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THE HISTORY OF UKRAINIAN-JEWISH RELATIONS THROUGH THE PRISM OF FICTION

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In the context of the current political realities in Ukraine and the full-scale Russian-Ukrainian war, we are witnessing the emergence of civil society in our country. Various national communities, whose representatives are citizens of our country, are participating in these political processes. In this context, the aim of the study is to examine and analyze the centuries-old history of Ukrainian-Jewish relations through the prism of works of fiction.

Keywords: *history of Ukrainian-Jewish relations; literary anthropology; fiction and history; postcolonial vision of the historical process; Orientalism; Occidentalism.*

Ковбасенко Ю. І., Левітас Ф. Л., Салата О.О. Історія українсько-єврейських стосунків крізь призму художньої літератури

В умовах сучасних політичних реалій, що склались в Україні, та повномасштабної російсько-української війни ми є свідками становлення в нашій країні громадянського суспільства. У цих політичних процесах беруть участь різні національні спільноти, представники яких є громадянами нашої держави. У цьому контексті мета дослідження: вивчити та проаналізувати багатовікову історію українсько-єврейських відносин крізь призму творів художньої літератури.

Ключові слова: історія українсько-єврейських взаємин; літературна антропологія; художня література та історія; постколоніальна візія історичного процесу; орієнталізм; окциденталізм

The history of Ukrainian-Jewish relations spans more than a thousand years of coexistence between the two peoples on Ukrainian soil. There have been both rather positive moments and tragic chapters in this story. Renowned Ukrainian historian Y. Dashkevych, researching this complex issue, used sources to prove that centuries of contact between Ukrainians and Jews were largely positive, with conflicts being episodic in nature and occurring during difficult and turbulent times (Levitas, Kovbasenko, Salata, 2020, p. 78).

A major unifying factor for Ukrainians and Jews (labelled as ‘unreliable’ peoples by the Russian imperial and totalitarian systems) has historically the struggle for national identity, freedom and the development of their own statehood.

Researchers who sincerely wish to understand this topic are constantly confronted with various myths, prejudices, and stereotypes that have left a deep mark on the historical memory of both peoples. It is no coincidence that renowned contemporary scholars Paul-Robert Magocsi and Yohanan Petrovsky-Stern emphasise that under the influence of Muscovite (imperial, Soviet, and post-Soviet) propaganda, "for Jews, Ukrainians are fundamentally anti-Semites, ready to go and beat Jews at the first opportunity. For Ukrainians, Jews are swindlers, exploiters who have always served foreign rulers, oppressors of the Ukrainian people..." These prejudices and stereotypes still cloud Ukrainian-Jewish relations (Magocsi, Petrovsky-Stern, 2016, p. 2).

Consider the cover of the satirical magazine *Perets* (No. 12 (1102) for June 1981) (Figure 1).

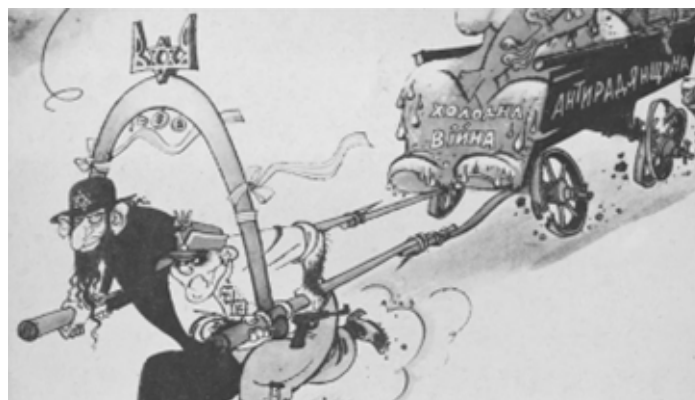


Figure 1. Ukrainian-Jewish collaboration as featured in *Perets* (No. 12 (1102), 1981

