

***Skovorodynstvo* and *skovorodyntsi* as an Alternative Sociocultural Trend (the End of the 18th and the First Half of the 19th Centuries)**

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Abstract

The article examines the *skovorodynstvo* as the socio-cultural trend of the educated class of followers of philosophical views and, most of all, the lifestyle of Ukrainian travelling philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda (1722–1794). Common to the *skovorodyntsi* was the fascination with the person of Skovoroda. The *skovorodynstvo* was in agreement with some other nonconformist trends of that time, had a connection with the Ukrainian national movement. Thus, is it a coincidence that the initiators of the Ukrainian cultural and national revival such as Ivan Kotliarevskyi, Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko and their followers are included in this movement? What features of Skovoroda's way of life did attract his followers, and what did they bring on their own? The nonconformism of Ukrainian pre-romanticism and early romanticism coincided with the nonconformist lifestyle of the philosopher, noticeable and attractive during his lifetime and especially after his death. The *skovorodynstvo* can be divided into two trends: popular (among the general public) and intellectual. *Skovorodyntsi* from intellectual movement (intellectuals) found themselves in literary work, discovering or propagandizing the ideas of the *skovorodynstvo*, as well as giving the image of the *skovorodynets*. During the period between 1790 and 1850, the *skovorodynstvo* remained as a marker of the alternatives. The intellectual moods of the 19th century perceived or rejected the *skovorodynstvo*, oscillating between realistic materialism and idealistic mysticism, but such a trend to some extent continued, thus enriching other alternative socio-cultural or intellectual-aesthetic moves (tolstovstvo, modernism etc).

Key Words: Hryhorii Skovoroda, the *skovorodyntsi*, the *skovorodynstvo*, nonconformism, Ivan Kotliarevskyi, mysticism.



This article aims to reveal an important page in the history of ideas, intellectual history, cultural history and cultural anthropology in Ukraine at a crucial time — the transition to the power of empires with their specific modernization, and the cultural era of Romanticism. The ideas and influences of the history and personality of Hryhorii Skovoroda at that time were significant in society and defined Ukrainian culture for many decades, crossing the borders of empires.

First, we should pay attention to the nonconformist components of the figure of Hryhorii Skovoroda from the socio-cultural point of view, not through the prism of philosophical works, but his way of life. And Skovoroda's work is only so far reflects the author's social nonconformism and found popularity and following in society.

The itinerary will be the assessments of researchers through the prism of alternative/nonconformist socio-cultural trends of the time close to Skovoroda's life, which he is sometimes associated with. This will be the basis, because we are mainly interested in Skovoroda's followers, who understood his figure, ideas, and heritage in their own way. Such Ukrainian historians, philosophers, literary critics as Oleksandr Rusov, Mykhailo Vozniak, Serhii Yefremov, Mykhailo Hrushevskyi, Mykola Zerov noted the existence of the *skovorodynets* as the type. Almost unanimously, not only students directly taught by Skovoroda are enrolled into the movement, but also the founders of Ukrainian literature based on the live vernacular: Ivan Kotliarevskyi, Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko and some others, also including Taras Shevchenko. Recently, the topic as a socio-cultural trend was covered by Ukrainian literary critic Leonid Ushkalov. Thus, mainly putting an emphasis on the research of scientists, basic information about the problem of the *skovorodynstvo* as a socio-cultural movement should be generalized.

Oleksander Rusov noted that in Ukrainian and Russian society in the 1820s and 1830s, the interest in Skovoroda was so significant that it even aroused the interest of the popular publications such as "Telescop" (Telescope) and "Otechestvennye Zapiski" (Domestic Notes). He also paid attention to Skovoroda's motives, as well as the promotion of Skovoroda's ideas by literary means in Kotliarevskyi's works.¹

Skovoroda himself can be correlated with the tradition of nonconformism and alternative socio-cultural trends. Ukrainian literary historians, in particular Vasyl Mykytas, noted that Skovoroda belonged to the Ukrainian tradition of goliard vagrants, or wandering deacons. In this case, these people are not just the students of the senior courses of Kyiv Academy (philosophers and theologians), but as well as the wandering teachers, *diak-bakaliary* (deacon-bachelors). The half-starving living conditions of these deacons often pushed them to vagrant lifestyle, but also to some other habits, that is why these deacons were often called *pyvorizy* (beer likers), *horilkopyvtsi* (vodka drinkers). They were often brawlers, occasionally working as clerks, fans of *Venus Cupid* and so on.²

Instead, the half-starving and wandering conditions prompted just some individuals to a completely different tribe of life. And Hryhorii Skovoroda is the brightest example here. He belonged to the traditions of wandering deacons, but not a beer liker or merrymaker. The encyclopedist Irynei Falkivskyi and the traveler Vasyl Hryhorovych-Barskyi were among those wandering deacons who lead such a life for scientific purposes, for new impressions and thus described their experience in writing. Skovoroda, who travelled many times during his life, often changed his place of residence, and spent the last quarter of his life continuing travelling.³

1 Aleksandr (Oleksandr) Rusov, "Kakova rol "Voznoho" v "Natalke Poltavke"? [What is the Role of Vozny in *Natalka Poltavka*?], *Kievskaiia Starina*, vol. LXXXIV (1904): 41–64.

2 Vasyl Mykytas, *Davnoukrainski studenty i profesory* [*Ancient Ukrainian Students and Professors*] (Kyiv: Abrys, 1994), 240–61.

