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**“THE PHENOMENON OF CULTURE IS  
THE PHENOMENON OF BREAD”:  
THE DEBATE ON CULTURE IN BELARUS  
(1988–1991)**

**INTRODUCTION**

The concept of ‘new thinking’, introduced in 1987 by the newly appointed Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, sought to embrace the transformation of both societal structure and individual values.<sup>1</sup> The change in the political organisation made broad public discussion feasible, which centred on the transformation as well as the political instruments leading to it. Culture happened to be at the very epicentre of this debate as it lay at the intersection of the collective and private.

Gorbachev’s reform initiatives found Belarusian culture in a state of discord.<sup>2</sup> The social demand for literature, which was the core element

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1 For the English-language version of the conception, see Mikhail Gorbachev, *Perestroika: The New Thinking for Our Country and the World* (New York: Bessie/Harper&Row, 1987).

2 On Soviet cultural production see Kristin Roth-Ely, *Moscow Primetime: How the Soviet Union Built the Media Empire that Lost the Cultural Cold War* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 2011).

in the field of cultural production, had been declining for decades.<sup>3</sup> Responding to this downturn, the Belarusian Soviet intelligentsia had adhered to the idea of moral obligation toward high culture.<sup>4</sup> It affirmed the call for high moral standing and an interest in the ‘right’ kinds of leisure and cultural production, such as literature, works of monumental sculpture and painting, theatre, and classical music.<sup>5</sup>

This normative approach left no room for the consumption of ‘mass’ culture, which was declared corrupt and incompatible with the morality of developed socialism.<sup>6</sup> Rock music, American movies, street art, romance novels, and consumerism were condemned and deemed a troubling example of general cultural decline.<sup>7</sup> A buzzword for this kind of moral critique, which had been gaining momentum since the 1970s,<sup>8</sup> was ‘spirituality’ (Russian *dukhovnost*).<sup>9</sup> In Belarus, the call for spirituality was linked to the well-established imaginary

3 On the language situation in late Soviet Belarus see Steven L. Guthrie, *The Belorussians: National Identification and Assimilation, 1897–1970*. Part II 1939–1970”, *Soviet Studies*, vol. XXIX, 2 (1977), 270–283; *Letter to a Russian Friend. A “samizdat” Publication from Soviet Byelorussia* (London: The Association of Byelorussians in Great Britain, Ukrainian publishers limited, 1979); *Letters to Gorbachev. New documents from Soviet Byelorussia. Second edition with original text. Listy da Harbachova. Vydan’ne druho z perakladam na anhel’skuiu movu* (London: The Association of Beyerlorussians of Great Britain, 1987).

4 Compare to Timo Vihavainen, *The Inner Adversary: The Struggle against Philistinism as the Moral Mission of the Russian Intelligentsia* (Washington, D.C.: New Academia Publishing, 2006) and Serguei Alex. Oushakine, “Introduction: Wither the intelligentsia: the end of the moral elite in Eastern Europe”, *Studies in East European Thought*, 61 (November 2009), 243–248.

5 More about that see Michael David-Fox, *Crossing Borders: Modernity, Ideology, and Culture in Russia and the Soviet Union* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015).

6 For the critique of mass culture in Soviet Belarus see Savelii Paūlaū, “Kulturgeit”, *Vobraz-88. Litaraturna-krytychnyaia artykuly* (Minsk: Mastatskaia litaratura, 1988), 22–23 and Piatro Vasiuchenka, “Pamizh knizhnym i ziamnym”, *ibidem*, 151.

7 For some examples of the criticism of Western culture in Belarusian journalism and literature see Vladimir Begun, *Polzuchaia kontrrevoliutsiia* (Minsk: Belarus’, 1974), Idem, *Vtorzhenie bez oruzhii* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardia, 1979); Idem, *Iarmarka predatele* (Minsk: Belarus’, 1983); Anatol Viartsinski, *Niu-Iorkskaia sirena* (Minsk: Mastatskaia litaratura, 1987). Vladimir Begun’s main ‘enemy’ was Soviet Zionism but he also put much effort into criticising the West. The poet Antalol Viartsinski (b. 1931), was editor-in-chief of the democratically oriented weekly *Litaratura i mastatstva* (*Literature and Art*). Yet his view of the USA, which he visited in 1977, was very critical.

8 Kathy Rousselet, “Dukhovnost’ in Russia’s Politics”, *Religion, State and Society*, 1 (2020), 38–55.

9 Here and passim Belarusian and Russian titles and proper nouns have been Romanised according to the Library of Congress system. There are however two exceptions, which the authors allowed themselves for the sake of the readability. Firstly, we avoid the apostrophe (an equivalent of the soft sign in Russian and Belarusian) at the end of proper nouns, so that Ales’ and Maladosts’ have been spelled Ales and Maladosts. Secondly, we avoid using the Belarusian hard ‘ë’, substituting it with ‘e’. Thus, we write Tuteishyia, not Tuteishyia, Fedarenka and not Fedarënka.

of national assimilation and the oblivion of the traditional peasant way of life.<sup>10</sup> Simultaneously, among the younger authors a conviction started to appear that the crisis of national culture could not be resolved solely by appeal to morality and enlightenment.

This article explores intellectual positioning toward modern mass culture, as was debated in Belarus in the late 1980s and early 1990s, on the eve of the country’s independence from the Soviet Union and amidst political and economic turmoil.<sup>11</sup> Our goal is to examine an intellectual innovation directed against traditional moral reasoning in Belarus. The dispute over the new definition of mass culture and its relation to the evolving national movement was about to be played out in term of generational conflict and quests for the integrity of the intelligentsia itself. The younger generation of authors (for the main part literati) turned their attention to the previously condemned genres, themes, and actors thus undermining the ‘sacred’ status of literature and art. Simultaneously, they strived to expand the culture, for instance by translation and rehabilitation of previously banned and forgotten names.

Literary critic Siarhei Dubavets (b. 1959, one of the main protagonists in this article) summarised this ideological effort in 1992 as follows: “[T]he phenomenon of culture is the phenomenon of bread.”<sup>12</sup> The new thinking aimed at a total reassessment of low culture. Dubavets (and his counterparts) sought to redefine the very idea of cultural production. For him, culture and arts should not have been rested upon the idea of moral improvement, but instead should have reflected people’s everyday needs.

To be sure, the “historicist claims of cultural decline”, as Luke Parker recently put it, was specific not only for the regional culture of the BSSR (the Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic) and the Soviet Union in general,

10 On the plight of Belarusian villages and the Belarusian people under Soviet Rule see Ales Adamovich, “Z knihi ‘Bramu skarbaū svaikh adchyniaiu’”, Arsen Lis and Ianka Salamevich, *Maksim Haretski: uspaminy, artykuly, dokumenty* (Minsk: Mastatskaia litaratura, 1984), 126; Uladzimir Karatkevich, *Ziamlia pad belymi krylami: narys* (Minsk: Mastatskaia litaratura, 1977). For a comparative perspective see Judith Pallot, “Rural Depopulation and the Restoration of the Russian Village under Gorbachev”, *Soviet Studies*, vol. 42, 4 (1990), 655–674.

11 For more on the debate and alternative identity constructions, see in Astrid Sahn, “Politische Konstruktionsversuche weißrussischer Identität. Zur Bedeutung des Rückgriffs auf Geschichte für die unabgeschlossene weißrussische Nationalstaatsbildung”, *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 4 (1994), 541–561.

12 Siarhei Paūloūski, “Novaia Kul’turnaia situatsyia”, *Nasha Niva*, 5 (1992), 3. Here and passim the translations are the authors’ unless otherwise stated.

it had also been part of Western cultural discourse for centuries.<sup>13</sup> The scepticism over modernity, technologies, industrialisation and urbanisation developed powerfully across Europe.<sup>14</sup> Not intending to enter the debate, we purposely avoid discussing the phenomenon of mass culture here but concentrate solely on the variety of its discursive representations in the milieu of young writers.

The diversity of cultural forms that entered the Soviet Union with the continued opening of the Iron Curtain provided an alternative both to the Soviet state's socialist realism and to the "negative classicism" of the intelligentsia.<sup>15</sup> Using the Belarusian case, we describe the attempts to employ mass cultural production in the Belarusian language in order to re-start cultural (and later political) education and mobilisation processes in the society.

