

Egyetemi doktori (PhD) értekezés tézisei

**Hungarian motives in the literary and philosophical works of
Grigory Savvich Skovoroda**

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I. The aim and general characteristics of the study

The aim of the present study is to define and expound a concrete row of Hungarian motives in the literary and philosophical works of Grigory Savvich Skovoroda (1722–1794). The Hungarian period is one of the least studied and examined of Skovoroda's life, therefore it demands a special attention for the determination of the objective reasons and sources of the themes of his writings from the point of view of the formation of Russian and Ukrainian literature. This subject has been previously dealt with but without the account of the geographical places and historical conditions directly connected to Skovoroda's emperor's service in Hungary, Austria, Italy and Poland in 1745–1750. Notwithstanding the considerable stretch of time and numerous scientific papers, the name of this talented master of belles-lettres makes us discuss him again. It can be all explained by the intercultural processes flowing inside the united Europe, as well as on both sides of the new political borders, positively influencing the dynamic development of the international relations between Russia, Ukraine and Hungary.

Drawing thematical parallels in the writings of Skovoroda, it should be stressed that his creations were inspired by the soul garden of Balassi, the visual world of Comenius, the sacral psalms of Muretus and the esoteric emblems of Wetstenium where behind all the evident lies the eternal truth. His creative heritage has really forever combined in itself the best features of the national cultures of Russia, Ukraine and Hungary, thus showing a brilliant example to the future European and world men of letters. From a large number of works of biographical character, first of all, it is necessary to note the essay of Kovalensky, *The Life of Grigory Skovoroda*, which came out in 1795, being based on the personal experience the author gained as Skovoroda's friend and disciple. Furthermore, it needs to mark the article of the Hungarian professor Hess de Calve, *Skovoroda – the Cynic of the Present Age*, which appeared in the Ukrainian *Vestnik* in April 1817 alongside the short memoirs of Vernet, of Swiss origin, *The Lopansky Bridge – an Except from the Reminiscences of Kharkov*, under the common title *Skovoroda, the Ukrainian Philosopher*.

Serving as a *pridvornyy ustavshchik*¹ for the Imperial Commission of Hungarian Wines under the command of General-Mayor Vishnevsky in Tokay, Skovoroda conceived a whole scale of colourful lines vividly reflecting the daily life of common Magyars so much resembling his native Malorosses. In the times of the reigns of the Russian Empresses

¹ Court regulator responsible for maintenance of domestic churches and chapels at royal palaces, as well as the order of organized church services (Rus.).

Elizabeth and Catherine II, Skovoroda became a follower of the pansophical teaching of Comenius, an ingenious Moravian educator of the seventeenth century. Summing up the results of his five-year stay in Hungary, it must not be forgotten to mention the fruitful influence exerted upon him by Hungarian culture and the intercourse with the representatives of various social layers and religious denominations. Speaking modern language, Skovoroda stepped forward as the first dissident on the thorny spiritual paths of the Russian Empire, not willing to keep step with the dark clerical dictatorship and throwing down an open challenge to the church censors by his emblematic allegory. His banned treatises as political *samizdat*² turned into an inexhaustible spring of Christian symbols and ideas, inspiring dozens of artists and narrators to enthusiastically create regardless of their ethnic origin or social background.

