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## Normalising a Ukrainian Intellectual Identity in the Nineteenth Century: The Role of Marko Vovchok (1833-1907)

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**Abstract:** A question that confronted educated Ukrainians, predominantly landowners descended from Cossack notables, in the Russian Empire in the first half of the nineteenth century was whether they should foster an identity distinct from an all-imperial one. A sense of historical distinctiveness, the value placed by the late Enlightenment and the Romantic Movement upon the culture of ordinary people and the wealth of Ukrainian folk culture persuaded many of the need to generate a high culture employing the Ukrainian language. Yet, prior to the Ukrainian-language prose of Marko Vovchok (Maria Markovych), an element essential for the development of a multifunctional modern culture, and of an identity able to be shared by a modern Ukrainian intelligentsia, was lacking: a stylistically transparent prose able to function not only in a poetically charged way, but as a neutral medium for communicating content. The paper identifies the features of Marko Vovchok's writing that made this innovation possible.

**Keywords:** identity, intellectuals, prose, public sphere, Ukrainian literature, Marko Vovchok

In 1841 *Haidamaky*, a long poem by Taras Shevchenko (1814-61), was published as a small book.<sup>1</sup> It told the story of the great 1768 uprising by Cossacks and peasants known as 'Haidamaky,' inspired by memories of Cossack glory and hopes for restored liberties, against the nobility of the declining Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. *Haidamaky* combined verse narrative with dramatic dialogue in a range of metrical forms. Accumulating scenes of carnage and pillage in diverse locations, it confronted its readers with the panoramic image of a landscape engulfed by a revolutionary conflagration. Not only was the poem an immensely ambitious poetic project; it also articulated complex historical and ethical questions, such as that of responsibility for social and religious oppression, but also of whether the oppressed have a right to violence and vengeance. *Haidamaky* was probably the most challenging and important work of the fledgling modern vernacular Ukrainian literature to date.

Curiously, at the end of this serious work came a piece of prose paradoxically titled 'Foreword' and a paragraph addressed to the book's subscribers, both rather colloquial and chatty, full of exclamations, questions and direct speech, and clearly reminiscent of the burlesque tone of what had already come to be regarded as the foundation text of modern Ukrainian literature, Ivan Kotliarevs'kyi's *Eneida* (1798), his travesty of Virgil's *Aeneid*. The opening sentences with their construction of a guileless, sketchily educated speaker all at sea as to the practices of the publishing world are typical of the two prose texts in their entirety:

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After the word itself comes the foreword [*Po movi – peredmova*]. One could do without it, but, you see, every book that I've seen printed (seen, mind you – I've read very little) has a foreword, but mine doesn't. If I hadn't intended to print my *Haidamaky* I wouldn't have needed a foreword. But now that I'm sending it out into the world I have to deck it out properly, so that people don't laugh at us beggars [...].<sup>2</sup>

The same pose of eccentric informality was characteristic of Ukrainian-language epistolary prose, including that of Shevchenko, and of the brief editorial essays that appeared in the Ukrainian-themed almanacs of the time – Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko's 'Suplika do pana izdatelia' (Petition to Mr Publisher) in *Utrenniaia zvezda* (The Morning Star, 1833), for example, or Ievhen Hrebinka's 'Tak sobi do zemliakiv' (To Our Countrymen, More or Less) in *Lastivka* (The Swallow, 1841).<sup>3</sup> When it came to literary prose, as in the case of his diary of 1857-58 or his short novels, written in exile in the 1850s, Shevchenko wrote in Russian.

Why so? It seems unlikely that Shevchenko saw himself as choosing between the burlesque and some other tone when writing Ukrainian prose, or between Russian and Ukrainian when writing his prose narratives, richly interspersed with aesthetic, psychological and cultural reflections. It is more plausible to conjecture that in Shevchenko's judgment there simply was no usable tradition of neutral, transparent reflective prose in Ukrainian, and therefore no means in that language for discussing 'serious' public issues or, indeed, any matters requiring intellectual abstraction or generalisation. Mainstream public concerns were the domain of the imperial language, Russian. Ukrainian, insofar as it was written at all in the educated class of society, was reserved mainly for intimate, informal, 'in-group' communication within a community demarcated by social, historical and territorial attributes: the landowning gentry descended from Cossack notables. Acquired by members of this educated elite through childhood contact with servants and peasant playmates, the Ukrainian language was not visible to them as a valuable cultural possession: in the first decades of the nineteenth century it was not, in general, part of the 'cultural capital', to borrow Bourdieu's term, that one built up through education.<sup>4</sup> Hence there was no possibility of invoking, through Ukrainian-language writing, an 'intellectual' identity – an identity similar to that of people accustomed to writing from a perspective of secular reason on general questions and matters of public concern in the West European countries since the late seventeenth century, in Central Europe from the last third of the eighteenth century, and in the Russian Empire from the 1830s.