3 Valerii Shevchuk, *Iz vershyn i nyzyn. Knyzhka tsikavykh faktiv iz istorii ukrainskoi literatury* [*From Tops and Bottoms. A Book of Interesting Facts From the History of Ukrainian Literature*] (Kyiv: Dnipro, 1996), 170, 176; Yurii Barabash, "Grigorii Skovoroda i traditsii 'mandrov' [Hryhorii Skovoroda and Traditions of Wandering]," *Voprosy literatury* 3 (1988): 86–110.

Obviously, the wandering way of Skovoroda's life in the bosom of nature contributed to the development of such traits as pantheism, described in the appropriate creativity works (*Sad bozhestvennykh pisen* (The Garden of Divine Songs), *Baiky kharkivski* (The Kharkiv Fables)).⁴ Such works, combined with a social satire, became the most popular among the various classes of people. Skovoroda's songs have gained popularity, having many edited versions. What is more, they had many followers. A little bit later we shall consider this question.

Other features that described Skovoroda's lifestyle as the alternative one were, first of all, his nonconformism, Skovoroda's disagreement with the church authorities on the basis of pedagogical work, which he led in an unorthodox way. Skovoroda's independence from social authorities is also known. Such things were combined with the personal gentleness of the philosopher, he willingly communicated with the people from all levels of society – from the nobles to the philistines and peasants. His social ideal was unequal equality, the harmony of different states, that complemented each other with this equality.

Some authors, such as Vladimir Ern and especially Viktor Petrov (Domontovych) saw a clear homosexuality in the way of life of the philosopher, which, however, Skovoroda himself suppressed with an effort. According to Petrov, “there is some food intoxication, meat intoxication and there is hunger intoxication. There is phallic intoxication and there is phallic intoxication of the abstinence.”⁵

Such signs of Skovoroda's famous statements praising friendship and love, the love vocabulary that the philosopher used in his correspondence with Mykhailo Kovalynskiy (Kovalinskyi), avoidance and even fear of the female sex, seem to be the evidence of such a thing. Even if this was not the case, or such a homosexual component was unconscious, a platonic attachment to a young friend, along with avoiding female company, could not go unnoticed and not cause gossip (Skovoroda almost never denied these facts). This was even more embedded in the image of the eccentric nonconformist.⁶

Another feature, even more alternative and nonconformist, was the emphasis on Skovoroda's asceticism, combined with a certain self-excommunication from the Orthodox Church. He repeatedly criticized it and its men of the cloth. However, Skovoroda did not support the Protestants. Rather, his views resonated with the ancient features of early Christian heresies or pre-Christian beliefs such as Manichaeism/

4 Hryhorii Skovoroda, *Kharkivski baiky* [The Kharkiv Fables], ed. Pavlo Tychyna (Kyiv: Ukrainiske derzhavne vydavnytstvo, 1946); Hryhorii Skovoroda, *Pisni. Virshi. Baiky. Traktaty. Dialohy* [Songs. Poems. Fables. Treatises. Dialogues], in *Povne zibrannia tvoriv* (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1973), vol. 1.

5 Oleksii Sinchenko, “Osoba Hryhorii Skovorody v interpretatsii Viktora Petrova [The Person of Hryhorii Skovoroda in the Interpretation of Viktor Petrov],” *Antyproloh: Zbirnyk naukovykh prats, prysviachenykh 60-richchiiu chlena-korespondenta NAN Ukrainy Mykoly Sulymy* (Kyiv: VD Stylos, 2007), 379–80.

6 Viktor Petrov, “Osoba Skovorody [The Person of Skovoroda],” *Rozvidky*, vol. 3, (Kyiv: Tempora, 2013), 1514–22. Reprint chapter: Viktor Domontovych. “Skovoroda: druzhba z Kovalinskym [Skovoroda: Friendship with Kovalinsky],” *Lel* 2–3 (1996): 28–31.

Bogomilism (it was especially popular among Ukrainian ideology, as noted by Pavlo Chubynskyi and Mykhailo Drahomanov) and pantheism.⁷

He was also accused of Manichaeism and blasphemy, as well as misanthropy. The self-rejection of drinking wine and eating meat indirectly contributed to the accusations.⁸ In general, Skovoroda was almost a vegetarian. According to his closest student Kovalynskyi:

The opposite outlook, doctrine, lifestyle soon attracted the attention of the whole local society. He dressed decently but simply; he had food mainly consisting of herbs, fruit and dairy spices, he ate it in the evening, after sunset; he did not eat meat and fish not because of any superstition, but just for his inner need; he slept not more than four hours per day; got up at the crack of dawn and, when the weather allowed, always went for a walk outside the city to get some fresh air and in the gardens; always positive, cheerful, easy-going, mobile, restrained, cherry, satisfied with everything, merciful, humiliated, willing to speak, where he is not forced to speak, eradicating morality from everything, respecting any state of people, visited the sick, comforted the sad, he shared the last thing with the poor, chose and loved friends for their hearts, had piety without superstition, intelligence without arrogance, behaviour without flattery.⁹

The fact that the philosopher limited himself in food, slept not so much etc., seemed to cause little discomfort, and did not exhaust him. However, understanding the argument of Petrov and Sinchenko, we can expand the understanding of asceticism not only in erotic terms, but also in the search for altered states of consciousness: “The ascetic is a person who is in search of unknown pleasures abandoned the simple pleasures open for everyone and for their accessibility being vulgar.”¹⁰

Also in encyclopedic editions, Ukrainian literary critics believe that there is a reverberation of libertinism in the works of Skovoroda.¹¹ Unfortunately, this point is

7 Mykhailo Drahomanov, *Vybrane* (“...mii zadum zlozhyty ocherk istorii tsyvilizatsii na Ukraini”) [*Selected Works* (“... My Idea is to Make an Essay on the History of Civilization in Ukraine”)], ed. R.S. Mishchuk (Kyiv: Lybid, 1991), 265.