II. The theoretical basis and methods of the study

The literary and philosophical works of Skovoroda are traditionally divided into three main parts: the spiritual poetry of the cycle, *The Garden of Godly Songs*, the Aesopian prose of the collection, *The Kharkovian Fables*, and the exegetical treatises, dialogues and parables, including the interpretations of Muretus, Ovidius, Vergilius, Hosius, Cicero, Plutarch, Terentius, Horace and Tertullianus. Moreover, it is important to mention his private correspondence consisting of 125 letters of which 79 were addressed to Kovalensky, 14 to Pravitsky and 32 to different people, such as Yakubovich, Liashevetsky, Zhebokritsky, Maximovich, Bazilevich, Tamara, Dolgansky, Teviashov, Norov, Disky, Karpov, Zemborsky, Soshalsky, Kurdiunov, Donetsk-Zaharzhovsky and others. The biographical essay of Kovalensky, *The Life of Grigory Skovoroda*, occupies a significant place in his heritage, allowing to understand the encircling historic events and the personalities with whom he associated himself for a long time. Next to it, owing to the article, *Skovoroda – the Cynic of the Present Age*, Hess de Calve, a native of Pest-Buda and a professor of philosophy at Kharkov University, justly deserves the honourable title of the first biographer of Skovoroda in Hungary. The archival researches of the historians Rachinsky and Tardy help exactly comprehend the real reasons for the centuries-old popularity of high-quality Tokayan aszu, a specialty indispensable to the festive tables of Russian noblemen. So does the work of the Russian historian Rachinsky, *Russian Commissars in Tokay in the XVIIIth century*, published in the Russian Vestnik in 1875 on the basis of the findings made in the Central Moscow

² Unofficial reproduction of unpublished manuscripts (Rus.).

Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia. There, for the first time, was given a full description of the activities of the Imperial Commission of Hungarian Wines set up on the orders of Empress Anna Ioannovna in June 1733, which was for many years commanded by General-Mayor Fyodor Stepanovich Vishnevsky about whom Kovalensky also wrote in connection with the departure of Skovoroda abroad. Having at his disposal the unique documents and letters from the official correspondence of the Russian Empress Elizabeth and Court Commissar Vishnevsky, Rachinsky managed to shed light on the less known details, concerning the five-year stay of Skovoroda in Tokay, without which Skovoroda's biography would have remained unfinished. According to his discoveries, Empress Elizabeth, by her personal edict of 6 April 1745, dispatched Vishnevsky for the production, purchase and supply of Tokayan wine to Russia. Thanks to the military and political union between Peter I and the Transylvanian Prince Ferenc Rakoczi II, Tokayan wine acquired an unusual popularity in the highest circles of Russia about which the Sarospatakian historian Tardy accounts in detail in his study, *The History of the Tokayan Wine Trade Commission (1733-1798)*.

One of the aims of the present study is to determine the official post of Skovoroda which he might have had in the Imperial Wine Commission and who of Hungarian scholars he might have met as there is practically no exact information left in this respect. The reason for that may be the fact that the foreign trade targets were simultaneously pursued with the foreign political ones, expressed in a wide religious agitation and propaganda among the Slavonic speakers inhabiting the Habsburg Empire, that is Racs, or Serbs, and directed at their mass resettlement in the free *volosts*³ of south-western and south-eastern Russia in order to establish New-Serbia and Slav-Serbia there. The plan was successfully realized in July 1751 under the leadership of the Serbian Colonel Horvath, subsequently, a general and the first Governor of the Novoserbian Province, by a mutual agreement of the Austrian Archduchess Maria Theresa and the Russian Empress Elizabeth, jointly getting ready to declare the Seven Years' War on Germany. In hopes of a better life and obtaining fertile lands, thousands of people originating from the Balkan and Transylvanian regions moved from Austria and Hungary to the territories of the modern Kirovograd and Lugansk *oblasts*⁴ of Ukraine where their genetic descendants still live today. It is quite possible that Skovoroda might have played an active part in the preparation of this ethnic process while he was serving in the Tokayan Gardens from approximately 20 September 1745 to 8 September 1750 (by the chronological

³ Smallest administrative division of tsarist Russia (Rus.).