In the following discussion I propose that a major obstacle to the evolution of a Ukrainian intellectual identity lay in the difficulty of imagining a community of public discussion whose membership would be defined by competence in the Ukrainian language. This went hand in hand with the difficulty of thinking of Ukrainians as a socially multi-layered nation with elites as well as masses, in contrast to

<sup>2</sup> T. Shevchenko, 'Peredmova [do vydannia: 'Haidamaky.' Poema T. Shevchenka. Sanktpeterburg, 1841]' in Shevchenko, *Zibrannia tvoriv u shesty tomakh*, Kyiv, Naukova dumka, Vol. 5, 2003, p. 201.

<sup>3</sup> The notion that the burlesque style was expressive of the culturally circumscribed but materially replete lifestyle of the Ukrainian gentry was reflected in Nikolai Gogol's early 'Ukrainian' tales. In the speech of Rudyi Pan'ko, the comic narrator of *Vechera na khutore bliz Dikan'ki* (Evenings on a Farm near Dikan'ka, 1831-32), Gogol created a Russian-language equivalent of this comic mode. The stereotypical association of the Ukrainian language with earthy comedy was not limited to a particular genre: it was as evident in belles lettres as it was in the small corpus of Ukrainian-language expository and epistolary prose. The power of this stereotype is reflected in the code-switching that was characteristic of the correspondence of the 1840s and 1850s. Almost all of the letters written by the Ukrainian literati of the time are in Russian, whether they are addressed to Russians or Ukrainians. But when Hrebinka or Kulish in correspondence a compatriot wish to make a point forcefully or to express themselves colourfully, uncouthly or, sometimes, intimately, they often switch from normal polite Russian into a pronouncedly rustic Ukrainian, as in Kulish's letter of 6 December 1847 to Viktor Bilozers'kyi: '[In Russian:] The electrotyping is going very well indeed. I made the mould of an ornament for a picture frame and suspended it [in the electrolyte] myself. The result was even better and stronger than previously. [In Ukrainian:] There you have it: if you're on a roll, the devil himself rocks your children to sleep! [In Russian:] I'm perfecting my English' (Panteleimon Kulish. *Povne zibrannia tvoriv*, Kyiv, Krytyka, 2005, 2003, Vol. 1, p. 196-197.)

<sup>4</sup> P. Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital' [1983], trans. Richard Nice, in J. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, New York, Greenwood, 1986, pp. 241-258.

thinking of them as a one-dimensional plebeian ethnos, 'the people' (*narod*). I also want to suggest that the Ukrainian-language writings of Maria Markovych (born Maria Vilinskaia; she published under the pseudonym Marko Vovchok) provided an example of a kind of prose that was able to be a vehicle for intellectual communication within a Ukrainian-language sphere, and therefore an enabling factor for the emergence of a Ukrainian intellectual identity.

Since the 1920s there have been numerous discussions of the features of the social group that is commonly labelled as 'intellectuals.'<sup>5</sup> My purpose is served by regarding intellectuals as defined by their social role and the kind of social consciousness of which they are carriers: they are people who write from a position of critical secular reason informed by education; their objective as they see it is the general good (not the good of an interest group of which they are spokespeople); and they see their proposals and debates in the sphere of ideas as influencing the convictions and actions of broad social groups as well as of those in power. In the Age of Enlightenment, the intellectuals' sphere of address was as broad as Europe itself. In the nineteenth century, as nationalisms emerged and standardised national languages asserted themselves as carriers of new high cultures, groups of intellectuals began to see themselves as attached to particular nations and to address public spheres that they conceived of as national.<sup>6</sup> It is the identity of members of one such group that I have in mind when I refer to a 'Ukrainian intellectual identity.'

At first sight there is a certain implausibility in regarding Marko Vovchok as a pioneer of Ukrainian intellectual identity. She was born in Orel in Russia and had the upbringing and education of a woman of the Russian gentry. Her exposure to things Ukrainian came through Opanas Markovych (1822-67), an ethnographer who had been, together with Shevchenko, the historian Mykola Kostomarov (1817-85) and the writer Panteleimon Kulish (1819-97), a member of the clandestine proto-nationalist Cyrillo-Methodian Brotherhood whose members were exposed in 1847 and variously punished. Markovych was sent into exile in Orel. Maria married Markovych and travelled with him to Ukraine, learned Ukrainian (an act that, for her, in contrast to many of her Ukrainian contemporaries, represented an acquisition of cultural capital) and began to collect Ukrainian folklore. In 1857 she caused something of a furore in Ukrainian circles in both Ukraine and St Petersburg with the publication, in Ukrainian, of *Narodni opovidannia* (Peasant Tales), a collection of eleven short stories. The stories soon appeared in translation into Russian, at first as translated by the author herself, then in a separate book identifying, not entirely accurately, the eminent Russian novelist Ivan Turgenev as the translator.<sup>7</sup> 1857 was also the year when Panteleimon Kulish, who edited and published Marko Vovchok's collection, also brought out his own *Chorna Rada* (The Black Council), the first historical novel in Ukrainian. It was a year before Shevchenko returned to St Petersburg from exile and four years before Ukrainian expatriates in the imperial capital began publishing their Ukrainian-focussed journal *Osnova* (Foundation). After 1865 Marko Vovchok published little in Ukrainian, though her writing and translating career, much of it spent in Western Europe, proceeded for another three decades.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For an account of the phases and directions in the study of intellectuals see C. Kurzman and L. Owens, 'The Sociology of Intellectuals,' *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28, 2002, pp. 63-90 and the generous bibliography supplied there (pp. 82-90).