### THE MANIFESTO OF THE TUTEISHYIA

Mobilised by perestroika, the new generation of the creative intelligentsia in Belarus turned its attention towards mass culture. The lack of mass culture was now treated not as a success, but as a sign of failure. The conservative communist party bureaucracy was still strong in Belarus and the restrictions put in place on the intelligentsia by the republican Department of Ideology and Propaganda persisted. At the same time, the majority of the population did not seem to take an interest in Belarusian culture. Even more drastic was the condition of the Belarusian language, which was falling into disuse in the face of Russian in cities and a Belarusian-Russian mixed dialect in villages.<sup>16</sup>

13 Luke Parker, "The Shop Window Quality of Things: 1920s Weimar Surface Culture in Nabokov's Korol', dama, valet", *Slavic Review*, 2 (2018), 395.

14 A great example of such anxiety (and thus a comparison for our purposes) about modern society is German culture between 1890 and 1945. See for instance Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969); Raymond Geuss, "Kultur, Bildung, Geist", *History and Theory*, 2 (1996), 151–64; Parker, "The Shop Window Quality of Things", 390–416.

15 Patrick Brantlinger, *Bread and Circuses: Theories of Mass Culture as Social Decay* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 1984.

16 For studies explaining the status of the Belarusian language in Soviet and post-Soviet Belarus see Elena Gapova, "Negotiating Belarusian as a 'National language'", ed. by Ernest Andrews, *Linguistic Changes in Post-Communist Eastern Europe and Eurasia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 132–160. See also, Nelly Bekus, "'Hybrid' Linguistic Identity of Post-Soviet Belarus", *Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, vol. 13, 4 (2014), 29 and Elena Temper, "Der reinste slawische Stamm. Identitätsbildung à la bielarusse", *Osteuropa*, 12 (2009), 293–308.

The situation required a radical solution, part of which was a plea for the creation of mass culture in Belarusian and the overhaul of formerly condemned forms of popular amusement.

When a group of likeminded people, calling themselves Tuteishyia (Locals), gathered in Minsk at the end of 1986, its first intention was to comprehend and combat the crisis in Belarusian culture. It assembled several dozen young authors (age 25–30), the leaders of whom were for a time considered the most promising figures of new Belarusian literature.

With his passionate and nationally inspired poetry Anatol Sys (1958–2002) was a rising star of cultural festivals and political rallies in Minsk. Adam Hlobus (b. 1959) gained popularity among the Belarusian literary critics. He published short urban stories and Belarusian haiku, through which he sought to modernise Belarusian prose. Andrei Fedarenka (b. 1964) became the frontrunner of the traditional, realistic line in Belarusian literature.<sup>17</sup>

Simultaneously with individual artistic developments, the group's collective identity coalesced. In spring 1987, Siarhei Dubavets, who was a trained journalist, literary critic, and samizdat publisher, introduced his pitch for the ideology and aesthetics of the group.

Dubavets wrote a program text entitled *Manikhoest (Manifesto)*. The document, which he presented at one of the group's first meetings, warned of the crisis in Belarusian culture, a culture that Dubavets argued had long lost its appeal in the eye of the public. He went on to explain that the influence of national culture had drastically declined due to the corrupt actions and motivations of its most well-known representatives.

To sharpen this criticism, Dubavets employed the neologism *prykarytnasts'* (parasitic smugness). The concept was supposed to embrace a specific set of values, attitudes and behaviour adopted by the Belarusian Soviet intelligentsia, who, Dubavets claimed, misused Belarusian culture, seeing it solely as an instrument of personal enrichment.<sup>18</sup> (See Fig. 1.) Instead, the author proposed the idea of excellence in literature.<sup>19</sup>

17 Iustyn Rokash, "I. Drazdovich. Dzionniki. 1933–1937. V. Adamchyk. Padarozhza na Butsafale. A. Kabakovich. Paseianae ūzyidzie", *Nioman*, 5 (1993), 164; Fedarenka's first book appeared in 1990, see Andrei Fedarenka, *Historyia khvaroby* (Minsk: Mastatskaia litaratura, 1990).

18 Siarhei Kavaliou, "Manikhoest... (1987) iak litaraturna-hramadskaia prahrama Tavarystva maladykh litarataru", *Studia Bialorutenistyeczne*, 11 (2017), 181–193.

19 *Ibidem*, 183. Hanna Kisliutsyna, *Kul'turny hradyent. Idei, manifesty, kirunki belaruskaj litaratury na miazhy XX–XXI stahoddziau* (Minsk: Prava i ekanomika, 2015).

The majority of the Tuteishyia objected to the *Manikhvest* because of its radicalism, yet in one way or another its major ideas circulated in the texts of leading Tuteishyia authors.<sup>20</sup> The opposition to Belarusian Soviet literature and its creators was decisive; they were dubbed *prykarytniki* (those who are fed from the state trough). This confrontation between the old and the new did not encompass the field of literary production solely, parallel discussions also took place in the artistic milieu.<sup>21</sup>

Strikingly, the accusations were depersonalised. Neither the *Manikhvest* nor other public appeals from the Tuteyshyia ever pointed explicitly to specific texts or authors, allowing suggestions that the offensive was directed first and foremost at the literary establishment and its rigid hierarchical structures and not at individual authors.<sup>22</sup>

However, even those writers who were neither party members nor Writer's Union bureaucrats, enjoyed the social and material benefits with which the Party generously gave them. The examples of such internationally recognised authors as Ales Adamovich (1927–1994) and Vasil Bykaŭ (1924–2003) are telling. At the time when perestroika was gaining momentum, criticism of it, and occasional appeals for re-Stalinisation, all the same spread in society. Bykaŭ and Adamovich considered it their task to combat the reaction and started to appear regularly in central, all-Union printed media such as *Literaturnaia gazeta*, *Moskovskie novosti* and *Ogonek* defending the society's strivings.<sup>23</sup> In addition to this, Western journals that reported the progress of perestroika in the USSR, referred to Bykaŭ

20 Kavalioŭ, "Manikhvest", 182 and passim.

21 See, for instance Barys Krapak, "Tupik z sherai lesvitsai", *Maladosts*, 1 (1989), 159–170.

22 Though such indirect, impersonal criticism was regarded as a sign of stagnation, in a surprising move it also penetrated the alternative way of thinking. See Sergei Zaprudskii, "Neukhodiashchee vchera", *Nioman*, 6 (1990), 179–183. Compare to Serguei Oushakine, "The Terrifying Mimicry of Samizdat", *Public Culture*, vol. 5, 2 (2001), 191–214. Oushakine argues that both the establishment and dissident intelligentsia positioned themselves in the relationship to state power either accepting (cherishing) or denying it.

23 See for instance Vasil Bykov, "Dubinki protiv glasnosti", *Ogonek*, 47 (19–26 November 1988); Sergei Shapran, "Vasil' Bykov: 'Segodniashnii krizis ot total'noi ideologizatsii'", *Sovetskaia Molodezh'*, May 4, 1990; Arkadii Brzhozovskii, "Cheloveku dolzhno byt' khorosho", *Nashe nasledie*, 3 (1989), 155–158; Ales Adamovich, "Ispytanie slovom: neibileinye zametki", *Nioman*, 2 (1987), 165–182; *Idem*, "Kurapaty, Khatyn', Charnobyl'", Ales Adamovich, *Vybraniia tvory* (Minsk: Knihazbor, 2012), first published on July 15, 1990, in *Literaturnaia gazeta*.



FIG. 1. "A SPECIAL THOUGHT," VANDEIA NAVYVARAT: BELARUSKAIA ANANIMNAIA LITARATURA KANTSA XX ST. (MENSK: VIL'NIA, 1989), 17.

and Adamovich regularly.<sup>24</sup> They were highly valued as novelists, widely read and well-connected in the Moscow cultural and political circles. However, neither Bykaŭ nor Adamovich was able to resist the privileged life of the Soviet creative worker entirely. The former was awarded the Order of the Hero of Socialist Labour (1984) and the Lenin Prize (1986) the latter held the position of Director of the

24 For instance: "Dogmatische Bremsversuche in Weissrussland. Vorwürfe des Schriftstellers Wasil Bykow", *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, November 6–7; Ales Adamovich, "Problems with the New Way of Thinking", *Breakthrough: Emerging New Thinking*, ed. by Anatoly Gromyko and Martin Hellman (New York: Walker and Company, 1989).