⁴ Designation of administrative division of modern Russia and Ukraine (Rus.).

calculations of the Ukrainian biographer Makhnovets, the author of the book, *Grigory Skovoroda*). The other reason for the absence of the authentic materials in relation to the Hungarian period of his biography may also be the fact that Empresses Elizabeth and Catherine II did not want to make public anything in connection with the mass resettlements of the subjects of Maria Theresa on the southern borders of Russia. Even now, most Ukrainian historians prefer to keep silence about this issue as it continues to be a taboo in the ethnic annals of the eighteenth-century Ukraine. At the same time, all the extant information on the stay of Skovoroda abroad is extremely important as the majority of his songs, poems, epigrams, fables, treatises, dialogues, parables and interpretations contain a hidden biographical context conditioned by some concrete geographical names and political processes. The key to his legendary secrecy cannot be found in the documentary article of Rachinsky, full of all kinds of events and the names of people directly connected to his presence in Hungary. The explanation is to be sought in the psychological analysis of the character of Skovoroda, in his excessive restraint and unconcealed inclination to mysticism which turned into his religious and idealistic philosophy.

A special role in the composing of the literary portrait of Skovoroda is played by the personal correspondence with Kovalensky, Tamara, Pravitsky, Yakubovich, Teviashov, Soshalsky and Kanorovsky-Sokha – the people who were spiritually close to him. It is also essential to mention that his exegetical treatises were strictly banned by the official censorship and could not be published until 1912 which certainly affected his biographers and critics. Kovalensky, Hess de Calve, Vernet, Snegiriov, Sreznevsky, Hizhdeu, Danilevsky, Yefimenko, Bagaley, Bonch-Bruyevich, Ern, Sumtsov, Tchizhevsky, Verhovets, Popov, Redko, Ivanyo, Makhnovets, Nezhenets, Verba, etc. are traditionally referred to as the reseachers of his life. Whole generations of Russian poets and writers, including Karamzin, Snegiriov, Sreznevsky, Gogol, Tyutchev and Tolstoy, regularly visited Austria and Hungary to view the places from where in youth Skovoroda had drawn his creative inspiration. Still today, at the Great Library of Sarospatak Calvinist College, one can find the works of Comenius, Hosius and Muretus once leafed through by Skovoroda. The activities of the Imperial Wine Commission were further on tightly linked to his personality as he continued to be interested in the fate of those with whom he had served together, dedicating to them his poetry and prose as, for example, to Falkovsky *An Interpretation from Plutarch's About the Tranquillity of the Heart*. On the other hand, his friends, and Kanorovsky-Sokha among them, began out of respect to dignify him with the name *Dunaievsky*, generously offering their financial help and influence in society.

III. The chief notions of the study

Dmitry Ivanovich Tchizhevsky, an outstanding Russian and Ukrainian philosopher, a philologist and a slavist, was the first to draw attention to a certain methodological connection between the Slobodian enlightener Skovoroda and the Moravian humanist Comenius, playing an important part in the comprehension and theoretical assessment of the literary and philosophical works of Skovoroda. The materialistic sensualism of Comenius with its three sources of cognition is **the popular “love of wisdom” of Skovoroda**, his principle of universal agreement, the unity of the world and the correlation of the opposites. According to Skovoroda, man is part of nature and ought to obey its laws, therefore everything is to be conformable, that is related to it. **Srodnost**,⁵ in his definition, is an absolute harmony of moral and aesthetical principals to which one must constantly aspire. Despite a large number of publications, Skovoroda, as a poet, a writer and a philosopher, had for many decades remained unstudied and practically unknown. It was hardly possible to define his literary style and philosophical direction to which he belonged. Tchizhevsky became the first who succeeded in it due to the scientific milieu in which he was living in the political emigration abroad. Because of the circumstances, his book could not be published in the USSR in the 1930's but he boldly, without looking back on Stalinist censors, **characterizes Skovoroda as an extremely paradoxical representative of dialectical thinking** in the sense as it existed in antiquity, determining two basic elements of his philosophy: **antithetics and the principle of circulation**, directly rising to the teachings of Plato, Plotinus, Proclus and the Fathers of the Church.