<sup>6</sup> For inquiries into the role of intellectuals in the development of public spheres delimited by nation see, e.g., the essays collected in R. Pipes (ed.), *The Russian Intelligentsia*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1961, especially 'Martin Malia, 'What Is the Intelligentsia?,' pp. 1-18; M. Raeff, *Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia: The Eighteenth-Century Nobility*, New York, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1966; B. Gesen, *Die Intellektuellen und die Nation: Eine Deutsche Achsenzeit*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1993; and C. Charle, 'Intellectuals in Europe in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century' in H. Kaelble (ed.), *The European Way: European Societies During the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2004, pp. 186-204.

<sup>7</sup> On Turgenev's role as editor of Vovchok's autotranslation, rather than as translator, see V. Dudko, 'Kulish i Turgenev', *Khronika 2000: Ukraïns'kyi kul'turolohichnyi al'manakh*, 78, pp. 431-458, <<http://www.historians.in.ua/index.php/statti/382-viktor-dudko-kulish-i-turheniev>>, accessed 24 March 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Book-length studies of Marko Vovchok's life and works include O. Zasenka, *Marko Vovchok: Zhyttia, tvorchist', mistse v istorii literatury*, Kyiv, Vydavnytstvo Akademii nauk Ukraïns'koï RSR, 1964; E. P. Brandis, *Marko Vovchok*, Moscow, Molodaia gvardiia, 1968; M. S. Hrytsai, *Marko Vovchok: Tvorchyi shliakh*, Kyiv, Vyshcha shkola, 1983; and T. Panasenko, *Marko Vovchok*, Kharkiv, Folio, 2010. Marko Vovchok's activity in three linguistic environments, Ukrainian, Russian and

Marko Vovchok did not write much in the genres favoured by intellectuals of her time: essays, journal articles and book reviews. An exception was 'Mrachnye kartiny' (Bleak Pictures), a long review in Russian of three books in English, and even that is of not quite certain authorship.<sup>9</sup> She wrote imaginative literature, and she translated, mainly from the French (to this day, Russian readers encounter Jules Verne in her translations). The works closest to an intellectual genre were her published *Otryvki pisem iz Parizha* (Excerpts from Letters from Paris, 1864-66) in Russian and the shorter *Lysty z Paryzha* (Letters from Paris, 1865) in Ukrainian, which might be described as something between travelogue and social reportage. Her correspondence deals, on the whole, not with ideas, but with personal and family matters and with the business arising from her activity as a writer.

Furthermore, Marko Vovchok wrote only a small fraction of her published opus in Ukrainian – about one seventh of it.<sup>10</sup> Her letters, with the exception of several to her husband Markovych, some to her mentor Shevchenko and a small number of others, were in Russian. Her Ukrainian reputation rests almost entirely on *Peasant Tales* and a handful of other prose works that appeared in journals and collections.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, Marko Vovchok's fiction is seldom set in a milieu that might be called intellectual, and her Ukrainian writing not at all. The typical story of *Peasant Tales* has a peasant, in almost all cases a woman, as its narrator, and takes as its theme the misery of peasant life, the inhumanity of serfdom, and the special traumas suffered by peasant women.<sup>12</sup> Vovchok's Russian-language fictional prose has a broader social sweep, with the lower and middle gentry receiving her often acerbic satirical attention. But here, too, characters seldom appear as people of ideas – as they do regularly somewhat later in the prose of, say, Ol'ha Kobylians'ka (1863-1942), who greatly admired Vovchok's work. And this despite the fact that after her St Petersburg sojourn Vovchok was in the company of, and in correspondence with, the Ukrainian writing fraternity – Shevchenko and Kulish, of course, but also the folklorist Danylo Kamenets'kyi (1830-81) and Vasyl' Bilozers'kyi (1825-99), the editor of *Osnova*. Even closer, and in some cases intimate, were her relationships with members of the Russian *intelligentsia*: the novelist Turgenev, the socialist exile Aleksandr Gertsen, the jurist Aleksandr Passek, the critic Nikolai Dobroliubov, the historian Konstantin Kavelin and the radical critic Dmitrii Pisarev.

To substantiate the counterintuitive thesis that Marko Vovchok had a role – and a substantial, pioneering role at that – in making possible a Ukrainian intellectual identity it is necessary to consider aspects of her imaginative prose that, up to *Peasant Tales*, had been absent from Ukrainian literature. They may be discussed, in order of increasing importance, under the headings of content, narrative stance, and voice.

