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## Section: REVIEWS

### ESCAPE INTO CREATIVITY: THOUGHTS ON THE MARGINS OF A NEW WORK ABOUT VASYL STEFANYK

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*Velykochyi, V., Monolatii, I., & Derkachova, O. (2022). (Un)Expected Stefanyk. Brustury: Discursus.*

The 150th anniversary of the birth of Vasyl Stefanyk, the outstanding Ukrainian short stories writer and public figure, was celebrated with the appearance of a number of significant, fresh and interesting publications dedicated to his personality. This notable event brought to life works of various genres and volumes: among them there appeared a fundamental 3-volume collection of the writers' works and a relatively small interdisciplinary research compilation authored by the scholars of our university, its primary aim has been to better understand Stefanyk as a person and a master of the word.

Resulting from scientific research and reflection, the focus of scientists has shifted to the problem of personal loneliness (Velykochyi et al., 2022, p. 95). As a writer Stefanyk offers an unsurpassed in strength and depth depiction of human experiences of borderline states: a painful awareness of mortality and ending of the earthly path, fears of solitude, weakness, old age, protection which cannot be warned away even through a sacred archetype of one's own home, family home (Velykochyi et al., 2022, pp. 67-91). As a representative of Galician intelligentsia of that time, he sympathizes with his literary characters primarily because "they were themselves, they did not deny or shy away from themselves"; for himself he chooses the role of an impersonal onlooker witnessing the drama of the Pokuttia village, eventually he becomes his literary prototype of that dichotomy of the "leading stratum" in Galicia (Halychyna) at the beginning of the XX century, which served as both the driving and braking force of social and cultural development (Velykochyi et al., 2022, pp. 56, 63).

Consequently, as a public and political figure Stefanyk delivers passionate electoral speeches campaigning as a bright emotional leader, he is actively engaged in the daily parliamentary work in the Austrian parliament, yet, during the whirlwind of the turbulent events of the Ukrainian revolution of the early XX century later he remains strangely detached holding on the position of an observer most time (Velykochyi et al., 2022, pp. 22, 29, 32-33). Apparently, he was ready to painstaking toil on daily basis and thoroughly perform his direct duties, as he saw meaning and significance in his social work (although he would constantly subject everything to doubts), yet he would shy away from public roles or taking the lead, especially during uncertain moments of social bifurcations, when the future was quite debatable, and intuition (usually inherent for such kind of people) hinted at less than pleasing outcomes.

His image of a sensitive introvert-melancholic, a very delicate and sensitive person, finds its proofs in biographies and memoirs dedicated to him and characterizing him. Thus, Yuriy Hamorak writes: "Stefanyk is a lyricist, a person with a sensitive soul, vulnerable and sympathetic to his personal sufferings and the one's of people around, yet, at the same time, he is filled with some kind of peculiar peasant resilience" (Stefanyk, 2020a, p. 50). Recent research conducted by Harvard University scientists proves that a complex and unique combination of natural temperament and life experience results in highly reactive, sensitive, vulnerable children mostly growing up outwardly calm and cautious, thoughtful and self-reflexive, focused on the inner world, they need solitude for creativity and recovery. Being extremely responsive, kind, and honest, they react to manifestations of cruelty and injustice quite acutely; they often choose the "life of the mind" (intellectual professions) and are more likely to become writers, artists, and thinkers (Cane, 2016).

A small but telling fragment from the writer's life sheds certain light on the peculiarities of Stefanyk's nature. It is directly related to his rather long stay in the village of Chortovets in 1900. In general, the outstanding writer had many close ties with the Horodenka region: in addition to his social and political activities there, there were personal relations including his friendship with Ivan Pleshkan, a parish priest of the village of Chortovets, that goes back to their student days (both of them studied at the Kolomyia grammar school), as well as his friendly relations with the Hamorak family. Vasyl Stefanyk stepped on the path to public life in the 80s of the XIX century with illegal groups of students of the Kolomyia grammar school. It was there that he befriended his elder companion Ivan Pleshkan, "a poet who died too soon", who became one of his first friends and advisers. In his autobiography, Vasyl Stefanyk recalled: "Ivan Pleshkan, a senior fellow student from a neighboring village, helped me to study for several months." Stefanyk mentioned the books I. Pleshkan gave him to read, while helping the future writer in his studies. After a while, the friends' paths parted: Stefanyk went to the Drohobych grammar school, then continued his education in Krakow, and I. Pleshkan became a student of a theological seminary in Lviv.