In the opinion of Tchizhevsky, the antithetics of Skovoroda is an entirely regular process, consisting of antique Platonism, mystique of the Middle Ages and German mysticism of modern times. **His antinomical style** cannot be unnoticed as it immediately attracts attention, while reading his dialogues and conversations. The same concerns **his ethics** which is no least antithetical often expressed in a humorous manner as, for example, in his Aesopian fables. Admitting **the unsystematic character of the antithetics of Skovoroda**, Tchizhevsky is confident that Skovoroda's thoughts are filled with the conviction of the antagonism of the world and real existence. **His antithetical formulae** are, in the first place, contradictions between the notions standing near but constantly opposing each other. Apart from **the dialectics of Skovoroda**, comprising antithetics and the teaching of circulation, there also

⁵ Relationship (Rus.).

occurs **symbolism** marked in a constant address to a certain environment, nature, art, religion, etc. Naturally, his symbols do not always yield to a monosemantic decoding but obviously have at their disposal a possibility of **symbolic cognition and interpretation**, directly compelling to an active search of truth. **The philosophical style of Skovoroda** is a distinctive turn from the theoretical interpretation of habitual verbal notions to the primary forms of thinking presented emblematically. As it used to be already characteristic of pre-Socratic thinkers, every single symbol of Skovoroda has not one but several meanings, often intercrossing with each other, that is why he can hardly be called “the Ukrainian Socrates”. Skovoroda symbolically interprets events of historical or biblical background, expressing them in a simple but quite pronounced form with a hidden sense of existence. The visual method of Comenius is similarly imbued with the idea of symbolism, that is the transfer of different kinds of information through a system of images and pictures which was achieved in the pictorial dictionary, *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*. His main difference from Skovoroda consists in a more exact formulation of thoughts as it served the chief aim of his Latin teaching at Sarospatak Calvinist College.

The metaphysical thoughts of Skovoroda are united by the monodualism based on antithetical thinking. Matter, in his understanding, is liable to decay, mortal, dependent and passive, therefore it needs a constant support from God outside. Speaking of **Skovoroda’s dualism**, Tchizhevsky justly thinks that he hardly differs from the German mystics, the Fathers of the Church and Philon, thus being in a close connection with the whole Christian philosophy. **The duality of the world** is, in general, one of the central elements of baroque poetry while **the antithetical interpretation of two natures by Skovoroda, a visible and an invisible one**, is very important for the understanding of his philosophical views and ideas.

The artistic legacy of Skovoroda cannot be limited by some conditionally accepted frames of ethnic character. The literary geography of his creations practically knows no borders as he belongs to the world culture, rejecting any cosmopolitanism which his pre- and post-Soviet critics often refer to. The secret of the phenomenon of Skovoroda should be sought in his complex biography stretching from the Malorossian Chernukhy to the Italian Rome. His spiritual influence occupies an important place in the Slavonic literatures of the former Soviet republics. Taking into consideration the political situation formed around Tchizhevsky, it can be easily understood why he so militantly accentuates the priority of the Ukrainian element in the writings of Skovoroda, although his assertion of the mysticity of Skovoroda’s philosophy, as a system **deriving rather from the symbolism, emblematism and interpretation of the Saint Scripture**, still raises a question. The traditional reference to

his work, *A Dream*, written down in Kavray in 1758, can hardly serve as evidence for such a categorical claim because it is based on some real experiences of the author and is only partly mystified for the sake of a greater stylistic effect. All the events in the work described are the concrete episodes of the writer's several years, involving the Petersburgian and Tokayan periods of his biography which once again stresses a special necessity of possessing the exact details of his service at the Imperial Choir and the Commission of Hungarian Wines. Ignoring or sometimes deliberately neglecting some biographical facts leads to the misunderstanding and the subsequent distortion of the true views of Skovoroda. As a poet and a writer, he was by nature **inclined to a partially mystical interpretation of the events of personal character** which were afterwards reflected in his poetical and prosaic translations.