The content of Marko Vovchok's stories is widely familiar. In the eleven *Peasant Tales*, and several subsequent Ukrainian-language stories published in the first half of the 1860s, peasants suffer at the

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French, is the subject of the collection of texts and articles V. Aheieva (ed.), *Try doli: Marko Vovchok v ukrains'kii, rosiis'kii ta frantsuz'kii literaturi*, Kyiv, Fakt, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> This omnibus review of George Augustus Sala's *Gaslight and Daylight* (1859), Augustus Mayhew's *Paved with Gold* (1858) and James Greenwood's *Unsentimental Journey* (1867) appeared anonymously in the St Petersburg journal *Otechestvennye zapiski* in 1868. For a bibliography of the discussion of Marko Vovchok's authorship of this piece see the commentary in Marko Vovchok, *Tvory v semy tomakh*, Kyiv, Naukova dumka, 1964-67, 2003, Vol. 6, pp. 584-85.

<sup>10</sup> Works in Ukrainian comprise approximately 14% of the fiction and non-fiction in the seven-volume edition of her works, M. Vovchok, *Tvory*, op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> The most substantial of these was the short novel 'Instytutka', initially published in a Russian translation attributed to Turgenev (1860), and then in the original in *Osnova* (1862).

<sup>12</sup> Scholarship has recently begun to take account of the fact that Vovchok's works engaged in feminist advocacy as much as they opposed serfdom. See Vira Aheieva, 'Cholovychyi psevdonim i zhinocha nezalezhnist' in Aheieva (ed.), *Try doli*, op. cit., pp. 101-113 and O. M. Bazhan, *Genderni modeli kharakterotvorennia prozy Marka Vovchka ta Hanny Barvinok*, diss. Kyiv, 2010.

hands of landowners,<sup>13</sup> peasant women suffer under the sexual predation of noblemen,<sup>14</sup> but also from their own powerlessness in a violent patriarchal peasant society;<sup>15</sup> and almost all characters, oppressed and oppressors alike, suffer psychological trauma and depression connected to their role in a wicked society.<sup>16</sup> There is never overt ideological preaching in these stories – the narrators are figured as straightforward people who truthfully recount events and feelings and make judgments without drawing political conclusions from their experiences. But the ethical stance of the author ‘behind’ these narrators is never in doubt. The ‘argument’ of Vovchok’s Ukrainian stories corresponds to the great modern plea for human liberation into a state of dignity. It is an argument that is a leitmotif of European thought and culture since the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. It is secular, insofar as, in contrast to religion, it locates human liberation in the present social world. It accords with a notion of justice based on the conviction that human beings are equal because they are equally endowed with the faculty of reason. The peasants in Marko Vovchok’s tales are, of course, depicted as members of a particular social class at a particular time. But, more importantly (and here they differ from the peasants of a Hulak-Artemovs’kyi or a Kvitka-Osnovianenko), they are, in the first instance, human beings, and their plight is a matter of universal concern – the proper field of engagement of the secular intellectual.

But if universalism is a key factor in the intellectual’s identity, why was it important for *Peasant Tales* to be written in Ukrainian, rather than in the more widely accessible established language of the empire, Russian, which was also Marko Vovchok’s native language and the language into which she translated the stories immediately after their first publication? The answer must be inferred from Marko Vovchok’s literary works, for, unlike Kulish or Kostomarov, she never put down in writing her reflections about Ukrainian literature or her mission in it. It is an answer that justifies the defence of the culture of all oppressed or submerged peoples: respect for the dignity of human beings must go hand in hand with respect for the cultural attributes through which their human essence is expressed. As Benedict Anderson observed, the nineteenth century witnessed the growing acceptance of the view that ‘languages (in Europe at least) were, so to speak, the personal property of quite specific groups – their daily speakers and readers – and moreover that these groups, imagined as communities, were entitled to their autonomous place in a fraternity of equals.’<sup>17</sup> Thus, nineteenth-century intellectuals claiming to encompass the Ukrainian peasant in their universalist project could only assert this universalism within the culture of the people on whose behalf they claimed to speak. It was this universalism-with-a-national-face that Marko Vovchok introduced as a standpoint available to Ukrainian intellectuals.

Equally important as a factor making possible an intellectual identity is the establishment for the intellectual of a position in the cultural sphere that is (or, more precisely, as an important tradition of inquiry into intellectuals reminds us, *seems*)<sup>18</sup> independent of particular social or other group interests, and that authorises the intellectual to speak on behalf of society – indeed, of humanity at large. This, too, Marko Vovchok accomplished in her prose. She did so by managing in an innovative way the relationship between the narrator, who is a character in her stories, and the implied ‘author’ – the structuring intelligence behind the narrator and the story as a whole.

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<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., ‘Kozachka’ (The Cossack Woman), ‘Odarka,’ ‘Horpyna,’ ‘Vykup’ (Bought out of Serfdom), and ‘Ledashchytisia’ (The Idle Girl).