It is one of the most vivid examples of the use of numerous strategies of ‘satanisation’ in the USSR (in fact, in the reincarnated Russian Empire) of nationally conscious Ukrainians and Jews who stubbornly refused to renounce their national identity in favour of assimilation into the ‘single Soviet people’. A cartoonist for the leading satirical magazine of the Ukrainian SSR drew a symbolic ‘cart of anti-Sovietism and the Cold War’ pulled by grotesquely depicted Ukrainians in Mazepin hats (in modern Kremlin propaganda terminology, this is a ‘Banderite’) and a Jew (“Zionist”) with a six-pointed Star of David (‘David’s shield’) on his characteristic hat. Above the yoke, the Ukrainian trident and the aforementioned Jewish Star of David are deliberately contaminated on either side. Moreover, whether the Soviet artist intended it or not, objectively, his caricature deconstructs the well-known imperial myth about the insatiable ‘anti-Semitism’ of Bandera’s followers and Ukrainians in general, since these ‘irreconcilable historical enemies’ pull the aforementioned cart side by side, in the same harness.

It is also telling that instead of bells under the yoke of this ‘Zhidobanderivsky harness’ (again, Kremlin terminology), instead of bells, there are... US dollars, as a symbol of alleged treachery, of anti-Muscovite national liberation movements being ‘bought off’ by the ‘rotten West’ (‘Uncle Sam’).

This is yet another of the numerous motifs of Kremlin propaganda, which vilifies anything that does not fit into the imperial paradigm (similarly, the Muscovites later explained the freedom-loving expression of will by Ukrainians in the Maidan protests of 2004 and 2013 as being due to ‘Western money,’ ‘Nuland cookies,’ etc.).

Thus, this caricature embodies two geographically divergent but equally aggressive strategies of the Muscovite empire: anti-Jewish, anti-Eastern (‘Orientalism’) (see: Kovbasenko, 2024) and anti-American, anti-Western (‘Occidentalism’).

Ukrainian and Jewish scholars M. Marynovych and M. Feller have convincingly demonstrated how to overcome these prejudices, find the truth, set priorities, and reject delusions. They argue that the grammar of Ukrainian-Jewish relations has always been highly comparative. At the same time, imperial propaganda alternately blamed one or the other nation for interethnic problems. In propaganda clichés of national animosity, Ukrainians were presented as a people who pillage and plunder, and Jews as the main culprits of the crimes of the

Bolshevik regime. In reality, however, history knows no absolute assessments (Khonigsman, Najman, 2016, p. 223).

For example, accusations of anti-Semitism among Ukrainians during the Khmelnytsky Uprising have become traditional and even stereotypical, widely circulated by Russian propaganda. But much less has been said about the fact that many influential Jewish families (the Borukhovychs, Markovichs, etc.) even belonged to the Cossack elite. And after the victories of the Cossack army and Khmelnytsky's triumphant entry into Kyiv in December 1648, the local clergy and broad sections of the population welcomed him as "Moses, the saviour and liberator of the Ruthenian people (not to be confused with 'Russian,' a much later fake self-designation, a "pseudonym" of the Muscovites. – Author) from noble bondage." This comparison emphasised his role not only as a Cossack military leader, hetman, but also as a national leader who led the Ukrainian people out of centuries of oppression, similar to the biblical Moses, who led the Jewish people out of centuries of Egyptian captivity.

In contemporary Ukrainian historical and literary visions, considerable attention and scholarly interest is focused on the positive contribution of the Jewish community to the socio-economic and cultural life of Ukraine. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, in addition to traditional Jewish professions such as craftsmen, small traders, doctors, and pharmacists, there was the prospect of acquiring new intellectual professions: lawyers, engineers, workers in the humanities, agriculture, which undoubtedly had a positive impact on all spheres of life in Ukraine at that time (Shamara, 2016, p. 234).

At the same time, there is a certain intellectual influence of Jewish culture and tradition on the formation of the views of the Ukrainian intelligentsia. The most important source here was the Bible, which, according to the well-known literary scholar V. Skuratovsky, was transformed from a theological and philosophical treatise into a literary and ideological tool for Ukrainian national development. It was in line with these efforts that Ukrainian translations of the Holy Scriptures by P. Kulish, I. Nechui-Levytsky, I. Pului, and others appeared (Filler, 1998, p. 45).