As a logical result of the philosophical analysis of Skovoroda, Tchizhevsky proclaims him **“the most interesting Slavonic pre-Romantic”** and believes that the tradition of the development of mysticism and Platonism undoubtedly conducts to the philosophy of Romanticism. Underlining the strong and weak sides of his study, it should be mentioned that he was the first to discover the relation of Skovoroda's works to the compilation of Wetstenium, *Symbola et Emblemata Selecta*. It became a universal key to the understanding of the symbols of Skovoroda and by its means Tchizhevsky explained every single drawing and engraving, making Skovoroda's works more understandable for the modern reader. Today, *Symbola et Emblemata Selecta* is already available for everybody in a complete electronic volume. The chief analytical shortcomings of Tchizhevsky or of Bagaley, Ern and others before him consist in the authors' dispossession of full realia from the biography of Skovoroda, therefore they were not able to throw light on the important primary sources, such as *Hymni Sacri* of Muretus. For the same reason, Tchizhevsky underestimated German philosophy, more exactly Hungarian, referring to the subjective comments of Vernet in the memoirs, *The Lopansky Bridge – an Except from the Reminiscences of Kharkov*. While in the emperor's service in the Tokayan Gardens, Skovoroda more than once accompanied the Court Commissar Vishnevsky to Sarospatak where Mihaly Szatmary Paksi II, David Sarkany and Istvan F. Banya were teaching, the famous Calvinist professors, the convinced supporters of **positive rationalism** and the followers of the Sarospatakian pedagogue Janos Csecsi Jr. who combined the basic principles of the philosophy of Descartes with the theology of Coccejus in his work, *Theologica Prophetica et Symbolica*. The students with great enthusiasm studied Grotius, Spinoza, Leibniz, Rousseau and Kant, as well as read the multi-volumed edition of a new French encyclopedia. Following the example of Csecsi, future teachers and ministers on the money of Zemplenian sponsors regularly attended the universities of Franeker, Utrecht,

Amsterdam, Halle, Heidelberg, Bern, Zurich and Geneva. The exchange of views with the Calvinists radically changed the spiritual world-outlook of Skovoroda. Despite the ideological predisposition of the Ukrainian critics Shinkaruk and Ivanyo, with prejudice accusing Tchizhevsky of bourgeois nationalism and the distortion of the anticlerical views of Skovoroda, his work, *The Philosophy of Grigory Skovoroda*, further on remains actual for modern reseachers of this great philosopher of the eighteenth century, for, like a symbolic bridge, **Skovoroda connected Hungarian positive rationalism to Russian and Ukrainian Christian thinking.**

IV. The conclusions and results of the study

The influence of Skovoroda as the founder of Russian and Ukrainian Christian philosophy on the subsequent literary and philosophical thinking is so huge that it would need a separate study, being a great challenge to any researcher of this unique talent of the world culture of the eighteenth century. A whole row of literators and philosophers addressed themselves to the theme as, for example, Snegiriov, Sreznevsky, Soloviov, Tolstoy, Bagaley, Stellecky, Verkhovets, Ern and Tchizhevsky. The principal feature inseparably connecting Skovoroda to his spiritual followers, in the opinion of Ern, who developed the teaching of logos, is **strannichestvo**⁶ which in various artistic forms finds expression in the works of talented writers and poets, such as Pecherin, Dobroliubov, Tolstoy, Gogol, Soloviov, Dostoievsky, Tyutchev and many others. Similarly to Skovoroda, Pecherin, a poet, a religious thinker, a professor of Moscow University, a monk of the Catholic Redemptorist Order in Ireland and one of the first dissidents deprived of Russian citizenship, becomes the prototype of Pechorin, the protagonist of Lermontov's psychological novel, *The Hero of Our Times*. Dobroliubov, a pedagogue, a literary critic and a publicist with an extensive European knowledge, openly condemns the state educational system for servile submissiveness, absolute obedience, the suppression of personal freedom and blind subservience as killing **"the internal man"**. Tolstoy, a great novelist, at the age of 73, to the great astonishment of the whole cultural world no longer used to such phenomena, unexpectedly leaves home and goes to live among common people. Gogol, a satirist and a folklorist, in an endless search of true inspiration and spiritual oblivion, in a hurry abandons the snow-covered Petersburg and departs for the sunlit Rome. Soloviov, a philosopher, a theologian and a poet, a distant relation

