

LETTER TO A RUSSIAN FRIEND

**A 'SAMIZDAT' PUBLICATION
FROM
SOVIET BYELORUSSIA**

LONDON 1979

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INTRODUCTION

The Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic is one of the 15 constituent republics of the Soviet Union. It borders in the West on Poland and is surrounded on other sides by the Ukrainian, Russian, Latvian and Lithuanian Soviet republics. Established in January 1919 with Minsk as its capital, its present-day territory consists of 207,600 sq. kilometers (80,200 sq. miles) and is inhabited by over 9 Million people, more than 80 per cent of whom are Byelorussians. According to its new constitution which came into force on 14 April 1978, as well as the one that preceded it, the Byelorussian SSR is a 'sovereign socialist state' which 'voluntarily and on the basis of equality' joined other Soviet republics to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Art. 68). It has, however, retained the right of 'free secession from the USSR' (Art. 69) and the power 'to conclude treaties with foreign countries, establish diplomatic and consular relations, and take part in the work of international organisations' (Art. 74).

As far as can be ascertained, no Byelorussian Soviet ambassador has ever presented his credentials at the Court of St. James, nor is there a Byelorussian consul in Manchester. The apparent reason for this is that 'As regards diplomatic relations of the BSSR with foreign countries, they are realised at the present moment with the help of legations and missions of the USSR abroad' (Yu. Brovka, Beloruskaya SSR - suverenny uchastnik mezhdunarodnogo obshcheniya, Minsk, 1974, p. 69). It should be noted, however, that the Byelorussian SSR is one of the original signatories of the United Nations Charter in San Francisco in 1945, as well as a member of the UNESCO, ILO and some other international organisations. It is debatable, however, whether Byelorussian delegates genuinely represent their country's interests, or merely provide an additional vote for the Soviet bloc.

While there are thus good reasons to doubt the sovereign status of the Byelorussian SSR in the international forum, one may expect it at least to enjoy a considerable degree of autonomy in conducting its internal affairs, in particular in the field of the development of its national language and culture. In effect the constitution confers upon it 'the responsibility for national education, cultural and scientific organisations and institutions of the Byelorussian SSR, health service, physical education and sport, social security; preservation of historical and cultural monuments' (Art. 70, 10), as well as the duty of assuring that every citizen of the Republic should have 'the possibility of being educated in his native tongue' (Art. 43). At first sight this genuinely seems to be the case, and it is not unusual in Byelorussian Soviet publications to find passages such as this: 'In the Byelorussian Soviet

Republic the language of our people has become the official state language. The Byelorussian literary language, which before the Revolution could only be found in works of Byelorussian literature hidden in dark corners of Russian and Polish printing presses, began to be heard loudly in the governmental and cultural establishments of the Republic, in the schools, in the streets and squares of our cities as well as in village clubs, in the mouths of party, social and cultural workers and of civil servants. Byelorussian publishing houses were established, newspapers, magazines and all kinds of books began to appear in the native tongue of our people ' (A. Kryvitski, Nasha rodnaya mova, 3rd ed., Minsk 1973, p. 89).

Things, however, are not always what they seem. The document published here presents quite a different picture of the state of the Byelorussian language and culture in Soviet Byelorussia. Entitled Letter to a Russian Friend, it was written in Byelorussia between November 1976 and April 1977, and has been circulating privately in typescript form. A copy of it first reached the present publishers in October of this year. The work is written in Russian in the form of a letter to a Russian friend in answer to the latter's question expressing doubts about the future of the Byelorussian language in this age of scientific and technological progress or (as they like to call it in the Soviet Union) revolution. The author at the very outset rightly perceives that the question raised by his friend has a direct bearing on the problem most vital for Byelorussians, namely their capacity for survival as a nation. He then goes on to say that what we are witnessing at the present time in Soviet Byelorussia is a policy of intensive assimilation.

Byelorussians are no strangers to this policy of assimilation. Since the annexation of their country by Russia in the late 18th century they were consistently denied any rights to separate national identity and cultural development. The aim of those responsible for the implementation of the so-called 'Russian cause' (ruskoe delo) was to convert Byelorussia into the North-western province (Severo-zapadnyi krai) of Tsarist Russia. The Soviet national policy is more complex than that of their predecessors, and one can distinguish in it two opposing tendencies. On the one hand the Soviet authorities like to be regarded as champions of the national rights of oppressed peoples, and claim that in the USSR there exist ideal conditions for the peaceful development of various national languages and cultures. On the other hand their avowed final aim is to create one communist society having one common culture and speaking one language. This new society is supposed to emerge as the result of fusion, allegedly inevitable yet at the same time voluntary, of various national and ethnic groups. Of these two tendencies, the one favouring national emancipation has been gradually relegated to a window-dressing operation, while

the second one aiming at the creation of an international communist society has been gathering strength consistently. Given the central position occupied by the Russians within the Soviet Union, as well as their numerical superiority, there are few doubts as to what would be the character of the culture and common language of such a society. In fact underneath all its elaborate slogans of 'internationalism' this is nothing else but a policy of assimilation or, more precisely, russification of non-Russian peoples. It is interesting to note that the Byelorussian writer Maksim Haretski clearly foresaw the significance of this policy of 'Internationalisation', as it is sometimes called as early as 1919. One of the characters in his novel Dzvie dushy, (Two Souls) says: '...alien people, unaware that they had failed to rid themselves of their own nationalism in which they were immersed, have come to us with an internationalism which exists only in their mouths and as a figment of their imagination, and with fanatical mercilessness began to convert the Byelorussian people into manure beds for cultivating their own form of fictitious internationalism... They want the characteristic traits of their own nationality to become the signs of true internationalism for us.' (M. Haretski, Dzvie Dushy, Vilna 1919, p.175). The novel has never been published in the Soviet Union.

The policy of assimilation affects all non-Russian peoples of the USSR, but its effects are felt most acutely in Byelorussia. There are several reasons for this, the principal one being no doubt that Byelorussians, together with the Ukrainians and Russians, are the only Slavic peoples of the USSR. The Byelorussian and Ukrainian languages belong to the same linguistic group as Russian and therefore are more easily susceptible to the influence of the latter than the languages of non-Slavic peoples such as Lithuanians or Georgians. Unlike the Ukrainians, however, the Byelorussians are a comparatively small nation and thus less capable of resisting the persistent pressure of russification. It must also be remembered that Byelorussia has not yet fully recovered from the destruction caused by the Second World War, during which more than a quarter of her population (nearly 2.5 million) perished. This came in the wake of Stalin's reign of terror in the 1930's, of which the exact number of victims remains still unknown; at the same time the Western part of Byelorussia, which until 1939 remained under Polish rule, was also subjected to a policy of assimilation at the hands of Polish authorities.

Western readers today are fairly familiar, at least in name, with clandestine publications of Soviet dissidents, usually called 'Samizdat'. Most of these publications originate in Russian circles and deal with social evils and the lack of human rights in the Soviet Union. National problems, since they do not concern Russians, are hardly mentioned in them at all. It remains for

the non-Russians themselves to draw attention to the plight of their peoples. The author of Letter to a Russian Friend does precisely this. He is a Byelorussian who loves his country and people and has a profound knowledge of its history and culture. He is also well acquainted with the social and political structure of the Soviet system and is critical of many of its aspects. This kind of criticism, however, falls outside the scope of his work except insofar as it has direct bearing on the fate of the Byelorussian people who are subjected to a process, to use his own words, of 'spiritual castration' leading to the loss of their national and cultural identity. A remarkable feature of the Letter is the complete absence of any spirit of hatred or resentment towards those who are responsible for the present state of his nation, but only sorrow caused by the indifference and lack of understanding on the part of even those Russians who themselves strive towards a 'spiritual regeneration of the Russian people'. He sadly remarks that before the Revolution the plight of the Byelorussians was noticed by the Russia of Gor'ky and Ulyanov-Lenin. I don't know of any name in Russia today, which would take notice of the sorrows of my people though I would like to believe that these sorrows will not remain unnoticed'.

Much has been heard recently about the hardships suffered by Soviet Jews and their struggles to maintain their ethnic and religious identity and to gain the right of free emigration to Israel. Byelorussians have nowhere to go, and indeed there is no reason why they should go anywhere. They are at home, and it is in their native country that their very existence as a nation is threatened. They only want to be left in peace to remain what they are, and ask those who threaten them to learn 'to respect our differences; just as we have learnt to cherish those things which we hold in common'.

This is the moving message of the Letter to a Russian Friend.

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Every attempt has been made to reproduce the text exactly as it appears in the Xerox copy of the typescript that reached the editors. A deliberate decision was made not to tamper with the spelling or grammar. It must be said in all fairness to the author that Russian is not his native language, and that the Letter shows some signs of having been written in haste (and, presumable, with great caution), which prevented him from correcting what he had written. Since this is not intended to be an academic publication, inaccuracies in quotation (e.g. in the extract from the Hypatian chronicle on p.10) have been left; they in no way affect the message of the Letter. Handwritten corrections and alterations, many of them illegible, occur throughout

the text; since it is not known whether they are the work of the original author, they have been omitted altogether in the text as printed here. The handwritten footnotes, also largely illegible, have likewise not been included.

References to the original typed footnotes are given in both Russian and English texts by asterisks; references to explanatory editorial notes are given only in the English text, by numerals.

ПИСЬМО РУССКОМУ ДРУГУ

Белорусский язык...
В век научно-технической
революции не постигнет ли
его участь волжского диалекта?

Вашим вопросом взята под сомнение существеннейшая черта моего народа, в котором выражен дух, индивидуальность и в конечном итоге — жизнестойкость белорусов.

Вопрос о белорусском языке, перенесенный из средневековых, дореволюционных эпох, в известном смысле еще существует. В объеме намного меньшем нежели существовал он, скажем, сто лет тому назад, когда и белорусский язык, и весь околоседемиллионный народ говоривший на нем объявлялись химерой или "польской интригой" в Северо-западном крае; там по триединой формуле — самодержавие, православие, народность — решалось "русское дело", дело скорейшего превращения тогдашних "западноруссов" в "истинно русских" людей. Сие "русское дело", представлявшееся величайшим деянием не одним полицейско-бюрократическим носителям славы России, судьбе угодно было отправить на свалку истории вместе с обломанным клювом хищной птицы, возвышавшейся над императорским гербом.

Белорусы обрели собственную социалистическую государственность, первостепенные социальные и политические права вместе с правом развивать просвещение "на родной мове"^х. На вечный вопрос "посмотрим, что скажут еще сами белорусы" относительно своей самобытности и исторической жизнеспособности, который для угнетаемого и понижаемого народа прозвучал в те мрачные времена голосом искреннего сочувствия и светлой надежды, на этот вопрос мои соотечественники представили и продолжают представлять немало доказательств различного свойства и "калибра", снимая сомнения относительно своего естественно-исторического места в общем предназначении народов и человечества. Можно было бы адресовать Ваше внимание на эти доказательства и Ваш восприимчивый разум нашел бы

х Канстытуцыя Беларускай Савецкай Сацыялістычнай Рэспублікі. Мінск, 1973.

нужный ответ на возникший вопрос, рассеяв, возможно, сопутствующие ему сомнения.

Но затронутая проблема, выходя за рамки приватной беседы двух друзей, выглядит достаточно сложной и болезненной, чтобы замалчивать ее. Она действительно существует – в остатках ли империльного мышления, в рецидивах ли империльной политики – рая и белорусов, не оставляя безучастными и сторонних наблюдателей. В реакции со стороны на современное положение белорусского языка заметно различие во взглядах посещающих БССР украинцев, поляков, чехов, словаков, болгар и русских. Первые недоумевают по поводу искусственного сдерживания, вторые – по поводу "искусственного" насаждения белорусского языка в Белоруссии.

В своих сомнениях Вы – не исключение, хотя мне и трудно скрыть досаду, что стереотип о моем родном слове не чужд даже русским просвещенным умам, не исключая тех, кто сегодня болезненно задумывается над возрождением русской идеи. О массовом обывателе, у которого от усердного поклонения золотому тельцу и "литым богам" притупляется чутье к собственным национальным ценностям, говорить не приходится.

Итак, проблема есть и проблема тревожная: в Белоруссии мы являемся свидетелями развернувшейся ассимиляции. Устроители этого духовного кастрирования населения действуют под знаменем интернационализации и неизбежного слияния наций, игнорируя ту элементарную истину, что в будущую единую общечеловеческую семью придут и идут не безъязыкие народы-кастраты, забывшие свои имена и достоинства, а каждый принесет с собой неповторимый букет своего разумения истины и красоты. С какой стати белорусам передавать кому бы то ни было право выразить за них их **собственное** предназначение на этой планете, тем более, что неоднократные попытки могущественных соседей белорусского народа выразить за него волю и стремления оборачивались нередко в ущерб белорусам, создавая на этом участке цивилизованной Европы "культурное" подобие колониальной Африки.

Типичный продукт и в определенном смысле духовный суррогат ассимиляторской политики явил Вам тот самый капитан дальнего плавания, выражая свое пренебрежение к языку земли, взростившей

его. Нечто похожее можно обнаружить в нынешней белорусской интеллигенции с ее поразительной "безъязкостью" и национальной индифферентностью, в силу чего критерии ее интеллигентности оказываются под немалым вопросом и самую ее, пожалуй, вернее было бы именовать, скажем, кадрами с высшим образованием северозападной части СССР.

Разумеется, ассимиляция /в своем месте мы попытаемся представить некоторые ее реальные черты/, как бы она не форсировалась, имеет свои пределы, ограничиваемые /пусть и ограниченной/ белорусской государственностью, и поэтому она бессильна сдержать развитие языка и культуры белорусского народа, хотя способна сужать естественные границы этого необратимого процесса, тормозя и деформируя его. И хотя "русское дело" в Белоруссии в 1977 году ни по содержанию, ни по форме, ни по своим конечным целям не адекватно своему однофамильцу 1877 г., нас не может не тревожить сам факт существования такового, пусть и в иных, более гуманных формах.

Не вижу необходимости ломится в открытую дверь, утруждая Ваше, филолога, внимание изложением различий между диалектом и языком^х. Но считал бы возможным вернуться к некоторым "узелкам" на исторической линии восхождения и возрождения белорусского народа, которые могли бы, как мне кажется, дать представление о глубинных источниках развития и жизнестойкости "маей сінявокай Радзімы і роднае мовы маей".
О преходящем характере недуга "безъязкости" в белорусском обществе — также.

Письмо к русскому другу — это и моя тоска по сегодняшнему Николаю Добролюбову, способному с высоты могучего великорусского полета взглянуть на судьбу белорусов не менее уважительно как и покровительствующе.

Итак — историческое отступление.

В пору продвижения славян с Юга на Север, пришедшие к берегам озера Ильмень переселенцы в окрестностях этих "нашли уже славянский народ, говоривший белорусской речью /Кривичей/", реку Мутную, вдоль которой расселились пришельцы, они переименовали в Волхов, а озеро Мойско, из которого река брала начало — в Ильмер. "Вероятно, что страна,

х Разве что осмелюсь порекомендовать небезинтересное пособие: "Белорусский язык для небелорусов". Минск, 1973.

где поселились новгородцы, была или обитаема, или граничила с обитаемой Кривичами /белорусами/, подтверждая тем, что белорусское наречие действительно вторгается в глубину Новгородской земли."^x

Возможно, отчасти по несходству обычаев "тутэйшых" жителей и пришельцев /которые позднее пригласят в князя скандинава Рюрика/ возникли спорадические столкновения между полоцкими князьями и новгородско-псковскими. Сепаратизм полоцчан, как известно, являл одно из существенных препятствий на пути централизации древнерусского государства, развертывавшейся по линии Новгород-Киев.

Известно кое-что и о последствиях, коими доводилось расплачиваться обитателям земли Полоцкой /в т.ч. Минской/ за неумение сочетать собственное вечевое начало с общерусским /киевским/ централизмом, в ту пору, надо полагать, еще не состоявшим в близком родстве с демократизмом. "На Немизе снопы стелют головами, молотят чеши харалужными, на тоце живот кладут, вежт душу от тела. Немизе кровави березе не бологом бяхуть посеяни костями русских сынов", повествует автор "Слова...", творивший, как подозревают /древняя белорусская версия о происхождении памятника/ где-нибудь на берегах Немиги или Свислочи. Семнадцатью годами позже после описанной битвы, в 1084 году к берегам мученицы-Немиги придет киевское воинство во главе с князем Владимиром, придет не в образе "красного солнышка", не с целью братской: "Не оставиша ни челядина, ни скотины, все разграбиша и пожгоша".^{xx}

"Не оставиша" и "пожгоша" – стоит запомнить эти слова, роковым рефреном пронизывающие тысячелетнюю историю Белоруссии в части писанной киевскими князьями, литовскими и польскими королями, татарскими ханами, московскими царями, французским императором, германскими меченосцами.

