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ARNOLD MCMILLIN

## ASPECTS OF BELARUSIAN VERSE PARODIES

In memory of Sante Graciotti

The writing of parodies goes back to the times of the Greeks and Romans, whilst, more recently in England, for example, it is thought to begin with Geoffrey Chaucer in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Cousins of parody, such as satire, pastiche, burlesque, persiflage and travesty, will not be considered here, except for two anonymous 19<sup>th</sup>-century Belarusian pastiche-like travesties, *Ėneida navyvarat* (The *Aeneid* inside out) and *Taras na Parnase* (Taras on Parnassus) that are traditionally treated as the beginning of Belarusian parodic writing. The first of these has two Slavic forebears: Nikolaj Osipov's *Virgilieva Ėneida, vyvoročennaja na iznanku* (Virgil's *Aeneid* turned inside out, St Petersburg, 1791-96: in four parts, with a further two parts added by Aleksandr Kotel'nickij in 1802-06) and secondly a Ukrainian version by Ivan Kotljarevs'kyj published in the same city seven years later: *Ėneida na malorusskij jazyk perelicovannaja* (The *Aeneid* given a new face in the Little Russian language). The Belarusian version, however, appears to be independent of these, probably written in the first quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but certainly after 1812, since it refers to Kutuzov's pursuit of Napoleon. The question of its authorship as, indeed, of the other travesty, remains uncertain to the present day (see Kisjalëu 1978 and 2005). Similar to *Ėneida* in language and metre, but more polished in execution, *Taras na Parnase* was probably written in the early 1840s and may, just possibly, be by the same author (see Šaŭcoŭ 1971); this dream of a woodman visiting Parnassus depicts a prosperous homestead described by Taras with an ethnographer's eye for prosaic, realistic detail. Both travesties circulated widely in manuscript throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and they are

considered to be two of the most important works of the early period of modern Belarusian literature.

Most Belarusian verse parodies were written towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and five books of individual parodies appeared at this time or slightly later: Jurčanka 1974 and 1989; Skobla 1993; Zėkaŭ 1994 and 1995, and one major anthology (Kudlasevič 2001). Whilst in the West scholars had agonized over definitions of the genre (see, for example, Dentith 2000) the last of these compilations contains no analysis as such, but more general suggestions from its editor, for instance, that parodies are a sign of a literature's maturity and completeness (Kudlasevič 2001, 4). He also recalls how the great poet Anatol' Sys (1959-2005) had suggested that it was much easier to parody than to create, or, indeed, to cut corn; for Sys parodies were reverse sides of existing things or their shadows (Kudlasevič 2001: 6). Ivan Malec (b. 1951), himself a parodist, in his 'Slova paradistu' (A word to the parodist) complains that not enough work has been done on the genre, and that not all parodies are destructive (Kudlasevič 2001: 7-10).

Before going on to 20<sup>th</sup>-century parodies, it may be worth mentioning a few earlier works: the first were two anonymous satirical pieces of prose: *Pramova Mjaleški* (The speech of Mjaleška, ?1622-?32) and *List da Abuchoviča* (A Letter to Abuchovič, 1655). Centuries later an anonymous satire on a wide range of writers and critics, *Skaz pra lysuju haru* (The tale of a bare mountain) circulated widely, albeit unofficially, at the beginning of the 1970s; some four decades later its authorship was claimed by a leading cultural figure of the time, Nil Hilevič (1931-2016). Most recently has appeared a parodic book on the present authoritarian leader, *Idyjot, samy nastajaščy* (The most absolute idiot, see ISN 2000, with a second edition in 2001); for more of a similar type of satire see Anastasiya Astapova's excellent study of political folklore (Astapova 2015).

Returning to the heyday of verse parodies in Belarusian literature, they include: corrective contrasts, of which a good example is Michas' Skobla (b. 1966) on Michas' Stryhalėŭ (b. 1938) (see *infra*), and mockery of various weaknesses and inadequacies, as well as contradiction or humorous exaggeration of the poets' ideas and creative endeavours (*passim*). Additional characteristic Belarusian

themes include the writing of verse and the ambition of poets to reach Parnassus,<sup>1</sup> often with advice from parodists that their victims should consider giving up writing altogether, and related to this the suggestion that there are too many ‘ordinary’ poets. Particularly notable are examples of sexism in an essentially patriarchal society, sometimes expressed directly but more often through the portrayal of women as victims, as well as being helpmates or hindrances to their male partners; the concept of parasitism and the production of food is also alive in a country that until relatively recently was essentially agricultural. Minor themes include sacrilege, shopping and clothes (the latter two not mentioned in this article).

