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The Nation's Clothes: Constructing a Ukrainian High Culture in the Russian Empire, 1860-1900

In the Russian Empire during the second half of the nineteenth century, a remarkable metaphor appeared frequently in articles about Ukrainian culture. Friends and enemies alike repeatedly compared the cultural activity of the Ukrainian intelligentsia (labelled in contemporary political discourse as “Ukrainophiles”) to an act of “dressing” the people or changing their cultural “clothes.” For example, while speaking to a peasant woman, a young Ukrainian patriot in an autobiographical story by Ahatanhel Krymsky likens the national poet Taras Shevchenko to a shoemaker: “You really need a shoemaker, a spiritual one! You need this shoemaker to patch up all your footwear, your boots and bast shoes!” Similarly, in 1882 an observer in the Ukrainophobe newspaper *Kievlianin* characterizes contemporary Ukrainian music as “Schumann and Beethoven attired by Mr. Lysenko in a villager’s coat (*svyta*)” and contemporary Ukrainian poetry as something like “Byron and Mickiewicz fitted out with peasant boots (*choboty*) by Mr. Starytsky and Mr. Konysky.”¹ The composer Mykola Lysenko himself is said to have described a colleague’s arrangement of a folk song as “dressing our melodies in an alien diatonic clothes. They are beautiful but not for our tunes; as the people say, ‘a sheepskin is good but not tailored for me.’” Finally, in the first, uncensored version of Mykhailo Starytsky’s drama *Ne sudylosia* (It Was Not Destined, 1883), which was never performed on stage in full, an intellectual, Mykhailo Liashenko, proclaims: “Each people want to develop for themselves the most convenient forms. Each people feel freest and most comfortable in their own dress, not to mention the language.”²

The popular metaphor provided a catchy image of “dressing” the overwhelmingly peasant nation³ with the “clothes” of a modern high culture, aptly expressing the essence of the intelligentsia’s conscious construction of the new Ukrainian high culture in the name of the peasantry and from the rudiments of folk culture. Ernest Gellner has argued that modern nationalisms’ cultural work consists of creating from the elements of the folk tradition a new universalist culture appropriate to the industrial age: “Nationalism usually conquers in the name of a putative folk culture. Its symbolism is drawn from the healthy, pristine, vigorous life of the peasants, of the *Volk*, the *narod*. [...] If the nationalism prospers it eliminates the alien high culture, but it does not then replace it by the old local low culture; it revives, or

¹ Pretenzii grechnevoi kashi, in: *Kievlianin*, 25 March 1882. *Svyta*: mantle or cloak worn by Ukrainian peasants, made of homespun, coarse cloth. Mykola Lysenko (1842–1912) was the leading Ukrainian composer of the time, considered as a founder of the national music. Mykhailo Starytsky (1840–1904) and Oleksandr Konysky (1836–1900) were among the leading Ukrainian writers of the 1880s.

² Quoted after L. H. SOKYRKO Mykhailo Starytsky. Kyiv 1960, p. 130.

³ On the Ukrainians’ social structure and related cultural and political challenges, see ANDREAS KAPPELER Ein „kleines Volk“ von 25 Millionen: Die Ukrainer um 1900, in: *Kleine Völker in der Geschichte Osteuropas*. Ed. by Manfred Alexander, Frank Kämpfer, Andreas Kappeler. Stuttgart 1991, pp. 33–42.

invents, a local high (literate, specialist-transmitted) culture of its own, though admittedly one which will have some links with the earlier folk styles and dialects.”⁴

The Ukrainian intelligentsia in the Russian Empire followed Gellner's prescription, claiming they were only reviving their nation's culture, while in fact they were creating a new one. More importantly, whereas the models of cultural construction were the same as those in other stateless European nations, the significance of the Ukrainian intelligentsia's cultural work was unprecedented because the tsarist government suppressed not only the Ukrainian political and social movements, but also the language, literature, education, and scholarship. Precisely for this reason, the growth of Ukrainian nationalism in the tsarist empire is not well described by Miroslav Hroch's popular model of the national movements' evolution from an academic to a cultural to a political stage.⁵ The tsarist crackdown on the Ukrainian language and culture meant that some attributes of the cultural stage – such as Ukrainian newspapers, schools, and clubs – did not emerge until the early twentieth century, while the nation's political mobilization began in earnest only in 1917. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to categorize the Ukrainophiles' cultural work as belonging to a pre-political stage. Both their own attitudes and the government's reaction confirmed that culture-building *was* a political enterprise.