8 M. I. Kovalynsky, “Zhyttia Hryhoriia Skovorody [Life of Hruhorii Skovoroda],” in *Piznai v sobi liudynu* (Lviv: Svit, 1995), 16–17, 30.

9 Kovalynskyi, “Zhyttia Hryhoriia Skovorody,” 17.

10 Oleksii Sinchenko, “Osoba Hryhoriia Skovorody v interpretatsii Viktora Petrova [The Person of Hryhorii Skovoroda in the Interpretation of Viktor Petrov],” *Antyproloh: Zbirnyk naukovykh prats, prysviachenykh 60-rychchiiu chlenu-korespondenta NAN Ukrainy Mykoly Sulymy* (Kyiv: VD “Stylos”, 2007), 379.

11 “Libertyny [Libertines],” in *Literaturoznavcha entsyklopediia: u 2-kh t.*, ed. Yu. I. Kovaliv (Kyiv: VTs “Akademiia”, 2007), vol. 1: A–L, 555–56.

not explained probably due to certain Epicurean ideas (reasonable hedonism) and free-thinking. Obviously, we mean the socially ideological libertarianism, that is free-thinking (skepticism), and not a way of life (libertinism), as in the characters of the Marquis de Sade.¹² Perhaps Skovoroda's "libertinism" consisted in the fundamental contempt of public opinion, precisely in the spirit of the divine marquis?

Thus, such observations were about the features of Skovoroda's nonconformist style during his lifetime, as it was understood by the society of that time. Certain features of the cult popularity of the philosopher and his lifestyle, or its most notable elements, were observed during his lifetime and, especially, right after his death.

The posthumous *skovorodynstvo* is also connected with the mythologizing aspect of the figure of Hryhorii Skovoroda, even with his certain cult (here we can take into attention analogies, for example, with *accursed poets* or rock stars, in particular the *eternally young* from the so-called *27 club*). So, what was the informal influence by the figure of Skovoroda and did the *skovorodynstvo* existed as a trend, like a subculture with a set of certain characteristics?

Several waves can be distinguished chronologically in a conditional *skovorodynstvo*. The first one is intravital. This wave was pointed out in connection with the founding of Kharkiv University. Skovoroda's followers were the intellectual and even material basis of this institution. According to Serhii Yefremov,

...it is enough to say that when it was necessary to find an ideological, honest and pure person in Ukraine, they looked for him among the *skovorodyntsi*, i.e. students of this wonderful man and supporters of his doctrine. And even the first university in Ukraine, Kharkiv University, was established in Slobidskyi Region in Ukraine, where mostly lived and taught Skovoroda... Donations to that new university, after the cry and *dramatic gestures* of Karazin (b. 1802) were mainly given from Skovoroda's students, acquaintances and friends, and those donations immediately accumulated a large amount according to that time, 400,000 carbs. Skovoroda undoubtedly influenced both the father of the new Ukrainian literature, Kotliarevskyi, and the father of the Ukrainian novel Kvitka...¹³

Ukrainian ethnographer and folklorist Oleksandr Rusov wrote that at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries sentimental songs ("sweet songs") were popular in Ukrainian society, and their spread was explained due to the influence of Skovoroda's work. Examples of such folk art can be found in Ivan Kotliarevskyi's vaudeville *Moskal-*

12 Manfred Schruba, "O niektórych francuskich źródlach polskiej poezji libertyńskiej i satyryczno-obyczajowej XVIII wieku," *Pamiętnik Literacki* 95.1 (2004): 77.

13 Serhii Yefremov, *Istoriia ukrainskoho pysmenstva [History of Ukrainian Writing]* (Kyiv: Femina, 1995), 150.

charivnyk (The Muscovite-Sorcerer). Their language is also very similar to Skovoroda's language – Russian with numerous Ukrainianisms, or occasionally with Ukrainian phrases. In the end, it all depended on the environment those singers came from, and at the same time co-authors of such collective creativity.¹⁴

Kostomarov noted the basis of the Skovoroda's subculture – the public popularity of the figure of Skovoroda:

Not so many people can be noted among public personalities and so well remembered and respected as Skovoroda. All over the area from Ostrogozhsk (Voronezh governorate) to Kyiv, in many homes his portraits are hung; every educated Ukrainian knows about him; his name is known to many illiterate people; his traveling life is the subject of stories and anecdotes; in some places, descendants of parents and grandparents know about the places he visited, where he liked to be, and point to them with respect; Skovoroda's good relations between Skovoroda and his contemporaries is the family pride of his grandchildren; the wandering blind comprehended his singing; on the temple holiday, on the city fair you can often meet a crowd of people surrounding a group of these rhapsodists, listening to with kind-hearted tears: to every city its own manners and rights. The other reason why Skovoroda's songs became popular throughout the Southern Rus country can be explained by the fact that some of them were included in the collections of Galician songs by Waclaw from Olesko and Żegota Pauli, without knowing themselves that these songs were created by Skovoroda.¹⁵