Не по этой ли причине художественное слово Бояна белорусского возрождения явилось свету достоинствами не совсем и не главным образом художественными?:

x Костомаров Н.И. Правда Москвичам о Руси. – "Основы", Спб., 1861, кн. 10, с. 4

xx Цит. по: Игнатовский В., Смолич А. Белоруссия. Минск, 1926, с. 26

Сотні год, непрыцелем-братам прыбітая,
Зарастаючы зямлем чужым, як лазой сенажаць,
Ты ляжала няпамяці пылам пакрытая,
А народ твой быў змушан маўчаць і табой пагарджаць.

І круцілі цябе як каму падабалася,
Кожны строіў, наводзіў цябе на свой строй, на свой лад,
Ажно часам жальба, як кляцьба разлягалася
Ды нячутнай ляцела, умираючы ў грудзі назад.

Спаў народ, і ты спала, і ворагі верылі,
Што нішто не разбудзіць цябе, што заснула навек,
І дзялілі цябе, усімі мерамі мерылі,
Што памерла ўжо ты - не адзін так казаў чалавек.

Янка Купала. - Беларуска.

Эти четверостишья /если не ошибаюсь, не переведенные на русский язык/, фокусирующие еще не написанную историю и философию моего народа, способны подсказать нечто весьма существенное в судьбах белорусского языка и неизвестного белорусского Гамлета.

Вернемся, однако, к раннему средневековью. Только ли феодальной раздробленностью, естественным стремлением полоцко-туровских, витебских, минских, гродненских /не решаюсь добавить: и смоленских/ капиталов на Запад и т.п. "материальными" причинами объясняется поведение белорусских князей-"сепаратистов"? Которые, не вняв кровопускательным урокам, и позднее норовили сторониться общей упряжки, заставляя сокрушаться /на сей раз сына Мономаха - Мстислава/ тем, что "зане не бяхуть в его воли, не слушахуть его, коли зовяше в русскую землю на помощь но паче молвяху Бонякову, шелудивому во здравие".^х

Причины такой политики коренились, по мнению историка в лучшем смысле этого звания, не в фамильной вражде, не в недрах княжеского рода, не в каких-то привнесенных обстоятельствах, а "в настроениях самого населения", обусловленных, в свою очередь, географией, климатом и иными естественными факторами.^{хх}

Только что отмеченные моменты симптоматичны в плане изначального своеобразия в развитии этнической самобытности белорусов, обозначившегося, повидимому, еще до возникновения противодействующих явлений чужеродного свойства

х Цит. по: Любавский М.И. Основные моменты истории Белоруссии. М., 1918, с. II.

хх Там же.

/литовцы, немцы, шведы, поляки/. Тем не менее, в противостоянии событиям неблагоприятным для всего славянства побеждало духовное родство "западноруссов" с их северо-восточными и юго-западными соплеменниками и единоверцами. В битве на Неве 1240 г. против шведов и крестоносцев вместе с новгородцами и суздальцами сражались полоцкие воины; к тому времени политический союз Полоцка и Витебска с Владимиро-Суздальской и Новгородской землями скреплял брак Александра Ярославовича с дочерью Полоцкого князя Брачислава. В 1262 году в поход против Ливонского ордена "ходиша Ярослав Ярославич и Товтил Полоцкий, Новгородцы и Псковичи, и Полочани под Юрьев, единым приступом три стены взяша, а немцы избиша".^х

Таким образом, еще одна историческая зарубинка взывает к нашей памяти: "единым приступом взяша, а немцы избиша". Шевеля прошлое, она также напоминает нам о силе единения для грядущих приступов, от которых вряд ли предохранят нас самые гениальные "программы мира".

Однако, об изначальной своеобразии белорусов в древней общерусской семье. Многие, неизвестное доселе из их жизни, быта, обычаев а также о их отношениях с соседями - родственниками и чужаками - поведали бы нам древнебелорусские летописи, писанные, скажем, в Полоцке, Витебске, Минске, о коих нам пока ничего неизвестно, хотя исключать наличие их нет достаточных оснований. Поглотил ли их безвозвратно смерч "все пожгоша", как поглотил он "книжницу" /библиотеку/ Полоцка вместе с подлинными произведениями Кирила и Мефодия и, как полагают, вместе с летописью Кривичско-Полоцкой земли во время сражения войск польского короля Батория и московского царя Ивана Грозного /1579 г./? Скрыты ли о-ни от нас многослойными напластованиями времени и когда-нибудь явятся рукам археологов подобно недавнему явлению берестяных грамот Витебска? Какбы ни было, мы лишены возможности судить о тех временах по источникам писанным самими белорусами, хотя и знаем о их пристрастии к такого вида творчеству. Вынуждены довольствоваться отрывочными и сторонними сведениями из Ипатьевской летописи, позаимствованными, по мнению некоторых

х Гісторыя Беларускай ССР у пяці тамах. Т. I, Мінск 1972, стар. II9.

историков, из несохранившегося Полоцкого источника. Между тем, древнебелорусское летописание прояснило бы, возможно, predetermined Богом и Природой живое творческое начало в духе моего народа, которое в последующие нелегкие столетия помогло ему сохранить и закрепить свою индивидуальность, предохранив от растворения в литовско-польской стихии, а позднее – от капитуляции перед тотальным обрусением.

Это начало уже в эпоху крушения государственных империй и заката империльных религий помогло белорусам во всеуслышание заявить о праве "людзьмі звацца". Помогло выжить, отстаивая завоеванное право, тогда, когда не только дух, но и плоть его оказалась на грани физического истребления. Тем самым – человеческим пепелом Хатыни и 627 Хатыней, жизнью каждого четвертого – они, белорусы окончательно заручились признанием и уважением народов и государств, заняв свое место в Организации Объединенных Наций и отстаивая вместе со всеми мир и справедливость между людьми и народами.

Правда, кое-кто и поныне хотел бы иметь дело с белорусами и даже расточать комплименты по части их мужественного и добродушного нрава за пределами... белорусского языка. Не смущаясь тем, что это был бы взгляд не на живой народ, а на некий этнографический манекен, лишенный души и поэтому безучастный к напяливаемым на него различным "языковым" одеждам. Подход к белорусам как к этнографическому материалу, годящемуся лишь для других, "исторических", народов, столетием раньше мог /по причине "спячки" белорусов/ сойти за обыкновенное заблуждение.^х Сегодня же внациональный /внеязыковой/

^х Можно поэтому снизойти к тогдашнему мнению небезызвестного великорусского патриота, чья историко-философская культура в наших глазах оказывается весьма поколебленной: "Северо-западный край – точно такая же Россия и на точно таких же основаниях как сама Москва" /Данилевский И.А. Россия и Европа/. Хотя уже тогда и Северо-западный и Юго-западный края начинают доставлять свидетельства, опровергающие свою русскую "истинность" в московском /великорусском/ разумении: "Польские политики прикладывали к Белоруссии и Украине мерку шляхетской республики и католической административной нетерпимости, московские стали применять к ним аршин боярской монархии и нетерпимости православно-обрядовой" /Драгоманов М.П. Собр. полит. соч. Т. I, Париж, 1905, с. 16/; "Бросив самый поверхностный и беглый взгляд на прошлое и современное Белоруссии, мы находим в ней весьма поучительные черты, а именно общее явление, что как энергично не насаждалась культура в народе, она никак не может привиться, если не соответствует духу народа и если она не проистекает из органической потребности национальной жизни" /Данила Баровик. Письма о Белоруссии Спб., 1882. – Цит. по: Александрович С.Х. Пуцявіны роднага слова. Мн., 1971, стар. 60/.

взгляд на этот народ, после представленных им стольких и столь дорогостоящих свидетельств собственной исторической полноценности, трудно не назвать кощунством. И то, что признавалось нормой в самодержавной России – тюрьме народов, в "союзе нерушимом республик свободных, сплоченных навеки великою Русью" можно и должно называть истинным именем: шарлатанством. Нам еще придется коснуться неладов между величием и великодушием, отнюд не благопритствующих белорусскому возрождению, которое – как не парадоксально – трудно считать законченным хотя бы по причине не полностью снятых ограничений в развитии белорусского языка.

Но, прежде чем перейти к вопросу о "лингвистических" недомоганиях белорусского общества, стоило бы напомнить о главном: о существовании и развитии белорусского национального организма. Организма живого, растущего, не однажды доказавшего свою жизнестойкость и свой иммунитет перед самыми неблагоприятными "историческими" инефекциями.

x x x

Женщина во время родов – если верить Семенову-Штирлицу – кричит "мама" на языке и даже оттенке, усвоенным с матернским молоком. Так, должно быть, и народы – радость и боль, тоску и надежду, все в себе сущее выражают своим естественным словом.

Истории не так давно угодно было еще раз – и теперь с особой пристальностью и суровостью – взглянется в лицо белоруса, испытать на прочность дух белорусский: его расстреливали, вешали, сжигали. Выстоял он, пронеся сквозь могильные рвы и дым пепелищ свое слово родное. Вслушайтесь:

"Палілі нас у сорак другім годзе, напрадвесні. Гэта эсэсаўцы былі. З чарапамі. ... Нас пяць душ выскачыла. Ага, дык яны як ляцелі ключэм цераз гэтае вакно, дык немцы па іх вочарадзё пусцілі... Яны беглі ўсе, як гусі якія, ключэм так яны ўсе і паляглі, гэтыя людзі. А я ззаду ў вакно выпала і тут канаўка была, і кусцікі былі такія... І ляжала я ў гэтай канаўцы. Каб на мяне гэты агонь быў, вецер, дык я б згарэла, усё роўна згарэла б у гэтай канаўцы, але вецер кланіў туды, на склады, склады таксама гарэлі. Дык я і

засталася.

А далей ляжала, ляжала, гэтыя ўжо людзі пішчаць, выюць, сабакі брэшуць. ... Даходзілі ўжо. Ой, на розныя галасы, не можна! Вот ужо зноў пачало мяне калаціць! Крычалі людзі на розныя галасы. Так ужо гэта, у тым клубе. ... Устала я. Каб дзе кот ці які верабей, ці што на свеце – усё... Гэта такая цішыня... А можа я толькі адна на свеце асталася? Дык я думаю – няхай гэтыя немцы ці прыстрэляць мяне, ці што ўжо... Бо як я буду адна жыць на свеце".

"... А я гляджу ўжо – цёмна, так толькі мясячко ўсходзіць, толькі пачынаў усходзіць. Тады вот у нас старая была адна /яна памерла, здаецца, запрошлы год/, дык яна:

- А мая ж ты, – галосіць – дочанька, за што ж цябе забілі, хай бы лепш мяне! ... А тут з намі ў гэтай хаце быў хлопчык адзін. Бацьку яго забілі ў тым хляве, дзе былі мужчыны, а яго адзелі за дзяўчынку: бо гаварылі, што хлопчыкаў забіваюць. Дык яны ўзялі яго сюды, адзеўшы дзевачкай. А яго, беднага параніла крэпка: растрапалі тут во, жывоцік, усё, усё... Дык ён, бедны, просіцца:

- Выміце мяне, каб я не гарэў.

А тут ужо ўсё гарыць. А ён просіцца...

Мы, праўда, за яго і – цераз акно. І самі праз акно вылезлі. З гэтай самай жанчынай. І што ж – па нас яны сталі страляць, а мы так за дым гэты захіліліся і пайшлі".

"Я думаю, куды мне, Божа мой?

... Куды людзі, туды і мы! Што Бог дасць".

"Мы былі ў лесе, гаворыць Вольга Рыгораўна Грышановіч, ну і прышлі з лесу, калі нашых спалілі. Паглядзелі, сабралі попел: дзеці ляжаць – здаецца, жывое. Возьмеш – папялок рассыпаецца. У адной хаце мы сабралі ўсіх. Дзевяць цаброў – адны беленькія костачкі".

"Надзька, дачушка мая! Мяне заб'юць, а ты хавайся дзе!".

"Я, мае дзеткі, трохі недачуваю... Я вам буду расказваць як было. ... І толькі, мае вы дзеткі залатныя, як гэта мы з вамі гаворым – ужо выстрал. Ужо людзі – хто на конях з таго Адамова, першага ляцяць сюды. З гравейкі выстрал. Тут упаў адзін... Ён так упаў, яго не забілі... Ой! Пулі свісцяць.

... Пабілі мне акно ў хаце. Пуля пабіла. Усё ўжо – немцы тут. Акружылі... А мае /дзеткі/ як сядзелі на палу... Вядома, маленькія, а каля печы полічак быў такі... Хата была новая, харошая. Як згарэла, дык яны... Іх кірпіч і заваліў там... Яны ўжо там і папакліся... Мы пасле іх толькі костачкі такія пазнаходзілі. І з плаціцаў пугавічкі... А то згарэлі яны ўжо... Гэтыя трупы мы паўбіралі, пазакопвалі. Трун не рабілі. Так палаценцамі пазасцілалі і пазакопвалі... От як здзекваліся з народа! ... Мой быў пасля ў партызанах. А пасля прыйшоў з вайны з гэтае і забалеў ён, і памёр".

"Сорак восем было гаспадарак. Чалавек сто восемдзсят – усіх пабілі. Асталося чатыры бабы і два мужчыны. Адзін у ячмяні лёг, а другі ў калодзеж ускочыў".

"Штыхамі дзетак маленькіх паролі...

А потым, як ужо наша армія ішла, нашы ў плен іх узялі. І шанавалі. Мы пайшлі глядзець іх, дык яны сядзяць каля агню, павычосваліся... Пленныя! Дык мы кажам:

– Каб вас у агонь пакідаў, як вы нашых дзяцей кідалі! ... Так яны і пасунуліся ад агню далей".

"Як ужо білі!... Ай білі! ... Лес шумеў і зямелька стагнала, як білі. Хто дзе... Колькі нас адбеглася? Бабы дзве толькі. А то ўсё дзеці. Яны пусцілі з пулямётаў у рост, а дзеці маленькія і засталіся гадоў на пяць, на шэсць каторня".

"Мая адна дзевачка ўцякаць, а той давай з пулямёта біць. Яна і ўпала на мяжу. Немец хлопца паслаў... Ён, той хлопец, і сённека е... "Забярм тое дзецка, што я забіў!". Хлопец пабег, трасе яе: "Жэня! Жэня!" /Бабуля плача/. "Я яе – кажаў потым той хлопец – узяў на бярэмя, прынёс". Ён падняў ей плацечка, глядзіць. "Во, – кажа, – шчаслівае дзецка: я яго з пулямёта так біў і – жывое..." .

Таков он, язык белорусов, повествующий сегодня человечеству о том – тем, возможно, являя ключ к национальной идее народа – каким сверхскотом делается всякий, вздумавший стать сверхчеловеком. Диалекту, даже окропленному водами могучей реки, такая нагрузка, согласитесь, вряд ли по плечу.

Язык, закаленный под пытками варваров "чингис-ханов с телеграфами" /А. Адамович/, выжил неуж-то затем, что б исчезнуть в хитросплетениях "просвещенного" молоха? Не думаю.

Научно-технический прогресс несет в себе не одну сплошную унификацию. Дифференциацию, разнообразие – тоже. Можно судить хотя бы по детищу века – телевизионной коробке, наполняющей тэлеэфир "от Москвы до самых до окраин" не одной унифицированной программой "Время", "17" и прочими телемгновеньями. На тех же "окраинах" с голубого экрана звучат не одни маршевые песни вроде "Сегодня мы не на параде, мы к коммунизму на пути...". Там слышится и нечто глубоко прозрачное, способное всколыхнуть очерствевшую от бесконечных "парадов" душу: "Ой, рэчанька, рэчанька, чаму ж ты няпоўная...". Конечно, пропорции звучаний первого и второго свойства далеки от их соответствия духу и плоти живого человека. Первые заявляют о себе громче, решительнее; они – пока в почете сии качества – "короли" сцены, экрана, эфира. Это печалит. Однако не менее радует то, что уже не только они, звучания маршево-сомнительного свойства владеют умами и настроем людей в озерно-ракистовом крае. Техническая революция – не только смерть и гниение. Она также – рождение и пробуждение. В народе, как и в личности, она усиливает позиции знания, а с ним – достоинство, гордость, дух творчества, самовыражения и самоутверждения. Словом, в ней – свой животворящий источник и свое болото, свой расцвет и свое увядание, разве что увядание – только одно из проявлений жизни, но не сама жизнь, бесконечная в развитии. От нас с Вами зависит, чему отдать предпочтение.