Paradoxically, due to the tsarist repressions against any form of organized Ukrainian life, the local intelligentsia particularly appreciated the need to constitute a nation discursively, remaining at the stage of “imagining” the nation during a time when other peoples of East-Central Europe saw their nationalisms developing into mass movements. The long gestation of Ukrainian-ness in the empire of the Romanovs made this process ideally suitable for the cultural analysis of nationalism, the trend increasingly influential in present-day Western scholarship.⁶ This paper will demonstrate that both the Ukrainian intelligentsia and its opponents realized, however instinctively, what Gellner in his last book formulates as the following two propositions: “Homogeneity of culture is *the* political bond,” and membership in a given high culture is the “precondition of political, economic and social citizenship.” The Ukrainophiles' imaginative ideological labor did not just compose a modern national culture from the elements of folk tradition, but also created a new political reality.

The Nation's Language

In the late summer of 1860, two young Ukrainian students moved from one city in Ukrainian ethnic lands, Kharkiv, to another, Kyiv, to attend the local university. Fluent in Russian and French, and accustomed to using some Ukrainian at home, the students experienced this city of Polish high culture as a foreign country:

“We went to the theater but understood nothing: some comedy about life in Warsaw was performed; we made for the billiard-room, but there, markers and guests spoke Polish. Then we dropped into the shop and were asked there, ‘Co państwo chce?’ Finally, in the cook-shop we

⁴ ERNEST GELLNER *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford 1983, p. 57.

⁵ See MIROSLAV HROCH *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations*. Transl. by Ben Fowkes. Cambridge 1985.

⁶ The cultural studies approach to nationalism is best explained in: GEOFF ELEY, RONALD GRIGOR SUNY Introduction: From the Moment of Social History to the Work of Cultural Representation, in: *Becoming National: A Reader*. Ed. by G. Eley and R. G. Suny. New York 1996, pp. 3–37.

were offered 'jajka sadzone' and 'legumina,' dishes which we had not heard of. Lysenko sighed that we were now in Poland [...]."⁷

Rather than returning from the Polish-speaking Kyiv to the Russian-speaking Kharkiv, Starytsky and Lysenko joined a small but growing group of Ukrainian patriotic intelligentsia developing the Ukrainian high culture. All the governmental restrictions notwithstanding, they succeeded by the early twentieth century in making things Ukrainian much more visible in big cities: in theater, literature, dress, and cuisine.⁸

Although by the early 1860s, Romanticism was out of fashion in literature, philosophy, and the arts, one typical Romanticist concern – the codification of literary language – continued to dominate the Ukrainophile cultural imagination. After the work of Ukrainian national bard Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861), the *questione della lingua* seemed to have been resolved in favour of the central Ukrainian vernacular. But the new literary Ukrainian had just made its debut in journalism and scholarship, in particular in the St. Petersburg journal *Osnova*, when the Valuev decree of 1863 and the Ems ukaze of 1876 forbade Ukrainian publications within the Russian empire.⁹ In response to this situation, leading Ukrainian thinkers of the time proposed several alternative programs of Ukrainian culture-building, all essentially suggesting the parallel development of Ukrainian- and Russian-language literatures in Ukraine – the former using the villagers' dialect to describe peasant life and the latter discussing elevated subjects as part of an "all-Russian" literary discourse. These programs were Mykola Kostomarov's idea of "literature for home use," Panteleimon Kulish's "homestead philosophy," and Mykhailo Drahomanov's theory of "Europeanization" through the use of the Russian high culture.¹⁰ The consistent implementation of any of these plans could have resulted in the reversion to "Ukrainian literature in Russian" previously exemplified by Nikolai Gogol and analogous to Anglo-Irish literature.¹¹ Significantly, though, none of these proposals had a decisive influence on contemporary Ukrainian writers, who soon discovered the possibility of publishing in Ukrainian in the neighbouring Galicia, a province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire heavily populated by Ukrainians. In addition, the tsarist proscript-

⁷ MYKHAILO STARYTSKY K biografii N. V. Lysenka (Vospominania), in: *Tvory u vosmy tomakh*. Kyiv 1965. Vol. 8, pp. 385–430, here p. 406. *Co państwo chce?*: What do the gentlemen want? (Polish); *jajka sadzone*: fried eggs (Polish); *legumina*: pudding, sweet dessert (Polish). On Polish culture's domination in mid-nineteenth-century Kyiv, see MICHAEL F. HAMM *Kiev: A Portrait, 1800–1917*. Princeton, NJ 1993, pp. 55–81.