<sup>14</sup> E.g., ‘Odarka’ and ‘Otets’ Andrii’ (Father Andrii).

<sup>15</sup> E.g., ‘Kozachka,’ ‘Chumak’ (The Salt Trader), ‘Son’ (The Dream) and ‘Pavlo Chornokryl.’

<sup>16</sup> E.g., ‘Chary’ (Sorcery), ‘Svekrukha’ (The Mother-in-Law), ‘Maksym Hrymach,’ ‘Danylo Hurch’ and ‘Try doli’ (Three Destinies).

<sup>17</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed., London, Verso, 1991, p. 84.

<sup>18</sup> See especially A. Gramsci, ‘The Intellectuals’ [1932] in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, trans. Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith, New York, International Publishers, 1971, and P. Bourdieu, ‘The Corporatism of the Universal: The Role of Intellectuals in the Modern World,’ *Telos*, 81, 1989, pp. 99-110, here pp.109-110.

Before *Peasant Tales*, Ukrainian writers had written about Ukrainian peasants, often encouraging their readers to enjoy the wealth of peasant folk culture and lifestyle (as in Kotliarevs'kyi's *Eneida* and Hulak-Artemovs'kyi's or Hrebinka's verses that parodically or semi-parodically imitated the folk idiom) or to admire the peasants' (idealised) moral virtues (as in Kvitka-Osnovianenko's story 'Marusia,' 1834). But the authorial voice of these writings had hitherto clearly belonged to the gentry; the narrative structures of such works as Kvitka's 'Saldats'kyi patret' (The Soldier's Portrait, 1833) had emphasised the *distance*, often used to comic effect, between the narrator, a representative of the untutored common folk, and the implied author, who identified with an educated elite. (The poetic works of Shevchenko, himself born a peasant and a serf, explicitly challenged this alienation – in contrast to his scant passages of Ukrainian prose, which did not.)

What Marko Vovchok accomplished was the destruction of this social distinction between narrator and author. No longer was the narrator the object of ironic depiction from the perspective of a culturally more 'advanced' author participating in an elite all-imperial culture quite different from the one being represented. Vovchok's stories were characterised not by solidarity with the gentry audience, but by unrelenting critique of it both collectively, as an exploiting class, and individually, as men and women whose attitudes to serfs range from ineffectual sentimental charity, through indifference, to psychopathic cruelty.<sup>19</sup>

Marko Vovchok, who in her childhood experienced the painful situation of a poor relation in a wealthy home, appears to have shed her gentry identity with alacrity when she married Opanas Markovych and entered into the semi-bohemian circle of déclassé impoverished educated people struggling to live on low-paid government jobs and by free-lance writing. Similarly, the author implicit in the texts is figured as unattached to any privileged class and as socially disinterested – or, more precisely, as driven by the interests of humanity as a whole. This generality of human concern, an essential component of the intellectual's stance, had previously escaped Ukrainian prose, but after Marko Vovchok, in the long prose works of Ivan Nechui-Levyts'kyi (1838-1918) and Panas Myrnyi (1848-1920), for example, it would become its staple.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Marko Vovchok created a voice suitable for articulating a Ukrainian intellectual identity. The populist tradition of Ukrainian literary scholarship in its nineteenth-century version as well as its Soviet variant praised Marko Vovchok for imitating the peasant voice, seeing in this an *a priori* value (in his preface *Peasant Tales* Kulish praised the collection as 'living ethnography').<sup>20</sup> This view was partly correct: while, naturally, her stories are by definition works of art, not nature, Marko Vovchok in *Peasant Tales* deliberately used folk locutions and tropes that she had found and recorded in the course of her ethnographic research.<sup>21</sup> And she made use of some linguistic forms, the diminutive in particular, that are regarded in much of the secondary literature as characteristic of peasant speech.<sup>22</sup>

But this was not her most significant innovation. More important was the fact that in her stories Marko Vovchok abandoned the tone of comic or sentimental eccentricity that had characterised Ukrainian fictional and non-fictional prose hitherto. The 'speakers' of these pre-Vovchok prose texts had been figured by the authors as intensely subjective and sometimes irrational. The position of

<sup>19</sup> See for example 'Sestra' (The Sister) and 'Instytutka' (After Finishing School).

<sup>20</sup> P. Kulish, 'Slovo od izdatelia' in *Narodni opovidannia Marka Vovchka*, St Petersburg, P. A. Kulish, 1858 [in fact, 1857], v-x, here vii. See also P. Kulish, 'Vzgliad na malorossiiskuiu slovesnost' po sluchaiu vykhoda v svet knigi "Narodni opovidannia Marka Vovchka"' in Kulish, *Tvory v dvokh tomakh*, Kyiv, Dnipro, 1989, pp. 477-484, here p. 482. The pre-1991 studies cited in Note 6 hold very similar positions.