To Skobla, as has been mentioned, belongs an excellent satire on a rather absurd poem by Michas’ Stryhalëŭ, *Aleja Anny Kern* (The avenue of Anna Kern), in which he talks about wandering down a lime avenue hoping to meet Puškin’s most famous lover ‘again’, the subject of *Ja pomnju čudnoe mgnovenie* (I remember a wondrous moment). Apart from the chronological and other disparities between Puškin and Stryhalëŭ, the latter seems ignorant of the flora of Petersburg, when he calls the place of his imagined meeting a lime avenue. The parodist suggests that the lovesick poet pretends that he wrote Puškin’s famous line and that he asks Anna why she needs an Arab, but at the end she crushes him with a pun:

Не трэба ліпавых алей  
І вершаў ліпавых таксама!<sup>2</sup> (Skobla 1993: 58)

Another strange poem is by Viktor Šnip (b. 1960), of which the very first line must seem absurd, “U kavjarni pachne kavaj...” (“In a coffee shop it smells of coffee...”); in it the poet expresses his discomfort in what he feels to be alien surroundings:

У кавярні пахне кавай,  
У кавярні духата.  
Ля сталоў дубовай лавы

(<sup>1</sup>) Perhaps the obsession with Parnassus, which will appear in some of the examples below, is linked to the anonymous 19<sup>th</sup>-century, work, but it should be noted that the best Belarusian poets like Ryhor Baradulin (1935-2014), Uladzimir Njakljaeŭ (b. 1946) and Ales’ Razanaŭ (1947-2021) do not use this trope.

(<sup>2</sup>) “I don’t need lime avenues, nor fake poems either!”.

А на лавах блятната.  
 Мне вяскому няёмка,  
 Нават страшна тут стаяць.  
 Нешта смокнуць па саломках  
 На мяне праз дым глядзяць.  
 А купляю шклянку чаю.  
 Чай, як брудная вада.  
 Ды на гэта не зважаю  
 І стаю як сірата.  
 А ў кавярні пахне кавай,  
 А ў кавярні духата.  
 Месца мне няма на лавах,  
 Толькі гэта не бяда.  
 Мне б сюды век не заходзіць,  
 Толькі нейкі чорт занёс.  
 Знаю, што кавярні ў модзе,  
 А да іх – не дарос.  
 Дарастаць жа не імкнуся,  
 Мне галоўнае – было б  
 Вольна жыць у Беларусі,  
 Слова роднае жыло б.  
 Замкі, храмы і курганні.  
 Не аддаць палын-траве.  
 Слава Богу – не у кавярнях  
 Беларусь жыве.<sup>3</sup> (Šnip 1989: 59)

Skobla's parody is ironically entitled *Prys' viaščen'ne dnju nezaležnas'ci* (Dedication to Independence Day) and describes the poet as equally uncomfortable in a cafe where there is drink, free food and

(<sup>3</sup>) "In a coffee shop it smells of coffee, in a coffee shop it is stuffy. Near the tables are oak benches, and there is a swamp on the benches. As a country boy I feel awkward, it is even frightening to stand here. They are sucking something through straws, they are looking at me through the smoke. I buy a glass of tea. The tea is like dirty water. But I do not pay attention to that and stand like an orphan. And in the coffee shop it smells of coffee and in the coffee shop it is stuffy. There is no room on the benches, but that is no misfortune. I would not come here for centuries, but some devil brought me in. I know that coffee shops are in fashion, but I have not grown up enough for them. I am not striving to grow sufficiently. For me the main thing is to live freely in Belarus, that our native language should live. Castles, churches, burial mounds I would not give up for any old rubbish. Thank God that Belarus does not live in coffee houses".

pop music, where he does not indulge, disapproving of the drunken poets there. Here are two stanzas from the middle of the parody:

Лезуць п'яныя паэты,  
На халяву каб  
Выпіць з ёй за свята гэта,  
Толькі я аслаб...