⁸ On the symbolic role of clothing and cuisine for Ukrainian patriots, see S. YEKELCHYK *The Body and National Myth: Motifs from the Ukrainian National Revival in the Nineteenth Century*, in: *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies* 7 (1993) pp. 31–59.

⁹ See A. I. MILLER «Ukrainskii vopros» v politike vlastei i russkom obshchestvennom mnenii (vtoraia polovina XIX v.). S.-Peterburg 2000; DAVID SAUNDERS *Russia's Ukrainian Policy (1847–1905): A Demographic Approach*, in: *European History Quarterly* 25 (1995) pp. 181–208; IDEM *Russia and Ukraine under Alexander II: The Valuev Edict of 1863*, in: *International History Review* 17 (1995) pp. 23–50.

¹⁰ Only Drahomanov's program is widely available. See the Soviet edition of his works: M. P. DRAHOMANOV *Literatura velykoruska, maloruska i halytska*, in: *Literaturno-publitsychni pratsi*. Kyiv 1970. Vol. 1, pp. 80–220. For an illuminating comparison of the three visions, see GEORGE G. GRABOWICZ *Ukrainian-Russian Literary Relations in the Nineteenth Century: A Formulation of the Problem*, in: *Ukraine and Russia in Their Historical Encounter*. Ed. by Peter J. Potichnyj [et al.]. Edmonton 1992, pp. 214–44, here pp. 226–38.

¹¹ This use of the "imperial" language enabling earlier Ukrainian cultural agents to address a wider audience is examined in OLEH S. ILNYTZKYJ *Cultural Indeterminacy in the Russian Empire: Nikolai Gogol as Ukrainian Post-Colonial Writer*, in: *A World of Slavic Literatures: Essays in Comparative Slavic Studies in Honour of Edward Mozejko*. Ed. by Paul Duncan Morris. Bloomington, forthcoming.

tion of the Ukrainian language in the early 1860s and mid-1870s alternated with the relative relaxation of the official policies during the early 1870s and 1880s.

The three programs, however, were more than pragmatic responses to the government's repression. The Ukrainian theorists stumbled over the principles of Realism and *narodnist'* (populism). Their source of authentic national culture, the peasantry, lacked words in its vocabulary to describe sophisticated modern phenomena, but forcing peasant literary characters to speak "modern" diction would have violated the sanctity of folk cultural authority. A prominent novelist, Ivan Nechui-Levytsky, argued in 1878 that the literary language should be based on the language of the village grandmother and that the high culture should limit itself to the tropes of folk genres, but, as Maxim Tarnawsky has shown, Nechui did not follow in his novels this ideology of extreme purism.¹² Constructing a modern high culture entirely from folk tradition proved impossible, although linguistic purism remained an important component of the Ukrainophile populist views, as did the study of the peasant vernacular.

The Ukrainophiles of both the 1860s and 1890s considered paramount the collection of materials for a dictionary of the Ukrainian language. Several groups in different cities initiated similar dictionary projects during the 1860s. (Starytsky and Lysenko joined one of these groups in Kyiv.) The Ukrainophile lexicographic pursuit resulted in two impressive Russian-Ukrainian dictionaries: the one containing 37,000 words was prepared by Mykhailo Komarov and the members of Odesa *hromada* (society of Ukrainian activists) and published in four volumes in Lviv in 1893–98 under the suggestive pen names of M. Umanets and A. Spilka (M[ykhailo] from Uman and the O[desa] society). Another was the 40,000-word, two-volume dictionary by Yevhen Tymchenko, published in Kyiv in 1897–99. A Ukrainian-Russian dictionary was conceived by Kulish in 1861, compiled by the members of Kyiv *hromada* for decades, and finally re-edited and published by Borys Hrinchenko in 1907–09, in four volumes totalling 68,000 words. It is important to stress that the Ukrainophile populist efforts were aimed at the *collection* of the "authentic people's language" rather than at its *standardization*, and that all these dictionaries are classified by the historians of lexicography as merely "dialectal" or "ethnographical."¹³