<sup>21</sup> See B. N. Khomenko, *Narodni dzherela tvorchosti Marka Vovchka*, Kyiv, Vyshcha shkola, 1977 and, in the collection *Marko Vovchok: Statti i doslidzhennia*, Kyiv, Naukova dumka, 1985, the essays: M. Ie. Syvachenko, 'Do temy: Marko Vovchok i narodna kazka,' pp. 239-281 and O. I. Dei, 'Narodna balada pro sestru ta bratviv-rozbiinykiv i ii opratsiuvannia Markom Vovchkom,' pp. 282-310.

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., V. Chaplenko, *Ukrains'ka literaturna mova: ĭi vynykennia i rozvytok*, New York, Ukrain's'kyi tekhnichnyi instytut u N'iu Iorku, 1955, p. 141.

higher rationality from which they were observed was that of the educated all-imperial elite. Marko Vovchok's women narrators, by contrast, for all their social and educational disadvantage, were represented as reliable, objective witnesses of character and event; they are endowed with an intuition of natural justice and with native wisdom. There is no superior position from which, as Kvitka did, the 'author' condescendingly observes the narrator, displaying that narrator's cultural specificity as underdevelopment and thereby complimenting the elite audience upon its relative cultural sophistication. In general, in the works of Marko Vovchok the views or values espoused by the narrator are shared by the implied author.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, the diction of Marko Vovchok's narrators identifies their class and pays tribute to their folkloric cultural endowment. The author does not bestow upon them socially implausible capacities for abstraction or generalisation. They are not presented as folk intellectuals. But their measured, neutral and objective tone, and the critical import of their narratives, performs in the Ukrainian language a mode of deliberative communication that is the essential feature of the intellectual. Kulish noticed the discursive novelty of Marko Vovchok's prose, but did not quite grasp its significance for the gestation in Ukrainian of the neutral modern prose that is the vehicle for intellectual exchange. '[Marko Vovchok's] great achievement,' wrote Kulish, is that he speaks not on his own behalf, but that of the people. He does not reveal his thoughts to us, as Kvitka does; he does not grieve for the people with his own soul, as does Taras [Shevchenko]: the author here has stepped back from his writing; instead, in his writing the people itself speaks to us face to face in its own words, as in its most elevated hours it speaks through song. The merit of Mr Marko Vovchok lies in the fact that he has learnt the real language of the people as one learns songs, and has spoken to us in the way that the people speak among themselves. [...] Such stories as those of Vovchok (God grant that there be more of them) will be [seen] in time as the basis of our national literature, once it has spread its luxuriant boughs in all directions.<sup>24</sup>

Kulish's reading of Marko Vovchok, however favourable, saw in her work no more than a respectful and sympathetic imitation of the 'language' of the people (a metaphoric notion signifying the people's overall ethos or genius). In his understanding, what occurred in *Peasant Tales* was still a mediation between the educated readership and the people conceived of as a plebeian mass; the discursive field of 'the people' remained separate and required translation in order to become accessible to the empirical reader ('[Vovchok] has spoken *to us* in the way that the people speak *among themselves*'; emphasis added).

The difference between the voice of Marko Vovchok's fiction and that of her predecessors may be illustrated by considering the opening few sentences of her story 'Odarka' from *Peasant Tales* and those of Kvitka-Osnov'ianenko's 'Soldier's portrait.' Kvitka immediately focusses attention upon the style and situation of the narration and the character of the narrator, bringing to light the deficiencies (albeit endearing ones) of each:

Once upon a time there was a painter... his name keeps buzzing around in my head, but I'll be blown if I can remember it... Very well then, he was a painter. What an artist he was! Dammit, how he could paint! You folk reading or listening to this book might imagine that he painted just like that, any old way, mixing up some paint, red or beetroot or yellow, and then simply smearing it across a table or a chest. Not on your life! Listen to this: whatever he catches sight of, he whips up a portrait of it right away. A pig or a bucket – whatever it is, he makes it absolutely lifelike. Whistle in amazement, that's all you can do. And if he paints anything and

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<sup>23</sup> In Marko Vovchok's Ukrainian-language fiction there are rare occasions where a story is told from the point of view of narrators who, though representatives of 'the people,' are the objects of satire because of the confused or distorted nature of their perceptions. This is the case in the comic tale 'Chortova pryhoda' (The Devil's Adventure), not published until 1902, in which the story of an encounter with a devil is narrated by drunkard and ne'er-do-well. Vovchok, *Tvory*, op. cit., Vol. 6, pp. 217-229.