Лёг зняможана пад лаўку,  
Выціраю пыл.  
Нат на дробную халяўку  
Не хапіла сіл.<sup>4</sup> (Skobla 1993: 61)

As has been mentioned, Belarus is a deeply patriarchal country, where old-fashioned attitudes to women are prevalent and also evident in some of the poems and parodies here. This unpleasant phenomenon has been vigorously resisted in recent years by, amongst others, the very talented poet Vol'ha Hapeeva b. 1982) whose *Pjasočny matyl'* (The sand butterfly) is dedicated to male and female feminists (Hapeeva 2003: 13); her most recent play *Tam* (There) ends with a grossly explicit speech by the arrogant Administrator against the women who have resisted his sexual advances:

Прырода жанчын – клапаціцца пра іншых, – так-так, гэта не я прыдумаў, гэта нават па тэлевізіі кажуць. Таму вось буфетчыца, прыбіральшчыца, нянецка, медсястра – гэта і ёсць сапраўдныя заняtki для сапраўдных жанчын. Яы ПА ПРЫРОДЗЕ ім суджаныя, а не таму, што мужчыны не хочуць рабіць гэтую брудную, нізкаплатную, нікім не паважаную, бесперспектыўную працу.<sup>5</sup> (Hapeeva 2016: 226)

Finally in these examples of Hapeeva's feminism are two lines from a poem *Tak dziŭna byvae časam...* (It is sometimes so amazing...):

(<sup>4</sup>) “Drunken poets grab the free stuff in order to drink to this holiday, I alone have weakened... I lie down exhausted under the counter and wipe off the dust. I do not even have the strength for a tiny bit of the free goodies”.

(<sup>5</sup>) “It is the nature of women to look after others – yes, yes, I did not think that up, they even say it on television. Thus that assistant in a snack bar, cleaning woman, nanny, medical sister – those are the real occupations for real women. They are destined to this BY NATURE, and not because men do not want to do this dirty, badly paid work that is respected by nobody and without any prospects”.

а потым бежыце ў басейн  
каб разам утапіць несправядлівасць патрыяхатначна свету<sup>6</sup> (На-  
реева 2017, 19)

Although being a feminist in such a society is a lonely position, На-  
реева is not alone. Also well worth mentioning, for example, is the  
young Spanish exophonic writer Ángela Espinosa Ruiz (b. 1993).  
Her first book was a samizdat e-book, *Pamjác' pra buduščynju* (Me-  
mory of the future, 2015), quickly followed by another book, *Rajal'  
lja mora* (A piano on the seashore, 2015). In the first of these a verse  
about lack of freedom *Marš peramohi* (Victory march) appears to  
end with a line hinting at the difficulties of feminism: “Вольнасці і  
на кухні ня будзе” (“And there won’t be any freedom in the kitchen  
either”, Ruiz 2015: 6). From the same book is *Njavesta* (The young  
girl), each line of which is: “Бяжы, дзяўчына, ўцякай” (“Run, girl,  
escape”); the reasons for fleeing include people envious of her blue  
blouse, a husband, death and the sea; delay will mean it will be too  
late and end in tears (Ppb, 25).

The theme of women’s role in Belarusian parodies may be introduced  
by a poet, Ales’ Zvonak (1907-1996), writing long before the age of  
feminism. A parody *Antypaėtésija* (A verse against poetesses) by A-  
natol’ Zékaŭ (b. 1955) based on two uncompromising lines by the  
earlier poet does not reject their thought but only suggests that Zvo-  
nak would like, so to speak, to defect:

Не, на Парнас больш не палезу я –  
Занадта многа там багiнь...<sup>7</sup> (Zékaŭ 1994: 31)

\*

Не, на Парнас я не палезу,  
Не завярну ў той бок свой след.  
Туды больш лезуць паэтэсы,

(<sup>6</sup>) “and then run to the swimming pool in order to together drown the injustice  
of the patriarchal world”. For more detail about the work of this poet see McMillin  
2019: 107-24.

(<sup>7</sup>) “No, I shall not clamber onto Parnassus any more – there are too many god-  
desses there...”.



А я ўсяго, на жаль, паэт.

Як шмат іх, маладых-зялёных,  
 Рыфмапрывабных паэтэс!  
 А можа й я Алеся Звонак,  
 А аніякі не Алесь?<sup>8</sup> (Zëkaŭ 1994: 31)

Leŭ Maroz (b. 1938), being over thirty, in *Ja stary, Maryja...* (I am old, Maryja...) writes to his girlfriend that she should dream of someone younger and better. Zëkaŭ's parody, *Ne s'ni mjane, Maryja...* (Don't dream of me, Maryja) ends with a clear explanation of the problem:

Не пытай, у чым прычына,  
 Бо ўсё знаеш без мяне ты:  
 Быў бы й я ого-мужчына –  
 Толькі стаў, на жаль, паэтам.<sup>9</sup> (Kudlasevič 2001: 214)