Нашлись же трое белорусских интеллигентов^х: они вооружились этой самой "НТР", объездили и обошли белорусские села и местечки, записав на магнитофонную ленту воспоминания уцелевших смертников Хатыней и явив современникам и потомкам уникальный исторический и литературный памятник.

Вглядитесь же в лица живых из "вогненных вёсак", вслушайтесь в их печальную речь, от которой веет не только печалью. Многие поведают Вам эти люди, в том числе и о бессрочном паспорте своего языка.

х Есть, вопреки допущенному в начале огульному утверждению, своя интеллигенция в Белоруссии. Правда, в пропорциях уступающих количеству кадров с высшим образованием, но способная сообщить народу национально-интеллектуальное ускорение, сдерживать которое не в состоянии самая многочисленная рать чиновников и "генералов".

Вслушался же Поэт сестры Украины в дыхание испепеленной земли:

– Я Ядвига,
Учительница села,
Хлебороба хатынского дочь,
Здесь подпольно
Уроки с детьми я вела,
Шли занятия каждую ночь.
Чтоб предатель и враг-чужеземец
Не знал,
Не глумился кроваво
Над нами
Первоклассник
И тот
В нашей школе читал:
"Никогда мы не будем рабами..."
Мне, Ядвиге Каминской,
Неведом был страх,
Я боролась за правое дело,
Чтоб у всех белорусских детей
На устах
Белорусская мова звенела
Из криничных ключей,
Из шумящих лесов,
Чтоб звенела, как наши цимбалы,
И несла чистоту свою
В хор голосов
Песней Якуба,
Песней Купалы.

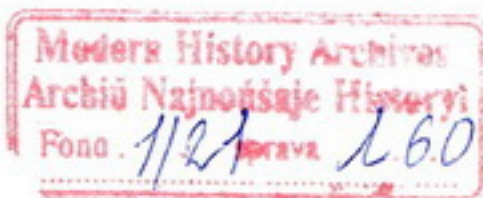
Микола Нагнибеда. Хатынь.

х х х

Таков он, белорусский народ – народ, как свидетельствуют дни минувшие и нынешние – не раб и не нем. С позиций этого народа, не подающего признаков онемения, поставленный Вами вопрос не существует. Он возник не среди белорусов, а в стороне от их исторического восхождения и вопреки ему. У него весьма давняя хоть и не весьма славная история.

Этот вопрос поставлен теми, кто смотрел на белорусов примерно так, как смотрит столяр на неструганную доску, норовя стругать ее до необходимой, по разумению древообделочника, гладкости.

Поначалу польский король норовил достругать мой народ до блеска окатоличенного шляхтича. Затем московский царь-единоверец, исправляя старания своего польского коллеги,



"врачевал" над израненным белорусским организмом, сиюсь вдыхнуть в него великодержавный дух "истинного" великорусса. Парадоксальнее всего, что усердия эти проистекали от "великороссов" с немалой примесью в них германских кровей. Как знать, не завершилось ли бы "врачевание" по прусскому образцу испусканием живого духа белорусов, не поспешила история на время для ветеринарных усилий российского императора и не прикажи она двуглавному орлу долго жить. Возможно — не поторопись история — на сегодняшней 2700 язычной планете одной мовой было бы меньше, а у "великого и могучего" — одним диалектом больше. Не знаю, выиграл бы или нет от этого русский язык /чрезмерные диалектные нагрузки вряд ли на пользу даже самым мощным языкам/, но общечеловеческая культура обеднилась бы определенно.

Польский король старался триста лет с лихвой. Российский царь — полтораста лет. Почти полтысячелетия мой народ, оставленный и преданный своими высшими и средними слоями, норовили, каждый на свой лад сделать "истинным". Не вышло. Остался он, верный своему предназначению, белорусским народом, выйдя, однако, из столь длительной инквизиторской лаборатории духовно надломленным. Почти без своих писателей, историков, философов, художников, композиторов.

Четыреста лет позволялось ему только рожать для более могущественных соседей Костюшек, Мицкевичей, Достоевских. Не позволялось зато передавать детям своим собственный язык, посредством него — дух и мудрость народа. И вырастали дети, забывшие своих родителей, сменялись поколения, не помнившие уже своего первоначального родства и имени. И сами белорусы уже было основательно засомневались в своей самости, "явив" почти в центре Европы этнографическую диковинку — мужицкий народ, именовавший себя "тутэйшыми".

Должно быть значительный "масштаб совершенства" /И. Гердер/ изначально был сообщен этому народу, коль встряхнулся он от духовной спячки и забывания именно тогда, когда история уже, казалось, завершила в этой части земли поименную инвентаризацию всех народов и государств.

Богушевич, Купала, Колас, Богданович, Тетка, Ядвигин, братья Луцкевичи... Из недр белорусских являются люди

и стремятся выразить – пусть не все одинаково верно и удачно – идею своего народа, скрытую под его домотканым рубищем. И как раз с возрождения белорусского языка начинают они свою великую и нелегкую работу.

Этот язык еще четырьмя столетиями раньше звучал во дворцах литовско-белорусских канцлеров и магнатов, выразил совершеннейшее по тем временам законодательство /Литовский статут/, гением Франциска Скорины явил белорусам и всему восточному славянству первый перевод "Библии", содействуя "научению простых людей русского / не смешивать с русским – авт./ языка" и "лепшаму выразумлению люду христианского и посполитого". Этот язык, столь обещающе заявивый о себе во времена Ренессанса, оказывается на несколько веков /ирония геополитик и геокультур?/ оттесненным со всех улиц и перекрестков публичной культуры и политики и загоняется в курные крестьянские лачуги. Этот язык в его собственном доме низводят до положения гадкого утенка. Ускорившая свою поступь история начинает обходить его стороной вместе со своими научными и художественными открытиями, творениями, промышленно-техническими переворотами, политическими революциями – всеми теми явлениями, в общении с которыми развивались, совершенствовались /впрочем, и засорялись/ другие европейские языки.

Белорусский язык, подавший на рубеже XIX–XX веков свой измученный, но еще достаточно живой голос, напоминал чем-то робкую, застенчивую Золушку, решившуюся отправиться на королевский бал. С тем отличием, что первые белорусские подвижники, взявшиеся сопровождать выход своего "мужицкого языка" на мир людской, не располагали ни волшебством доброй Феи, ни могуществом принца. Белорусской Золушке предстояла нелегкая задача разубедить высокомерную и самоуверенную публику в том, что за ее простой /.../остью скрывается не простоватость, а нечто более существенное и не менее благородное и что ее словотворческие способности имеют мало общего с наклепываемыми на них эпитетами "трапка", "парадак" и т.п..

"Не кідайце мовы сваёй, каб не ўмёрлі" /"Ради жизни язык свой берегите"/ – с таким наказом вступили белорусы в XX век, одновременно наверстывая дела эпох минувших, некогда их обошедших, и осуществляя веления новой эпохи. Вполне доброт-

ные результаты крупномасштабной и многоплановой работы невозможно представить вне белорусского языка, к многожильности которого прибавляется немало иных достоинств, позволяющих ему шествовать "вровень с веком" и поднимать свой, уже далеко не мужицкий народ до уровня современной эпохи.

Судите сами. В 1906 году усилиями небольшой группы мелкошляхетских интеллигентов-белорусов вышли первые газеты на белорусском языке "Наша доля" и "Наша нива", не без раздражения встреченные тогдашней русофильствующей и полонофильствующей публикой как нечто надуманное и противоестественное^х. 70 лет спустя представитель ООН с благодарностью принимает от моих соотечественников 12 томов "Беларускай Савецкай Энцыклапедыі" на хранение в книжных архивах Объединенных наций. К языкам более и менее могучим нашего СССР и других стран, давно и постоянно осваивающим более и менее лучшие творения белорусов, недавно прибавился английский язык. Уолтер Мэй, переводчик антологии "Белорусской поэзии" стремился передать английскому читателю "красоту, музыкальность белорусского языка, его искренность и силу, раскрыть источник мужества и непоколебимой веры народа в лучшее будущее, все то, что /он/ так полюбил в белорусской поэзии и в белорусах" /"Звезда", 10 октября 1976 /. С доброй ласки советской космической промышленности "мова мая" в творениях Якуба Коласа устами Петра Климука поднялась в космическое пространство, где ее услышал второй обитатель корабля русский брат Севостьянов.

Словом, наказ Мацея Бурачка, отца белорусского возрождения,

х К тем временам восходят бытующие кое-где и поныне суждения: "Культура русская и культура польская слишком сильны, чтобы допустить возможность образования между ними третьей искусственной культуры - белорусской, не имеющей под собой реальной почвы ни в истории, ни в литературе, ни в жизни" /"Белорусская жизнь", 1911, No.20/. Этот тезис имел авторитетного предшественника еще в 1867 году: "Дело идет об истреблении полонизма, а белоруссы, как будто уже избавленные от опасности, хлопочут не о спасении от польского ига, а о сохранении местных особенностей! Да и есть ли эти особенности?" /Из письма И.С. Аксакова к М.О. Кояловичу. Цит. по: Самбук С.М. Общественно-политическая мысль Белоруссии во второй половине XIX века. Мн., 1976, с.141/. Великорусскому "молоту" вторила польская "наковальня": "Белорусский народ никогда не имел и не имеет своей литературы. Создала ее польская интеллигенция. Создана она искусственно" /"Правда", Варшава, 1910, на польском языке/.

не забыт. Живет и развивается язык белорусский, а с ним — народ Беларуси. И если кому-то кажется, что это развитие — к закату, то в таком заблуждении меньше всего повинны белорусы.

Вопрос, с которого началось это письмо не выражает — повторяю — ни интересов, ни воли белорусского народа. Но отражает определенное отношение к белорусам со стороны. Так уж ведется издавна, — Вы это видели, — что роковое "со стороны" далеко не всегда "угадывало" что для белорусов лучше и что хуже. Казалось бы канули в Лету причины, в силу которых этот народ долгое время оставался объектом сторонних интересов и политик, а состояние нашего языка не перестает вызывать вопросы и недоумения.

Почему же так происходит? Почему и сегодня белорусам приходится тратить немало усилий на расчистку завалов, препятствий с пути развития своего языка, своей культуры? Почему история, сообщив им необходимое ускорение, не оградила это ускорение от пут инерции и консерватизма, в силу чего культурное восхождение не свободно от холостых оборотов и даже попятных движений?

Исчерпывающие ответы на эти вопросы не по моим силам, как бы не удлинялось и без того растянувшееся письмо. Не уверен, что такие ответы вообще возможны сегодня /Приходится помнить к тому же: живем мы не только в век братства, но в век доносительства тоже. По этой причине молчание пред несправедливостью даже в почете не меньшем, чем, скажем, святая сама справедливость./.

Тем не менее решаюсь привлечь Ваше внимание к одной существенной стороне вопроса, способной, может быть, раскрыть и сам вопрос. А именно: к остаткам "русского дела"... в... суверенной социалистической Белорусской Республике.

х х х

Вот что свидетельствует "Лысяя гара", литературный памятник белорусского народного творчества семидесятых годов XX века:

Был час, был век, была эпоха,
 Когда налопавшись в отвал
 Кой-кто уверовал в панчошу -
 Надежно-сытый идеал.

Когда в родной столице Минске
 Культурно вскормленный нахал
 Самоуверенно по-свински
 Родную речь мою пинал.

Когда иной артист народный,
 Не зная двух народных слов,
 За сытый харч "творил" здесь плодно
 К усладе тутошних ослов.

Они давно готовы были,
 Давя с трибуны души крик,
 Добить нанет, свести в могилу
 Купалы-Коласа язык.

Когда бы партия по-русски
 Не укрощала волчью прыть,
 Они и дух наш белорусский
 Живьем не прочь бы проглотить.

Не вижу нужды в более веских доказательствах, хотя частных фактов по существу проблемы придется еще касаться. Поэтические обобщения такого накала не вырастают сами по себе. В них - кровоточащая рана белорусов. Не тех, которые в начале века, пожелав "людьми зваться", понесли по свету на изможденных плечах "свою кривду". Дети и внуки тех белорусов уже стали людьми и потому-то не могут примириться с ущемлением их национального достоинства. Тогда вопль белорусов сочувственно услышала Россия Горького и Ульянова-Ленина. Я не знаю имени России, которая прислушивается к сегодняшней печали моих соотечественников, хочется верить, что эта печаль не останется не услышанной.

В чем причины ассимиляции? Кто ее непосредственные виновники? И эти вопросы заслуживали бы специального рассмотрения. Но кое что нам подсказывают только что процитированные четверостишья.

Зло отчасти - в самой эпохе, позволяющей "панчохе" катироваться идеалом высшего порядка. Трудно понять - откуда возникают такие "идеалы" /в следствие неудачной стыковки обеих революций или из природы одной из них/ но они налицо и чтобы в том убедиться - не обязательно ехать в столицу Белоруссии. Когда же "панчоха" находит себе пристанище в политике, в культуре, результаты не замедлят сказаться. И только ли в Белоруссии?

Признаюсь Вам: рассматривая полки и витрины книжных магазинов Москвы, вчитываясь в заголовки русских газет, в чем-то недалеко ушедших от "казенных громкоговорителей" /М. Кольцов/, не нахожу картину с моим языком более мрачной нежели нынешняя картина с языком Пушкина, Гоголя, Твардовского, Шолохова. Какая доля из словарного запаса этого языка находится сегодня в общеупотребительном обиходе? Не уверен в том, что доля достаточная для успешного обслуживания двух революций одновременно и тем более — для подготовки грядущей "революции духа". К тому же "окраинам" не безразлично, с каким багажом жалует к ним "великий и могучий". Со словами: революция, коммунизм, социализм, коллектив /пусть себе и заимствованными/. Или со словами и словосочетаниями: блат, бронь /билет на поезд, в театр и т.д./, дефицит /почти во всем/, очередь /почти за всем, за водкой — в особенности/, бардак /почти везде/, в долгу не останусь /намек на взятку/ и бесчетным множеством т.п. вкroppившихся в жизнь и быт белорусов /только ли их?/. Куда печальнее, когда развитый и великий язык становится средством для целей отнюдь не великих, причем не обязательно в руках русских. "Панчошные" дела небезмысленно обделывают сегодня "сами белорусы", превосходя порой, казалось бы не превосходимых в этом смысле потомков "черты оседлости".

Так, недавно они приняли закон БССР о народном образовании, записав в нем, что учащимся средней школы представляется возможность обучения на родном языке или на языке другого народа СССР, а родители имеют право выбирать для детей по желанию школу с соответствующим языком обучения. А вот политика, действующая "по закону": "Открывая широкие возможности для изучения белорусского и русского языков, мы считаем непозволительным какие-либо шаги, создающие предпочтительные условия для любого из них, подчеркивающие приоритет того или другого".^х

Стоит Вам заглянуть в Белоруссию, чтобы убедиться в том, как справедливая буква закона и внешне безобидные слова политика о равенстве обоих языков оборачиваются на практике "равенством" Красной Шапочки и Серого волка, как резко сокращается количество школ с белорусским языком обучения, как

х Кузьмин А. Интернациональное воспитание... — "Полит. самообраз.", 1977, Но.2, с.42.

учащиеся повально /"по желанию родителей"/ стремятся освободиться от изучения родного языка, а если и принуждаются к изучению /кто-то же должен, коль существует Белоруссия, изучать и белорусский.../, то "изучают" его со всей изобретательностью усвоения не ахти любимых предметов. Таков "языковой" климат формирования будущих "капитанов" дальнего и ближнего плавания.

На следующей ступени учащегося будут, скажем, в Бобруйске, учить плехскому промыслу, но не традиционной белорусской росписи, еще выше - учить проектному и строительному делу главным образом в ракурсе железа и бетона, в век НТР действительно "безнациональных". Таким образом вырастают художники, готовые зарабатывать, но не способные творить. Появляются проектировщики, обделенные чувством национального своеобразия, исторической преемственности и в своем изобретательстве не способные подняться выше фантазии обитателей города Глупова.

К примеру, белорусские глуповцы хотя и не Волгу "толоком замесили", зато живую Немигу засыпали песком и укатали асфальтом, снеся заодно единственный в Минске старинный квартал - сердце древнего города. На сим месте нынче царствует роскошный пустырь: Со временем, говорят, он украсится не менее роскошными торговыми рядами /неприменно "самыми-самыми"/. И наша бедная историческими достопримечательностями белорусская столица обогатится, наконец, уникальным сооружением - памятником Головоотяпству НТР-ской эпохи.