Vasyl Stefanyk often visited the Horodenka region and Chortovets, in particular. During the elections to the Galician Regional Sejm, he supported and advocated for candidates from the Ruthenian-Ukrainian Radical Party, which aimed to defend the peasants' rights. He delivered a series of brilliant speeches. During one meeting in the Stetseva there was present perennial teacher and director of the Chortovets School V. Hryhoriv. He witnessed the fiery speech of the writer who called the people to education and enlightenment.

Being a student at the University of Krakow, during his summer holidays in 1895, Stefanyk took active part in the election campaign to the Sejm that was held in the villages of the Oberty district, including Chortovets. He delivered speeches and publicly supported lawyer Severyn Danylovych, a member of the radical party. Anti-nobility (namely Polish nobility) speeches in front of voters guaranteed V. Stefanyk an arrest. He spent 13 days in prison, and in his letter to Vaclav Moraczewski dated from August 7, 1895 he wrote: "I was arrested on the way to You ... A prison cell with bars and locked doors makes a very unfortunate impression – I am waiting for apathy". It seemed that the short-term imprisonment failed to intimidate the young student, as he continued his public activity. However, it is likely that that unpleasant experience of forced isolation from the entire external world had found its place in the depths of his soul and prompted him to sympathize with similar experiences of others more acutely.

In addition to his social and political work that brought Stefanyk to the Horodenka region, including Chortovets, time and time again, he sometimes visited the Pleshkans. His most fruitful summer in terms of writing was in Chortovets in 1900. Stunned by the sudden death of his 54-year-old mother Oksana on January 1 that year, the artist found his comfort in the village. In a letter to I. Pleshkan as of May, 17 1900, Stefanyk wrote:

«По смерті мами а на женихання теперішнє тата, я не хочу до Русова показуватися. І надумав я найняти тихий кут, аби спокійно у нім який час перебути і всякі роботи подороблювати. Нагадав-єм собі за той пустий двір у тім пустім саді в Чортівці. Якби ти мені там зріхтував одну гарну хату, якби умеблював її той економ і аби я там міг сидіти і писати, то було би мені добре... І я би переніс там центр руської новели... Лишень хату улади так, аби було в ній гарно сидіти та і писати» (Stefanyk, 2020b, p. 309). ("After the death of my mum, I do not want to go to Rusiv to witness marital advances of my father. Therefore, I decided to rent out a quiet cosy place, so that I could quietly stay there for a while and with all sorts of work to catch up. I recalled that empty courtyard in that empty garden in Chortivka. If you readied me a nice house there, if that house butler furnished it, so that I could sit there and write, then it would be good for me... And I would move there the center of the Ruthenian short story... Yet, work on the house in a way for it to be nice so that I could write in it" (Stefanyk, 2020b, p. 309). On May 25 Ivan Pleshkan responded: «Я знаю, що тобі, любчику, конче потрібно обширної і спокійної кімнати, де би міг бись, вільний від щоденних зносин зі світом, легко переливати на папір свої душевні образи, повні життя і крові» ("I know that you, my dear, need a large and quiet room where you could easily pour your images, full of life and blood, onto paper"), and invited Stefanyk to Chortovets.