Biblical contexts began to play an important role in Ukrainian political aspirations. First, Lesya Ukrainka emphasises the role of the Bible as an important component of knowledge of world history in a textbook for home schooling: 'Anyone interested in the history of human culture and faith must carefully reread the **biblical** legends...' (Ukrainka, 2008, p. 205).

Agreeing with the need to critically evaluate individual biblical stories, the distinguished poet asserts that "the holy hand is most visible in the legends of the East... Ultimately, this idea could indeed have first arisen among the Jewish people, in the desert, surrounded by oppressive nature, under the vast, merciless desert sky. Legends about God himself leading Israel through the desert make a great impression" (Ukrainka, 2008, p. 208). Lesia Ukrainka's reflections on the people who came out of Egyptian slavery and stayed in the desert, overcoming many difficulties, until, with God's help, they finally reached their main goal, the land of Canaan, and finally gained their long-awaited freedom, become a kind of guide for the political, historical and literary visions of Ukrainian society.

It is no coincidence that 'The Law of God or The Book of the Genesis of the Ukrainian People' as a political manifesto of the Cyril and Methodius Brotherhood (actually: 'Ukrainian-Slavic Society') contains important emphases based on the Old Testament. M. Kostomarov, as the leading author of this programmatic document of Ukraine's first political organisation, outlines the historical aspirations of the Ukrainian people and emphasises important aspects of the religious and philosophical texts of the Bible. The Lord himself chose the Jews and sent Moses to them. And Moses gave them the law, which he received from God on Mount Sinai, and decreed that all should be equal, that there should be no king among them – but that they should know One King – God in heaven, and that order should be maintained by judges chosen by the people.

Interpreting biblical texts, the renowned historian attempts to convey to the public the tragic lessons of ancient Jewish history: '...But the Jews chose kings for themselves... and the Jews, having made kings for themselves, forgot the one Heavenly King, and now they have fallen away from the true God...' As a result, 'the Lord punished them: their kingdom was lost and all were taken captive by the Chaldeans' (Kostomarov, 1991, pp. 12-13).

Ukrainian historian I. Hlyz, who wrote a vivid annotation to Mykola Kostomarov's work, argued that love for Ukraine, and its history in God's Law, reflected in social justice, humanism, and the desire to work for society, became the centre of the entire ideological message of this work (Kostomarov, 1991, pp. 7-8).

The spiritual leaders of the Ukrainian people, Taras Shevchenko, Lesya Ukrainka and Ivan Franko, in their literary and socio-political legacy, viewed the fate of the Jewish people as parallel to the historical fate of the Ukrainian people. This is all the more symbolic given that they were, of course, unaware of the

future establishment of the State of Israel (1948). Taras Shevchenko metaphorically associates the history of the Jewish people, who for centuries sought their promised land, with the misfortune of the Ukrainian people:

*На ріках круг Вавилона,
Під вербами в полі,
Сиділи ми і плакали
В далекій неволі.*

*Na rikah kruh Vavylona,
Pid verbamy v poli,
Sydily my i plakaly
V dalekii nevoli.*

On the rivers around Babylon,
Under the willows in the
field,
We sat and wept
In distant captivity.

(Shevchenko, 1960. p. 281)

But the aforementioned 'David's Psalms' are not only a statement of Ukrainian reality in the 19th century, witnessed by T. Shevchenko. Their final part is important – a romantic reinterpretation and belief in a new future for Ukraine. The motif of freedom for the people becomes the leitmotif of all the works of the great Kobzar:

*Окують царей неситих
В залізніє пута
І їх славних оковами
Ручними окрутять,
І осудять губителів
Судом своїм правим.
І вівіки стане слава,
Преподобним слава.*

*Okuiut tsarei nesytykh
V zaliznyie puta
I yikh slavykh okovamy
Ruchnymy okrutiat,
I osudiat hubytelei
Sudom svoim pravym.
I voviky stane slava,
Prepodobnym slava.*

They will shackle the
insatiable kings
In iron chains
And surround them with
glorious shackles
With their hands,
And condemn the destroyers
With their righteous
judgment.
And glory will last forever,
Glory to the righteous.