Проблема, разумеется, не только в развитии художественных промыслов архитектуры. Живопись, скульптура, графика, плакат, музыка, кино, хореографическое искусство, словом, состояние всей белорусской культуры нельзя понять вне проблемы белорусского языка. Понимая под языком не столько функцию общения между людьми, сколько и прежде всего дух и способ жизнедеятельности и самовыражения людей. Можно, без большого риска ошибиться, предположить, что на сегодняшний день в белорусской культуре, за некоторым исключением литературного цеха, много специалистов, кадров с высшим образованием и мало, до обидного мало интеллигентов. Белорусских интеллигентов.

Что же в том предосудительного, спросите Вы, если люди охотнее предпочитают русский язык - белорусскому? Как же можно не считаться с желаниями людей? Но в том-то и суть

проблемы – кощунственная суть, – что внешние и случайные /привнесенные многолетними неблагоприятными обстоятельствами/ признаки выдаются порой за естественное волеизъявление.

Следуя такой сомнительной логике можно было, к примеру, и в 1922 году внять настроению слуцкого крестьянина, отказывавшего поддерживать школу в его деревне лишь на том основании, что там "молиться не учат, а некую белорусскую мову вводят"^х. Кстати и тогда находились люди, готовые видеть в крестьянской отсталости веление времени. Эти люди – уже не царские сатрапы, а буревестники революции, – выступавшие в первые годы советской власти против "искусственного насаждения" белорусской национальности^{хх}, в сердцах, видимо, считали себя правыми, полагаясь на тогдашнее настроение усредненного белоруса, еще не совсем очнувшегося от четырехсотлетней спячки. Буревестникам светлого будущего еще предстояло усвоить элементарный урок истории, что ни соединение пролетариев всех стран, ни установление всемирного братства народов не мыслимы над национальностями и тем более – вопреки им. Жизнь вскоре заставит их признать, что революция – если не сводить ее к обыкновенному политическому перевороту – не приподносится народу в качестве подарка; она совершается самим народом сообразно его историческому опыту и духу.

Только на этой основе белорусы, втянувшись в перестройку жизни, смогли строить новую жизнь, как бы заново создавая и самих себя: людей со своим именем, языком, со своей культурой.

х Колас Якуб. Збор твораў. Т. II, Мінск, 1976, стар. 34.

хх "Мы считаем, – писал секретарь Северо-западного комитета РКП/б/ В.Кнорин, – что белорусы не являются нацией и что те этнографические особенности, которые их отделяют от русских, должны быть изжиты" /"Звезда", 6.X.18 г./.

На XI съезде партии наркому И.Сталину пришлось специально останавливаться на заблуждениях национальных нигилистов, противящихся самоопределению белорусской нации /см. XI съезд РКП/б/. Стенографический отчет. М., 1963, с. 213/. Кто победил бы тогда в споре – пессимисты или оптимисты – сказать трудно, не выйди к тому времени "мужицкий язык" из-под соломенных стрех на бурлящие перекрестки эпохи. Белорусское движение той поры вместе со своими героями еще дождетя достойного внимания и уважения потомков.

Условия социалистического строительства, обеспечившие национальное и социальное возрождение белорусского народа, не всегда благоприятствовали. Из 60 лет советской власти отнимите 20 лет на территориальную расчлененность белорусского организма /Западная Белоруссия под гнетом буржуазной Польши/, 7 лет на две войны, вдоль и впоперек перепачкавших этот край, лет 10 - на послевоенную нормализацию /проблемы куска хлеба и крыши над головой/. Остается всего лишь 20 с небольшим лет да и те не лишены крайностей или обыкновенного авантюризма в национальной политике.

За столь короткий срок стало возможным понастроить в Белоруссии заводов и городов, осушить болота /перестарались, говорят, и здесь, сводя местами осушение к иссушению/, обеспечить социальные блага. Но не успелось - и не могло успеться - завершить национальное возрождение, высшим проявлением можно было бы считать достижение народом в общей языковой культуре и национальной культуры в целом. Когда белорусская речь в форме литературного языка вернулась бы /уже не в дворцы канцлеров и магнатов/ в кабинеты судей и политиков, в залы заседаний, в детские сады, школьные классы и студенческие аудитории, в театры и клубы /не только и не столько на сцену/, на улицы и площади городов и поселков. Словом, когда она из орнаментального украшения превратится в живую ткань общественной жизни, а звучание белорусского слова в троллейбусе, в магазине белорусской столицы будет восприниматься так же естественно как сегодня воспринимается здесь испорченный русский язык, который, в самом деле, скорее напоминает диалект нежели оригинальный язык. Когда, наконец, сформируется и стабилизируется нужный национально-языковой макроклимат, без которого белорусские Ромео и Джульетта обречены были бы на вечную немоту.

Трудно сказать, когда придет поколение белорусов, окончательно излечившихся от комплекса языковой неполноценности, от своеобразной национальной стыдливости. Но формирование этого поколения - уже сегодня не призрак, а живая реальность, тянущаяся к солнцу молодыми побегами на обновленной белорусской ниве. Политики, допущенные к

этому необратимому процессу, могут его ускорять или замедлять /чаще, к сожалению, они предпочитают последнее/, но не в состоянии "переделать" его внутреннюю логику даже с помощью вводимых законов, открывающих путь к... беззаконию.

"Охранителям" равенства прав обоих языков в Белоруссии почему-то невдомек, что сие "равенство" на неравных исходных возможностях того и другого и что более сильному больше представляется... привилегий^х. Им, всерьез, видимо, считающими себя марксистами-ленинцами, невдомек, что после многовековых преследований, сильно затормозивших и деформировавших развитие белорусского языка, следует прежде всего устранить фактическое неравенство - огромные историко-культурные диспропорции в уровне обоих языков, словом обеспечить "выравнивание уровней" в соответствии с природой социализма, как ее понимали Маркс и Ленин. Не поспевайте для вчерашнего "гадкого утенка" льготами в тепле и пище; и лишь когда тот, обретя силу, взмахнет скрепшими крыльями и займет свое место в ровной журавлиной цепи - тогда ваша прокурорская "непозволительность" может иметь какой-нибудь смысл.

Но если "потребность дня" или "угода дьявола" способны заслонить отдельным деятелям историческую перспективу, от этого сама перспектива еще не исчезает. Некоторым "законодателям" 30-х годов, отмеченных тотальным наступлением на юные, еще не окрепшие силы белорусской интеллигенции /Гарэцкі, Ігнатоўскі, Александровіч, Шчакаціхін, Галавач, Чарот.../ тоже было, видимо, невдомек, что их р-р-революционное наступление на "буржуазный национализм" в социалистической Белоруссии не далеко отошло от самой махровой контрреволюции, прикрывающей грязную работу красным стягом. И что через каких-нибудь двадцать лет время реабилитирует жертвы, хотя /пока/ не назовет истинным именем инициаторов и исполнителей "нероновщины XX века". Бело-

х Напр., в БССР из 88 журналов 58 выходят на русском языке, 30 - на белорусском. На Украине соотношение /соответственно/: 185:75:108. Лишены белорусы, в отличие от укр. своего историч. журнала, "Иностр. Л-ры" и т.п.

русская культура еще не скоро оправится от кровопускания над первым поколением ее интеллигенции, брошенного в пасть угольно-золотых разработок Крайнего Севера и Восточной Сибири.

Отметим по ходу, что на русском языке был составлен приговор 1864 года о повешении в Вильне Кастуся Калиновского – первого белорусского интеллигента и революционера. Этот же язык сопутствовал шельмованию и "пуску в расход" /еще одно словосочетание/ Калиновских нового времени. Дело, разумеется, не в языке, а в конкретных носителях его. Потому то я и не могу не привлечь Ваше внимание: в мой край язык братского народа приходит не только в образе мятежной лиры Лермонтова и боготворящей грусти Чехова. Но также – в облике самовольного, непререкаемого "не п...потерплю", заглушающего нередко наше родное мягкое "калі ласка". И сегодня под пресловутое "не п-п-потерплю" /в условиях НТР стало возможным серийное производство уникального органика градоначальника Бурдас-того/ в Белоруссии продолжается охота за "националистами", хотя, – надо отдать справедливость, – способами более демократическими. Нынешние "охотники" научились обходиться без кровопусканий. Со временем, можно надеется, они набьют оскомину и на духовных репрессиях, когда официальными обличениями убивается истина /"давя с трибуны души крик"/.

Даже социально справедливый строй, как видим, оказывается бессильным там, где политика отчуждается от нравственности. Преодоление этой отчужденности – в интересах более благоприятного развития родного языка и не только – могла бы значительно содействовать белорусская интеллигенция. Но та сама, как Вы знаете, страдает недугом безъязыкости. В этом ее и вина и беда. В этом, может быть, одна из острейших проблем белорусской национальной жизни. А недомогание интеллигенции в свою очередь объясняется деликатным, мягко скажем, положением белорусского языка, который не преследуется, но и не очень-то поощряется. Где же выход из этого заколдованного круга и есть ли он? Думается, что есть. Он в создании подлинно равных /хотя бы равных, коль "непозволительно" льготы/ условий обоим языкам.

Что же происходит на практике? После 400-летнего изгнания нашему родному языку позволили, наконец, существовать рядом с русским, однако на условиях чем-то напоминающих условия приживальщика /на своей собственной земле!/: он вытеснен из сферы дошкольного /город/, отчасти – школьного,

профессионального, среднего специального, высшего воспитания и образования; не позволили ему закрепиться ни в партийном, ни в советском аппарате, обслуживающем всю официальную жизнь Республики^х.

Подготавливаемые и живущие при таких обстоятельствах интеллигенты, не усвоив как следует родного языка и не свыкшись с ним, не в состоянии передавать его своим детям. Чаще дети таких интеллигентов впитывают с молоком матери язык... не материнский. Можно понять позднее реакцию на изучение белорусского языка в школе как и повальные старания родителей /благо - закон освящает/ оградить своих крошек от чрезмерной учебной нагрузки.

Не усваивает эта интеллигенция глубоко и чужого языка - понятного, доступного, но не одухотворяющего. На этом языке она создает электронно-вычислительные машины, пишет канцелярские справки и политические доклады. Но не в состоянии развить культуру, которая во все века выростала на конкретной земле, питаясь соками этой земли и вдыхая паветра, согреваясь светом солнца распостертых над этой землей /речь - о создателях, не о потребителях культуры/.

И все же возможности денационализации белорусской интеллигенции не безпредельны. О бесперспективности отмеченного явления можно судить по глубинным тенденциям как самого белорусского общества так и сопредельных с ним народов - поляков, украинцев, литовцев, латышей; всего современного человечества. У которого тяжелое, прерывистое дыхание необузданного "прогресса" вызывает к жизни новые и более сильные национальные импульсы, способные врачевать и возвышать человеческий дух над "свинными помоями" века.

х Между тем когда-то юная революция и в этом направлении сделала было первый и, как оказалось, последний шаг, ставя задачу "далеешага паглыблення і пашырэння беларусізацыі ў партыйным і савецкім апарате", выдвигая не менее благородный лозунг: "каб уся КП/б/Б загаварыла на беларускай мове" /XI з'езд Камуністычнай Партыі /бальшавікоў/ Беларусі. Мінск, 1928, стар.424/. Сегодня белорусская парторганизация - единственная, пожалуй, из всех республиканских п/о, не жалующая свою родную речь на заседаниях, совещаниях, бюро, пленумах, сессиях, собраниях. Не думаю, чтобы и эта "интернационалистская" черта долго оставалась нерушимой. В частных беседах и в "урезать - так урезать" и здесь начинают все чаще отводить душу родным, незаменимым словом.

Белорусская интеллигенция со временем пояснит миру, что ее межнациональная коммуникативность вырастает из ее собственных национальных достоинств, но никак не в стороне от них и что вненациональный "интернационализм" имеет столько же общего с природой и духом социалистического строя как и бесчетные "дворянские гнезда", "дома бедноты" – лесные и городские "палаццо" "слуг народа", упражняющиеся на народном теле лишь постольку – поскольку народ еще не сказал своего извечного: досыць!, довольно!

Веру мою питают физики-странники, спасающие от "научно-технического" варварства живопись древнего Полесья /остатки усадьбы Достоевского спасти не успели они/. В их подвижничестве – грядущий день белорусской интеллигенции в широком значении слова.

Возлагая основную надежду на нее, никто не склонен приуменьшать значения других социальных слоев белорусского общества в довершении национального возрождения. Можно, однако, предположить, что возрастание роли рабочих, специалистов, чиновников, профессиональных военных и т.д. в этом процессе во многом обусловлено усвоением ими высших ценностей национальной культуры и в первую очередь литературного языка. И этот обещающий процесс, подхлестываемый той же самой НТР, зарождается на наших глазах, стоит только захотеть к нему прислушаться и присмотреться. Многие говорят за то, что завтрашний день явит нам нечто вроде единого национального фронта, призванного в полном объеме завершить дело начатое в Белоруссии Богусевичем и Купалой, Лениным и Червяковым. И тогда мой народ, окончательно познав и осознав свою собственную идею, тот самый "масштаб совершенства" и став полновластным хозяином в своем доме, вряд ли позволит напяливать на себя без надобности иноязычные одежды. Так как осуществить свое предназначение ему возможно и удобнее будет в своей исконной, белорусской. От этого у белорусов ничуть не уменьшится желание постигать издавна близкий и незаменимый для их полнокровной жизни язык сестры России.

Можно надеяться также: со временем и русский язык в отношениях с "беларускай моваю" найдет оптимальное соче-

тание величия с великодушием. Тем более, что эта гармония заложена в природе языка братского народа, следуя которой всеми чтимый великорусс В.И. Ульянов-Ленин стремился сам и нам наказывал "защищать российских инородцев от нашествия того истинно русского человека великоросса-шовиниста, в сущности подлеца и насильника, каким является типичный русский бюрократ"^х.

Наученные историей, мы различаем благотворное влияние языка русского народа и тлетворное "не п.п.отерплю", "р...разорю" "истинно русского держиморды", обличье которого дополняет сегодня обюрокращенная и обезнационаленная часть белорусского общества. Часть, однако, не сводимая к целому и не имеющая ничего общего с внутренним состоянием и исторической динамикой целого.

О части более существенной и органически слитой с целым можно узнавать по иным источникам. Хотя бы вот по этому:

Речь родная звучала не даром,
 Единя шеренги бойцов.
 С ней во пламени битв и пожаров
 Запеклась белорусская кровь.
 От глумления ее защищая
 Шли в атаки, горели живьем -
 Чтоб народ мой, неволи не зная,
 Жил и славил бы счастье свое.

/Нил Гилевич/.

Возможно одного этого восьмистишья оказалось бы достаточно, чтобы "снять" Ваш вопрос и не следовало утомлять Вас так растянувшимся и не совсем "причесанным" письмом? Но не моя в том вина, что, мучаясь над строками, думалось не только о друзьях. О неблагожелателях - тоже. Тех последних Господь, как известно, обошел даром понимать с полу-слова. Вот они и низвергают обличительные водопады там, где следовало бы внять голосу разума и совести. Их самоуверенная безапелляционность отчасти и понуждает на длиноты в вопросах вобщем-то ясных.

Далекий от намерения в чем-бы то ни было просвещать Вас,

х Ленин В.И. Полн. собр. соч. Т.45, с.357

я не мог не надеяться на понимание и поддержку русскими друзьями сегодняшних стремлений белорусов, частично обозначенных в этом письме. Надежда моя покоится на глубоком уважении к русской идее с ее /насколько она доступна моему пониманию/ отрицанием религии власти и утверждением религии духа. Естественна также наша солидарность с возрождением вашей идеи; без духовного самоочищения русского народа и нам трудно рассчитывать на успех своего дела. Белорусы не обладают, возможно, соборными, комюноторными качествами, но по своей сути они – также народ богочеловеческий и чуждый человекобожеству.

Накрепко породненным столетиями, быть нам вместе и в грядущем испытании, уготованном Славянству. Выстоим тем успешнее, чем раньше избавимся от остатков внутреннего пан-монголизма, научившись у в а ж а т ь то, что отличает каждого из нас. Как научились мы дорожить слагаемыми нашего родства.