<sup>24</sup> Kulish, 'Slovo od izdatelia,' op. cit., pp. ix-x.



writes underneath – he was literate, you see – ‘this is a plum, not a melon,’ then it’s a plum all right, no doubt about it.<sup>25</sup>

The narrator’s style is marked by a lack of narrative competence (he cannot remember the key fact about the object of his narration), which is compensated for by a disarmingly forthright repair strategy: acknowledgment of the fault and a cheerful moving on to the point of the monologue. The narrative situation, too, is characterised by a lack: the lack of literacy on the part of some members of the audience that the narrator envisages (in contrast to the exclusively literate and, indeed, educated real readership of the story – the subscribers to the almanac *Morning Star*). Illiteracy on the part of some in the fictional audience renders plausible the emphatically oral, informal and colloquial tone of the speaker’s narrative; at the same time, illiteracy is perhaps the main sign of the remoteness of the represented world from polite (Russo- and Francophone) society, and of its incongruity relative to such ‘literary’ environments as the salon or the drawing room. Finally, cultural lack is one of the defining features of the narrator as a character: though endowed with a natural aesthetic sensibility – he is moved by works of art and especially by the miracle of mimesis – he is, nevertheless, entirely bereft of the refinement that a modicum of education would impart to his judgments. The distance between what he can say about ‘lifelike’ representation in the visual arts, and what any member of the readership of *Morning Star* could say on the same topic, is enormous; it is one of the chief sources of the comedy of Kvitka’s masterfully written tale, but at the same time it is a symptom of the entrapment of Ukrainian-language prose in a discourse of inadequacy, limitation and self-apologia.

The difference between Kvitka-Osnov’ianenko’s narrator and Marko Vovchok’s, and between their respective authors’ attitudes toward them, could scarcely be greater. In Marko Vovchok’s ‘Odarka’, one of the stories in *Peasant Tales*, the narrator speaks in full seriousness and takes responsibility upon herself for a severe social judgment:

Our old landlord – he’s dead now – was an evil man. It’s not that I want to remember him that way, but there is nothing better to be said of him.

Across the river from us some free Cossacks had a farmstead, and even they feared him like fire. They kept out of his way, because he could do them great harm. And as for what we serfs had to suffer at his hands – may God protect every Christian from anything like it. If you saw him coming you’d run for your life, over hill or dale, just to avoid crossing his path. It was the girls that were most afraid of him. He put an end to many a girl’s innocence. And what could you do... he’d be walking about the village, sullen and angry and looking this way and that like a hungry crow. We were sitting in our house one day – it was him we were talking about, and none too kindly – when there was a pounding and a crashing in the hallway, and the landlord himself burst in.<sup>26</sup>

There is no joking here, no flirting with the audience, no invocation of charming lower-class naïveté to be enjoyed by cultured, comfortable genteel readers. Instead, a narrator who is part of an oppressed ‘we’ depicts a situation of unchecked tyranny where social power licenses sexual violence. No reader reaction is accommodated by the text except condemnation of the landlord, both as a fictional figure – he is depicted so schematically in the narrator’s account that the term ‘character’ seems out of place – and as a representative of an appallingly unjust social system. The narrator’s narrative of the landlord’s cruelties implies the positive values that his oppressions contradict: his sexual voracity negates, but thereby points to an ideal of equality and mutual respect between the sexes; his violence negates, but points to a society founded on peace and mutual care; his resolve to curb the residual freedoms of the peasant descendants of the Cossacks negates, but points to the ideal of liberty. In short, the ‘evil’ (*nedobryi buv*) that the narrator identifies as the landlord’s defining characteristic (and against which she invokes God’s protection) negates, but points to the possibility of human goodness.

<sup>25</sup> H. F. Kvitka-Osnovianenko, ‘Saldats’kyi patret: Latyns’ka pobrekhen’ka, po-nashomu rozkazana’ in *Zibrannia tvoriv u semy tomakh*, Kyiv, Naukova dumka, 1978-81, 2003, Vol. 3, pp.7-20, here p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Vovchok, *Tvory*, op. cit., 2003, Vol. 1, p. 62.



The tone set by the opening sentences is maintained throughout the story. Through the language of the narrator, itself free of the abstractions or generalisations that would be unlikely in the diction of a person without formal education, and using the resources of the language of ordinary people, Marko Vovchok brought up for discussion the ignominy of inequality and its nadir, serfdom; the scandal of social and sexual violence; and the countervailing ideals of human freedom and equality. The most universal of questions and the most urgent of public issues, Marko Vovchok demonstrated, could be thought and written about in the Ukrainian language even as it then was. Writing in Ukrainian could go beyond expressing the local and class-specific identity of Ukrainian landowners; it was available for use by writers whose sense of mission derived from their view of themselves as in solidarity with society, indeed humanity, at large.

In part, the force of Marko Vovchok's universalist plea for human justice in *Peasant Tales* lies in the contemporary, usually ahistorical, framing of her subject matter. The injustice of serfdom is presented as a source of present suffering for a multitude of people and as an affront both to the spontaneous moral intuition of Vovchok's untutored peasant characters, and to any ethics more abstractly based on the principle of egalitarian respect for all human beings. The address of *Peasant Tales* is to an audience of no particular social profile or historical provenance. By contrast, the social outrage that was articulated in the poetry of Taras Shevchenko mingled with an anti-colonial pathos whose referent was the historical narrative of the subjugation of a Ukrainian identity group by rapacious neighbours. This socio-historical rancour, formulated most forthrightly in the poem 'I mertvym, i zhyvym, ...' (To the Dead, the Living..., 1845), was expressed on behalf of a yet-to-be-created trans-class nation, into the membership of which the Ukrainian gentry, self-congratulatory as to its remembered Cossack past, was to be wrenched by appeals to conscience and shame.<sup>27</sup> Shevchenko addressed an empirically existent gentry audience with an appeal to abandon its historical elite consciousness in favour of modern national self-identification. In *Peasant Tales* Marko Vovchok sidestepped the issue of the actual readers' social profile and identity by projecting an ideal universal readership motivated by values conceived of as universal; in her early work the Ukrainian language functioned not as a device for defining a special, culturally circumscribed, national community, but as a means of culturally securing the reach of universalist social values into the whole of the Ukrainian-speaking population.