All-Union Research Institute of Cinematography (VNIIG Goskino SSSR)<sup>25</sup>. In addition both travelled extensively within the socialist block and outside it. In 1989, they both ran for and were elected as deputies of the Congress for the People's Deputies of the USSR.

Bykaŭ, with his apparent success among the readership, extensive editions and translations across the Eastern Bloc, was not the author to be considered as irrelevant. However, neither he nor Adamovich made it into the spontaneous canon of the Belarusian culture as worded by the Tuteishyia.<sup>26</sup>

The Second World War and village life were the strongholds of Belarusian post-Stalin Soviet literature, its “identification mark and curse”, as critic Siarhei Kavaliouŭ recently put it.<sup>27</sup> Bykaŭ and Adamovich represented both of the strongholds.<sup>28</sup> Their concern with the moral conflict at a time of war fitted well with the setting of the Soviet intelligentsia's sun. In their private correspondence, they also demonstrated scepticism towards mass culture.<sup>29</sup>

Literature was not the only field primarily shaped by pleas for morality. Similar visions also penetrated the so-called ‘ethnographic generation’ of Belarusian artists.<sup>30</sup> One of the leaders of the cohort, art historian Mikhas Ramaniuk (1944–1997), opposed authentic peasant culture to the stereotypical culture of the big city.<sup>31</sup> There was an inclination to blame ‘spiritual decay’, to worry about the ‘degradation of European

25 Vserossiiskii nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut kinoiskusstva. For more consult Viktor Matizen and Vera Tsyrukun, *Noveishaia istoriia otechestvennogo kino. 1986–2000. Kino i kontekst*, vol. IV (Sankt-Petersburg: Seans, 2002). See: [https://web.archive.org/web/20141215052335/http://2011.russiancinema.ru/index.php?e\\_dept\\_id=1&e\\_person\\_id=14](https://web.archive.org/web/20141215052335/http://2011.russiancinema.ru/index.php?e_dept_id=1&e_person_id=14) [viewed 04.02.2020].

26 Some interviews and articles published by the former Tuteishyia in the early 1990s reveal that Bykaŭ was once seen as an overly Soviet author. In 1994, the editorial board of *Nasha niva* published a short biography of Bykaŭ in which his oeuvre was divided into two main parts: before the 1980s, and after, when Bykaŭ had become a ‘national author’. Delayed recognition like this was even more apparent in the case of Adamovich. In an essay published in 2001, Dubavets dealt with his deeply troubled relationship with this writer. Siarhei Dubavets, “Aposhniae slova Alesia Adamovicha”, *ARCHE Pachatak*, 3 (2001), 19–30.

27 Kavaliouŭ used this expression in regard to village prose, yet it applies similarly to the theme of war in Belarusian literature. Siarhei Kavaliouŭ, “Prarok-blazan-lehenda: aŭtarskaia traektoriya Anatolia Sysa”, *Dzeiasloŭ*, 101 (2019), 173.

28 Ales Adamovich, *Voina i derevnia v sovremennoi literature* (Minsk: Navuka I tekhnika, 1982); Vasil Bykaŭ, “Znak bjady”, *Polymia*, 8 (1982), 18–167.

29 Ales Adamovich, Vasil Bykau, “Tak uzho na niabesakh zapisana”, *Dzeiasloŭ*, 1 (2008), 209; Juras Zaloska, *Versii. Shliakh da khrama “idea sui”* (Minsk: Tekhnalohiia, 1995), 26–27.

30 Halina Sachanka, “Vandroŭki naiave i ŭ sne”, *Maladosts*, 3 (1989), 161.

31 Zaloska, *Versii*, 230.

civilization’, to complain about the crisis in culture and society, and to warn against the calculation of tangible benefits and rationalisation.<sup>32</sup>

Personal contact with nonconformist artist were decisive for members of Tuteishyia, and yet ideologically their understanding of culture diverged.

The Tuteishyia relentlessly undermined the mental world of Belarusian village prose. Especially questionable for the group was the particular ethical stance shared by authors working within this genre. The latter tended to depict the traditional Belarusian village as a model of rigorous life and a hotbed of morality. The modern city and its residents appeared only when a counterexample was needed.<sup>33</sup>

This breach between the ‘older’ and ‘younger’ generations was rooted in descent and family background. Most Belarusian writers were born into peasant families and grew up in the countryside. For the majority of the Tuteishyia, in contrast, Minsk was the place of birth and residence.<sup>34</sup> The new cohort was said to be the first generation within Belarusian culture to be predominantly urban.<sup>35</sup>

The narrow pool of authors recognised by the Tuteishyia comprised only three late-Soviet Belarusian authors: Ales Rasanaŭ (b. 1947), Uladzimir Karatkevich (1930–1984) and Mikhas Stral'tsoŭ (1937–1987).<sup>36</sup> Rasanaŭ had had personal contact with many of the cohort, while his meditative, experimental poetry was a quintessence of the non-Soviet in Belarusian literature.<sup>37</sup> With his historical fiction, Karatkevich was proclaimed the prophet of Belarusian culture in the *Manikhvest*.<sup>38</sup> Stral'tsoŭ, attracted readers by his sense of style and

32 Halina Bahdanava, “Paslia vernisazhu”, *Maladosts*, 7 (1990), 159–169.

33 Viktor Kavalenka, “Suchasnast' i litaratura. Heroi, ideinast', maisterstva”, *Polymia*, 7 (1985), 188.

34 For an overview of the social background of the Belarusian Soviet intelligentsia see Tatsiana Astrouskaya, *Cultural Dissent in Soviet Belarus (1968–1988)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019), 191–204.

35 Nikolai Serdiukov, “Liki obraza”, *Nioman*, 9 (1989), 170–72; Ryhor Baradulin, “Pershy sklad perad natsiskam”, *Maladosts*, 4 (1993), 214–223.

36 E.g. see the results of a survey organized by the editors of *Nasha Niva* “Strakazinae voka”, *Nasha Niva*, 17 (1993), 5–7.

37 Siarhei Dubavets, *Vershy* (Minsk: Medysont, 2007): 56–65. See also, Anatol Ivashchanka, *Paetyka Alesia Razanova, Pamizh medytatsyiai i ratsyiai* (Minsk: BNTU, 2008), 3.

38 Kavaliouŭ, “Manikhvest”, 183 and 185; Adam Hlobus, “Uladzimir'. Slovy pra pis'mennika Uladzimira Karatkevicha”, Hlobus, *Partrety* (Minsk: Haliiafy, 2014), 22–26.

dignity.<sup>39</sup> Anatol Sys named Rasanau his role model, while Adam Hlobus found inspiration in Stral'tsou's prose.

This discrepancy within the social background of the actors in the field of Belarusian culture production resulted in the Tuteishyia bringing a significant innovation to the public debate on culture, modernity and nation. Dubavets had bluntly expressed it in the *Manikhvest*: "I am a city dweller. I do not feel embarrassed about contemporary urban mass culture. I am integrated into it." Literary critic and Tuteishyia chairman Ales Bialiatski (b. 1962) used this idea as a new goal for the future Belarusian culture.<sup>40</sup> A few years later, in 1991, Dubavets used as a goal setting for the editorial program of his newly created intellectual newspaper *Nasha Niva* (*Our Field*), seeking to break homogenous Belarusian Soviet culture into low and high.<sup>41</sup>

The advocacy of urban culture was significant, but not the only way to re-conceptualise Belarusian culture. Perestroika generated strong demand to reassess the historical past and to fill in the so-called 'white spots' of history.<sup>42</sup> There was a need to rehabilitate authors who perished in the years of Stalin's repressions and were unknown to the broader public. As an editor of *Nioman* (*the Niemen*)<sup>43</sup> journal, Dubavets became part of this collective effort, triggered by perestroika. His fellow members, among whom were Bialiatski and Iazep Ianushkevich (b. 1959) engaged readily in the process.

Ianushkevich, a promising literary scholar, explained the meaning of such 'resurrection' work.<sup>44</sup> It was essential to repudiate the critical attacks of the recognised authors at the Tuteishyia and, in particular, the group's seeming detachments from the tradition. The group's platform, Ianushkevich insisted, was indeed historically aware.

39 Adam Hlobus, "Mikhas'. Slovy pra paeta Mikhasia Stral'tsova", Hlobus, *Partrety*, 27–32.

40 "Usio naperadze. Anketa 'Maladosti'", *Maladosts*, 4 (1988), 145.