⁶ Pilgrimage (Rus.).

of Skovoroda on the mother's side, declares **the Christian idea of Sophia** as a universal soul symbolizing eternal femininity in God and his design of the world. Dostoevsky, a realistic writer, sentenced to death penalty replaced by long years of hard labour and military service, appears to be like-minded with Kant in the interpretation of spiritual beauty who, like Skovoroda, discussed **internal morality**. Tyutchev, a singer of nature and the forerunner of Russian symbolists, organically unites the nineteenth century poetry to the late baroque style of Skovoroda, "the most interesting Slavonic pre-Romantic" by the conclusion of Tchizhevsky. In contrast to Western philosophical thinking, for centuries putting "the external" in the front, **Skovoroda skilfully revives the priority of "the internal"**, building up "**his teaching of heart**" on the ancient symbols and emblems borrowed from *Symbola et Emblemata Selecta*. His original **Slavonic interiorism** wins a victory over the exteriorism of rationalistic West, paving the way to Russian symbolism, the main principle of a new eastern philosophy. As more than a hundred years ago, Ern aptly remarked: "The comparisons could have been multiplied. But for any impartial reader, all the significance of the life work and thinking of Skovoroda should become already clear. Skovoroda stands at the very threshold of Russian thinking. He is the first to creatively start what afterwards ingeniously grows, multiplies and blooms. The brightness and greatness of the subsequent should not even a little hide his humble but heroic figure or take away from him just a particle of the glory and recognition that befit him. Skovoroda has a specific delight of the primitive, the charms of connecting the ingenious to the naïve and chaste constraint of cultural forms, and this delight, as an inimitable one, will forever stay with him".⁷ His literary and philosophical works colourfully are expressed by the line of Kölcsey: "You dripped the nectar from the vines of Tokay...",⁸ the author of the Hungarian National Anthem. For Skovoroda, Hungary forever remained "...my beloved Ungaria...",⁹ while he confessed about himself as the "...the son of that land...".¹⁰ His creations further on play a fundamental part in the organic integrity of our approaching of the literatures of Hungary, Russia and Ukraine both on the artistic and thematic levels.

Today's world network and means of communication already offer anybody an easy access to the complete electronic editions of Skovoroda's works. The two-volumed collection (*Grigory Skovoroda, the Complete Collection of Works in Two Volumes. Kiev: The Scientific Thought, 1973*) is particularly recommended among them as containing the archaic forms of

⁷ Эрн В., Григорий Саввич Сковорода. Жизнь и учение. Москва, 1912, 116–117.

⁸ Kölcsey F., Válogatott művei. Budapest: Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó, 1975, 68.

⁹ Сковорода Г., Повне зібрання творів: У 2-х т. Київ: Наукова думка, 1973, т.1, 279.

¹⁰ Ibid., 125.

the eighteenth century Russian and Ukrainian languages and providing an excellent material for the linguistic analysis of the language style of this original poet, writer and philosopher. Skovoroda's vocabulary abounds in the lexical richness and variety of the words of Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Polish, Hungarian, English, German, French, Italian and Turkish origin, offering practical viewpoints for studying modern Russian and Ukrainian etymology.

V. Bibliography

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VI. The publications in connection with the study

1. *В любезной моей Унгарии...* Вестник. Российский культурный центр. Венгерская ассоциация преподавателей русского языка и литературы. Будапештский университет им. Лоранда Этвеша. Современный русский язык: функционирование и проблемы преподавания. № 24. Будапешт, 2010, 146–152.
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