(Shevchenko, 1960. p. 281)

Statelessness, the destruction of King Solomon's Temple, oppression by those in power, national persecution, the tragic pages of ancient Israel's history, and other themes became the leitmotifs of Ukrainian poetry in the 19th century and later (Lina Kostenko and others). Thus, in Lesya Ukrainka's poem 'Jewish Melody,' hopes for national revival are in harmony with biblical refrains: "My beloved! You are a ruined temple to me!" Even at the beginning of Ukraine's independence, renowned historians Y. Honigsman and O. Naiman, who were well acquainted with Lesya Ukrainka's work, noted that not only in 'Jewish Melodies,' but also in 'On the Rivers of Babylon' 'In the Catacombs,' and in the poet's dramatic works, biblical themes are used as examples of patriotic self-awareness, humanism, and national ideals (Khonigsman, 1992, p. 148).

‘This is not a passing sympathy, not temporary political slogans – it is something deeper, stemming from national self-awareness on the paths of destiny and common spiritual sources,’ stated the well-known Ukrainian literary critic Y. Sverstiuk, and continued: ‘In Lesya Ukrainka's words, “And you once fought, like Israel, my Ukraine,” has become the political slogan of modern conscious Ukrainianism’ (Sverstiuk, 1994, p. 8).

According to Ukrainian-Canadian historian T. Hunczak, I. Franko was most actively interested in and used Jewish themes. Thus, in the poem ‘Moses,’ the great Ukrainian writer showed the tragic fate of Ukrainians through the prism of the misfortune of the Jewish people, who for centuries sought the Promised Land. The prologue to the poem ‘Moses,’ notes T. Hunczak, ‘is like the cry of the author's wounded soul’: ‘My people, tortured, broken, / Like a paralytic at a crossroads, / Covered with human contempt, like a scab...’

I. Franko embodies his fierce love for the Ukrainian people in the words of the biblical character, the Jew Moses (the historical and interethnic contexts seem obvious here):

*О, Ізраїлю! Як би ти знав,
Чого в серці тім повно.
Якби ти знав, як люблю я
тебе,
Як люблю невимовно!*

*O, Izrayiliu! Yak by ty znav,
Choho v sertsy tym povno.
Yakby ty znav, yak liubliu ya
tebe, Yak liubliu nevyrovno!*

Oh, Israel! If only you knew
What fills my heart.
If only you knew how much I
love you,
How much I love you beyond
words!

(Hunczak, 1994, p. 44-45].

At the same time, the symbolism of the image of Moses the Jew in the Ukrainian writer's interpretation is much deeper. As I. Franko himself wrote, ‘I made the main theme of the poem the death of Moses as a prophet who was not recognised by his people. This theme in this form is not biblical, but my own, although it is based on the biblical story.’ The situation of loneliness of a national leader (prophet) who sees the path to liberation but is not understood or supported by his own enslaved people is typical. T. Shevchenko (‘Perebendya’), Lesya Ukrainka (‘Cassandra’), and many others wrote about this. Franko himself went through a similar situation, ultimately not being elected to the Austrian parliament by his own countrymen. All this prompted the Ukrainian to constantly return to the image of Moses, not only in the poem of the same name, but also in other works, including the satirical (sic!) poem ‘Lys Mykyta’. Here is the allegorical (Aesopean) monologue of its character, the ‘suicidal ram’ (spelling authentic):