Then the same Kostomarov noted that “perhaps it would be worth distinguishing the real Skovoroda from the ideal Skovoroda now; but there is no doubt that the last image arose from the first...” Even if Skovoroda's works are not very adorable (for example, Ivan Franko in “Essays on the History of Ukrainian-Ruthenian Literature” considered only *Kharkiv Fables* valuable), the author's significance is measured not only by aesthetic quality. Equally important is the impact on his age, the degree of the author's direction he expresses, the moral state of his environment, the holding/capacity of the mental requirements and tastes of contemporaries.¹⁶

14 Rusov, “Kakova rol,” 46–47.

15 Nikolai Kostomarov, “Slovo o Skovorodie. Po povodu retsenzii na yeho sochinieniia v ‘Russkom slovie’ [A Word about Skovoroda. Regarding the Review of His Works in the ‘Russian Word’],” *Osnova* 7 (1861): 177. Mykola Kostomarov, “Vidpovid na retsenziiu V. Krestovskoho [Response to Krestovskiy's Review],” in *Tvory: u 2 t.* (Kyiv: Dnipro, 1967), 413–14.

16 Kostomarov, “Slovo o Skovorodie,” 178–79.

This is one of the developments of mass popularity. And cult popularity already expected the following. The sources of Skovoroda's obvious mass and cult popularity were not so much his works, little known or completely unknown immediately after the philosopher's death, as numerous retellings (even anecdotes) that demonstrated him as the nonconformist, and even a freak. The society soon became acquainted with the publication of Skovoroda's biography by his student and friend Mykhailo Kovalynskyi, which was republished several times after 1794 in the same decade. The work had a great significance among its first publishers of Freemasons, first in the manuscript collection *Zerkalo sveta* (Mirror of Light) and in numerous lists.¹⁷

Works that were not published during Skovoroda's lifetime were on the lists that implies a certain variability. By the way, this is also a sign of alternative or even countercultural trends, the analogues at different times were the illegal systems of publishing and distribution of erotic, pornographic and satirical works,¹⁸ self-publishing, as well as subcultural publications (fanzines and other types of DIY-culture).

Therefore, it is a high time to characterize the Skovoroda's subculture, and among scientists already mentioned, Mykhailo Hrushevskyi characterized it as the most diligently in the context of the history of religious thought. Ukrainian encyclopedist Yevhen Onatskyi described *Skovorodynstvo* as "a mystical movement generated by the teachings of Skovoroda and alienation of the Orthodox Church, captured by the Muscovites, from the people."¹⁹ The type of *skovorodynets* was brought out by Kotliarevskyi in *Natalka Poltavka* in the character of Vozny, but uneducated actors turned him into a negative figure due to misunderstanding, which was largely because of his bizarre "vinaigrette" language. Hrushevskyi wrote that in the character of Vozny Kotliarevskyi wanted not only to "show the type of inconspicuous, but respected skovorodynets, who did not lose his moral values, even in his own unfavourable position, but observes his life through skovorodynets' eyes, showing himself also a supporter of Skovoroda's morality."²⁰

I will try to widen this common explanation, known mostly among a narrow circle of literary historians. According to Hrushevskyi, *skovorodynstvo* as an alternative trend of intellectuals began in the 1790s (surely under the influence of Skovoroda's death), although the author of Skovoroda's cult biography Kovalynskyi was a *skovorodynets* in the 1760s. Hrushevskyi explained the establishment of the *skovorodynstvo* as a socio-cultural movement in the 1790s because of the similarity of Skovoroda's teaching with the intellectual life and the moods of that time. This is the

17 Mikhail Lepekhin, "Kovalenskyi Mykhail Ivanovich," in *Slovar russkykh pysatelei XVIII veka*, accessed December 4, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070927015227/http://www.pushkinskijdom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=1106>.

18 Umberto Eco, Jean-Claude Carrière, *Ne spodivaitesia pozbutysia knyzhok* [*This is Not the End of the Book*] (Lviv: VSL, 2015), 233–35.

19 Yevhen Onatskyi, "Skovorodynstvo," in *Ukrainska mala entsyklopediia*, book 14 (Buenos Aires: Administration of UAOC in Argentina, 1965), 1761.

20 Mykhailo Hrushevskyi, *Z istorii relihiinoi dumky na Ukraini* [*From the History of Religious Opinion in Ukraine*] (Kyiv: Osvita, 1992), 106.

secret of his great popularity. The philosopher's charisma coincided with the types of society moods and its desires.

Society was in demand for a new ideology due to the influential Western European and Russian trends. This ideology got the features of a religious, new, independent of the official church canon, morality, which would suit the living conditions of the new nobility-*szlachta* – the *dvoryanstvo* and related social elements. If in the last quarter of the 18th century Freemasonry and mystical German doctrines became widespread in the Russian surrounding, the society looked for a churchless, unofficial, appropriate for Age of Enlightenment, and at the same time appropriate for the new elite's morality and ideology, free from previous rituals and asceticism. Ukrainians closer to the imperial centre were also involved in these movements (Mykola Novikov, Semen Hamaliia), and for the wider rates of a more conservative Ukrainian society a new trend was created – the *skovorodynstvo*. Thus, the new trend of *skovorodynstvo* was parallel to the Freemasons and mystics. According to Kovalynskyi, Skovoroda was hostile to the confidentiality of Freemasonry, its secret practices, because moral goals must be open. Skovoroda was also against the magical and alchemical practices that were often used in those circles of Freemasons and mystics. However, this position was not categorical, and Skovoroda was considered as “theirs” due to the established tradition. It is possible that later, being abroad, Skovoroda approached the Freemasonry circles, as even his own phraseology slightly confirms such a fact.