41 A poetic formulation of this rationale see Siarhei Paŭloŭski, "Novaia Kul'turnaia Situatsyia", *Nasha Niva*, 5 (1992), 3. The long echo of this intern debate was still to be heard as late as in 1994 with some former members of the group publicly repudiating the whole idea. See for instance "Litaratura. Dzen' sionniashni: Anketa 'Maladosti'", *Maladosts*, 6 (1994), 245–255.

42 For Belarusian history, the concept of 'white flecks' has proved to be long-living, see *Ein weißer Fleck in Europa... Die Imagination der Belarus als Kontaktzone zwischen Ost und West*, ed. by Thomas Bohn, Viktor Shadurski (Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2011). The authors conceptualize Belarus as a 'white spot' in European history and contemporaneity, yet simultaneously they approach themes which remain overlooked in the history of Belarus.

43 *Nioman* was a Russian-language journal founded in 1952 (under the title *Sovetskaia Otchizna*) with the purpose of popularising Russian translations of Belarusian authors.

44 "Usio naperadze. Anketa 'Maladosti'", *Maladosts*, 4 (1988), 152–153.

He compiled a list of classical writers, mostly from the eighteenth century, whose legacy had been awaiting recognition, and which the 'youth' was ready to tackle. For Dubavets and his counterparts, it was necessary to emphasize that they did not deny the entire legacy of Belarusian Soviet literature but rather rebelled against negative aspects such as moralising, corruption, the search for reward, opportunism, and timeserving.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, one more direction was the re-mapping of Belarusian culture, i.e. the definition of its place in Europe and the World.<sup>46</sup> The criticism of established Belarusian culture for its feeble engagement with the European intellectual legacy would be articulated more strongly in the 1990s,<sup>47</sup> although the debate had begun in the late 1980s.

#### THE IMPLICATIONS OF SEMANTIC CHANGE: STIMULATING MASS CULTURE

According to the Tuteishyia, the expansion of Belarusian culture should have been the primary concern, embracing geography, genre, and topics.<sup>48</sup> To demonstrate the variety of cultural elements involved we consider, in what follows, the examples of rock-music and new mass-media for young audiences, discussing the transformation of the cultural scene in late Soviet Belarus.

As early as 1984, a journalist and music critic by the name of Vitaŭt Martynenka (1959–2016), together with a group of associates, resolved to promote 'Belarusian rock music' in order to bring it to a broader public.<sup>49</sup> With the foundation of the Tuteishyia, this attempt at 'cultural management' became more ideologically consistent.<sup>50</sup>

45 Kavaliou, *Manikhvest*, 190–191.

46 The debate on the place of Belarus (and Eastern Europe) is ongoing, for example see *Eastern Europe Unmapped. Beyond Borders and Peripheries*, ed. by Irene Kacandes, Yuliya Komska (New York; Oxford: Berghahn, 2018).

47 Gapova, "Negotiating Belarusian", 154–155.

48 Kavaliou, *Manikhvest*, 183.

49 One of his most devoted associates was Anatol' Mial'hui (b. 1957), who worked as a freelance correspondent at *Chyrvonaia zmena* (Red Offspring) weekly.

50 Vitaŭt Martynenka, "Ikh dzen' pryidze", *Maladosts*, 9 (1990), 135–141. 'Cultural management' is a concept that Martynenka used in his texts.

Driven by his passion for rock music,<sup>51</sup> which was at the time gripping youth across the USSR, Martynenka planned to open a rock club in Minsk. However, he faced a major conceptual obstacle: the intelligentsia's notion of culture excluded rock music as philistine, alien 'mindless entertainment'.

Martynenka supported traditional ideals of the intelligentsia, such as national identity, national and spiritual revival.<sup>52</sup> He also adhered to the scepticism about consumption and nihilism.<sup>53</sup> Simultaneously, Martynenka argued that popular culture should not necessarily be associated with moral decline. On the contrary, he considered it to be an adequate instrument for the mobilization of the Belarusian people.<sup>54</sup> Simultaneously, he warned against the 'foreign' elements of pop culture, which were spreading in the cities among the Belarusian youth.<sup>55</sup>

In other words, it was necessary to instil urbanisation with the national character.<sup>56</sup> Like the Tuteishyia, Martynenka was skeptical about the cultural establishment. He believed that culture could be profitable, and argued that Belarusian rock music had provided a positive example: rooted in national traditions, it had built a bridge between the simple and the complex, thus endowing rock music with 'serious spirituality'.<sup>57</sup>

These endeavours to sway the establishment resulted in the foundation of new printed media, innovative both in terms of design and content and intended primarily for a youth audience. In 1989 *Krynitsa/Rodnik (Wellspring)* journal appeared, published in two versions, in the Belarusian and Russian. As the opportunity to publish their work was minimal, the Tuteishyia had appealed to the

51 For a history of the expansion of rock music in other Soviet cities, see Sergeij I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City. The West, Identity, and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960–1985* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2010).

52 *Idem*, "Sionnia ūbachtys' zaŭtrashniae", *Polymia*, 2 (1990), 216–218.

53 Maria Paula Survilla considers this dichotomy in her introduction to *Through the Prism of Rock*, a samizdat essay collection on rock music in Belarus, the Soviet Union and abroad. See, Maria Paula Survilla, "Introduction", in Vitaut Martynenka, Anatol Mialhyj, *Through the Prism of Rock. Essays, Reviews, Interviews* (New York: Byelorussian Institute of Arts and Sciences, 1989), 9.

54 Martynenka, "Ikh dzen' pryidze", 135–141.

55 *Ibidem*, 135.

56 Dubovets, Semionova, "Neformaly– kto vy?", 164.

57 Martynenka, "Ikh dzen' pryidze", 138.

Central Committee of Lenin Komsomol in Belarus and the Writer's Union with a request to open a platform where young writers' voices could be heard.<sup>58</sup> At almost the same time the *Maladosts (Youth)* journal launched a book series intended for budding authors<sup>59</sup> in which, for instance, the first poetry collection by Anatol Sys appeared.<sup>60</sup>

Led by the poet Uladzimir Niakliaeu (b. 1946), *Krynitsa* tried to respond to the rapid changes in the cultural life of the USSR by seeking a rapport with the youth market. It started to publish previously unavailable translations, discussed contemporary popular music (both Western and Belarusian), while leaving room for polemical essays and works relating to art and literature. Its run print rocketed in the course of the late 1980s and early 1990s amounting to the several thousand copies – a fantastic number for a Belarusian literary journal. Though, its Russian-language version *Rodnik* had a much larger share of the total circulation.<sup>61</sup>

Adam Hlobus, one of the leading figure of Tuteishyia, who was also an artist and an alumnus of the Minsk College of Arts and Music, contributed greatly to the popularity of *Krynitsa*. Together with the nonconformist historian Anatol Sidarevich (b. 1948), a member of the journal's editorial board between 1987 and 1992, he opened the journal's pages to the members of Tuteishyia as well as the other underground authors and artists.<sup>62</sup> Hlobus curated the section on sport, music, fashion and art.

Simultaneously with his work for *Krynitsa*, Hlobus became an active contributor to the children's magazine *Biarozka* (see Fig. 2) and all-Union Russian-language journal *Parus (Sail)*, issued by the Belarusian Komsomol. The former published a historical comic for

58 Hanna Kislitsyna, *Kul'turny hradyent. Idei, manifesty, kirunki belaruskai litaratury na miazhy XX–XXI stahoddziaŭ* (Minsk: Prava i ekanomika, 2015), 83. Though, Adam Hlobus considered this decision to be taken in Moscow, see. "Hul'ni z narodam. Hutarki z Adamam Hlobusam, zapisanyia Aliaksandrai Andryeŭskai", *ARCHE Pachatak*, 5 (2000), 15.

59 *Bibliiateka Chasopisa Maladost'* (The Library of *Maladosts*). Between 1988, when the series had been launched, and 1991, when the USSR ceased to exist, some forty young authors were able to contribute.