Modern high culture, however, in order to speak Ukrainian, demanded finding the words for many concepts in art and education, and later, in industry and science, that could not be found in the peasant vernacular. The Ukrainophiles had to turn either to borrowing from other "modern" languages or to creating new words on the basis of those already existing in folk speech. Although borrowing in bulk seemed to be unpatriotic, the very possibility of *changing* the "sacred" people's speech appeared no less unacceptable to many in the populist camp. The so-called *kuvannia sliv* (literally, "the hammering of words") became one of the Ukrainian intelligentsia's most controversial creative cultural activities in the second half of the nineteenth century. Mykhailo Starytsky, perhaps the best-known enthusiast of the "hammering," literally invented such basic words of present-day standard Ukrainian as *mriia* (dream), *bezmovnyi* (silent), and *charivnyi* (magical, enchanting). However, a number of other ostensibly legitimate inventions, all based on folk words, were not accepted by the practitioners of the national high culture: *maievo* (horizon), *zalassia* (pleasure), *kolot* (rebellion), and *truzhen* (toiler).¹⁴ Such authoritative populist figures as Kostomarov and Nechui-Levytsky severely criticized Starytsky for his "hammering of words". Their main argument was simply that the

¹² MAXIM TARNAWSKY The Paradox of Populism. The Realism of Ivan Nečuj-Levyč'kyj, in: Harvard Ukrainian Studies 14 (December 1990) pp. 608–22.

¹³ P. I. HORETSKY Istorija ukrainskoi leksykohrafi. Kyiv 1963, pp. 68–149.

¹⁴ M. P. KOMYSHACHENKO Mykhailo Starytsky. Kyiv 1968, pp. 57–58.

“people,” that is, the peasants, were not using such words. Kostomarov was especially upset with Starytsky’s bold translations of European literature into Ukrainian and, in particular, with the use of the neologisms in these translations. His irritation prompted Kostomarov to single out for a mocking critique what is now seen as a standard literary word, Starytsky’s *baiduzhist’* (indifference).¹⁵

Translations of world literary classics were generally one of new national high cultures’ most effective vehicles of self-assertion and development. The first modern literary work in Ukrainian, Ivan Kotliarevsky’s *Eneida* (1798), was already a translation, albeit of a “travesty” variety, of Vergil’s *Aeneid*.¹⁶ The Ukrainophile generation produced the first serious translations, although it still practiced adaptive “renderings” in Ukrainian with at least some element of burlesque: Stepan Rudansky’s *Iliad* (1872–77), and Petro Nishchynsky’s *Odyssey* (1890), *Iliad* (1902–03), and *Antigone* (1883). The travesty “rendering” of classics seemed to ensure the translated work’s “nativization” through its retelling in the low-style, primitive vocabulary of the peasantry, archetypes of folk poetry, and heroic imagery of Cossack myth. The “serious” translation, on the contrary, sought to deliver the text and ideas of the original in codes of the new local high culture.

Panteleimon Kulish, who distinguished himself with his translation of the Bible and all the major Shakespearean dramas, was undoubtedly the most prolific “serious” translator of this generation. All his translations, however, were published in Austria-Hungary and not allowed to circulate in the Russian Empire.¹⁷ Moreover, Kulish in his mature years opposed the organized Ukrainian movement and openly expressed his disenchantment with such icons of the national myth as Cossacks and Shevchenko. In Ukraine under Russian rule, the Ems ukaze of 1876 greatly hindered the printing and distribution of literary translations as well as of Ukrainian belles-lettres. What was published in Dnieper Ukraine before the Ems ukaze and, through some loop-holes, after it, was translated mainly by Mykhailo Starytsky and, subsequently, his younger colleagues. Starytsky translated H. C. Andersen’s *Tales* (1873), Ivan Krylov’s *Fables* (1874), Serbian epic songs (1876), and poems by Byron, Heine, Mickiewicz, and Pushkin. Many of Starytsky’s translations were notorious for their frequent use of controversial neologisms.¹⁸