<i>...Здавна думав я про тес, Щоб овечим стать Мойсеєм, Вивести овець з ярма – Із хліва – на вольну волю. Много труду, мук і болю Я прийняв – та все дарма.</i>	<i>...Zdavna dumav ya pro teye, Shchob ovechym stat Moyseyem, Vyvesty ovets z yarma – Iz khliiva – na volnu voliu. Mnoho trudu, muk i boliu Ya pryiniav – ta vse darma.</i>	<i>...I have long thought about this, To become Moses to the sheep, To lead the sheep out of bondage – Out of the barn – into freedom. I accepted much labour, torment and pain – But all in vain. In the narrow sheep brains, You cannot instil a single fresh thought: Their hearts are fearful. "What freedom do we have? The wolf will eat us in the field, It is a sin for us to think about freedom!" Well, think, kind sir, About my difficult mental state! Fate wanted to mock me: Prophetic things in my soul, But all around me sheep's foreheads, Hay, fodder, a warm barn!</i>
<i>У тісні овечі мізки Думки свіжої нітрішки Не втовкмачиш: серце їх Боязливе. «Що нам воля? Вовк поїсть нас серед поля, Нам про волю думать грих!»</i>	<i>U tisni ovechi mizky Dumky svizhoyi nitrishky Ne vtovkmachysh: sertse yikh Boiazlyve. «Shcho nam volia? Vovk poyst nas sered polia, Nam pro voliu dumat hrikh!»</i>	
<i>Ну, подумай, пане чемний, Про важкий мій стан душевний! Насміх долі так хотів: У душі пророцькі речі, А кругом лоби овечі, Сіно, жвачка, теплий хлів!..</i>	<i>Nu, podumai, pane chemnyi, Pro vazhkyi miy stan dushevnyi! Nasmikh doli tak khotiv: U dushi prorotski rechi, A kruhom loby ovechi, Sino, zhvachka, teplyi khliv!..</i>	

(Franko, 1890, p. 4)

In addition, I. Franko sought the foundations of Ukrainian-Jewish understanding not only in poetry. In his article ‘The Jewish Question,’ he eloquently emphasised that Ukrainian democrats should beware of anti-Semitism ‘like a contagious disease.’ In his review of Theodor Herzl's book ‘The Jewish State’ (he was personally acquainted with the founder of the Zionist movement), the Ukrainian spoke positively about the aspirations of the Zionists.

Incidentally, like Lesya Ukrainka, who visited Palestine in the early 20th century, he was interested in the activities of Zionist women. In his article ‘Semitism and Anti-Semitism in Galicia,’ Franko clearly outlined the programme of the Ukrainian national movement on the Jewish question: to achieve equality for Ukrainians and Jews in Austria-Hungary (Prymost, 2013, pp. 336-337).

It should be acknowledged that there was no shortage of critical remarks about Jews among well-known Ukrainians. However, these remarks were not ethnic or religious in nature, but mainly socio-economic, as members of the Jewish community were stereotypically perceived as representatives of the exploitative strata of society.

But the louder the Ukrainian liberation movement in the Russian Empire proclaimed itself, the more important Ukrainian-Jewish ties became. Prominent Ukrainians paid increasing attention to the similarities between the fates of the Ukrainian and Jewish peoples. The first and most significant act was a letter from T. Shevchenko, M. Kostomarov, P. Kulish, and Marko Vovchok (1858) against anti-Semitic publications in autocratic magazines.

The Muscovite authorities understood and continue to understand the effectiveness of the ancient imperial principle of ‘divide et impera’ (‘divide and rule’), sowing discord between Ukrainians and Jews. This is how Maria Grinchenko (wife of Borys Grinchenko) wrote about it in her article ‘Who is the enemy of the people?’ (1905): “The tsarist government incites not only the people against the intelligentsia, but also one people against another. This was started by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Plev... So Plev came up with this trick: to set our people, the Ukrainians, against the Jews. By doing this, he thought he could kill two birds with one stone: destroy the Jewish intelligentsia and distract the Ukrainians from their real enemy. By showing that, supposedly, all the evil in Ukraine comes from the Jews. (Grinchenko, 1905. pp. 29-30)

Ukrainian-Jewish relations during the national revolution of 1917–1921 still await a fundamental, objective, and systematic research. There is no shortage of controversial and traumatic episodes here, which, of course, require critical reflection by both nations. However, there are many historical and literary sources featuring the Jews of the Ukrainian People's Republic who fought for Ukrainian statehood. Here is an excerpt from Leonid Poltava's historical poem dedicated to S. Yakerson, a centurion of the Ukrainian People's Republic army:

<i>Від боїв червоніли сніги ... Кулі в грудях – неначе медалі ... України хиткі береги Відпливали все далі і далі ...</i>	<i>Vid boyiv chervonily snihy ... Kuli v hrudiakh – nenache medali ... Ukrayiny khytki berehy Vidplyvaly vse dali i dali ...</i>	The snow was reddened by the fighting... Bullets in the chest – like medals... Ukraine's shaky shores Floated further and further away...
<i>Якерсон не вставав із коня, Не долали ні кулі, ні сон. А щоп'ятниця, на згарищах дня, Як мінявся тоді Якерсон:</i>	<i>Yakerson ne vstavav iz konia, Ne dolaly ni kuli, ni son. A shchopyatnyts, na zharyshchakh dnya, Yak minyavsia todi Yakerson:</i>	Yakerson did not get off his horse, Neither bullets nor sleep could overcome him.
<i>У світильника ставив свічки, Похилювши високе чоло, І в тремтінні рудої руки</i>	<i>U svitylnyka stavyyv svichky, Pokhylyvshy vysoke cholo, I v tremtinni rudoyi ruky Stilky viry u zhyda bulo,</i>	And every Friday, at the end of the day, How Yakerson changed then: He placed candles in the

<i>Стільки віри у жида було,</i>	<i>Skilky vichnostey ta khvylyn –</i>	lamp, Bowing his high forehead, And in the trembling of his red hand
<i>Скільки вічностей та хвилин –</i>		
<i>Знають Бог та Єгова самі:</i>	<i>Znayut Boh ta Yehova sami:</i>	The Jew had so much faith,
<i>Був він сином обох</i>	<i>Buv vin synom obokh</i>	
<i>Батьківщин</i>	<i>Batkivshchyn I obydyi byly u</i>	As many eternities and minutes as
<i>І обидві були у тюрмі</i>	<i>tiurmi</i>	God and Jehovah themselves know: He was the son of both Fatherlands And both were in prison

(Poltava, 1967, p. 32).

In the context of Ukrainian emigration, after the defeat of the 1917–1921 revolution, themes from the Old Testament became particularly relevant. Thus, in a poem by Oleksandr Oles in exile, he again speaks of the common fate of Ukrainians and Jews in exile: ‘O suffering people! Teach us in exile to love our Jerusalem!’

Most Ukrainians abroad lived with this slogan until 24 August 1991. As noted by the well-known writer and human rights activist Yevhen Sverstiuk, Ukrainians have always been inspired by the fate of the Jewish people, who managed to endure countless sufferings but preserved their spirit and desire for a free life. From the Perm camps, where the famous Ukrainian was held by the totalitarian regime, Yevhen Oleksandrovych wrote: ‘And you, once fought like Israel, my Ukraine!’ - the voice of Lesya Ukrainka echoes. ‘And you will rise again, as Israel rose!’ - echoes in our hearts" (Sverstiuk, 1994, p. 15).

Conclusions and Perspectives.

Summarising the results of our research, it should be noted that for many centuries, the Muscovite (first imperial, then communist, and now current) authorities created myths, formed stereotypes, and prejudices that have had and continue to have a profound impact on the fate of both the Ukrainian and Jewish peoples, leaving a deep mark on the historical memory of both nations. It has been found that the mutual influence on the culture and traditions of the Ukrainian and Jewish peoples has enriched the socio-economic and cultural life of Ukraine over the last 400 years of our shared history. A vast heritage and experience in literature, art and science has been formed. The works of famous

Ukrainian historians, writers, poets and human rights activists show us that the fates of both peoples have been and remain complex, and therefore only through cooperation and mutual support can we overcome the challenges that lie ahead. Ukrainian-Jewish relations, which have a long tradition, require further thorough research and contemporary assessment in the domestic humanities, and target a broader textual database comprising both Ukrainian and foreign networks of fiction. Respectively, the proposed interpretations of literary works as a valuable historical source require a broader interdisciplinary approach and a “synthetic” methodology.

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