60 Anatol Sys, *Ahmen* (Minsk: Vydavetstva TsK KPB, 1988).

61 The print run at its peak amounted to the several hundred thousand copies. For more about the meaning of the journal see in Valiantsin Akudovich, "Uvodziny ū Novuiu litaraturnuiu sytuatsiyu. Lektsyi dlia Belaruskaha Kalehiiuma", *Frahmenty*, 3–4 (1999). See: <https://belcollegium.by/valyancin-akudovich-uvodziny-u-novuyu-litaraturnuyu-situaciyu/> [viewed 21.03.2020]; and recently Valiantsin Akudovich, "'Krynitsa' i 'Krynitsa'", *Dzeiasloŭ*, 101 (2019), 183–188.

62 "'Neformaly' – kto vy?", *Nioman*, 6 (1988), 167.



FIG. 2. BIAROSKA (LITTLE BIRCH), 7 (1988). THE COVER OF THE YOUTH JOURNAL WITH THE NAMES AND PHOTOS OF BELARUSIAN ROCK BANDS.



FIG. 3. THE COVER OF THE HISTORICAL COMIC DZIKAE PALIAVANNE (MINSK, 1991). COURTESY OF ADAM HLOBUS.

children called *Dzikaie paliavanne* (*Wild Hunt*), which Hlobus created based on the eponymous detective novella by Uladzimir Karatkevich (first published in 1964).<sup>63</sup> In the comic, Hlobus appeared both as a post-modernist author and artist. He created an entertaining project out of the text that has already become one of the classics of Belarusian literature. Simultaneously, he worked with the visual image, challenging the gravity of historical painting (see Fig. 3).<sup>64</sup>

Unlike some of his counterparts, Adam Hlobus was consistent in his attempts to make culture appealing to a general audience, even though these attempts ventured out the premises of *Belarusian* culture. From the second half of the 1980s, Minsk became the informal post-Soviet capital of tabloid media such as *Chastnyi detektiv* (*Private Detective*) or *Laskovyi mai* (*Caressing Mai*), and the centre of the dime novel production. These printed media were created and sold by a company founded and owned by the successful businessman Adam Hlobus. As an artist, however, Hlobus continued to work and publish in the field of Belarusian culture.<sup>65</sup>

The Tuteishyia's prophet Uladzimir Karatkevich set a good example of how popular literature can engage mass audiences. Simultaneously, he was fond of cinematography, as it was the quickest way to the people.<sup>66</sup> Another example in this vein is the informal student association Maistroŭnia (Workshop, active 1979/80–1984), which aspired to revive folk traditions and was quintessential of the Belarusian late-Soviet underground.<sup>67</sup> What was particular about the group's activity was not the anti-Soviet orientation, but rather its intention to engage with the masses: public lectures and staged public festivities were preferred over private engagement with underground literature.

63 Adam Hlobus, "Dzikaie paliavanne...Lehenda ŭ maliunkakh", *Biarozka*, 6, 7, 8 (1988). In 1991 an amended version appeared as a single book publication: Adam Hlobus, Uladzimir Stsiapan, *Dzikaie paliavanne i Karol' Stakh* (Minsk: lunatstva, 1991). The comic enjoyed increasing popularity throughout the 1990s and 2000s. For the author's recollections of the history of its creation see "Hul'ni z narodam", 16.

64 See, for instance, Adam Globus, "Shliapa pozharnogo tsveta", *Parus*, 8 (1988) and *idem*, "Khoku", *Parus*, 8 (1988), 11.

65 For more consult Tatsiana Astrouskaya, "Located on Archipelago: Toward a New Definition of Belarusian Intellectuals", *Eastern Europe Unmapped*, 87–88.

66 Adam Mal'dzis, *Zhytystio i ŭzniasenne Uladzimira Karatkevicha* (Minsk: Litaratura i mastatstva, 2010), 82.

67 For more about *Maistroŭnia* consult Siarhei Dubavets, *Maistroŭnia. Historyia adnaho tsudu* (n. p.: Radyio Svaboda, 2012).

### THE IMPLICATIONS OF SEMANTIC CHANGE: THE ART OF RESURRECTION

The discussions on the content and the idea of culture have had several practical implications. In his responses to the questionnaire in *Maladosts*, literary scholar Iazep Ianushkevich announced a plan for archival work, necessary, as he claimed, for the restoration of Belarusian culture.<sup>68</sup> Ianushkevich, who represented the adherents of radical modernisation within the group, simultaneously had affiliations within the state academic system (The Institute of Literature of the Belarusian Academy of Sciences). This position allowed him to come to grips with neglected domains of Belarusian literature, especially that of the nineteenth century.<sup>69</sup>

The discourse of the rehabilitation of forgotten names and ideas fitted conveniently into the political lexicon of perestroika<sup>70</sup> following the times of bans and prohibitions<sup>71</sup> and embodying the logic of the political moment. The conception of the white spots in history was part of this lexicon. It urged the shedding of light on the gaps in the canon and the restoration of missing documents and shreds of evidence from the past.

Working for *Nioman* (*the Niemen*) Siarhei Dubavets shared the group's intention of re-actualising previously banned heritage. One of the most significant early achievements of the journal's editorial board was the launch of Barys Mikulich's (1912–1954) autobiographical bi-lingual novella *Apovests' dlia siabe* (*A Novel for Oneself*), written in the late 1940s. Mikulich – a capable prose writer who fell victim to Stalin's purges – was one of the first to depict the ordeal of the repressed. Despite his posthumous rehabilitation in 1954 and the

68 For more insights into his professional identity, see Iazep Janushkevich, “U pradchuvanni znakhodak”, *Polymia*, 4 (1992), 173–206.

69 Iazep Ianushkevich, “Novyia shtrykhi zhytstsiapisu V. Dunina-Martsinkevicha”, *Polymia*, 1 (1988), 196–200; *idem*, “Seibit praŭdy”, *Maladosts*, 1 (1988), 128–142; *idem*, “Aŭtohrify Stanislava Maniushki”, *Maladosts*, 8 (1989), 164–172; *idem*, “Napisana dlia nashchadkaŭ. Da 150-hoddzia Frantsishka Bahushevicha”, *Maladosts*, 3 (1990), 167–174.

70 For the lexicon of perestroika see in Nancy Ries, *Russian Talk. Culture and Conversation during Perestroika* (Ithaca; NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); comp. to Nikita Nankov, “Gorbachev chitaet Platona, Platon chitaet Gorbacheva. Glasnost', perestroika i blagorodnyi vymysel”, *Neprikosnovennyi zapas*, 2 (2012), 192–205. For the rehabilitation process in the USSR consult Arseni Roginskii, Elena Žemkova, “The Rehabilitation of the Victims of Soviet Repression”, *Osteuropa*, 11–12 (2017), 97–123.

71 Alla Semenova, “Kto берет слово?”, *Nioman*, 5 (1988), 162.

numerous efforts of his friends and colleagues, the novel was not published and thus remained unknown.<sup>72</sup> When the novel appeared in 1987 it became the first officially published memoir of the Stalin years in Belarus, also receiving recognition in the central press.<sup>73</sup>

For Dubavets, a long-lasting rehabilitation project became the writing heritage of Maksim Haretski (1893–1938), a writer and literary scholar whose prose belongs among the classics of Belarusian literature. Dubavets' fascination with Haretski surfaced in the 1970s in his samizdat publishing and continued through the next decades.<sup>74</sup> He remained committed to this work up to the early 1990s.<sup>75</sup> Unlike the case of Mikulich, endeavours to bring Haretski's name and his significance to light yielded partial results as early as the late 1960s.<sup>76</sup> However, the publication of his oeuvre was far beyond completion because several of his texts remained under suspicion. The 1988 four-volume collection of Haretski appeared to be one of the last examples of Soviet censorship intervention.<sup>77</sup> In 1993, in celebration of Haretski's birthday, *Nasha Niva* released one hundred of the censor's cuts.<sup>78</sup> The general intent of this and other such publications was, as it seems, to emphasize the contrast between banned authors and those accepted by Belarusian Soviet literature. Such a vision largely shaped the overall direction of the humanities in the 1990s.<sup>79</sup>

The years 1988 and 1989 became a watershed when the very notion of cultural heritage acquired a new meaning. Previously, the unpublished texts of (often lesser-known) Soviet writers had drawn primary attention. In two years, the names of those who were banned and repressed started to return gradually. The contemporary

72 Maksim Tank, *Zbor tvoraŭ: T. 10. Dzionniki (1960–1994)* (Minsk: Belaruskaja navuka, 2010); Ales Pashkevich, “Tvortsa ne dlia siabe”, *Litaraturnaia Belarus*, 4–5 (2007), 9.