Starytsky’s translation of *Hamlet* was published as a book (with a Russian foreword by the translator) only in 1882,¹⁹ but the censors never allowed the play to be performed publicly. It became known to the general public mainly because of the scandal around its rendition of Hamlet’s famous question. This controversy illustrates perfectly the then prevalent Russian chauvinist attitude to the construction of the Ukrainian high culture. Several Russian newspapers published in Ukraine carried a topical satire of this translation, asserting that the

¹⁵ N. I. KOSTOMAROV *Zadachi ukrainofilstva*, in: *Vestnik Evropy* (1882) no. 2, pp. 862–900, repr. in: *Naukovo-publitsychni ta polemichni pysannia Kostomarova*. Ed. by Mykhailo Hrushevsky. Kyiv, 1928, pp. 289–98.

¹⁶ Marko Pavlyshyn has pioneered a reevaluation of Kotliarevsky’s work as expressing some more sophisticated notions: a new vision of Ukrainian identity and the beginnings of the modern Cossack myth. See his *The Rhetoric and Politics of Kotliarevsky’s Eneida*, in: *Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 10 (1985) pp. 9–24.

¹⁷ See GEORGE S. N. LUCKYJ *Panteleimon Kulish: A Sketch of His Life and Times*. New York 1983, pp. 149–52, 161, 181–82.

¹⁸ DMYTRO ČYŽEVSKYJ *A History of Ukrainian Literature: (From the 11th to the End of the 19th Century)*. Transl. by Dolly Ferguson, Doreen Gorsline and Ulana Petyk. Ed. by George S. N. Luckyj. Littleton 1975, p. 601.

¹⁹ *Hamlet, prynts Dansky. Trahediiia v V diiakh V. Shekspira. Pereklav na ukrainsku movu M. Starytsky. Z prylohoiu muzyky M. Lysenka*. Kyiv 1882.

philosophical question haunting the Danish prince was translated into Ukrainian as *Buty chy ne buty, os v chim zakavyka* (To be or not to be, that's the snag) – a phrase sounding awkward and funny to the Russian reader. Although the real wording of Starytsky's translation read *Zhyty chy ne zhyty? Os v chim rich* (To live or not to live? That's what the question is), the notorious *zakavyka* appeared on the pages of the Russian press time and again, forcing Starytsky to send copies of the book to the editors, ultimately in vain.²⁰ In fact, *zakavyka* was not a Ukrainian word at all but, rather, a dialectal and awkward-sounding *Russian* word.²¹ The whole affair exemplifies the contemporary Russian unsympathetic perception of Ukrainians who were “speaking modern”: they should necessarily have expressed themselves in the awkward, ridiculous, and dialectal but nevertheless *Russian* words.

The Novel, the Drama, and the Opera

Benedict Anderson suggests in his *Imagined Communities* that some genres of the modern high culture are better suited than others to reflect the modern nation's new sense of cultural belonging. He specifically singles out two powerful forms of “national imagination”: the novel and the newspaper. According to Anderson, both embody the idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogenous, empty time, providing “a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history.” One might think as well of other genres of modern culture that incorporate the same notion and may serve as useful vehicles of national imagination. They include, but are not limited to, the drama and the opera.

The first Ukrainian novel, Panteleimon Kulish's Romantic historical work *Chorna rada* (The Black Council, written 1845–46, published 1856), profoundly affected Kulish' contemporaries. This full-length historical novel from Cossack times was written in the style of Sir Walter Scott, and both its form and topic perfectly fit the needs of the Ukrainian national imagination. Mykhailo Starytsky recalls how, at the age of 15, he was first introduced to Kulish's novel:

“I [...] dropped by chance to a bookshop. The salesman showed me as new arrivals Kulish's *Notes on the Southern Rus'* and his historical novel *The Black Council*. The latter intrigued me; previously, I had read in the Little Russian language only Shevchenko and Kotliarevsky. The former, of course, was moving due to his profound themes and beauty of the verse, but in form and vocabulary, his verses were close to the folk song. [...] Kotliarevsky made me laugh by his humour but did not make me even think of the possibility of writing about the things sublime in Ukrainian, of recreating in this language the subtlety of the human thought, and of rendering even the most delicate nuances of artistic imagination. The best lines of *Eneida*, its thoroughly satirical picture of hell, somehow escaped youthful attention because of the general cheerfulness of the plot. However, I still remember the deep sorrow awakened in our hearts by the well-known lines ‘Thus it was once in our unforgettable Hetmanate [...]’. And suddenly – a novel! A historical novel! [...] Finally, before going on vacation, I bought the book and read it over night, savouring every word, every phrase [...]. The novel also made a strong impression on Lysenko because of both its content and, most importantly, language. We read every phrase over and over again, being delighted by its versatility and sonority, by the brightness with which it depicts even the subtlest aspects of the material.”²²