The *skovorodynstvo* also had a strong mystical component, thus this trend was similar to the same alternative-ethical Freemasons and mystics. The Freemasons themselves were sympathetic to Skovoroda, and at least not hostile to the *skovorodyntsi*.

Freemasons, same as Skovoroda, reflected on the man's inside struggle of matter and spirit, on man's duty to overcome material urges and to ascend to the spiritual world through self-knowledge and attention to inner revelation. That is why, the *skovorodyntsi* gave some strong religious experience, a spiritual experience, such as a vision that changed an important role of the personality. Kovalynskyi experienced something similar during the conversation with Skovoroda.

Probably this mystical characteristic, in the sense of esoteric, gnostic and spiritualistic, was the main one in this movement. Already in the middle of the twentieth century some Ukrainian supporters of the *skovorodynstvo* and esoteric teachings put a sign of equality between them. Thus, Yurii Rusov in the preface to Skovoroda's biography, believed that the mystic Skovoroda was ahead of his time, warning against excessive inclination to materialism.²¹ According to Skovoroda, “The whole world consists of two natures: one is visible, the other is invisible. This invisible nature, or God, penetrates and holds all creation, everywhere it has always been, is and will be.”²²

21 Yurii Rusov, “Peredmova [Preface],” in Kovalynskyi, Mykhailo. *Hryhorii Skovoroda (Zhyttia i deiaki dumky ukrainskoho filosofa-spyrytualista)* (London: Nakladom Ukr. Vydavn. Spilky, 1956), 5.

22 Hryhorii Skovoroda, “Vstupni dveri do khrystyianskoi dobropravnosti [The Primary Door to Christian Goodwill],” *Tvory v dvokh tomakh*, vol. 1, ed. Oleksa Myshanych (Kyiv: AT Oberehy, 1994), 140.

The same Rusov (by the way, the son of Oleksandr Rusov mentioned before in this article, who investigated the *skovorodynstvo* in Kotliarevskyi's play *Natalka Poltavka*) considers Skovoroda's teachings in the context of mystical movements. Thus, this also applies to the *skovorodynstvo* as a socio-cultural trend. In general, the whole history of human civilization is also considered by esoterists as an alternation of periods of materialism and spiritualism (idealism).²³ When rationalistic materialism prevailed in Western Europe and human intellect was seen as the only source of perception and understanding of all phenomena, not only physical but also mental and ecclesiastic (spiritual) world, then, the Ukrainian philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda stood on the principles that became relevant later and created a group of philosophers-spiritualists.²⁴

Further, Rusov connected Skovoroda's doctrine with the mystical teachings of the second half of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries, in particular with the theosophy propagated by Ukrainian Olena Blavatska with the work "The Secret Doctrine" and anthroposophy. Although the last two movements contradicted each other, their principle of explaining the world not materialistically but spiritually certainly had many adherents, increasing more and more – after the First World War. The theosophical doctrine that next to the real world there is a spiritual world, which can be known through the spiritual perception of the Deity, dates to Antiquity (according to the interpretation of the same author – from the 3rd century AD Ammonius Saccas). Theosophy differs from theology in such a way that it is based not on the principles of doctrine (dogmas that are the basis of every religion, including Christian, Islamic etc.), but on some special religious ideas and impressions of man.

Theosophical ideology, like the later anthroposophy created by Rudolf Steiner (followed by Les Kurbas in particular), has a striking resemblance to the spiritualism preached by Hryhorii Skovoroda in his "Publicity" and "Discussions," the doctrine of two worlds, where the visible is only a reflection of the invisible, and the way to know this invisible is based on the principle: to know oneself (self-discovery).²⁵

Both Skovoroda and the *skovorodyntsi*, and modern spiritualists did not invent all these truths themselves, but had some "insight" into eternal wisdom, and intuition plays an important role here. Perhaps not coincidentally, the adherents of such esoteric teachings were people of literature and art. Thus, taking such an occult-esoteric focus of interpretation, the *skovorodyntsi* should be viewed primarily as followers of the mystical teachings of Skovoroda.

An important feature in the *skovorodynstvo* was that such people often resigned, abandoned a successful career, or did some defining ethical acts. Skovoroda avoided any career, Kotliarevskyi left his military career. The hero of Kotliarevskyi's play *Natalka Poltavka Voznyi* (legal executive and clerk) Borys Tetervakovskyi did the same. He is ready to forget about his career and the laws for Natalka's happiness, and later also renounces his marriage for the happiness of Natalka and Petro.