73 Semenova, “Kto берет слово?”, 162.

74 Astrouskaya, *Cultural Dissent in Soviet Belarus (1968–1988)*, 145–148.

75 Sergei Dubavets, “Maksim Goretskii. Neiubileinoe slovo”, *Nioman*, 2 (1993), 92–94. His unconventional, provocative writing style caused a misunderstanding with the classic's daughter, see G. Goretskaia, “Otkrytoe pis'mo v redaktsiu zhurnala ‘Nioman’”, *Nioman*, 10 (1993), 167–169.

76 See, for instance, Dzmitry Buhaeŭ, *Maksim Haretski* (Minsk: Navuka i tekhnika, 1968); Mikhas Stral'tsoŭ, *U poli zroku* (Minsk: Mastatskaia litaratua, 1976); Ales Adamovich, *Bramu skarbaŭksvaikh adchyniaŭ...* (Minsk: Vydavetstva BDU, 1980).

77 Semenova, “Kto берет слово?”, 163.

78 “Sto hadoŭ – sto [...]”, *Nasha Niva*, 10 (1993), 2.

79 Natal'ia Kozlova, “Soglasie, ili obshchaia igra”, *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 6 (1999), 193–209.

establishment authors had dubbed this work of resurrection ‘debunking the myths’.

Emblematic of this was the rehabilitation story of poet and revolutionary Ales Harun (Aliaksandr Prushynski, 1887–1920). For decades, his name had been wiped from the history of Belarusian literature for taking the side of the Second Polish Republic and its leader Josef Piłsudski in the Soviet-Polish War of 1918–1920. Quite symptomatically, Harun’s return started with a publication in the Moscow press.<sup>80</sup> Simultaneously, Belarusian critics, Uladzimir Kazbiaruk (1923–2016) first among them,<sup>81</sup> contested the common tendency to treat his activity as ‘anti-revolutionary’ and ‘anti-patriotic’.<sup>82</sup>

Thus, the ‘institutionalised’ work with the canon, its enlargement and modernisation were complex and multidimensional. Dubavets tagged this work as ‘intellectually inertial’, as it had seemed to reiterate the pattern of rehabilitation of the thaw period.<sup>83</sup> However, the majority considered the rehabilitation process that had re-started during perestroika to be appropriate. The intellectual self-positioning had no intention of shying away from its connection with the ethos of Khrushchev’s de-Stalinisation.<sup>84</sup>

Gradually, the rehabilitation of formerly banned and convicted authors became irreversible. Hastening to stay afloat, the Party was forced to catch up with this change in public opinion. By 1988<sup>85</sup> the Central Committee of the Belarusian Communist Party had fully rehabilitated Zmitser Zhylunovich (1887–1937), national communist and head of the first Belarusian Communist government (1919).<sup>86</sup> In 1990, the Party restored membership to another national communist and renowned historian, Usevalad Ihnatoŭski (1881–1931). However,

80 Viacheslav Ragoisha, “Sud’ba poeta”, *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 15 (08.04.1987), 7.

81 Uladzimir Kazbiaruk, *Svetlai voli zychny zvon. Ales’ Harun* (Minsk: Navuka i technika, 1991), 21.

82 Ryhor Shkraba, “Mnogo pravdy ne byvaet”, *Nioman*, 4 (1988), 142–154.

83 “Suprots’ adradzhen’nia. Fran’tsishak En - Juras’ Z”, *Nasha Niva*, 9 (1992), 22–23.

84 Ales Adamovich, *My – shestidesiatniki. Esse, publitsistika* (Moskva: Sovetskii pisatel’, 1991); Viktor Kovalenko, “Vremia zhazhdushchikh”, *Nioman*, 1 (1989), 134–146; Mikhas Tychina, “Otzovetsia v sleduiushchem veke”, *Nioman*, 5 (1992), 178–189.

85 Serafim Andraiuk, “Iaho trahichny les”, *Tsishka Hartny, Vybranyia tvory* (Minsk: Kniazbor), 9. Some sources specify 1987 as the year of Zhylunovich’s rehabilitation. See also Emanuel Iofe, “Apovests’ ab trahichnym liose”, *Polymia*, 6 (1988), 212–215.

86 Ernest Ialugin, “Posle nebytiia”, *Nioman*, 2 (1988), 7–106.

even this long overdue rehabilitation polarised the community of historians, drawing objections from the more conservative element, as the case of linguist Iazep Liosik (1883–1940) will show.<sup>87</sup>

Liosik was one of the leaders of the Belarusian national movement in Minsk between 1917 and 1920. He headed the Central Council of Belarusian Organisations (1917), the Council of the Belarusian Peoples Republic (1918–1919), and the Highest Belarusian Council (1919–1920). Simultaneously, Liosik insisted, that his real ‘counter-revolutionary’ activity was not his engagement in the alternative to the Communist Project of the Belarusian nationhood, but his contribution to the enhancement of the Belarusian grammar. In other words, it was his scientific work on the development and unification of the Belarusian literary language, and the fact that he stood up to the regime throughout the 1920s that made him persona non grata to the Soviet state.<sup>88</sup> Up to the end of the 1980s both the author and his books were still not officially recognised.

Rather than waiting for a decision from the cultural and ideological establishments, a young engineer by the name of Ales Zhynkin made the rehabilitation of Liosik his life’s work.<sup>89</sup> Zhynkin became attracted to Liosik’s work after reading the monograph *Verdict on the Revolution*, authored by the pro-Party historian Mikalai Stashkevich. As Stashkevich heavily denounced the activists of the Belarusian national movement, and Liosik personally, he might have expected quite the opposite effect.<sup>90</sup> Instead, as Zhynkin recollected, in 1988 he became fascinated by the mystery of Liosik as little was known about him and his destiny.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, Zhynkin refused to put

87 Although critic Ryhor Shkraba (1919–1997) appealed for the re-accessions of Ihnatoŭski’s work in 1988, pro-Party historian Adam Zaleski (1912–2002) denounced him as ‘tsarist official’ in 1989. Shkraba, “Mnogo pravdy ne byvaet”, 142–154 and Adam Zaleski, “Histarychnaia navuka i mastatskaia litaratura”, *Polymia*, 7 (1989), 184–199. The historian and political activist Mikhas Tkachou (1942–1992) seized the opportunity to use Ihnatoŭski’s rehabilitation against his political opponent. See Mikhas Tkachou, “Pis’menniki, historyia i ‘revizory’”, *Polymia*, 7 (1989), 200–213.

88 Liosik authored several textbooks for teachers and students. First on this list was “Practical Grammar”. See, Iazep Liosik, *Praktychnaia hramatyka* (Minsk: Adradzhenne, 1922).

89 Literary critic Iryna Bahdanovich (b. 1956) had noticed Zhynkin’s exceptional talent in 1991. See her afterword to the publication Iazep Liosik, “Asnoŭny motyŭ u tvorchas’tsi Maksima Bahdanovicha”, *Polymia*, 12 (1991), 177–192.

90 Nikolai Stashkevich, *Prigovor revolutsii: krushenie antisovetskogo dvizhenia v Belorussii 1918–1925* (Minsk: Universitetskoe, 1985).

91 Liosik, *Zbor tvoraŭ*, 4.

Liosik into the narrow framework of nationalist concepts by skipping such well-worn characteristics as ‘apostle [of the nation]’, ‘hero’, and ‘fighter’.

One of Zhynkin’s first endeavours was to publish an unknown novella by Liosik, which he copied by hand in the classified section of the Vladimir Lenin Belarusian State Library.<sup>92</sup> Paying the cost himself, he travelled thousands of kilometres to Krasnodar and Irkutsk (with his friend Iuras Harbinski) to retrace Liosik’s life and works,<sup>93</sup> meeting people who remembered ‘uncle Liosik’ personally and reconstructing historical truth from memory.

Zhynkin summarised the results in several journal articles, and in the introduction to Liosik’s collected work, which he mainly published himself.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, he discovered some primary sources, such as Liosik’s classified essay “Autonomy of Belarus” (1917), which he re-published in 1990.<sup>95</sup> “Autonomy for us [Belarusians] is a matter of life and death,” – stated Liosik in his 1917 publication.<sup>96</sup> Some 70 years later, in 1990, the matter had once again become urgent.

