a dozen members each, and even far-off Mongolia had a delegation of her own. And what about the Ukrainian SSR, a country much larger than any of the "people's democracies"? There was present just a single Ukrainian Soviet historian; he belonged to the general Soviet delegation, in which his role was completely inconspicuous; his name even appeared on the program spelled in the Russian fashion. To make things more ironical, this historian did not speak any Western language. One can only wonder whether his handicap was overlooked by the selecting authorities, or if, quite to the contrary, this might have served him as a special recommendation.

4. An important condition for healthy cultural development is its continuity. A budding scientist and scholar, a young man of letters and an artist, need to be trained in their craft not only from books, but primarily by the guidance and the living example of a master. The Stalinist terror of the 1930's and, to a lesser degree, the ravages of the war, nearly wiped out a whole generation of the Ukraine's intellectual leaders. The Russian cultural elite survived the epoch of the great purges much better; there it was rather an exception for a member of the Academy of Sciences, an eminent writer, etc., to be actually liquidated. In the Ukraine, on the other hand, it was a lucky exception when an intellectual of distinction succeeded in keeping alive through the terrible decade of the 1930's. In the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR, for instance, research in a number of disciplines was discontinued, and the corresponding Institutes and Chairs were abolished for the simple reason that there remained no scholars qualified to fill the gaps created by mass purges. To give an example from historiography, not a single scholar of any academic standing survived in the field of medieval studies.

In recent years, since Stalin's death, opportunities for cultural work have considerably improved. But the Ukrainian scholarly community sorely misses its "lost generation." Mature scholars cannot be improvised, and their lack also hampers the growth of the next generation. The picture we see today in many disciplines, and particularly in Ukrainian studies, is the following. The academic scene is dominated by a few "grand old men," who somehow have survived the epoch of the purges, and who now enjoy, belatedly, a great deal of recognition. Their services are, indeed, invaluable, but as they are not numerous, they must spread themselves out too much. Also, because of advanced age, they quickly pass away. (Two outstanding names in this category are those of the literary scholar, O. I. Bilec'kyj, and of the linguist, L. A. Bulaxovs'kyj, both of whom died recently.) On the other hand, there are many young men and women approximately thirty years old, eager and active, but

still academically raw and somewhat provincial in their intellectual outlook.

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I have discussed the drawbacks which impede Ukrainian scholarship in the USSR. The picture, however, would be one-sided, if I were not to mention also opposite factors which help to rectify, to some extent, the situation.

1. Of great importance was the incorporation into the Ukrainian SSR of those Ukrainian lands which, before 1939, belonged to Poland, Rumania, and Czechoslovakia. This territorial consolidation strengthened the Ukraine's weight as a constituent state of the Soviet Union. It also contributed, in a subtle but essential manner, to the change in mood of Ukrainian society perceptible since the end of the war. Let us remember that the population of the newly attached provinces possessed a high level of civic self-awareness and national militancy, that its mentality had been formed outside the Russian imperial sphere, and its cultural orientation had always been toward the West. There can be little doubt that these West Ukrainian attitudes have had a profound impact on the mind of the inhabitants of the central and eastern (old Soviet) Ukraine, and particularly on the manner of thinking of the intelligentsia.

2. The isolation from the non-Communist world finds some compensation in the increased closeness to the satellite nations of Eastern Europe. The Ukraine borders directly on Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, and, across the Black Sea, also on Bulgaria. The growing integration of the Socialist Bloc necessarily brings about for the Ukraine an intensification of contacts with those neighboring countries. So the unilateral, imposed cultural orientation on Russia is checked. Contacts with Poland are especially valuable. It is generally known that of all satellite countries, Poland enjoys the greatest amount of intellectual freedom. For many Ukrainian scholars and writers Poland is today a veritable "window into Europe," through which light and fresh air penetrate their country. Czechoslovakia is important as an example of modern, Western-style living which, contrasted with drab Soviet realities, appears temptingly sophisticated and comfortable. Bulgaria's cultural heritage and social tradition are very similar to those of the Ukraine. However, compared with Bulgaria, the Ukraine appears to be in many respects richer and more advanced. This gives Ukrainian intellectuals the pleasant feeling that there are at least some foreign contacts in which they are able to make a contribution from their own experience.

3. The activities of the Ukrainian diaspora in the free countries of the West also exercise a stimulating influence on the cultural life of the Soviet Ukraine. The Communist masters of the Ukraine themselves pay a tribute to this role of the exile community by the abuse which in their pronouncements and official propaganda they incessantly heap on the émigrés. As the latter have no material force

whatsoever at their disposal, their impact can be only spiritual: the ideas which the diaspora proclaims coincide with the secret dreams and hopes of the Ukrainian people in the homeland. Operating with very limited resources, Ukrainian groups in Western countries have produced literary and scholarly works of value. These activities are not unknown to the intelligentsia in the Soviet Ukraine, although émigré publications are directly accessible only to restricted, privileged circles. We are not privy to internal discussions which precede policy decisions in the USSR, but there is a high degree of probability that achievements of the diaspora are used by intellectual leaders in the Ukraine as arguments in pressing for concessions from Party authorities. For instance, the decision to publish a Ukrainian Soviet Encyclopedia was probably motivated by the wish to counter the Encyclopedia of Ukrainian Studies which émigré scholars started some years earlier in Western Europe. Thus, in spite of the "iron curtain," a muted dialogue between Ukrainian intellectuals in the country and in the diaspora goes on, and the former find moral support in the consciousness that in the outside world there are people who think of them and want to help them.

4. The last factor, without which all the others previously mentioned would be of no avail, is the indomitable vitality of the Ukrainian people, who have survived the Stalin era, as their ancestors survived the era of Tatar invasions. Today Ukrainian intellectuals try to rebuild the shattered cultural life of the country, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the Xruščev administration, moderate by Communist standards. These efforts are circumscribed by the continuous vigilance of the authorities, and also by the unhealed wounds left on the mind and the body of the nation by the Stalinist reign of terror. Nevertheless, the achievements of the last nine years are respectable, although they certainly fall short of what one might expect in the cultural life of a country of forty-two million inhabitants. Let us enumerate some of these achievements, especially those pertaining to the field of Ukrainian studies: the launching of several new scholarly periodicals, such as the *Ukrainian Historical Journal*, *Soviet Literary Scholarship*, *Soviet Law*, *Economics of the Soviet Ukraine*; publication in mass editions of the works of pre-revolutionary Ukrainian writers, some of whom had previously been banned; the appearance of a number of large standard works, produced collectively by groups of scholars, on various aspects of Ukrainian history, culture, and economics; publication of many monographic studies, most of them mediocre, but a few on a respectable scholastic level; resumption of scholarly work by the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR in several disciplines which previously had been discontinued; increased use of the Ukrainian language in scholarly publications and in higher education; the emergence of a whole new generation of young scholars and scientists. The ideological precepts of the regime must be carefully observed, but we may surmise that the incantations of Marxist-Leninist formulas and protestations of love to the "Russian brothers" are often no more than lip-service to the necessities of the situation.

NOTE

1. Text of a paper read at the meeting of the New York-New Jersey Regional Chapter of the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL) in New York, on 12 May 1962.