23 Rusov, "Peredmova," 3.

24 Rusov, "Peredmova," 4-5.

25 Rusov, "Peredmova," 7.

Thus, this hero of the play, written and first staged in 1819, was characterized by Hrushevskiy as the *skovorodynets* – “a positive Ukrainian representative character of good old Ukrainian traditions.” The actors, not understanding, made Voznyi a negative and comic figure: an old ugly cunning man, a sweet tooth, a law abuser (although any mentions about such things in the text are absent), who was fooled. A comic impression in this role was made by thick “vinaigrette” language. However, the very figure of a man brought up on the moral principles of Skovoroda is undoubtedly positive. Although he can sometimes be disturbed by the turbulent flow of life, but he has not lost his moral sense, even in that unpleasant situation, he had got into. After Tetervakovskiy pondered the situation (“I thought well...”), he performed a real act of heroism, just according to the rules of his great teacher – “start doing any good.”²⁶

Of course, the image of Voznyi as an idealistic *skovorodynets*-character, created by Kotliarevskiy, was disguised and profaned in the plays, reduced to the comic one (since the “materialistic” 1860s). However, Oleksandr Rusov corrected this situation by elegantly interpreting the image of Voznyi Tetervakovskiy (even the word *tetervak* means a gentle bird, whose name was taken to tease Ukrainians, but without slyness, as its name suggests).²⁷

In the play itself there are indications of some purely external *skovorodynets*’ features of. This is a neat, elegant, educated person, albeit with some excesses – this is indicated by the elements of clerical language, which, however, contains traces of ancient literary tradition. According to this vocabulary, however, we can see Skovoroda’s attitude to the world (greetings “Prosperous and peaceful being!,” expressions such as “vulnerable of love verbalization the heart due to all divine and human laws looks neither at breed, nor at age or status. Love... as it is said... equalizes everything” etc.). Even deception can be used with a high purpose (in order to relieve Natalka and her mother of poverty). But most of all the style of the *skovorodynets* is manifested in the songs, the most famous is a remake from Skovoroda’s, and this form has become popular (“Every City has its Own Morals and Rights”).²⁸

If Voznyi Tetervakovskiy is a public *skovorodynets*, as some other characters of the play, Kotliarevskiy himself is a *skovorodynets*-intellectual. Probably Kotliarevskiy was the most famous *skovorodynets*, according to Yefremov, “an intellectual of his time, the *skovorodynets* and freemason, a member of the biblical society and just a humane democrat.”²⁹ In the above described play, he himself looks at life with the “eye of the *skovorodynets*” and, exposing himself also a supporter of Skovoroda’s morality, synthesizing with modern, newer religious and moral trends, and sympathizing them in the late 1810s, Kotliarevskiy went through a similar learning process as Skovoroda.

26 Hrushevskiy, *Z istorii relihiinoi dumky na Ukraini*, 131–32.

27 Hryhorii Skovoroda, “Ubohyy Zhaivoronok [The Poor Lark],” *Povne zibrannia tvoriv: u 2-kh t.*, vol. 2 (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1973), 112.

28 Ivan Kotliarevskiy, “Natalka Poltavka [Natalka Poltavka],” in *Vybrane. Eneida. Natalka Poltavka: Poema, piesa* (Kyiv: Veselka, 1981), 179–214.

29 Yefremov, *Istoriia ukrainskoho pysmenstva*, 213.

From Poltava, the son of a chancellor, he studied at the seminary, but left it without completing the last theological course, probably not wanting a career in the church. Like Skovoroda, he earned money with the help of teaching profession for several years, settling among the common people, collecting folklore and folk vocabulary. He was not interested at all in church issues, obviously being a supporter of secular ethics (practical morality) and humanism. Instead of traditional icons, his working room was decorated with a painting of Magdalena with a skull. In his *Eneida* (Aeneid) we find many biting touches on the clergy, monks, bishops of some old scholastic school: obviously, his sympathies did not lean in this direction. We will find some mockery of modern natural philosophy as well.”³⁰

After successful military service, reaching the rank of major, he lost interest in that sphere, retired devoting himself to educational, philanthropic, literary, and theatrical affairs for thirty years. He diligently ran the upbringing children house for poor nobles, was a legislative member of Poltava’s branch of the Russian Bible Society (since 1818), which existed due to the inter-confessional basis. At the same time, among the same people, he belonged to the Masonic lodge *Liubov k Istyni* (Love of Truth), which was closed next year because of a special royal order (134-135). At the time of working on *Natalka Poltavka*, the 50-year-old Kotliarevskyi was “a type of old Poltava *skovorodynets* who, being in a modest social position, was able to proclaim with dignity these significant words: *By the goodness of the Almighty, I am a man!*”³¹

Another hero is Petro Hulak-Artemovskiy, who began in the same way, was a member of the nobility and clergy, leaving the theological education, worked as a teacher, then led some professor’s work and eventually found himself in Ukrainian literature. Unlike Kotliarevskyi, his complete rebirth did not take place. He neglected poetic and mystical work and immersed in his career, absorbing the Russian imperial ideology. By the way, he was also an active Freemason, which is more characteristic of all-Russian spiritual life of the educated class. At the end of his life, Hulak-Artemovskiy could no longer fully come back to the way of life as a total *skovorodynets*. We can assume that Artemovskiy’s *skovorodynstvo* was conjectural and concentrated in the literature. He moved to Kharkiv in 1817 and found a significant popularity of Skovoroda and probably the *Skovorodynstvo* itself. There were numerous legends about the philosopher at that time, he had the opportunity to get acquainted with the fables of Skovoroda, and in the 1830s – with the surveys about Skovoroda.³²

The third example of the *skovorodynets* among writers, steadier than just mentioned Hulak-Artemovskiy, is the founder of Ukrainian prose, Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko. Leonid Ushkalov noted that “when it comes to the principles of Kvitka’s outlook, the teaching of Skovoroda definitely comes to mind.”³³ Hryhorii Danylevskiy

30 Hrushevskiy, *Z istorii relihiinoi dumky na Ukraini*, 132–33.

31 Hrushevskiy, *Z istorii relihiinoi dumky na Ukraini*, 136.

32 Dmytro Bahalii, *Ukrainskyi mandrovanyi filosof Hr. Sav. Skovoroda* [*The Ukrainian Wandering Philosopher H.S. Skovoroda*] (Kyiv: Kobza; Orii, 1992), 371–73.