#### THE IMPLICATIONS OF SEMANTIC CHANGE: TRANSLATIONS

The review of the historical, regional, and civilisational place of Belarus was another great concern of the members of the Tuteishyia, the realisation of which required translations from the other (Western) languages into Belarusian.

In the late 1980s, an argument on the ‘structural deficiency’ of Belarusian literature arose. As seen by contemporary critics, the Belarusian literati were engaged only feebly with translations as most foreign literature came to Belarus through the mediation of Moscow, and in Russian,<sup>97</sup> a point of view persisted well into the

92 Iazep Liosik, “Apaviadanne bez nazvy”, *Spadchyna*, 3 (1991), 44–63.

93 Iuras’ Harbinski, Ales Zyynkin, “Sibirskii darohi belaruskai history”, *Maladosts*, 3 (1992), 139–145; *ibidem*, *Maladosts*, 12 (1992), 219–232.

94 Ales’ Zhynkin, “Mae darahiiia...”, *Maladosts*, 11 (1990), 153–162.

95 Iazep Liosik, “Aŭtanomiia Belarusi”, *Spadchyna*, 3 (1990), 19–23. Publication and afterword by Ales Zhynkin.

96 *Ibidem*, 21.

97 Liavon Jurevich, “Peraklady na emihratsyi”, *ARCHE Pachatak*, 6 (2001), 60–66.

subsequent decades.<sup>98</sup> Real or imaginary, this deficiency generated dispute and encouraged action.

The poet and literary critic Maksim Luzhanin (1909–2001), an establishment man, was surprised to find detective stories translated into Belarusian: “There *is* such expertise [*kadry*] in the republic [the BSSR].”<sup>99</sup>

Young authors were well aware of the power of literary translation. In May 1986, in Minsk, a translators’ club called *Babilion* (Babylon) arose. This club liaised closely with the Tuteishyia – some members were active in both groups – and simultaneously with the translation section of the official Belarusian Writer’s Union.<sup>100</sup>

In 1988, the co-founder of *Babilion*, linguist Siarhei Shupa (b. 1961), introduced it in the official *Maladosts* (Youth) monthly. An employee of one of the leading Belarusian state publishing houses, Shupa was rather sparing when talking of what was worthy of attention in contemporary Belarusian literature, although his list of potential translations was extensive.<sup>101</sup> However, even before the idea took shape there had been attempts to enrich the field of literature with translations.

A good example of this is George Orwell’s *1984*.<sup>102</sup> Shupa began to adapt it into Belarusian in the early 1980s, although as the book was banned in the USSR it took him much effort to obtain a complete copy and to finalise the translation.<sup>103</sup> As the Russian had not then been published (although it had been announced in *Novyi mir*), the translator’s ambition was to get the Belarusian version printed first, or at least simultaneously with the Russian version. To his dismay, neither of the leading literary journals in Belarus showed any interest in the idea. Similarly, Shupa was not able to garner support from

98 Danila Zhukoŭski, “Litaratura dlia dobraakhvotnaha chytannia”, *ARCHE Pachatak*, 2 (2002), 249–259.

99 *Zamezhny detektyŭ* (Minsk: Mastatskaia litaratura, 1988). Emphasis added.

100 Siarhei Shupa, “Babilion”, *Demokratychnaia apazitsyia Belarusi: persanazhy i kantekst*, ed. by Aleh Dziarnovich (Minsk: Arkhiŭ nainoŭshai historyi, 1999). See: <http://slounik.org/153727.html> [viewed 16.02.2020].

101 “Usio naperadze. Anketa ‘Maladostsi’”, 151. Interestingly, when Shupa talked about the much-discussed novel *Doctor Zhivago*, by Boris Pasternak, he said that he had read it only in a French translation.

102 Siarhei Shupa, “‘1984’. Douhaia daroha da knihi”, *Radyio Svaboda*. See: <https://www.svaboda.org/a/29987051.html> [viewed 29.01.2020].

103 As the original text was unavailable Shupa had to start the translation from French and German versions of the novel. Later the translation was verified against the original. Siarhei Shupa, “Sapraŭdny peraklad – heta peraklad prozy”, *Prajdzišvet*. See: <http://prajdzisvet.org/master/3-sapraudny-pieraklad-heta-pieraklad-prozy.html> [viewed 07.03.2020].

Vasil Bykaŭ, who refused help, referring to his “marginal status” in the community.

Annoyed with the situation, Shupa published a short, derisive note in Tuteishyia’s samizdat bulletin *Kontrol* (*Control*) in which he ridiculed the publishing policy of state literary journals including *Polymia* (*Flame*) and *Maladosts*: “It is known that *Novyi mir* is going to publish the novel [1984] this year. How can we, modest Belarusians, be among the first [and be] risky and pioneering? I am curious to know, what comparable to Orwell do the journals [*redaktsyii*] mentioned above have to offer?”<sup>104</sup> At last, liberal *Litaratura i Mastatstva* published excerpts from the translation in February 1989.<sup>105</sup> The same year, in summer, Barys Sachanka (1936–1995), editor-in-chief of *Mastatskaia Litaratura* publishing house placed *1984* on the publication list. The novel was finally launched in 1992, in, by this time, independent Belarus.<sup>106</sup>

The editorial board of newly founded *Krynitsa* journal prioritised translations from the very beginning.<sup>107</sup> According to the calculations of critic Tsikhan Charniakov, in 1988–1991 it published 74 translated works, mainly novellas from English, Russian, French, Polish, German, Estonian, Finnish, Lithuanian (in descending order by the number of publications), and other languages.<sup>108</sup> Siarhei Shupa was one of the active contributors to the journal, as were others from the Tuteishyia circle – Adam Hlobus, Uladzislaŭ Akhromenka (1965–2018), Jan Maksimiuk (b. 1958), Maksim Klimkovich (b. 1958), Aleh Minkin (b. 1962). The genres varied from Friedrich Nietzsche’s aphorisms to Agatha Christie’s detective stories, from excerpts of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* to Andrei Sakharov’s Nobel lecture. This hodgepodge of authors and styles seems to be symptomatic of the time of transition: as readers tried to bite eagerly from every new intellectual product made available to them, publishers and translators hastened to spice up the offer in literature.<sup>109</sup>

104 *Kontrol*, 2 (1989), 1.

105 Dzhon Oruel, “1984. Uryvak z ramana”, *Litaratura i mastatstva*, 2 (13.01.1989), 8–9.

106 *Idem*, *Ferma: apovests’*. 1984: raman (Minsk: Mastatskaia litaratura, 1992).

107 Tsikhan Charniakov, *Peraklady tvoraŭ zamezhnai litaratury ŭ chasopise “Krynitsa” (1988–2003)*. *Bibliiahrafichny davednik* (Minsk: Praidziset, 2010), 3.

108 *Ibidem*, 4–9.

109 For some anthropological insights into the culture of reading during perestroika, see Aleksei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).



FIG. 4. SIARHEI KHAREŪSKI’S ILLUSTRATION TO JORGE LUIS BORGES’S *BABYLON LIBRARY*. PUBLISHED IN *NASHA NIVA*, 2 (1991), 12. COURTESY OF SIARHEI KHAREUSKI.

*Nasha Niva* (founded in 1991), for which both Dubavets and Shupa worked, distanced itself from the ‘old’ printed media. It placed particular emphasis on translations in an attempt to introduced world literature into Belarusian culture on the one hand, and set a model for natives on the other. This literature included the works of Jorge Luis Borges<sup>110</sup> (whose collected works were intended to appear in Belarusian,<sup>111</sup> but never did), Edgar Allan Poe, Jerome Salinger, Milorad Pavić, Umberto Eco.<sup>112</sup> (See Fig. 4.) Another concern of *Nasha Niva*’s editors was the regional perspective: the ongoing re-mapping of Eastern and Central Europe demanded attention and

110 See for instance Frantsishak En, “U halerei B”, *Nasha Niva*, 2 (1991), 12; Khorche Luis Borkhes, “Babilionskaia bibliiateka”, *Nasha Niva*, 2 (1991), 12–15.

111 “Rykhtuiutstva knihi”, *Nasha Niva*, 15 (1993), 5.