Meanwhile, in frank and candid letters to his future wife Olha Hamorak (he addresses her "my best friend"), Stefanyk talked about his extreme exhaustion from work, spiritual grievances and devastation ("black crepe over the coffin of my spirit"), "the nastiest of thoughts", which he compares with death and coffins ("the heart full of coffins"), about the bitterness of "being one's own undertaker" and his literary creativity, which as it seemed to him "within the breath of death lose its strong contours". This kind of mood is confirmed by the analysis of his correspondence with O. Hamorak concerning this period: he apologized for his silence and not writing for a long time, yet, at the same time he asked her to write to him diligently and to "write daily", because, apparently, he preferred to listen more than to speak. Perhaps 29-year-old Stefanyk came to sudden and painful realization that full of hope, creative youth would be substituted by much more realistic maturity – the time of the person of a middle age and the peak of his life trajectory. There was a decade and a half of years of active social and economic activities, family life awaiting for him, leading to the summit of activity, yet at the same time that was a period of a long creative lethargy.

As one can assume from from Stefanyk's correspondence of 1900, he planned to stay in Chortovets for at least three months – from the end of June until the beginning of October, working on two books in order to publish them. Getting ready to the trip, in his letters Stefanyk complained about the difficult financial situation and wanted to borrow money. He hoped his future fees for works would help his to settle the debt, and he planned to get ready several works until the summer and to submit them to publishing houses. Therefore, despite the extremely difficult psychological state and lack of will and wish, he was planning to work hard in the summer: "I will work there like a horse". And though he had admitted before he did not like "any change" in his life, but on the way to Chortovets he was honestly comforted by the sight of every field that he passed, as he fled farther and farther from the world: "I can hardly wait for the house to appear so that work would make me forget everything." Although later, evaluating the results of his stay in the village, he admitted: "My creative work was moving forward with difficulty" (Stefanyk, 2020b, pp. 316, 320, 324).

For his guest to stay in complete peace of mind, the Pleshkans rented him a room on the former landlord's household where noone lived. The house was drowned in shrubbery, in front of it there was a large garden, and on the other side one could see an ancient park (they were destroyed in the course of World War II). The interesting point is that Stefanyk used to work in silence from the morning until noon ("I will be busy only in the morning, and then I will be all Yours..."), and then

he would come to the Pleshkans for lunch (the house where they lived was destroyed in the 1970s, there are other buildings in their place now). In July 1900, V. Stefanyk wrote to V. Morachevsky: «Я від Вас поїхав просто до Чортівця до Пleshканів і в них перебуваю дотепер... Я лагоджу дві книжці до друку і доста роблю. Сі люде, що я в них жию, дуже добрі і мені добре. Не так добре, як тихо. Здаєся мені, що лиш отака тишина може мені помочи» (Stefanyk, 2020b, p. 322). ("Having left You I went straight to Chortovets to the Pleshkans and I am still with them... I am working on two books, getting them ready to print, and get done quite much. People I live with are very good and I feel good with them. Not so much good but quiet. It seems to me that it is only this silence that can help me. ").

In this aspect, the conditions that the Pleshkans provided to Stefanyk proved to be a lifeline for him in the end. It was in July – September 1900 in the village of Chortovets that V. Stefanyk created his short stories "Winter wheat", "Thief", "Basaraby", "Funeral", "Dream", and "Such a Master". Another work "Maple Leaves" written at this time in Chortovets became a masterpiece of Ukrainian short story writing.