Наше стремление находится в полном согласии с пониманием всеславянского единства его непревзойденными выразителями: "Было бы очень прискорбно если бы, например, подражая политике канцлера Бисмарка, мы поставили вопрос о наших окраинах на почву принудительного и прямолинейного обрусения"^х. Провидению угодно было заставить Россию поступиться как "своими" окраинами, так и частью своей государственности в пользу родственных народов. Ни могущество и слава русского народа, ни уважение к нему со стороны белорусов, украинцев /поляков, финнов – тем более/ от этого не пострадали ни на гран, а братские чувства – если действительно существуют – надежнее всего искать в наше время.

Будем же последовательны, внимая голосу Провидения.

XI.1976 – IV.1977 г.

х Соловьев Вл. Национальный вопрос в России. Спб., 1888, с.106.

LETTER TO A RUSSIAN FRIEND

The Byelorussian language...
 Won't it suffer the same fate as the
 Volga dialect of Russian in this age
 of technological revolution?

Your question casts doubt upon the most significant feature of my nation, a feature which expresses the spirit, individuality and, in the final analysis, the vitality of the Byelorussians.

The Byelorussian language question has been passed down to us from medieval, prerevolutionary epochs; in a certain sense it is still a live issue, although to a much smaller extent than, say, a hundred years ago. At that time the Byelorussian language and the ten million or so people that spoke it were dismissed as a 'figment' or a 'Polish intrigue' in the North-Western Province of the Russian Empire. The 'Russian Cause', the business of rapidly transforming 'Western Russians' into 'true Russians', was being actively pursued by application of the triune formula 'Autocracy, orthodoxy, nationality'. At one time this 'Russian Cause' was of the utmost importance to the police, bureaucracy and all the other bearers of Russia's glory. Yet now fate has consigned this 'cause' to the rubbish tip of history, along with the broken-off beak of the bird of prey that once soared over the imperial coat-of-arms.

Byelorussians have acquired their own socialist statehood, with fundamental social and political rights, including the right to develop education 'in the native tongue'.* 'Let us see what the Byelorussians themselves have to say'¹ about their individuality and ability to play a part in history - this was the vital question affecting a persecuted and humiliated nation that was posed in those dark times by a voice evincing sincere sympathy and bright hopes. My compatriots have provided, and continue to provide, a considerable amount of evidence of varying quality relating to this question, and in so doing they remove any doubts as to their natural historical place in the general scheme of nations and of mankind. It would be possible just to draw your attention to this evidence; your receptive mind should then find the necessary answer to your question and possibly dispel any doubts that accompany it.

* Constitution of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, Minsk, 1973. (In Byelorussian.)

However, the problem we have touched upon here goes beyond the limits of a private conversation between two friends; it is too painful and complex to be silenced. The problem really does exist - either in the remnants of imperial thinking, or in persistent imperial policies which harm the Byelorussian nation and do not leave outside observers unscathed. Among those visiting the BSSR a difference in views on the present position of the Byelorussian language can be observed between (on the one hand) Ukrainians, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, and Bulgarians and (on the other hand) Russians. The former fail to understand the artificial obstacles placed on the development of the Byelorussian language in Byelorussia; the latter cannot grasp why the language is being artificially 'inflicted' on the population.

In your doubts you are no exception. It is, however, difficult for me to conceal my annoyance that stereotyped opinions of my native language can be held by educated Russian minds, including those who are nowadays anguishing over the rebirth of the Russian idea. There is no point even in mentioning the ordinary products of a consumer society whose awareness of their own national values has been blunted by too much bowing to golden calves and tin gods.

So this is indeed a worrying problem; we are now witnessing in Byelorussia a process of wide-scale assimilation. Those responsible for this process of national spiritual castration are acting under the banners of 'internationalisation' and the 'inevitable fusion of nations'. They ignore the elementary truth that the future united family of man will not be formed out of tongueless nations of castrati which have forgotten their name and true worth; each nation will bring its own unique understanding of truth and beauty. Why should Byelorussians have to concede to anyone the right to express for them their purpose on this planet? This question needs to be asked in view of the repeated attempts of the Byelorussian nation's powerful neighbours to express their will for them, attempts which have frequently resulted in harm to the Byelorussian nation and have created in this corner of civilized Europe something of a 'cultural' parallel to colonial Africa.

This helmsman of yours is a typical product, and in a certain sense a spiritual surrogate, of assimilatory policies, when he voices his contempt for the language of the country that gave him birth. Something similar can be observed among the modern Byelorussian intelligentsia with their remarkable 'lack of language' and indifference to their

nation. Indeed these features call their intelligence into question; it might be more appropriate to refer to the as 'cadres of the North-Western USSR with higher education'.

Of course a policy of assimilation (we shall try later on to portray some of its real aspects), however hard it may be pressed, is limited by the admittedly restricted statehood of Byelorussia. For this reason it is incapable of holding back the language and culture of the Byelorussian nation, although it can impede the natural growth of this irreversible process by retarding and deforming it. Although the 'Russian Cause' in Byelorussia in 1977 is in no way comparable to that of 1877 in content, form or final aims, we cannot but be concerned by the very fact of its existence, even if expressed in other, more humane ways.

I see no need to state the obvious by explaining to you, as a Philologist, the difference between a dialect and a language.* I should however like to return to certain significant moments in the history of the birth and rise of the Byelorussian nation which may, it seems to me, give you some idea of the deep-rooted sources of the development and tenacity 'of my blue-eyed motherland and my native tongue', as well as of the passing affliction of 'lack of language' in Byelorussian society.

This letter to a Russian friend is also an expression of my longing for a modern Nikolai Dobrolyubov, able to look down on the fate of Byelorussians from the powerful Great Russian vantage point - patronizingly, but with respect.

So now for a historical digression.²

At the time of the movement of Slavs from south to north, the migrants who arrived on the shores of lake Il'men' 'found a Slavonic people using Byelorussian speech (the Krivichi)'. They changed the name of the river Mutnaya to the Volkhov, and renamed lake Moisko, from which the river flowed, the Il'mer (sic). 'It is probable that the country where the Novgorodians settled was either inhabited by, or bordered on territory inhabited by the Krivichi (Byelorussians), thereby confirming that the Byelorussian dialect penetrates deep into the Novgorod land.'^{**}

It is possible that the conflicts between the Polatsk princes and those of Novgorod and Pskov arose partly because of differences in the

* I would however recommend the following not uninteresting textbook: The Byelorussian Language for non-Byelorussians, Minsk, 1973, (In Russian.)

** Kostomarov, N.I., 'The Truth about Rus' for Muscovites', Foundations, SPb, 1861, vol. 10. p.4. (In Russian.)

customs of the 'locals' and the settlers (who were later to invite the Scandinavian Rurik to come and rule over them). It is well known that Polatsk separatism was one of the most important obstacles on the path to the centralisation of the Old Rus' State along the Novgorod-Kiev axis.

We know something of the consequences for the inhabitants of the Polatsk principedom (including Minsk) of their inability to reconcile their own principle of government by popular assembly (veche) with Kievan centralism aimed at covering the whole of Rus'. It may be assumed the centralism of the time could hardly be described as democratic. 'On the Nemiga the spread sheaves are heads, the flails that thresh are of steel, lives are laid out on the threshing floor, souls are winnowed from bodies. Nemiga's gory banks are not sowed goodly - sown with the bones of Russia's sons.'³ says the author of The Song of Igor's Campaign, who wrote his poetry, according to an ancient Byelorussian version of the origin of the work, somewhere on the banks of the rivers Nyamiha or Svislach. Seventeen years after the battle here described, in 1084, the Kievan army arrived on the shore of the martyr-river Nyamiha with Prince Vladimir at its head, not in the role of the 'bright sun', not with any fraternal aims: 'They left not a serf, not an animal; they plundered and burned everything'. * 4

'They didn't leave' and 'they burned' - it is worth remembering these words. They resound like a fateful refrain throughout the thousand year history of Byelorussia, written in part by Kievan princes, Lithuanian and Polish kings, Tatar khans, Muscovite tsars, a French emperor and German swordsmen.

Is it not for this reason that the artistry of the Boyan of the Byelorussian renaissance was important to the world not so much and not chiefly for its artistic value?

For hundreds of years, crushed by our brother-enemy, smothered by alien growths like a meadow with brambles, you lay covered with the dust of oblivion; your nation was forced to be silent and despise you.

People twisted you as they pleased, each one remodelling and redirecting you in his own fashion, yet at times a plaint, like a curse, rang out and flew unheard, dying in the breast where it had begun.

The nation slept. You too were asleep. The enemies believed that

* Quoted from Ignatovsky, V., Smolich, A., Byelorussia, Minsk, 1926, p. 26. (In Russian.)

nothing would arouse you, that you had fallen asleep for ever. They divided you and decided that you were already dead - there were many who said so.

Yanka Kupala
The Spirit of Byelorussia⁵

These quatrains (which have never been translated into Russian, if I am not mistaken) focus on the as yet unwritten history and philosophy of my nation. They are able to suggest something very important for the fate of the Byelorussian language and the unknown Byelorussian Hamlet.

However, let us return to the early middle ages. Can the behaviour of Byelorussian 'separatist' princes really only be explained by feudal fragmentation, by the natural westward-looking aspirations of the wealthy in Polatsk and Turau, Vitsebsk, Minsk, and Hrodna (I hesitate to add Smolensk).⁶ These are the 'separatists' who, taking no heed of bloody lessons, later managed to avoid the common yoke and caused Mstislav, Monomakh's son, to grieve that 'they were not subject to his control, did not obey him when he summoned them into the land of Rus; but rather wished good luck to that mangy cur Bonyak.'^{* 7}

In the opinion of a historian truly worthy of the name, the roots of this 'separatism' lay not in family hostility, not deep within the ruling clan, not in some alien conditions brought in from outside, but 'in the mood of the population itself', which was in turn determined by geography, climate and other natural factors.^{**}

All the elements that have just been noted point to the way in which the Byelorussian nation developed as a separate ethnic entity, right from the very dawn of its history. This uniqueness was apparent even before the emergence of counteracting influences from other nations (Lithuanians, Germans, Swedes, Poles). Nevertheless, in order to withstand dangers that faced the whole of eastern Slavdom the spiritual kinship of 'Western Russians' with their fellow tribesmen and co-religionists in the north-east and south-west eventually triumphed. In the battle on the Neva in 1240 against the Swedes and the Teutonic Knights, warriors from Polatsk fought alongside men from Novgorod and Suzdal. At that time the political union between Polatsk and Vitsebsk on the one hand, and the Vladimir-Suzdal and Novgorod principedoms on the other, was

* Quoted from: Lyubavsky, M.I., The principle moments of Byelorussian history, Moscow, 1918, p. 11. (In Russian.)

** ibid.

strengthened by the marriage of Aleksandr Yaroslavovich and Tovtil of Polatsk, men of Novgorod, Pskov and Polatsk went 'on a campaign against the Livonian Order and came to 'Yur'yev, they captured three walls in a united attack and killed the Germans.'*

Here is another historical twist worth remembering: 'they captured three walls, in a united attack and killed the Germans'. When our memory sifts through the past, it can remind us of the strength of unity for future attacks from which even the most brilliant 'peace programmes' will not protect us.

Let us return to the question of the original unique identity of the Byelorussian nation within the east Slavonic family. Much that is still unknown of their life, habits, customs and their relations with their neighbours (both related and unrelated) would have been imparted to us in old Byelorussian chronicles, written, let us say, in Polatsk, Vitsebsk and Minsk. Nothing is as yet known of such chronicles, but there are insufficient grounds to deny their existence completely. Were they swallowed irretrievably by that tornado of fire 'they burned everything', as the Polatsk library was consumed, together with original works of Cyril and Methodius and, it is supposed, the chronicle of the Krivich-Polatsk principedom, during the battle between the Polish king Stephen Bathory and the muscovite tsar Ivan the Terrible in 1579? Are these chronicles hidden from us by the strata that time has since laid down, and will they at some time come into the hands of archaeologists, as the Vitsebsk birch-bark documents did recently? Whatever the answers to these questions, we are at the moment deprived of the possibility of judging those early times from original documents written by Byelorussians themselves, although we do know of their predilection for this kind of literary creation. We have to be content with fragmentary and indirect information from the Hypatian Chronicle borrowed, as some historians believe, from a Polatsk source which has not been preserved. Old Byelorussian chronicles might possibly be able to shed some light on the living and creative principle in the spirit of my nation, as God and Nature determined for it. It was this principle which in the following difficult centuries helped Byelorussians to preserve and strengthen

*History of the Byelorussian SSR in five volumes, vol. 1, Minsk, 1972 p. 119. (In Byelorussian.)

their individuality, protecting them from absorption by Poles or Lithuanians, and later from capitulation in the face of total russification.

In a period when state empires were crumbling and imperial religions were in decline this principle helped Byelorussians declare before all the world their right 'to be called people'.⁸ It helped them survive even at a time when, in defence of this right that they had won, their flesh as well as their spirit seemed on the verge of physical extinction. By the human ashes of Khatyn and 627 Khatyns,⁹ by the life of every one of their number, Byelorussians finally secured the recognition and respect of nations and states. They took their place in the United Nations Organization and together with the other members of UNO defend peace and justice among peoples and nations.

It is true that even today there are some people who like to have dealings with Byelorussians and even to lavish compliments on their brave and kind nature, provided the question of the Byelorussian language does not arise. They are not embarrassed by the fact that this is, in effect, a way of looking not at a living nation, but at some kind of ethnographical shop-window dummy, devoid of soul and therefore indifferent as to what linguistic clothes it is forced into. As a result of the Byelorussians' 'long slumber' as a nation, it might be said that to have seen them a hundred years ago as ethnographical raw material for other 'historical' nations was no more than an ordinary mistake. * Nowadays, after the

* One could turn to the opinion of a not unfamiliar Great Russian patriot, whose philosophy of culture and history has, in our eyes, come badly unstuck; 'The North-western province is just as much Russia as Moscow is, and for exactly the same reasons'. (Danilevskiy, I. Ya., Russia and Europe. (In Russian.)) However, even at that time both the North-western and South-western provinces were beginning to provide evidence refuting their genuine Russianness in the Muscovite (Great Russian) sense: 'Polish politicians applied the yardstick of a gentry republic and Catholic administrative intolerance; the Muscovites began by using that of a nobleman's monarchy and ritualistic Orthodox intolerance'. (Dragomanov, M.P., Collected political works, vol.1, Paris, 1905, p.16 (In Russian.))

'Even if we cast the most superficial and fleeting glance on the past and present of Byelorussia, we will find in it most instructive features, namely the common phenomenon, that however energetically one may seek to impose a culture on a nation, it will not take root if it does not correspond to the spirit of the nation, and if it does not arise from the organic needs of the national life.' (Danila Barovik, Letters on Byelorussia, Spb, 1882. (In Russian.)) Quoted from: Aleksandrovich, S. Kh., Paths of our native word, Minsk, 1971, p. 60. (In Byelorussian.)

Byelorussian nation has offered so much evidence of its unique historical identity, evidence that has cost it dear, any view of this nation which ignores the national (linguistic) aspect can scarcely be called anything other than utterly obscene. What was the norm for autocratic Russia, that prison of nations, should and must 'in an unshakeable union of free republics cemented forever by Great Russia'¹⁰ be called for what it is: charlatanism. We shall have to touch on the discrepancies between greatness and magnanimity which have by no means assisted the Byelorussian renaissance. It may seem paradoxical but this renaissance can hardly be considered complete, if only because of the restrictions on the development of the Byelorussian language which have still not completely lifted.

Before passing on to the problems of the 'linguistic' indisposition of Byelorussian society, it might be worth reminding the reader of the main point: the existence and development of the Byelorussian national organism. It is a living, growing organism which has more than once proved its vitality and its immunity to the most unfavourable 'historical infections'.

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If we are to believe Semenov-Stirlitz, a woman in labour cries out 'Mother' in the language and even with the intonation imbibed with her mother's milk.¹¹ And so it must be that nations express joy and sorrow, hope and longing, all they possess within themselves, in their own natural language.

Not so long ago history once more deigned to look closely into the face of the Byelorussian, testing the endurance of his spirit: he was shot, hanged, burned. He survived, bearing his native language all through the mass graves and the smoke of burning homes. Listen closely:¹²

'They set fire to us in '42, in the early spring. It was the SS. The ones with the skulls...five of us jumped out. So there they were leaping out of the window one after the other, and the Germans opened fire on them...they were all running like geese.

'Oh, and they all dropped down one after the other, these people. I fell out through the window right at the back, there was a ditch there, with bushes...So I lay in the ditch. If the fire had been coming towards me, you know, I would have been burned alive, I would have been - right there in the ditch, but the wind turned in the direction of the stores, they went up as well. So that's how I stayed alive.