The genre of the novel and the possibility of writing it in the Ukrainian language seem to have been a fascinating discovery for the Ukrainophiles of the 1850s–60s, but both the ascendancy of Realism and the tsarist restrictions soon limited this genre's appeal to the

²⁰ See, for instance, MYKHAILO STARYTSKY Lyst do redaktora hazety *Kievlianin* (28 January 1895), in: *Tvory u vosmy tomakh*. Kyiv 1965. Vol. 8, p. 536.

²¹ SOKYRKO Mykhail Starytsky p. 87.

²² STARYTSKY K biografii N. V. Lysenka pp. 398–99.

national imagination. The Ukrainian novel of the late nineteenth century became a typical populist enterprise, characterized by descriptive realism, ethnographism, and heavy concentration on social issues. Of the most prominent novelists of the time, Ivan Nechui-Levytsky was largely an ethnographic realist, while Panas Myrny focused on social injustice.²³ The title of Myrny's best-known novel, *Khiba revut voly, iak iasla povni* (Do the Oxen Bellow, When Their Mangers Are Full?, 1880), is, quite typically, a popular saying. Symptomatically, all the populist authors except Kulish did not even use the word *roman* ("novel"); instead, they called their long prose works *povisti* ("tales"). While the Ukrainian literature of the time adopted a modern system of belletristic genres and made an unqualified choice of vernacular Ukrainian as the literary medium, the writers' encounter with the epitome of modernity, the city, remained highly ambiguous. The first Ukrainian novel depicting city life in any detail is Nechui-Levytsky's *Khmary* (The Clouds, 1872). Although this novel was the first to describe in Ukrainian many elements of modern urban high culture, the novel portrays urban life in general as alien and degenerate. In a typical populist turn, Nechui sends his main character, Pavlo Radiuk, back to his native village to find inspiration, moral support, and, ultimately, a wife.²⁴

Similarly, a cursory look at the titles of contemporary plays seems to suggest that the folk culture provided the Ukrainian theater with both form and language. More often than not, the titles of Ukrainian plays are colorful popular sayings taken directly from folklore: *The Sausage and the Goblet Put an End to the Quarrel*; *Give the Heart Freedom and It Will Lead You into Slavery*; *Before the Sun Rises, the Dew Devours the Eyes*; *The Evil Spark Will Burn the Field and Itself Disappear*, etc. Panas Myrny's *Lymeryvna* (The Daughter of the Harness Maker, 1893) is written on the topic of a folk song,²⁵ as is Starytsky's *Oi ne khody Hrytsiu, ta i na vechornytsi* (Don't Go to Parties, Hryts!, 1892), and Starytsky's *Marusia Bohuslavka* (1899) is based on the topic of a folk historical poem, the *duma*. The main characters of Ukrainian plays in the 1880s–90s were peasants, and the audience loved these works precisely for their "authentic" depiction of the peasant life, as well as for their celebration of folk customs. Most plays contained at least some element of burlesque *à la* Kotliarevsky and typically included several folk songs.

The institution of a professional public theater and the genre of the drama of morals and manners performed in the vernacular belonged to a modern high culture. The realist aesthetics was manifestly modern, as was the actors' technique exemplified by Marko Kropyvnytsky's skilful arrangement of mass scenes in his theater company. Even demanding St. Petersburg critics like Aleksei Suvorin, who were not sympathetic to the ethnographic style, praised Kropyvnytsky's technique as "innovative" in the dramatic theater of the Russian empire in the 1880s.²⁶ But the celebration of peasant life still dominated the contents of contemporary drama.

²³ Anatol Svidnytsky's remarkable novel about the lives of the middle class, *The Luboratskis* (1861–62), remained unpublished.