It was later that Olena Pleshkan recalled: «Ми з чоловіком знали, що Стефаник пише в нас якусь нову річ, але ми його не питали про це, ані він сам нічого не згадував. Лише кілька разів питався мене, чи я не знаю якої народної пісні про кленові листки. Аж раз запросив мене з чоловіком до своєї кімнати і прочитав нам уже закінчений твір. Новела зробила на нас величезне враження. Стефаник скінчив читати, а ми з великого хвилювання не могли рушитися з місця». ("My husband and I knew that Stefanyk was writing something new while he was with us, but we never asked him about it, nor did he mention anything. He had asked me several times if I knew any folk songs about maple leaves. Once he invited me and my husband to his room and read us the already finished work. The short story made a huge impression on us. Stefanyk finished reading, but the emotions left us motionless"). It is hard to disagree with the "Notes on the margins of the" Maple Leaves" written by famous Ukrainian writer of the Soviet period Kost Hordienko: «...майже анатомічне дослідження душевних проявів – розпачу, горя, любові, ненависті, зневір'я, відчаю, безпорадності... Психологічний словник Стефаника досить широкий, переважно депресивний... У Стефаника нема порожніх слів, велике навантаження лягає на кожне слово, фраза надзвичайно згусла, пристрасна... Читаючи „Кленові листки“, переконаєшся, що серед нас мало хто працює над мовою так, щоб кожне слово, звучання віддавало певні душевні рухи...». ("...almost anatomical study of emotional manifestations – despair, grief, love, hatred, dejection, despair, helplessness... The psychological vocabulary of Stefanyk is quite extensive, mostly depressing. Stefanyk has no meaningless or empty words, each of them is of equal importance, every great phrase is extremely powerful, passionate... Reading the "Maple Leaves", you realize that there are few people among us who work on their language so much that each word, each sound would create certain mental vibes.)

At the end of September 1900, Stefanyk wrote in his letters that he was living "in a boring neighborhood", and he was dreaming of getting first to Chernivtsi and then to Krakow soon enough, and he did so in October. However, in Krakow, he missed a "quiet monotonous life" in the village amid the depth of autumn, and called this kind of life very human and very truthful, and even compared himself to an autumn leaf that would like to hide from the world winds; in a letter to Olha Hamorak he wrote he would gladly lead such a quiet life himself and he would sometimes feel envious of those who did; and this fact revealed one of the deepest inclinations of his nature.

Being a very deep and extraordinary person Stefanyk left an unforgettable trace in the souls of those who knew him back then. Ivan Pleshkan would write to Stefanyk: «...ти знай, Васильку, ти був для нас оживляючим духом, кожну річ оживив єсь» ("...you should know, Vasyl'ku, you were a refreshing spirit for us, [you had] everything revived"). His daughter Olha Pleshkan

mentioned in her memoirs: «Велика особистість Стефаника мала значний вплив на родину Гамораків... На мене Стефаник справив враження людини великого серця і великого таланту. Кожна зустріч з ним залишала в душі глибокий, незатертий слід. ... Ти будь сама собою, – не раз говорив Стефаник, маючи на увазі мої малярські роботи. Його велика любов до народу, особливо до селянства, з якого він вийшов, віра в його велику життєву силу, у світлий день його відродження були для нас, молодих сучасників Стефаника, захоплюючим прикладом». (“Stefanyk's great personality had a significant influence on the Hamorak family... I saw Stefanyk as a man of great heart and great talent. Each meeting with him left a deep, tender trace in my soul. Be yourself, Stefanik would tell me more than once, referring to my paintings. His great love for the people, especially for peasants, the ones he descended from, his faith in its great life force, in the bright day of its revival, served for us, young contemporaries of Stefanyk, as a fascinating example.)

After his senior friend Ivan Pleshkan died, Stefanyk took care of his widow and daughter, and after the death of his wife (1914), he asked Olena Pleshkan to help with the household management and with his three sons' upbringing. Vasyl Stefanyk saw to it that his friend's daughter Olha Pleskan, a native of the village of Chortovets and a famous future artist, would get an art education. Later she became a co-founder of the Ruthenian Literary and Memorial Museum of V. Stefanyk and worked there as a researcher. In 1986, on the occasion of the 115th anniversary of Stefanyk's birth, there was a memorial plaque opened in the village of Chortovets, it was dedicated to the writer and his stay in the village.

Chortovets sketches add important details to the psychological portrait of the classicist of Ukrainian literature of the late XIX and early XX centuries. They hint at the image of a very sensitive, vulnerable introvert, quite melancholic and, perhaps, to a certain extent mystical. Yet, these were those psyche peculiarities that made Stefanyk the one who we (not) know now.

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