33 Leonid Ushkalov, *Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko* (Kharkiv: Folio, 2012), 97.

also spoke about the significant influence of Skovoroda's spiritual teachings on Kvitka, but Vasyl Boiko noted the complete parallelism between Skovoroda's philosophy and Kvitka-Osnovianenko's worldview, which sometimes reaches a textual coincidence in his works. Kvitka's most expressive *skovorodynstvo* is evident while taking into consideration God's providence and human *srodnist* (kinship).³⁴

However, the author's work reflects only a part of the author's worldview or does not reveal his inner essence (as with Hulak-Artemovskiyi). Kvitka was obviously a follower of the *skovorodynstvo* in life as well. Hrushevskiyi noted that "looking closely at his writings and activities, we find him as an analogous type of free evangelical, similar to on the one hand with Skovoroda, on the other with Kotliarevskiyi." Though, Kvitka also had an attachment to the aesthetic side of the Orthodox rituals, ethnography, and landlord conservatism. As a child, being ill, he was even a novice of the monastery, then got rid of asceticism and returned to secular life. Also, like Kotliarevskiyi, he conducted philanthropic activities.³⁵

According to Bahalii, Kvitka was influenced by Skovoroda from an early age, who visited his father (at the time of Skovoroda's death, Kvitka was 16 years old). Kvitka himself told about his acquaintance with Skovoroda and made some humorous additions to his song "Vsiakomy Horodu" (Every City). And maybe in the remake of this song that has reached us, there are some of Kvitka's corrections. In any case, this shows that Kvitka was interested in this philosophical song by Skovoroda and its moral content. Moreover, it is possible that Skovoroda also influenced Kvitka's religious view. According to Yefremov, Kvitka was a man of extremely sensitive heart and gentle temperament and was brought up in the traditions and under the influence of Skovoroda's humanistic philosophy.³⁶

Unfortunately, we do not have enough information about other famous *skovorodyntsi*-intellectuals before the 1840s yet, except the mentioned above writers. However, the author of this article hopes to find more information about this movement and possibly confirm the existence of the subculture *skovorodyntsi*-intellectuals. In any case, it is difficult to speak about the existence of a broad socio-cultural trend of the *skovorodyntsi* after the 1830s. There is seen some gap in the introduction of *skovorodynstvo* later in time.

Perhaps the connecting link of the *skovorodynstvo* between the 1790s and 1830s and later times should be considered the activity of Izmail Sreznevskiyi and the Kharkiv circle of romantics, that gathered around him with Mykola Kostomarov belonging to it. In the collections *Zaporozhskaya Starina* by Sreznevskiyi Skovoroda's works were also published, and Sreznevskiyi himself wrote the novel *Major, Major!* in Ukrainian language (1836), where he portrayed Skovoroda and his only *affection* to a girl approximately in 1766. In the story, the author cited fragments from Skovoroda's *duma* (pondering) about the Paradise on Earth. In addition, Sreznevskiyi wrote down some

34 Leonid Ushkalov, *Hryhorii Kvitka-Osnovianenko* (Kharkiv: Folio, 2012), 97.

35 Hrushevskiyi, *Z istorii relihiinoi dumky na Ukraini*, 136–37.

36 Bahalii, *Ukrainskyi mandrovanyi filosof*, 373–74.

fragments from Skovoroda's works in a special notebook.³⁷ The same group of Kharkiv *skovorodyntsi* includes the collector and publisher of Skovoroda's works Oleksandr Khizhdeu (Hyzhdey)³⁸ and probably others.

Leonid Ushkalov considered the Cyril and Methodius brothers to be Skovoroda's students. Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Posiada, and Panteleimon Kulish were also considered to be supporters of Skovoroda's ideology according to the author's research.³⁹

A similar view has previously been expressed by other authors. First, Shevchenko was considered to be the *skovorodynets*. "...almost all Cyril and Methodius brothers were Skovoroda's spiritual students, including Shevchenko, who 'stole a penny from a deacon' and rewrote Skovoroda or *Tri tsarie so dary* (Three Kings with Gifts)."⁴⁰

It is worth noting here that Shevchenko became acquainted with Skovoroda's works (apparently poetic) as a child, in the 1820s, since Skovoroda's manuscripts were widely distributed.⁴¹ As mentioned above, Kostomarov mentioned the widespread popularity of Skovoroda in Ukrainian society, and apparently he was sympathetic to Skovoroda's ideas.

Shevchenko mentioned Skovoroda not only in the famous poem *To A. O. Kozachkovskiyi*, but also in his poems and stories in Russian, particular in the poem *Kniazhna* (Princess), in the stories *Kniahynia* (Princess) and *Bliznetsy* (Twins). Shevchenko's poem *Son* (Dream) begins with a variation of the song *Every City Has its Own Rights and Laws*.⁴²

Panteleimon Kulish wrote the poem "Hrytsko Skovoroda" only in the early 1890s, where he showed his solidarity (and to some extent his former group with the ideology of the great "old man").⁴³ The Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood of the 1840s showed similarities in its worldview with the followers of the *skovorodynstvo*, being representatives of "evangelical Christianity," or free evangelism.⁴⁴