112 See, for instance, Dzh. D. Selindzher, “Chas bananavykh rybak”, *Nasha Niva*, 1 (1991), 12 and 14–15; Milorad Pavich, “Khazarski sloŭnik”, *Nasha Niva*, 13 (1993), 14–15; Umberto Eco, “Nazhal’, musim viarnuts’ vam vash rukapis...”, *Nasha Niva*, 13 (1993), 14–15; Edhar Po, “Chorny kot”, *Nasha Niva*, 15 (1993), 12–14.

challenged them to find Belarus' place within it. In this context, such authors as Friedebert Tuglas, Bolesław Leśmian, Czesław Miłosz, and Vaclav Havel were the key figures. Furthermore, the paper published excerpts from contemporary Polish and Lithuanian periodicals introducing them to Belarusian readers. The choice was both obvious (the editorial board was located in Vilnius, Lithuania) and strategic, the political and cultural transformation taking place in Belarus' western and northern neighbours appeared to be more attractive than those on the East.

The general aesthetic line of the translation program can roughly be categorised as modernism. Intellectually, the paper carried on the tradition of the Tuteishyia group. The latter was often reproached for being abstruse, specialised, and fixated on writing technique rather than sustaining the usual motifs of Belarusian literary classics: patriotic feelings, realism, emotionality.<sup>113</sup> Technically perfected, the intellectualism of the young urban prose was received with distrust and accused of not being humanistic or emotional enough.<sup>114</sup>

In 1994–1995, Dubavets came to reckon with the first results of the effort undertaken by him and his associates. The 'translation boom', he asserted, turned out to be nothing more than an imitation of the creative process, resulting in the corruption of the language.<sup>115</sup> He had to recognize that the paper's aim to become the news-maker in the field of culture had not been achieved. Just as in the Soviet Union, the Belarusian reader still hunted for the latest news – such as Milan Kundera's recent novel or the death of Eugène Ionesco – in the Moscow press.<sup>116</sup> This pessimistic conclusion was in line with the ever-changing situation in Belarus, where the modernising forces confronted a wall of social inertia.

113 Vasil Makarevich, "Z siaredziny na palavinu", *Maladosts*, 2 (1991), 133–135; Ales' Bel'ski, "Samaia kreūnaia poviaz", *Maladosts*, 11 (1991), 238–242.

114 Siarhei Dubavets, "Dzion'nik pryvatnaha chalaveka", *Nasha Niva*, 6 (1992), 3; "Tsana kul'tury. Frahmenty kaliokviiumu ū redaktsyi 'NN'", *Nasha Niva*, 1 (1995), 2–3; see also Fran'tsishak En, "Listy pra suchasnuu litaraturu [II]", *Nasha Niva*, 4 (1991), 7; Ihar Babkoŭ, "Razvod belarushchyny z' dziarzhavai", *Nasha Niva*, 7–8 (1995), 3.

115 "Tsana kul'tury", 2.

116 Dubavets, "Dzion'nik pryvatnaha chalaveka", *Nasha Niva*, 5 (1994), 2.

## EPILOGUE: HANDLING DISCURSIVE CONTRADICTIONS

For some time the editorial board of *Nasha Niva* still cherished the idea of a mass culture that did "not exist yet and should be created". At this point, the publishers tended to address the paper's intellectualism critically. The printing run remained low, as did demand and profit.<sup>117</sup> The situation escalated with the defeat of Belarusian nationalism and the advent of the authoritarianism. The loss became apparent after a series of electoral failures and the consequent takeover of Aliaksandar Lukashenka. In 1995, the newly elected president Lukashenka initiated a referendum that reversed the efforts to create a nationally oriented genealogy of Belarusian nationhood. Instead, this was to be legitimised as an integral part of Soviet history.<sup>118</sup>

*Nasha Niva* was re-launched in 1996, switching from a quasi-journal format and going out weekly.<sup>119</sup> Intellectual essays and hermetic poetry gave way to up-to-date news and political commentaries. At this time, historian Aleh Dziarnovich (b. 1966) had become de facto leader of the project. Dubavets' 1991/92 saying "the phenomenon of culture is the phenomenon of bread" did not match particularly well with the texts of Borges and Sarraute. Indeed, reports about the war in Chechnya or interviews with former Belarussian Minister of Internal Affairs (and Lukashenka's opponent) Iury Zakharanka fitted much better into this conception. A doubling down, referring to the Tuteishyia Manifesto, one might say.

These events became a watershed in Belarusian history that allows us to take stock of the efforts undertaken by the Tuteishyia. The majority of authors who previously belonged to the association (it ceased to exist in 1989), abandoned the idea that mass culture with its "superficial entertaining character" could be an effective instrument for mobilisation. It had become clear enough by then that the project had been somewhat idealistic.

117 Dubavets, "Dzion'nik pryvatnaha chalaveka", *Nasha Niva*, 5 (1994), 2.

118 Astrid Sahn, "Kein politischer Frühling in Belarus. Das Scheitern der Parlamentswahlen im Mai 1995 und die Verselbstständigungstendenzen der Exekutive", *Osteuropa*, 11 (1995), 1021–1033.

119 "Ad redaktsyi", *Nasha Niva*, 1 (1996), 1.

Outwardly, this might seem to be a contradiction. While abruptly giving up the Tuteishyia's dreams about detective novels, erotica or science fiction in Belarusian, neither *Nasha Niva* nor other activists in the field succeeded in providing an alternative conception for the reanimation of culture. The moment of 'creative destruction' in the history of the Belarusian national movement, which was reloaded by the referendum of 1995, urged the formulation of pragmatic goals. In a surprising move, these goals resembled the intellectual ethos in the wake of perestroika.

Thus, the intellectual pursuits, discussed above, reiterate the peculiar logics of grid in the history of discourse as it understood by Michele Foucault<sup>120</sup> and Quentin Skinner.<sup>121</sup> The appearance of new political language or, in other words, innovation and change in the order of discourse, are possible when innovation bonds with the semantics of previous attempts at thought and speech.<sup>122</sup>

Such heterogeneous formations, as we hope, have been seen through our analysis of the discursive 'ecosystem' of perestroika. The translation project initiated by *Krynitsa* journal was a novelty, yet it still made use of the language of 'socialistic brotherhood' and 'the friendship of the people'. Authors who were repressed and banned by the Soviet regime were rehabilitated, although the rehabilitation process was often underpinned by emphasis on their adherence to the ideas of communism and revolution (as in the case of Ales Harun). Finally, the Tuteishyia's pursuit of leaving moral understanding of culture behind was combined with an ethically entrenched critique of the cultural establishment and the Soviet Belarusian intelligentsia.

120 Michel Foucault, "The Order of Discourse", *Untying the Text. A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. by Robert Young (Boston; London; Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 48–78.

121 Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas", *History and Theory*, 1 (1969), 3–53.

122 Denis Kozlov, *The Readers of Novyi Mir: Coming to Terms with the Stalinist Past* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013).

**TATSIANA ASTROUSKAYA, ANTON LIAVITSKI: "THE PHENOMENON OF CULTURE IS THE PHENOMENON OF BREAD": THE DEBATE ON CULTURE IN BELARUS (1988–1991)**

**KEYWORDS:** CULTURE; HISTORICAL SEMANTICS; SOCIAL AND POLITICAL JOURNALS; INTELLECTUALS; LITERATURE

### SUMMARY

The scope and content of public debate in the USSR increased radically with the onset of perestroika. Culture happened to be at the very epicentre of this debate, as it lay at the intersection of collective and private. Socialist culture claimed to be an intrinsically 'serious' and 'genuine' setting itself against the 'trivial' and 'superficial' bourgeois culture of the West. The CPSU used socialist realism to promote and encourage monumental genres in literature, music, art and architecture.

The late 1980s challenged the established notion of culture. In the BSSR (Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic), arose a group of young intellectuals (for the main part literati), who called themselves the Tuteishyia (Locals), and who saw it as their task to provoke a revolution in the field of culture. They explored previously neglected genres of mass culture such as the comic, detective novel, erotica, and rock music, thus questioning the 'sacred' status of literature and art. Simultaneously, they pushed the boundaries between the local and the global (looking for worldwide connections with Belarusian culture), past and present (rehabilitating authors and ideas rejected by Soviet censorship).

Relying on publications in the leading intellectual journals of the time, this paper seeks to grasp the main features of the structural transformation in the field of Belarusian culture that happened at the turn of the 1980s–1990s. Staying away from teleological, lineal interpretations, we emphasize the discrepancy, contradiction and multilayering of the change as understood by Foucault and Skinner.

## CV

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