'I lay there and lay there, there were people screaming and howling, dogs were barking...they were dying. Oh all in different voices. I can't go on. It's making me tremble all over again. The people were yelling all in different voices. It was all there, in the club building...I got tired. If only there was a cat or a sparrow or something...It was so quiet. Or maybe I was left all alone in the world? So I thought - well, let those Germans come and finish me off...how can I live alone in the world?

'And I look around - it's dark, the moon is just beginning to come up. There was this old woman with us (she died last year, I think), and she started off wailing 'O my little girl, why did they kill you, they should have killed me instead. With us in the cottage there was a little boy. His father was killed in the barn ailing with all the men. The boy was dressed up like a girl - there was a rumour that all the boys were being killed. So he was brought here dressed like a girl. Poor thing, he had been badly wounded, right here in the tummy...The poor boy kept begging us "Get me out so I don't burn". Everything all around is burning, and he just keeps on begging. So we went in for him and got him out through the window. Then we climbed out through the window as well. Together with that woman. Then they opened fire on us, we hid behind the smoke and got away.

'I thought to myself: 'My God, where shall I go?...Where people go, that's where I'll go too! Whatever God sends.'

'We were in the forest', says Volha Ryhoraŭna Hryshanovich, 'we got back after our folks had already been burned alive. We had a look and gathered the ashes together: there were children lying there just like they were alive. You would pick them up and the ashes would simply crumble away. In one cottage we put all the bodies together. Nine of them there were - nothing but white bones!'

'Nadzka, my little girl! I'll be killed, you go hide somewhere!'

'I don't hear very well, my dears...I'll tell you how it was. So, my dears, it was just like we are talking now. Then there was shooting. Then these people, some on horseback, running here from Adamovo. There was a shot from the path. One man fell - he just fell, he wasn't killed. Oh, bullets were whistling all around. A window in my cottage was smashed. A bullet smashed it. Then the Germans were on us, surrounding us...My little children were sitting on the floor...they were little and there was this brick shelf by the stove. The cottage was a nice new one. When it burned down, so did they...They were smothered by bricks

right where they were. That's where they were roasted alive. All we found of them later were little bones. And the little buttons from their dresses. They were all burned up. We collected the corpses and buried them. That's how the Germans made fun of people. Afterwards my husband was with the partisans. He returned from the war afterwards, too sick and died.

'There were 48 farms. 180 people - all of them were killed. Except four women and two men. One of them hid in the barley, the other jumped down the well.'

'They finished the children off with bayonets.'

'Later, when our army came, our lads took them prisoner and spared them. We went to have a look while they were sitting by a fire delousing themselves. Prisoners! So we said "You ought to be thrown on the fire, like you threw our children."...then they moved away from the fire.'

'How they killed! The forest shook and the earth groaned with the killing. All over people were dying. How many of us got away? only two women. And the little children. The Germans aimed their machine guns high and missed the little ones of five or six.'

' My only daughter started to run, and he started to fire from his machine gun. She fell on the edge of our land. The German sent a boy over...He, the boy, today is...'Pick up the child I shot!' The boy runs over, shakes her: Zhenya, Zhenya! (The old woman cries) 'I picked her up and brought her back' the boy said later. He lifted her little dress and had a look. 'That's a lucky kid - I took a lot of shots at her and she's still alive.'

This is what the language of Byelorussians is like, as it tells people today about the kind of superbeasts that men become when they dream of becoming supermen. We can agree that a mere dialect, even when fed from the water of a mighty river, could scarcely cope with such a burden.

Can it really be that a language steeled by the tortures of barbarians (Chingis-Khans with the telegraph (A. Adamovich)) has survived so as to disappear in the cunning trickery of an 'educated' Moloch? I do not think so.

Technological progress leads not only to unification. It brings differentiation and variety too. Television, that child of the age, is a case in point; it fills the ether not only with monolithic programmes

like 'Time', '17', 'from Moscow to the furthest reaches'. One does not only hear marching songs like 'Today we are not on parade, we are marching to communism' on TV in these 'furthest reaches'. One also hears songs that can stir a heart hardened with all these 'parades': 'O little river, little river, why are you so shallow?' Of course the ratio of performances of songs of the first type to songs of the second type bears no relationship to the needs of the body and soul of any living human being. The former assert themselves more vociferously, more decisively; for as long as the virtues they proclaim are rated highly they are the 'kings' of stage, screen and broadcasting. This is a cause of sadness. But the very fact that not only songs of a dubious martial nature can win the hearts and minds of people in our land of lakes and willow trees is a source of joy. Technological revolution means not only death and putrefaction. It can also bring birth and awakening. It can strengthen in a nation, as it can in an individual person, the position of knowledge and with knowledge come dignity, pride, the creative spirit of self-expression and self-assertion. In short, this revolution contains its own life-giving source and its own quicksands, blossoming and fading; after all, fading is one of the signs of life but is not life itself. Life continues to unfold for ever. Which gets preference depends on you and me.

There were three Byelorussian intellectuals: * they armed themselves with this technological revolution, travelled around Byelorussian villages and hamlets, recording the memories of survivors of the Khatyns: thus they were able to leave for their contemporaries and for future generations a unique historical and literary document.

Look closely at the faces of those who came out of the 'fiery villages' alive, listen closely to their sad speech, although there is more than sadness in it. These people will tell you a great deal, including the right of their native language to live.

A poet of our sister, the Ukraine, listened to the breathing of the ash-strewn earth:

I am Yadviga, a village schoolteacher, the daughter of a Khatyn

* In spite of the sweeping assertion made at the beginning of this letter, there is a Byelorussian intelligentsia. Although less numerous than the 'cadres with higher education', it is capable of passing on to the nation an accelerated rate of national intellectual growth which even the largest army of bureaucrats and 'generals' cannot hold back.

farm-worker. Here I conducted underground lessons with the children, so that the traitor and the foreign enemy should not know, should not make bloody sport of us. Even a first-former in our school could read 'We will never be slaves.' I, Yadviga Kaminskaya, knew no fear, I was fighting for a just cause, so that the Byelorussian language should ring out on the lips of Byelorussian children from the bubbling streams, from the leafless forests, so that it should resound like our cymbals and bear its purity into the choir of voices of the poems of Yakub, the poems of Kupala.'

Mykola Nahnibeda, 'Khatyn' 13

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Such is the Byelorussian nation - a nation which, as past and modern times have shown, is no slave and is not dumb. From the viewpoint of the Byelorussian nation the question you have posed simply does not exist, because it gives no sign of going dumb. The question arose not among Byelorussians, but quite apart from their historical growth and in spite of it.

It has been raised by those who look on Byelorussians more or less as a carpenter looks at an unplanned plank of wood with the aim of planing it down to the kind of smoothness that a woodworker thinks correct.

First the Polish king tried to plane my nation down to a shiny catholicised petty nobleman. Then the Muscovite tsar, a fellow Orthodox, came to correct the efforts of his Polish colleague and 'doctored' the wounded Byelorussian organism by trying to breathe into it the great-power spirit of a 'real' Great Russian. It is paradoxical that these dilligent efforts were made by 'Great Russians' with a considerable admixture of Germanic blood. We cannot know whether this Prussian style doctoring would have ended in the extermination of the Byelorussians' living spirit, if history had not been mean with time for the Russian emperor's veterinary experiments by cutting short the life of the double-headed eagle. It is conceivable that, if history had not been in a hurry, there would have been one language less on our planet of 2700 languages and that the 'great and powerful one' would have been one dialect richer. I do not know if the Russian language would have gained by this, since excessive dialect overloading is hardly of benefit even to the most powerful languages, but human culture as a whole would have been the poorer.

The Polish king's efforts lasted for 300-odd years, the Russian tsar's for 150 years. For almost 500 years they tried, each in his own fashion, to make my nation into something 'real' after it had been

abandoned and betrayed by its upper and middle strata. They did not succeed. The Byelorussian nation remained what it was, faithful to its predetermined purpose, but it emerged spiritually broken from its long subjection to inquisitorial experiments, virtually without writers, historians, philosophers, artists, composers of its own.

For 400 years it was allowed to give birth to Kosciuszkos, Mickiewiczzes and Dostoevskys¹⁴ on behalf of its more powerful neighbours. It was not, however, permitted to pass on to its children its own language and, through language, the spirit and wisdom of the nation. Children grew up oblivious of who their parents were; generations arose that could no longer remember their name and origin. Byelorussians came to have serious doubts about their own identity and thus became an ethnographical oddity virtually in the middle of Europe - a peasant people calling themselves the 'locals'.

A considerable 'measure of perfection' (J. Herder) must have originally been imparted to this nation if it could shake itself out of its spiritual slumber and oblivion just at the time when it seemed that history had already completed its nominal roll of nations and states in this part of the globe.

Bahushevich, Kupala, Kolas, Bahdanovich, Tsyotka, Yadvihin, the Lutskievich brothers¹⁵...from the very depths of Byelorussia there arose people who attempted to express, albeit not all of them equally truthfully and successfully, their nation's idea that lay hidden deep under home-spun rags. And it was with the rebirth of the Byelorussian language that they commenced their great and difficult task.

Four centuries earlier this language had been heard in the palaces of the Lithuanian-Byelorussian chancellors and magnates, it was used for the writing of the Lithuanian Statute, the most outstanding piece of legislation of the time, the genius of Frantsysk Skaryna used it to present to the Byelorussian people and all the eastern Slavs the first translation of the Bible, thereby assisting the 'education of the simple Rus'people' (not to be confused with Russians - author) and 'for the better understanding of the people of the Commonwealth'.¹⁶

The language that had made so much impact in Renaissance times found itself (by an irony of geopolitics and geoculture?) driven out of the streets and crossroads of public culture and politics and restricted to smoke-filled peasant hovels. In its own house the language was reduced to the status of an ugly duckling. As history quickened its

pace, the language was left quite untouched by discoveries and creations in science and art, by upheavals in industry and technology, by political revolutions - all the things with which other European languages were in contact as they developed and perfected themselves (and cluttered themselves as well).

The Byelorussian language raising its tortured but still lively voice at the turn of the last century reminds one somehow of a shy, timid Cinderella who has decided to go to the ball, but with this difference: the first zealots of the Byelorussian cause had neither the magic of the kind fairy nor the power of the prince at their disposal, as they accompanied their 'peasant tongue' out into the world. The Byelorussian Cinderella was faced with the difficult task of dissuading an arrogant and self-assured public that what lay behind her simple appearance was not mere simplicity, but something more significant and no less noble, and that her ability to create words had little in common with the usual labels pinned on them: 'trapka', 'paradak'.¹⁷

However great and obvious the achievements on this thorny path have been, the process of Byelorussian rebirth is far from completed; the epigraph to my letter is evidence of this.

'Do not abandon your language, so that you yourselves do not die.'¹⁸

This was the mandate with which Byelorussians entered the twentieth century, as they sought to catch up with the achievements of epochs that had passed them by and to meet the demands of a new age. The achievements of the time were on a grand scale and covered many different fields; their durable results cannot be considered separately from the Byelorussian language. The language already possessed many life-giving currents; to these were added several other qualities enabling it to keep 'in step with the age', and to raise its by now far from peasant people to the level of the modern world.

Judge for yourselves. In 1906 the first newspapers in Byelorussian, 'Our Fate' and 'Our Cornfield',¹⁹ were published by the efforts of Byelorussian intellectuals from the petty nobility. The papers were met with some degree of hostility by the russophile and polonophile

public as being far-fetched and unnatural.* 70 years later a representative of the United Nations accepted with thanks the twelve volumes of the Byelorussian Soviet Encyclopedia for the library of his organisation. English has recently joined the ranks of those languages of the USSR and other countries which have for a long time been assimilating the best of Byelorussian literary creation. Walter May, translator of the anthology 'Byelorussian Poetry' has tried to transmit to the English reader 'the beauty and musicality of the Byelorussian language, its sincerity and strength, to reveal the source of the nation's bravery and their unshakeable faith in a better future, everything that /he/ has come to love in Byelorussian poetry and in the Byelorussians.' (Zvyazda, 10 Oct, 1976).²⁰ By gracious permission of the Soviet space industry 'my language' has ascended into the cosmos in the works of Yakub Kolas as spoken by Pyotr Klimuk and heard by the second inhabitant of the space ship, our Russian brother Sevast'yanov.²¹

In short the message of Matsey Burachok, father of the Byelorussian renaissance, has not been forgotten. The Byelorussian language lives and grows, and with it the people of Byelorussia. If anyone thinks that this is a development in the direction of extinction, then the Byelorussians are least of all to blame for his error.

I repeat: the question with which this letter opened expresses neither the interests nor the will of the Byelorussian people. But it does voice a peculiar attitude towards Byelorussians from outside. This has been going on for a long time. You have seen that this fateful view 'from outside' has not always been able to discern what is best or worst for the Byelorussians. The reasons for their having been for so long the object of outside interests and policies now appear to have disappeared without trace; after all, we have acquired both our own

*Opinions of the following type date back to this time (here and there they are still current): 'The Russian and Polish cultures are too strong to allow the creation between them of a third, artificial, Byelorussian culture, which has no real foundation in history, literature or life'. (Byelorussian Life, 1911, no. 20. (In Russian.)) This thesis had an authoritative predecessor as early as 1867: 'It is now a question of eradicating Polish influence, but the Byelorussians, apparently freed from this danger, are now clamouring not to be saved from the Polish yoke, but for their local individuality to be preserved. But does this individuality actually exist?' (from a letter of I.S. Aksakov to M.O. Koyalovich. Quoted in Sambuk, S.M., Social and political thought in Byelorussia in the second half of the 19th century, Minsk, 1976, p. 141. (In Russian.))

The Polish anvil echoed the Great Russian hammer: 'The Byelorussian people have never had a literature of their own. It was created by the Polish intelligentsia. It was created artificially.' (Prawda ('Truth'), Warsaw, 1910. (In Polish.))

statehood and the recognition of other nations. Yet the status of our language does not cease to arouse questions and bewilderment.

Why does this happen? Why even now do Byelorussians have to expend much effort in clearing obstructions and obstacles from the path of their language's development? Why has history, having given them the necessary impetus, not shielded this impetus from the shackles of inertia and conservatism? As a result the cultural growth of Byelorussia is not free of influences that either lead it nowhere or even take it backwards.

Exhaustive answers to these questions are beyond my powers, however long this already protracted letter were to become. I am not at all certain whether such answers are possible these days. (I must remind you that we live in an age not only of brotherhood but also of informers. For this reason silence in the face of injustice stands in no less esteem than let us say, sacred Justice herself.)

Nevertheless I should like to draw your attention to one important aspect of the question which is perhaps capable of laying bare the nature of the question itself. To be precise: the remnants of the 'Russian Cause' in... the sovereign socialist Byelorussian republic.

*** *** ***

This is what 'Witch Sabbath Mountain', an example of Byelorussian folk literature of the 1970's, has to say:

'There was a time, an age, an epoch, when some people stuffed themselves to bursting and started believing in a stocking: the reliable ideal of satiety. When in his own native capital of Minsk some culturally fattened slob began pig-like and full of self-assurance to trample on my native tongue. When a 'people's artist' or two, not knowing two words of the people's language, 'created' fruitfully to keep their bellies full and to delight the local donkeys. They have long been ready to crush from the platform any cry of the soul, to exterminate and bury the language of Kupala and Kolas. If the Party did not seek (in Russian) to tame their wolfish urges, they would not be averse to swallowing our Byelorussian spirit alive.'

22

I see no need of weightier evidence, although I shall have to deal with particular aspects relating to the very essence of the problem. Poetic generalisations of such intensity do not come about by themselves. They bear the open wound of all Byelorussians, although not of those who at the beginning of the century wished to 'be called people' and bore 'their wrongs' on their exhausted shoulders through the world. The children and grandchildren of those Byelorussians have already become people and for that reason cannot reconcile themselves to any infringements of their national dignity. The Byelorussian's cry was heard with

sympathy at the beginning of the century by the Russia of Gor'ky and Ulyanov-Lenin.²³ I do not know the name of the Russia that hears the present-day sorrow of my compatriots. I would like to believe that their sorrows will not go unheeded.

What are the causes of assimilation? Who is most directly responsible for it? These questions too deserve special examination. However the verses just quoted suggest some things to us.