²⁴ *The Clouds* was first published in 1873 in Lviv in Austrian Galicia, and the following year, a heavily censored version was allowed for publication in Kyiv. In 1890, the second edition was issued in Lviv, while as late as 1900 the tsarist censors refused their permission to publish the second edition in Kiev (I. S. NECHUI-LEVYTSKY *Zibrannia tvoriv u desiaty tomakh*. Kyiv 1965. Vol. 2, pp. 379–380 [commentary by M. L. Mandryka]).

²⁵ OLEKSANDR KYSIL *Ukrainskyi teatr: Doslidzhennia*. Kyiv 1973, p. 120.

²⁶ KYSIL *Ukrainskyi teatr* p. 99; P. KYRYCHOK M. L. Kropyvnytsky i rosiiska kultura: "Vplyvolohiia" chy parytet? in: *Slovo i chas* (1990) no. 5, pp. 41–44, here p. 42.

The new Ukrainian theatrical culture, however, soon developed its own momentum and narrative models. Although claiming to be a true mirror of Ukrainian peasant life, by the late 1890s it was presenting the image of the peasant established in the early 1880s, rather than portraying the real world of Ukrainian villages at the turn of the century. The theatre historian Oleksandr Kysil observes that while the character, customs, and dress of the peasant changed, the theater of the 1890s did not reflect these changes and remained “backward-looking.” In fact, this only proved that Ukrainian theatrical culture of the time was the intelligentsia’s autonomous cultural construct ultimately based on the realities of folk life but not bound to reflect its evolution.

As a rule, the educated characters in Ukrainian plays spoke Russian, the peasants Ukrainian, and the townsfolk a mixture of these languages. This tendency, of course, reflected one of the principal demands of the populist aesthetic theory: in order to provide a genuine picture of real life, to deliver the truth, the “natural” speech must be used. Even in Starytsky’s play *Talan* (Destiny, 1893), the only drama depicting the life of the intelligentsia (in fact, of the actors) ever allowed by the censors, the characters speak different languages. All the actors, however, speak Ukrainian, and thus, this play is modern Ukrainian high culture’s first public self-reflection.

Starytsky’s cousin, brother-in-law, and closest friend, Mykola Lysenko, composed the most important Ukrainian operatic works of the second half of the century. All his works before *Taras Bulba – Rizdviana nich* (Christmas Night, 1873, 1882), *Utoplenu* (The Drowned Maiden, 1884), and *Chornomortsi* (The Black Sea Cossacks, 1872) – depend heavily on the direct quotation of folk songs and on the detailed depiction of folk customs. Lysenko himself designated his early works as operettas or “musical comedies” from peasant life; as such, they lacked the ideological message of nineteenth-century West European musical theater and performed a social function different from that of the opera in modern high culture. It is true that at least some enthusiastic patriots celebrated the 1873 version of *Christmas Night* as “the first Ukrainian opera.” Later historians of music, however, prefer to follow Lysenko’s own formal designations. L. Arkhimovych and M. Hordiichuk categorize *The Black Sea Cossacks* and the 1873 version of *Christmas Night* as “operettas”; in contrast, they classify the 1883 version of *Christmas Night* and *The Drowned Maiden* as “operas.” The critics hasten to add that *Christmas Night* in its 1883 version might be properly called “operakoliadka (Christmas carol)” since “the whole work is saturated with the scenes of folk rituals, particularly the scenes of carolling.”

In 1891, Lysenko completed the historical opera *Taras Bulba*, based on Nikolai Gogol’s famous patriotic novella about the Cossack struggles against Poland. Although never orchestrated or performed before the revolution, *Taras* was the first Ukrainian “serious” opera, with the libretto modelled after that of European “grand opera,”²⁷ and the author’s designation of “people’s historical drama” indicating the influence of Lysenko’s teacher Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. *Taras* is a heroic opera with numerous choir scenes – a genre perhaps no less “nationalistic” than that of the novel. Lysenko utilized most forms of modern opera singing: the aria, arioso, song, recitative, and ensemble. The scenes of Andrii with Maryltsia in particular are based on the musical forms of Romance and classical European opera (e.g., not on folk songs). Ostap’s popular aria “Shcho ty vchynyv?” (What have you done?) is an example of the modern operatic cantilena. Still, musical historians note that *Taras* includes “almost unchanged material from folk songs,” and most of this opera is based on the folk tunes. Nevertheless, the image of *Taras* is created by the reworking of folk melodies into European

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 123.

heroic opera's characteristically slow, solemn tempo: *Andante maestoso* with predominance of Forte and Fortissimo.²⁸

The opera's principal exposition of patriotic ideas is Taras's song *Hei, lita orel* (Hey, the Eagle Is Flying!), which, as a generic example of the Ukrainophile national imagination, combines the lyrics by Shevchenko (the kobzar's ballad from the poem "The Haydamaks") with the rearranged melody of a folk song (*Oi polety, halko*).²⁹ The national bard's words and the people's melody combined to legitimate a new high musical culture.