During a long time, from the end of the 18th to the 19th century, society experienced many intellectual trends, or, as Rusov wrote, "mood swings" (now so called socio-cultural trends or even subcultures): sentimental, romantic, objectively idealistic, natural-realistic, materialist-atheistic, satirical, nihilistic, spiritualistic, social-democratic, material-economic, Marxist, neo-Marxist, decadent and others.⁴⁵ Some intellectuals, under the influence of materialism in the 1860s, called Skovoroda's

37 Bahalii, *Ukrainskyi mandrovanyi filosof*, 269–70; Petrov, "Osoba Skovorody," 1508.

38 Bahalii, *Ukrainskyi mandrovanyi filosof*, 128, 272.

39 Leonid Ushkalov, "'Piznai sebe.' Ukrainska ideia Hryhoriia Skovorody ['Know Thyself.' Ukrainian Idea of Hryhorii Skovoroda]," *Tyzhden*, January 13, 2013, <https://tyzhden.ua/History/67626>.

40 Rusov, "Peredmov," 5.

41 Bahalii, *Ukrainskyi mandrovanyi filosof*, 375.

42 Bahalii, *Ukrainskyi mandrovanyi filosof*, 375–77. Taras Shevchenko, *Zibrannia tvoriv: u 6 t* [Collection of Works: in 6 vol.], vol. 2 (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 2003), 58–61.

43 Hrushevskiy, *Z istorii relihiinoi dumky na Ukraini*, 152–53.

44 Hrushevskiy, *Z istorii relihiinoi dumky na Ukraini*, 138.

45 Rusov, "Kakova rol," 47.

previously popular works “scholastic nonsense and seminar carrion” and denied the need for their publication.⁴⁶ However, at the same time, the work that most promoted, in a covert form, Skovoroda’s ideas, the play *Natalka Poltavka* did not lose its popularity neither then, nor after. *Skovorodynstvo*, according to Rusov, is precisely the main idea of the play.

It has already been observed above about the interpretation of *skovorodynstvo* as a continuation of the esoteric-mystical tradition. Whether Theosophists and other occultists had an interest in Skovoroda in the late 19th century is still unknown. Perhaps a little earlier the *skovorodynstvo* was ~~interested~~ interesting for followers of Lev Tolstoy, *tolstovtsi*. *Tolstovstvo* was also an ethical doctrine, and its founder was interested in the person of Skovoroda. “Spiritual Christians” of the end of the 19th century treated Skovoroda’s works and writings with piety (*maliovantsi*, *molokans* and others).⁴⁷

Skovoroda soon became a cult figure for modernists of the early twentieth century. One of the modernist critics, Andrii Tovkachevskyi, published a large essay about Skovoroda in 1913 in *Ukrainska Khata* where he examined him through the prism of Nietzscheanism.⁴⁸

Conclusion

Thus, not only the features of Skovoroda’s outlook, but also his alternative way of life, nonconformism created during the philosopher’s lifetime, and even more – after his death – his cult, and, at a higher level – following. Those features of *skovorodynstvo* that were most notable and attracted followers include: belonging to the existing tradition of the wandering way of life in Baroque Ukraine; a break with career strategies (the theory of doing nothing is similar to that perceived by American beatniks in Zen Buddhism); tendency to self-analysis / observation; inseparability of life from the expressed ideas; allegorical perception of the world, mysticism; interest in other ethical movements; pantheism (in Bahalii – “love of nature”), belonging to free intellectual activities (including teaching); neglecting of certain established social conventions, which manifested itself both in public attitude (vivid aphoristic statements) and in the preaching of reasonable hedonism (“Epicureanism”), naturalness as opposed to civilization; creative work.

The interest in Skovoroda remained in later times, combining with other alternative socio-cultural trends, such as the *tolstovtsi*, or early Ukrainian modernists. Panteleimon Kulish showed interest in Skovoroda in his times of his *khutorianstvo*, or *khutirskaphilosophy*. Later, part of the Soviet hippies invented their own *skovorodynstvo*. So, we have a phenomenon when the interest in the person, works, ideas of Skovoroda

46 Krestovskyi, “Khodataistvo g. Kostomarova,” 79–87.

47 Hrushevskyi, *Z istorii relihiinoi dumky na Ukraini*, 157.

48 Serhii Yakovenko, *Romantyky, estety, nitssheantsi. Ukrainska ta polska literaturna krytyka rannoho modernizmu* [Romantics, Aesthetes, Nietzscheans. Ukrainian and Polish Literary Criticism of Early Modernism] (Kyiv: Krytyka, 2006), 280.

or his way of life, with different intensity continues. However, the Skovoroda's tradition still remains in an alternative space: from personal introverted nonconformism to counterculture ("And who is the first hippie in Europe – oh, yes, Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda!"⁴⁹ – Ukrainian rap rock & alternative hip hop band *TNMK* or *Tanok na Maidani Konho* (Dance on the Congo Square), lyrics by Artem Polezhaka, music by Oleh "Fahot" Mikhailiuta).⁵⁰

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49 TNMK, "Istoria Ukrainy za 5 Khvylyn," November 19, 2019, accessed December 4, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BhuWhgS_HIA.

50 "Istoria Ukrainy za 5 Khvylyn, Tanok na maidani Konho: Slova, tekst, akordy [History of Ukraine in 5 Minutes, TNMK or Dance on the Congo Square: Lyrics, Lyrics, Chords, Ukrainian Songs]," *Ukrayinski pisni*, accessed December 4, 2022, <https://www.pisni.org.ua/songs/8389817.html>.

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