The evil lies partly in the age itself, an age which allows a 'stocking' to rate as the highest possible ideal. It is difficult to understand where such 'ideals' originate (as a result of an unsuccessful fusion of both revolutions or from the nature of one of them), but they obviously do exist; one does not need to travel to the Byelorussian capital to convince oneself of this. When the 'stocking' finds himself a haven in politics and in culture, the consequences will not be slow in manifesting themselves. This is surely true everywhere, not only in Byelorussia.

I must confess to you: when I examine the shelves and window displays of the Moscow bookshops, when I read attentively the headlines of Russian newspapers (which for some reason have not progressed very far beyond the status of 'government loudspeakers' (M.Kol'tsov)), I do not find the state of my native language any gloomier than that of the language of Pushkin, Gogol, Tvardovsky and Sholokhov. What proportion is large enough to serve successfully two revolutions at once, and certainly not to prepare for the imminent 'spiritual revolution'. The 'furthest reaches' are not indifferent to the baggage the 'great and powerful one' brings with it. Does it arrive with the words: revolution, communism, socialism, collective (even if they are borrowed)? Or with the words and phrases: influence, warrant (i.e. ticket for a train, theatre etc.), deficit (i.e. shortage - of almost everything), queue (for almost everything, especially vodka), cock-up (almost everywhere), 'I shall not remain indebted' (hinting at a bribe), and an incalculable number of similar expressions which have crept into the lives and everyday experience of Byelorussians (and other nations as well). It is even sadder when a developed and great language becomes a vehicle for aims that are far from great; it is by no means always the Russians who are guilty of this. Byelorussians themselves are these days quite adept at the 'stocking business', at times even excelling the apparently unsurpassable descendants of the Pale.

A law on education was recently passed in the BSSR. It includes provision for secondary school pupils to be educated in their own language or in the language of another nation of the USSR, with parents having the right to choose for their children a school with the corresponding language of instruction.²⁴ Here is politics acting 'according to the law': 'In providing every opportunity for the study of both Byelorussian and Russian, we consider impermissible any steps which create superior conditions for either of them and thereby give priority to one or the other.*

One has only to glance at Byelorussia to see that the just letter of the law and the superficially harmless words of this politician about the equality of both languages in practice turn out to be the 'equality' of Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf. The number of schools with Byelorussian as the language of instruction is declining sharply, all the pupils without exception ('at their parents' wish') rush to be rid of studying their native language, and if they are compelled to learn it (after all, if Byelorussia exists, somebody must learn the language), then they 'learn' it with all the inventiveness of children studying subjects they don't actually like. This is the 'linguistic climate' in which future helmsmen of the nation are educated.

In the next stage of education a pupil in, for example, Babruysk, will be taught painting in the Palekh style, but not traditional Byelorussian decorative arts. At a higher level he will learn how to design and build, but chiefly in iron and concrete, materials that in an age of technological revolution are truly 'non-national'. Thus artists are educated to earn their living, but not to create anything. Designers are produced who have been cheated out of their national identity, of any sense of historical continuity, who in their ability to invent are incapable of rising higher than the fantasy of the inhabitants of Glupov.²⁵

For example: the Byelorussian Glupovites may not actually have tried to make dough by mixing flour with the Volga, but they did fill in the living river Nyamiha with sand and cover it with asphalt, destroying at a stroke a unique ancient district of the city - the heart of old Minsk. A luxuriant wasteland now dominates the area. In time, so it is said, the area will be adorned by a no less luxuriant shopping

* Kuz'min, A., 'International education...', Political self-education, 1977, no.2 p. 42. (In Russian.)

centre (needless to say, of the really superlative variety). And our Byelorussian capital, already so poor in historical sites, will at length be enriched by a unique monument to the bunglerdom of the technological age. 26

Of course the problem lies not only in the development of arts, crafts and architecture. Painting, sculpture, graphic art, poster art, music, cinema, choreography, in short the whole state of Byelorussian culture, cannot be understood without reference to the problem of the Byelorussian language. Here we must understand by language not so much its communicative function, but above all the spirit and ability of people to express themselves in all areas of activity. Without much risk of being mistaken one can assert that at the present time there is a large number of specialists in Byelorussia, 'cadres with higher education', but, except in the literary field, disgracefully few real Byelorussian intellectuals.

What is wrong with that, you may ask, if people prefer Russian to Byelorussian? How can people's wishes be ignored? Here lies the real, nasty essence of the problem: purely superficial indications that are the result of unfavourable conditions lasting many years are at times taken for a natural expression of what people want.

If one were to continue with this dubious logic, then in 1922 notice should have been taken of the Slutsk peasant who refused to support a school in his village because 'the pupils aren't taught to pray and some subject called Byelorussian language has been introduced.'^{*} Even then, by the way, there were people who saw peasant backwardness as the order of the day these people, not tsarist satraps but stormy petrels of the revolution, spoke out in the early years of Soviet power against the 'artificial imposition' of Byelorussian nationality.^{**} In their hearts they evidently considered themselves quite correct, because they relied on the attitude of the average Byelorussian of the time who had not yet recovered from his four-hundred-year slumber.

^{*}Kolas, Yakub, Collected works, vol. 2, Minsk, 1976, p.34. (In Byelorussian)

^{**}V. Knorin, secretary of the North-western committee of the Russian Communist Party (bolshevik), wrote: 'We consider that the Byelorussians are not a nation and that those ethnographical peculiarities which distinguish them from the other Russians must be eradicated.' (Zvezda ('The Star') 6.10.1918). At the eleventh Party congress, people's commissar I. Stalin had to dwell specifically on the errors of those national nihilists who were opposing national self-determination for Byelorussians. (Cf. Eleventh Congress of the RCP (b). Stenographic report, Moscow, 1962, p. 213. (In Russian). It is difficult to say whether the pessimists or the optimists would have won the argument if the 'peasant language' had not emerged at that moment from beneath the thatch into the teeming crossroads of the age. Later generations have still to give the Byelorussian movement of the time and its heroes the attention and recognition they deserve.

The stormy petrels of a bright future had still to learn the basic lesson of history: that neither the unification of the proletariat nor the establishment of universal human brotherhood is conceivable as superior to the individual nations of which they will be comprised, and that they certainly cannot be achieved in spite of national considerations. Real life will soon compel them to admit that revolution, if it is not to be reduced to the level of a mere political upheaval, is not simply handed to a nation on a plate; it is made by the nation itself according to that nation's spirit and experience. On this basis alone the Byelorussians, once they had become involved in the construction of a new way of living, built for themselves a new life, as it were creating themselves anew: becoming a people with their own name for themselves, their own language and culture.

The conditions of socialist construction which ensured the national and social revival of the Byelorussian nation have not always been propitious. From the 60 years of Soviet power one must subtract 20 years of territorial division of the Byelorussian organism (the period during which Western Byelorussia was under the heel of bourgeois Poland), 7 years for two wars which ploughed up the whole country, 10 years for post-war normalisation (when the problems of getting bread to eat and a roof over one's head were paramount). This leaves just over 20 years, and even this period was not devoid of extremes and the usual kind of chicanery in national policy.

In this short period a considerable number of factories and towns have been built in Byelorussia, marshes have been drained (although this drainage is said to have been taken too far and to have become the equivalent of complete dessication), social welfare has been guaranteed. There was no time, indeed there could not have been time, to complete the national revival, the most important factor of which would have been the achievement of a linguistic and national culture affecting everyone. If this were to be brought about, it would be a time in which Byelorussian literary speech returns, not to the palaces of magnates and chancellors, but to the offices of judges and politicians, to committee rooms, kindergartens, schoolrooms and student lecture halls, theatres and clubs (and not only to be heard on the stage), to the streets and squares of our towns and villages. In short, when it has been transformed from a mere ornament into the living tissue of social life, when it would be as natural to hear Byelorussian in a trolleybus or shop in the Byelorussian capital as it is today to hear mangled Russian which

reminds one more of a dialect than the original language. When at last we would have attained the right kind of national and linguistic climate, without which our Byelorussian Romeos and Juliets will be eternally bereft of speech.

It is difficult to say when a Byelorussian generation will grow up completely cured of their linguistic inferiority complex, and unashamed of their national identity. However, the formation of this generation is today no longer an idle dream but a living reality which is pushing up its young shoots towards the sun on the rejuvenated 'Byelorussian cornfield'. Faced with this irreversible process, politicians can either hasten it or slow it down; unfortunately they more often choose the latter course of action. The one thing they cannot do is to alter its inner logic even by introducing laws that frequently lead to lawlessness.

The 'protectors' of the equal rights of both languages in Byelorussia somehow cannot grasp that this 'equality' proceeds from an unequal starting point, and that the stronger of the two languages is in fact being offered more privileges.* They apparently think of themselves as marxist-leninists but do not understand that after many centuries of persecution that have retarded and deformed the Byelorussian language, the first thing required is to remove an actual inequality - the enormous historical and cultural disproportion in the levels of both languages, to ensure a 'levelling out of levels' in accordance with the principles of socialism as understood by Marx and Lenin. Do not withhold privileges of food and clothing for yesterday's 'ugly ducking'; only when it has gained strength and can use its wings to soar upwards to join its fully-grown fellows can your procuritorial 'impermissibility' have any meaning.

Even if 'demands of the moment' or 'the Devil's due' are capable of obscuring the historical perspective for certain individual politicians, the perspective itself does not disappear.

The 1930s were remarkable for a frontal assault on the young, as yet untried strength of the Byelorussian intelligentsia (Haretski, Ihnatouski, Aleksandrovich, Schakatsikhin, Halavach, Charot and others).²⁸ The 'legislators' of the period were apparently unable to realize that

*Of 86 journals published in Byelorussia 53 appear in Russian and 30 in Byelorussian. The corresponding figures for the Ukraine are: total 185, 75 in Russian, 108 in Ukrainian. Unlike the Ukrainians, the Byelorussians have no historical journal, no foreign literature publishing house etc., etc., of their own.

their ever so revolutionary attack on 'bourgeois nationalism' in socialist Byelorussia was not far removed from the most rabid counter-revolution, hiding its dirty work under the red banner. They could not know that some 25 years later their victims would be rehabilitated, although the real instigators and perpetrators of this 20th century Neroniad have not yet been named. It will be some time before Byelorussian culture recovers from the destruction of its first generation of intelligentsia in the coal and gold mines of the far north and eastern Siberia.

We may note in passing that the document sentencing Kastus Kalinouski²⁹ (the first Byelorussian revolutionary intellectual) to death by hanging in Vilna in 1864 was compiled in Russian. This self-same language was used for abusing and 'sending for liquidation' (another nice turn of phrase) the modern Kalinouskis. Of course it is not a question of the language but of individual speakers of it. For that reason I must draw your attention to this point: the language of this brother nation of ours comes to our country not only dressed in Lermontov's rebellious guise or in Chekhov's divine sadness, but also in the form of a tyrannical relentless 'It is absolutely forbidden', drowning out our own gentle native 'please be so kind'. Even today, although admittedly in more democratic ways, the hunt for nationalists continues under the banner of the notorious 'It is absolutely forbidden'. (In the conditions of a technological revolution it has become possible to mass-produce³⁰ the once unique city boss Burdasty. Of course the 'hunters' have learnt to avoid bloodshed. It is to be hoped that in time they will lose the taste for spiritual repression in which the truth is killed by official denunciation ('crushing from the platform the cry of the soul')

As we can see, even a socially just system is powerless when politics become divorced from morality. It is in the interests of a more favourable development for our native language and much else besides to overcome this situation. The Byelorussian intelligentsia could help much more than it does, but, as you know, they suffer from the ailment of not having a language. Here lie both their guilt and their misfortune. This is perhaps one of the most urgent problems of Byelorussian national life. The indisposition of the intelligentsia can in turn be explained by the (to put it mildly) delicate position of the Byelorussian language which, while not being persecuted, is not exactly encouraged either. Where is the way out of this vicious circle, if indeed there is one at all? I believe there is one. It lies in the creation of truly equal conditions for both languages - if favours to one of them are 'impermissible'.

What happens in practice? After 400 years of persecution our native language has at last been permitted to exist alongside Russian, but on

terms that remind one somehow of the conditions on which a dependant lives (and in his own house!); it has been squeezed out of all areas of education: pre-schooling (in the cities) partly from schools, and from professional, special secondary and higher education. It has not been allowed to gain a hold in the party and government apparatus which controls the official life of the republic.*

Intellectuals educated and living in such conditions have not mastered their native language properly, are not accustomed to using it and so are incapable of passing it on to their children. More often than not the children of such intellectuals drink in with their mother's milk a language that is not maternal. One can understand their later reaction to learning Byelorussian in school and the mass efforts of parents, (it is just as well the law allows it) to protect their 'little preciousses' from an excessive intellectual burden.

The intelligentsia does not full acquire the foreign language either, a language which is intelligible, accessible, but which does not inspire. Through the medium of this language the intelligentsia builds computers, prepares official documents and political reports. But it cannot develop the culture which has been growing on our own soil through the ages, absorbing its juices, breathing the air over it, and warming itself in the light of the Sun that shines upon it. (Here we are talking about creators, not consumers of culture.)

Nevertheless the process of stripping the Byelorussian intelligentsia of its sense of national identity has clear limitations. If we examine the deep-rooted tendencies both of Byelorussian society itself and of the neighbouring peoples - Poles, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Latvians, indeed of all contemporary mankind - we can see that this process has no real future. The heavy breathing of unbridled 'progress'

*However, the once youthful revolution was on the verge of making the first and, as it turned out, the last steps in this direction by raising the question of the 'further intensification and broadening of Byelorussification in the Party and Soviet apparatus'. putting forward the slogan 'May the whole Communist Party of Byelorussia begin to speak in Byelorussian'. (11th congress of the Communist Party of Byelorussia, Minsk, 1928, p. 424. (In Byelorussian.))

The Byelorussian party organisation is probably the only one of all the republics that does not use its own language in its meeting and conferences. I do not believe that this 'Internationalist' feature will remain unshaken for long. In private conversation and at times when they really need to express their feelings people are more and more beginning to unburden their souls in their own irreplaceable language.

is calling to life in all men new and stronger national feelings which can heal the human spirit and raise it above the 'pig-swill' of the present age.

In time the Byelorussian intelligentsia will show the world that its ability to communicate with other nations arises from its own national values and not apart from them, and that an internationalism that tries to rise above national identities has as much to do with socialist society as do the innumerable 'nests of gentlefolk' and 'homes of the poor' - the country and city palaces of the 'people's servants', who reside on the people's body only until the people say their final 'That's enough!' My faith has been bolstered by those physicists who are touring the country and rescuing the paintings of ancient Palessie from technological barbarism; even they were too late to save the remains of Dostoevsky's estate. In their actions one can see the future of the Byelorussian intelligentsia in the widest sense of the word.

By placing our principle hopes on the intelligentsia, no-one wishes to belittle the importance of other social groups of Byelorussian society in completing the national revival. It may however be supposed that any increase in the role of workers, specialists, civil servants, professional soldiers etc. in this process is dependant on the extent to which they assimilate the higher values of their national culture, above all the literary language. This promising development, which the technological revolution is itself accelerating, is now taking shape before our very eyes. We have only to watch and listen carefully for it. There are many signs pointing to the rise in the near future of a united national front, which will be called upon to complete the work started in Byelorussia by Bahushevich and Kupala, Lenin and Charvyakou.³¹ Then my nation will have come to recognize and understand its destiny, that 'measure of perfection', it will have become master in its own house and will hardly allow itself to be forced into alien linguistic clothing. It will more easily fulfill its destiny in its own truly Byelorussian dress. This does not mean that the Byelorussians' desire to learn their sister nation's language will become weaker. After all Russian has been close to them for centuries; it is irreplaceable if their life is to have true value.

One may also hope that in time the Russian language too will find the best possible combination of greatness and magnanimity in its dealings with Byelorussian. This harmony lies within the very nature of the Russian language. That universally respected Great Russian

V.I. Ulyanov-Lenin was aiming at just such a combination when he instructed us 'to protect non-Russian nationalities within the Russian empire from the predations of that truly Russian type - the Great Russian chauvinist, the typical Russian bureaucrat, who is in essence a really aggressive scoundrel'.*

History teaches us to distinguish between the beneficial influence of the language of the Russian people and the pernicious 'I won't tolerate it', 'I'll ruin you' of the real Russian heavies, whose ranks are now being swelled by the bureaucratized and denationalized part of Byelorussian society. This part is, however no equivalent to the whole; it has nothing in common with the innermost condition and the historical dynamics of the whole of Byelorussian society.