Lysenko clearly understood *Taras* as his most important contribution to *Ukrainian* high culture. Several contemporaries relate that in 1891, Peter Tchaikovsky visited Lysenko in Kyiv, listened to parts of *Taras*, approved of them, and proposed to stage the opera in St. Petersburg. Since this performance would have required the Russian translation of the libretto (and would have totally changed the symbolic meaning of the *Taras Bulba* from the "Ukrainian national opera" to that of the "Little Russian ethnographic opera"), Lysenko did not accept this proposal. Similar offers then followed from Rimsky-Korsakov, Bolshoi Theater's chief conductor Ippolit Altani and artistic director Anton Bartsal, but Lysenko declined them as well.³⁰

The Ukrainian populist public vigorously maintained that only its own composers had the right and ability to arrange Ukrainian folk songs properly, if not to express the Ukrainian *Volksgeist* in music. The Ukrainophiles denied that Tchaikovsky used in his "anti-Ukrainian" opera *Mazepa* "authentic" Ukrainian melodies. Rimsky-Korsakov's opera *May Night* (based on a theme from Gogol and portraying the Ukrainian countryside) was cat-called in Kyiv in the 1880s and never again performed there until the beginning of the twentieth century. Dmytro Antonovych, a historian of the theater and the son of a prominent Ukrainophile, believes that this reaction was organized by the members of the Kyiv *hromada*, who were upset both by the suppression of the Ukrainian theater and by Rimsky-Korsakov's opera itself, which "made in Ukraine an unpleasant impression because the music was delightful but *alien to the Ukrainian spirit*."³¹

Like its counterparts among other stateless East-Central European peoples, the Ukrainian intelligentsia in the Russian Empire engaged in constructing a modern high culture by developing selected elements of folk tradition into new cultural forms. Unlike many of their neighbours' elites, however, the Ukrainophiles were prevented from addressing the peasant masses. The establishment of schools and periodicals in Ukrainian, not to mention Ukrainian political parties, remained impossible until 1905. Yet, in a certain sense, the Ukrainian movement did enter the political stage during the period 1860–1900. The tsarist government's proscription of Ukrainian literature, press, and theater defined these cultural activities as politically subversive. No subsequent relaxations of the official position changed the political significance of the ban. During the late nineteenth century, the Ukrainian movement made no progress in developing political structures or reaching the masses, but Ukrainian culture-building remained firmly in the realm of politics.

During 1883–88, the governor-general of Kyiv, Podillia, and Volhynia, General Aleksandr Drenteln, who had previously served as chief of tsar's political police, renewed a strict ban

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 134.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 129. *Kobzar*: itinerant, usually blind, peasant minstrel in Ukraine who accompanied himself on a *kobza*, a traditional stringing instrument that vaguely resembled a contemporary guitar. *Oi polety, halko* (Fly, You Jackdow!): a popular Ukrainian folk song.

³⁰ See M. V. Lysenko u spohadakh suchasnykiv. Ed. by O. M. Lysenko. Kyiv 1968, pp. 59–60, 320, 373.

³¹ D. ANTONOVYCH *Trysta rokiv ukrainskoho teatru*. Praha 1925, p. 181. Emphasis added.

on any Ukrainian professional theater in “his” provinces. At the same time, the Ukrainian companies were welcome in St. Petersburg in Moscow, where metropolitan audiences greeted Ukrainian theater as a fascinating populist-ethnographic pursuit. (Thus, during the winter of 1886–87, the Kropyvnytsky company’s tour in Moscow proved a huge success.) When asked why the Ukrainian theater was allowed in the imperial capitals but forbidden in Kyiv, Drenteln replied: “Because there it is only theater and here it is politics.”³²

³² *Ibidem*, p. 171.