Perhaps seeking to capitalise on the success of her Ukrainian stories, Marko Vovchok wrote works on related themes in Russian, published as *Rasskazy iz narodnogo russkogo byta* (Tales From Russian Peasant Life, 1859). But in the cultural field supported by the imperial language there already existed an established sphere of intellectual communication. Marko Vovchok's contribution in Russian did not expand the possibilities of that literature, as reviewers were not slow to point out.<sup>28</sup> In Ukrainian, however, the manner of her writing implied a possibility previously scarcely acknowledged or recognised as desirable: the possibility of neutral, transparent Ukrainian-language prose able to be put

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<sup>27</sup> For an analysis of the rhetoric of Shevchenko's poem 'I mertvym, i zhyvym i nenarozhdennym zemliakam moim v Ukraini i ne v Ukraini moie druzhnie poslaniie' (To My Compatriots in Ukraine and Not in Ukraine, Dead, Living and Unborn, My Friendly Epistle), see Rory Finnin, 'Nationalism and the Lyric, Or How Taras Shevchenko Speaks to Compatriots Dead, Living, and Unborn', *Slavonic and East European Review*, Vol. 89, No.1, 2011, pp. 29-55.

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., M. de-Pule, 'Nechto o talante Marko Vovchka (Likhoi chelovek, razskaz Marko Vovchka, Russkii Vestnik 1861 g. kn. 1-ia', *Russkaia rech' i moskovskii vestnik*, 47, 11 July 1861, pp. 693-696, an analysis of one of Marko Vovchok's Russian tales. In the reviewer's opinion, 'Marko Vovchok, not satisfied with the honourable place that he occupies in South Rus' literature, wished to assume a similar place in the Great Russian; unfortunately, he has not quite succeeded in fulfilling this wish' (p. 193; emphasis in the original). For the reviewer, Marko Vovchok represents no fundamental novelty in the context of Russian letters. Accordingly, he examines technical features of her fiction (her mimesis of Russian peasant life, her choice of sentimental plots, her prose style and her ability to create character) and finds them all wanting. In a similar spirit, a review defending Marko Vovchok's *Tales From Russian Peasant Life* against an attack in the journal *Sovremennik* does not do so by pointing to any novel accomplishments by the author, but by discussing and favourably evaluating nuances of her style (K. Leont'ev, 'Po povodu razskazov Marka Vovchka', *Otechestvennyia zapiski*, Vol. 135, Book 3, 1861, pp. 1-37). Likewise, the gigantic (26,000 word) review by Dobroliubov, praising the collection's anti-serf message, makes no suggestion that in the context of Russian-language literature the stories are in any way ground-breaking (N. A. Dobroliubov, 'Cherty dlia kharakteristiki russkogo prostonarod'ia (Rasskazy iz narodnogo russkogo byta Marka Vovchka. Izdanie K. Soldatenkova i N. Shchepkina. M. 1859)' in Dobroliubov, *Literaturnaia kritika*, Moscow, Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo khudozhestvennoi literatury, 1961, <[http://az.lib.ru/editors/d/dobroljubow\\_n\\_a/text\\_0430.shtml](http://az.lib.ru/editors/d/dobroljubow_n_a/text_0430.shtml)>, accessed on 24 March 2013).

to a broad range of uses – in particular, deliberation on general issues within a public sphere encompassing persons competent in the Ukrainian language. It would be a *national* public sphere open for participation by Ukrainian intellectuals.

This was fundamentally different from what, say, Kvitka wanted: recognition within a Russian imperial public sphere of a special niche for Ukrainian subject matter and for texts composed in the Ukrainian language. It was also different from what Kulish demonstrated in *The Black Council*: the possibility of criticising the foundation myths of Ukrainian gentry identity, but from the standpoint of distance from, and superiority to, both the historical actors represented, and the Ukrainophone audience addressed. Most of all, it was different from the Romantic admiration for the culture and folklore of the ordinary people that Mykola Kostomarov had expressed in his lyric poetry of the late 1830s and early 1840s in combination with disapproval of what he saw as the people's unchecked libidinous naturalness and their incompletely suppressed paganism. It was only after Marko Vovchok that the kind of reflective prose that Mykhailo Drahomanov, Lesia Ukrainka, Serhii Iefremov, or Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi wrote toward the century's end became not merely possible, but normal.