'My native language was not heard in vain as it united the warriors' ranks. Byelorussian blood became clotted together with it in the flames of battles and conflagrations. Defending it from desecration people went into battle, were burned alive - so that my nation, without knowing slavery, should live and praise its happiness.'

(Nil Hilevich)

These lines should possibly be enough to make you withdraw your question; I ought not therefore to drag out this already not exactly 'tidy' letter. But it is not my fault that, as I agonized over the letter, I thought not only of my friends. I also thought about those who are not well disposed towards us. As is well known, the Lord omitted to give them the gift of being quick-witted. That's why they pour forth denunciatory tirades at times when they should be listening to the voice of reason and conscience. Their categorical self-assurance is partially responsible for one's prolixity in questions that are in fact perfectly obvious.

I have no intention of trying to instruct you in any matter whatsoever, but I could not help but rely on the understanding and support of my Russian friends for the current aims of Byelorussians partly outlined in this letter. My hope rests on a profound respect for the Russian idea and its (as far as I understand it) denial of the religion of power and its assertion of the religion of the spirit. Our complete support for the rebirth of the Russian national idea is also perfectly natural, because without the spiritual self-cleansing of the Russian people we cannot count on the success of our own Byelorussian cause.

* Lenin, V.I., Complete works, vol. 45, p. 357. (In Russian.)

It may be that Byelorussians do not possess 'conciliarism', but by nature they too are a nation which can recognize the divine incarnation in man without trying to make men like gods.

The family bonds which unite us have been strengthened over the centuries; together we shall have to face the trials that lie before Slavdom in the future. The earlier we rid ourselves of the remnants of an inner Pan-mongolism by learning to respect the differences between us just as we have learnt to value the common elements that unite us, the better we shall withstand these trials.

Our aims are in complete accord with the idea of pan-slavism as advanced by its most outstanding protagonists: 'It would be regrettable if, for example, in imitation of the policies of Chancellor Bismarck, we settled the problem of our borderlands by means of straightforward compulsory Russification.'* Providence has deigned to make Russia settle the question of 'its' borderlands by relinquishing part of its statehood in favour of related peoples. Neither the power nor the glory of the Russian people, nor the respect that Byelorussians and Ukrainians (and Poles and Finns even more so) feel for them has suffered one iota; fraternal feelings - if they exist at all - are more likely to be found in our day as a result.

Let us be consistent in listening to the voice of Providence.

November 1976 - April 1977

* Solovyev Vl., National problem in Russia. Spb., 1888, p. 106 (In Russian.)

EDITORIAL NOTES

1. (p. 33) The quotation is taken from the article 'Notes on the characteristic traits of Russian rustic people' by the Russian literary critic and revolutionary thinker N. Dobrolyubov (1836-1861), which appeared in the journal Sovremennik in 1860. The full text of the relevant passage is as follows: 'With regard to the Byelorussian peasant, everything has been already decided a long time ago: downtrodden to such a degree that he has lost the ability to use his human faculties. We do not know how false this opinion is, because we have not studied Byelorussia in any detail, but we obviously cannot believe this to be true. Let us see what the Byelorussians themselves have to say' (N. Dobrolyubov, 'Cherty dlya kharakteristiki russkogo prostonarod'ya', Sovremennik, vol. 83, 1860).
2. (p. 35) In the historical digression that follows, the author tries to show that the people inhabiting the territory of present-day Byelorussia have been conscious of their separate identity from the earliest times of their history. It is this consciousness that underlies the continuous conflict in the 10-12th centuries between Polatsk, which was the earliest major political centre in the territory of Byelorussia, on the one hand, and Kiev on the other.
3. (p. 36) The passage is taken from the early epic poem entitled The Song of Igor's campaign (here given in the translation by Vladimir Nabokov) and describes the battle on the river Nyamiha in 1067 between Vseslav 'The Wizard', prince of Polatsk (1044-1101), and the princes of Kiev and their allies. The Nyamiha used to flow through Minsk until a few years ago when it became part of the city's sewage system.
4. (p. 36) Vladimir 'Monomach', prince of Kiev, wrote in his 'Poucheniye' (Instruction): 'In the autumn of the same year (i.e. 1084 - ed.) we went, together with the armies from Chernigov and with the Polovtsians, Chiteevich, towards Minsk; we took the city and left in it neither serf nor beast' (Povest' vremennykh let, ed. D.S. Likhachev, 'Moscow-Leningrad, 1950, vol. 1, p. 160).
5. (p. 37) Yanka Kupala (pseudonym of Ivan Lutsevich, 1882-1942) is considered to be the greatest Byelorussian poet. The poem Belarushchina (The Spirit of Byelorussia) was written in 1908, but because of its contents did not appear in print until 1922. It was reprinted for the second and last time in Soviet Byelorussia in 1928. It was not included in the seven-volume Zbor tvorau (Collected works), published by the Byelorussian Academy of Sciences in Minsk in 1972-77.

6. (p. 37) The city of Smolensk and its region lie today within the borders of the Russian Soviet Socialist Republic, despite the fact that it has always been regarded as part of Byelorussian ethnic territory. The ironical fact is that the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic was proclaimed on 1 January 1919 in Smolensk. A few weeks later, on orders from Moscow, the Smolensk region was detached from the new 'independent' republic.
7. (p. 37) Matvey Lyubavskii (1860-1936) was a Russian historian who specialised in the early history of Byelorussia (to the 16th cent.). The quotation in his book, to which the author of the Letter makes a reference, is taken from the Chronicle of Hypatius (Polnoe Sobranie russkikh letopisey, vol. 2, St Petersburg, 1908, col. 303). It concerns the refusal of the princes of Polatsk to come to the aid of the Kievan prince Mstislav in his fight against the Polovtsians in 1128.
8. (p. 39) 'Lyudz'mi zvatstsa' are the final words of Kupala's poem 'A Khto tam idzye?' (Who goes there?), which was written by him in 1907; for some time it was regarded as an unofficial Byelorussian national anthem. Here is an English translation of the poem by Vera Rich:
- And, say, who goes there? And, say, who goes there?
In such a mighty throng assembled, O declare?
Byelorussians!
- And what do those lean shoulders bear as load,
Those hands stained dark with blood, those feet bast-sandal shod?
All their grievance!
- And to what place do they this grievance bear,
And whither do they take it to declare?
To the whole world!
- And who schooled them thus, many million strong,
Bear their grievance forth, roused them from slumbers long?
Want and suffering!
- And what is it, then, for which so long they pined,
Scorned throughout the years, they, the deaf, the blind?
To be called human!
- (Like Water, like Fire. An anthology of Byelorussian poetry from 1828 to the present day. Trans. Vera Rich. London, 1971, p. 48.)
9. (p. 39) Khatyn' is the name of the village in central Byelorussia, 54 kms N-E of Minsk, which was destroyed on 22 March 1943 by the Germans, together with its inhabitants (149 persons, including 75 children), who were burned alive. Only one man escaped. Now in its place there is a memorial complex commemorating all Byelorussian innocent victims of man's inhumanity to man during the Second World War, among them 627 villages which suffered a similar fate to that of Khatyn'.

10. (p. 40) This is a slight paraphrase of the first two lines of the pre-1977 version of the Soviet national anthem:
- Soyuz nerushimyi respublik svobodnykh
Splotila naveki velikaya Rus'...
- (The unshakeable union of free republics has been cemented together for ever by Great Russia).
11. (p. 40) This is a reference to an incident in Yulian Semenov's spy thriller set in the last weeks of the Second World War (from which a popular TV series has been made) Semnadsat' mgnoveniy vesny (Seventeen moments of spring), Magadan, 1975. The hero, a Soviet agent high in the SS, is called Stirlitz.
12. (p. 40) The passages that follow come from the book by A. Adamovich, Ya. Bryl' and U. Kales'nik, Ya z vohryennay vyoski (I am from a fiery village), Minsk, 1974. They are extracts of accounts by eyewitnesses and survivors of the destruction of Byelorussian villages and mass murders of the population by German troops during the Second World War.
13. (p.44) The extract (which the author of the Letter gives in Russian translation) comes from the long poem Zvony Khatyni (Bells of Khatyn') by the Ukrainian poet Mykola Nahnibeda (b. 1911), written in 1972.
14. (p. 45) Tadeusz Kościuszko (1746-1817), a hero of the American War of Independence of 1776-83 and the leader of the Polish anti-Russian uprising of 1794, was a native of Byelorussia, as was also the great Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855). Although the Russian writer Fedor Dostoyevsky (1821-81) was born in Moscow, his family came from Byelorussia.
15. (p. 45) Frantsishak Bahushevich (1840-1900) is the greatest 19th-century Byelorussian poet, often called 'the Father of the Byelorussian national revival'. For Yanka Kupala see note 5. The name of Yakub Kolas (lit. pseudonym of Kastus' Mitskievich, 1882-1956) is usually coupled with that of Kupala as the greatest Byelorussian poet and writer. Maksim Bahdanovich (1891-1917) and Tsyotka (pseudonym of Alaiza Pashkievich, 1876-1916) were two other major early 20th century Byelorussian poets. Yadvihin Sh. (pseudonym of Anton Lyavitski, 1868-1922) was one of the first modern Byelorussian prose writers. Of the two Lutskievich brothers, Ivan (1881-1919) was a scholar and founder of the Byelorussian museum in Vilna, and Anton (1884-1948) was an outstanding literary critic and politician. All the persons mentioned here are among the pioneers of the modern Byelorussian national and cultural movement which began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

16. (p. 45) The author here draws attention to the flourishing state of the Byelorussian language and culture in the 16th-century Grand Duchy of Lithuania, of which Byelorussia formed part. In 1588 a code of civil and criminal law, known as Statut Velikoho Knyaz'stva Litovskoho (Statute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) was printed in the Byelorussian language. Even earlier, in 1517, the great scholar from Polatsk, Francis Skaryna, began printing his own Byelorussian translation of the Bible. The favourable conditions for the development of Byelorussian culture were cut short by the political events in the following centuries.
17. (p. 46) The stale joke about the Byelorussian language, which can still be heard in certain Russian circles, is that it differs from Russian only in the way Byelorussians pronounce certain words, e.g. 'trapka' instead of 'tryapka' (rag) and 'paradak' instead of 'poryadok' (order). The fact that the word 'trapka' does not exist in Byelorussian has never worried those who tell the joke.
18. (p. 46) This quotation is a slight adaptation of a phrase in the introduction to the book of poetry Dudka belaruskaya (Byelorussian Flute) by Matsiyei Burachok (pseudonym of Frantsishak Bahushevich, see note 15), published in Cracow in 1891. The original phrase is 'Nye pakidaytsie-zh movy nashay belaruskay, kab nya umyorli!' (Do not forsake our Byelorussian language, that you may not die).
19. (p. 46) Nasha Dolya (Our Fate) and Nasha Niva (Our Cornfield) were the first Byelorussian 'legal' newspapers; they appeared in 1906. Their publication was made possible thanks to the slight relaxation of certain restrictive laws and censorship after the 1905 Russian revolution. Only six issues of Nasha Dolya were published, five of which were confiscated by the Russian authorities. Nasha Niva was more fortunate and continued to appear until 1915. It became the focal point of the Byelorussian national revival, both political and cultural.
20. (p. 47) Fair Land of Byelorussia. An anthology of modern Byelorussian poetry, translated by Walter May, Moscow, 1976. This is in fact the second anthology of Byelorussian poetry in English; for details of the first, see note 8. It is worth adding that although Zvyazda (The Star) is the leading Byelorussian language daily newspaper ('Organ of the Central Committee of the Byelorussian Communist Party and of the Supreme Soviet and the Council of Ministers of the Byelorussian SSR'), its name is not actually Byelorussian at all, but a version of the Russian word 'zvezda'. The Byelorussian for 'star' is 'zorka'.

21. (p. 47) Pyotr Klimuk is a Soviet cosmonaut who made his first flight in 1973 in the spacecraft Soyuz 13. He was born in 1942 in the village of Kamarouka in S.W. Byelorussia, where his mother and relatives still live. On his return to Earth he told journalists that his most cherished possession during the flight was a miniature edition of poems by Yakub Kolas. Klimuk is the author of a book entitled Zory - pobach (Stars by my side), published in Minsk in 1977.
22. (p. 48) The 'samizdat' poem Lysaya hara (Witch Sabbath Mountain) is not available in the West. The word 'panchokha' is Byelorussian for stocking. The popular expression 'nabits' panchokhu' (to fill the stocking) means 'to get rich', 'to acquire material wealth'. The phrase 'to believe in the stocking' does not require any explanation.
23. (p. 49) The Russian writer Maksim Gor'kii (1868-1936) took a keen interest in the development of Byelorussian literature in the early 20th century. He subscribed to Nasha Niva (see note 19), expressed publicly a high opinion of the works of Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas, and in 1911 translated into Russian Kupala's poem 'A Khto tam idzye?' (see note 8).
There is no record of Lenin ever taking an interest in Byelorussia. However, since in Soviet hagiography all good things come from him, there is no harm in associating Lenin's name with one's cause.
24. (p. 50) Article 28 of the Education Act of the Byelorussian SSR, which came into force on 1 April 1975, reads: 'Pupils of secondary schools have the choice of obtaining their education either in their native tongue or in the tongue of any other people of the USSR. Parents or guardians have the right to choose for their children a school in which instruction is given in the language of their choice' (Dzvevyataya sesiya Vyarkhounaha Savyeta Belaruskay SSR vos'maha sklikannya, Minsk, 1975, p. 184). It is not difficult to see that in reality as it exists in the Soviet Union this freedom of choice boils down to the 'freedom' to abandon the native language in favour of Russian.
25. (p. 50) Glupov is the name of the town at the centre of the Russian 19th-century satirist Saltykov-Shchedrin's attack on the madness of official Russia Istoriya odnogo goroda (The History of a town). The name is derived from the adjective 'glupyi', 'stupid'.
26. (p. 51) The neglect and destruction of Byelorussian historical monuments caused a wave of protest in the late 1960s among young Byelorussians - writers, artists, actors as well as scientists and engineers. Several letters of protest appeared in 1969 in the daily paper Chyrvonaya zmena (Red generation), and articles in the journal Maladosc' (Youth) and other publications. Today the situation seems to have improved, but the protests came too late to save the ancient quarter of the Byelorussian capital Minsk and the historical river Nyamiha.

27. (p. 51, footnote) Wilhelm Knorin (1890-1939) was one of the Communist leaders in Byelorussia during the Revolution and the 1920s. A Latvian by birth, he, like the majority of his colleagues, was hostile to the idea of Byelorussia as an autonomous unit, separate from Russia. In 1928, as the First Secretary of the Byelorussian Communist Party, Knorin launched a vicious attack on Byelorussian national culture which reached its peak in the 1930s.
28. (p. 53) Maksim Haretski, writer and historian of Byelorussian literature (1893-1938); Usyevalad Ihnatouski, historian and first President of the Byelorussian Academy of Sciences (1881-1931); Mikola Shchakhatsikhin, art historian (1896-1940); Platon Halavach, novelist (1903-1937); Mikhas' Charot (1896-1938) - these are the names of only a few of the Byelorussian victims of Stalin's reign of terror in the 1930s. Many of them died in undisclosed circumstances; others finished their days in exile or in concentration camps; a few, like Aleksandrovich, survived and were 'rehabilitated' in the late 1950s.
29. (p.54) Kastus' Kalinouski was one of the leaders of the anti-Russian uprising of 1863-64 and the editor of the first clandestine Byelorussian newspaper Muzhytskaya praua (Peasants' truth). After his capture by the Russians he was hanged in Vilna on 10 March 1864. The author of the Letter draws the attention of his readers to the fact that the Russian language, in which Kalinouski's death sentence was pronounced, is also the official language of the present-day Soviet security police (known at various times as GPU, NKVD and KGB).
30. (p. 54) Burdasty (the name should actually be spelled Brudasty) was one of the disastrous mayors of Glupov (see note 25).
31. (p. 56) Ales' Charvyakou (1892-1937) was a prominent Byelorussian communist and one of the architects of the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, in which he occupied some of the highest posts, including that of Chairman of the Central Executive Committee (i.e. prime minister). He sincerely believed that the free development of Byelorussia's national life could be assured only within the communist system. This belief did not save him from Stalin's henchmen.
32. (p. 57) These are the last two stanzas (in Russian translation in the Letter) of the poem Rodnaye slova (The Native Word) by the modern Byelorussian poet Nil Hilevich (b. 1931). The poem, written in 1960, is an impassioned apologia for the native language and is addressed to those members of the young generation of Byelorussians who voluntarily abandon it in favour of Russian.

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