Leanid Dran'ko-Majsjuk (b. 1957) in *Pryhožaja žančyna pobač* (A beautiful woman alongside), despite his scorn for *o r d i n a r y* poets, and reputation as something of a Lothario, is too timid to make advances to the attractive woman beside him, imagining that the glamorous Russian poet Sergej Esenin (1895-1925) would have been bolder [although the latter is widely thought to have been bisexual – АМсМ] (Dran'ko-Majsiuk 1990: 86), but Malec in *Pobač z žančynaj* (Alongside a woman) suggests that he is held back by fear of AIDS (Kudlasevič 2001: 126). Raman Tarmola-Mirski (1936-2011) in a rather subservient poem, *Žančyna* (Woman), tells how he was ordered by his wife to become a poet (Tarmola-Mirski 1974: 32), but in the parody by Skobla *Žorstki raman-s* (A harsh romance) his success with young female readers brings dire consequences, including perhaps divorce (Skobla 1993: 59). Michas' Bašlakoŭ (b. 1951) believes he has not written the best words, and not spoken the best things to his beloved, and as a result someone else has run off

(<sup>8</sup>) “No, I shall not clamber onto Parnassus any more, I shall not turn my steps in that direction. It is mostly poetesses that clamber there, and I, regrettably, am just a poet. How many of them there are, young and green, poetesses of attractive rhymes! And perhaps I am Alice Zvonak and no way Ales’?”

(<sup>9</sup>) “Don't ask about the reason, for you know everything without my telling you: I would be a splendid man, but unfortunately became a poet”.

with her – if only he could have written and spoken better (Bašlakoŭ 1987: 50). Zékaŭ's parody, *Dulja dlja razjavy* (A rude gesture for a scatterbrain), attributes his literary ambitions to failure in love:

Пакуль я прагнуў славы,  
Начамі крэмзаў вершы,  
Хтось ад мяне, разявы,  
Дзяўчат пазманьваў лепшых.

Пакуль карпеў над кніжкай  
І на Парнас вырульваў,  
Дзяўчаты замуж вышлі  
Мне паказаўшы дулю.

Ўміг апусцела сэрца,  
І ўжо адно турбуе:  
Няўжо і ў выдавецтве  
Мяне чакае дуля?<sup>10</sup> (Zékaŭ 1994: 10)

Bašlakoŭ's concern about his publishers and status is far from untypical of Belarusian parodies. Sometimes poets and sometimes their parodists use classical or Russian poets as an often ridiculous symbol of their status-seeking. The already mentioned Leŭ Maroz feels closeness to Kupala, as he comes from the same area:

І з Купалавай радні,  
І гэтым ганаруся.  
[...]  
Заўжды ў паэзіі сваёй  
Я дздзьку Янку адчуваю.<sup>11</sup> (Maroz 1980: 12)

In Skobla's parody they drink beer and write poems together, to such an extent that people cannot distinguish where Kupala is and where Maroz. Eventually Kupala asks him to "finish off" one of his weakest poems, *Nad rakoŭ Arésaj* (On the river Aresaj, 1933), and also

(<sup>10</sup>) "Whilst I longed for fame, scribbling poems at night, somebody enticed the best girls away from me, scatterbrain that I am. Whilst I sweated over a book, and steered myself towards Parnassus, the girls got married, and made a rude sign at me. Immediately my heart lost its passion, and only one thing worried me: in the editorial office does a rude sign really await me?"

(<sup>11</sup>) "I belong to Kupala's kinsfolk and am very proud of that. [...] In my poetry I always sense Uncle Janka".

says that a far better poem *Mahila l'va* (The lion's grave, 1913) was dedicated to him.

Leanid Halubovič (b. 1950) is a serious writer who in *Kali z dušy spadae bytu mlos'c'* (When the nausea of everyday life falls from my soul) describes sitting in his study and imagining that he sees his reflection in writers like Homer, Shakespeare, Petrarch and Kupala. Skobla's parody is of his relationship with the "greats"; here two lines from the poem are followed by two stanzas of the parody:

А мне здаецца, тут я – вечны госць,  
Дзе кніжкі ўсе – жыцця майго люстэркі.<sup>12</sup> (Halubovič 1994: 17)

\*

Адрэчваю няўпэўненасць і жаль  
Ці мала мы, паэты, падрыжалі?  
Мой кожны верш – гісторыя, скрыжаль,  
Я й сам ўпісаны ў скрыжаль!

Мне з тых часоў ніколі не забыць  
Яшчэ ледзь-ледзь настроіў сваю ліру,  
А ўжо класічным: *быць або не быць*  
Я дапамог гаротнаму Шэкспіру.<sup>13</sup> (Skobla 1993: 16)

Incidentally, in another poem, *Štrychi da sanetaŭ Šekspira* (Lines on the Sonnets of Shakespeare) Halubovič suggests, somewhat startlingly, that the drama of life is unsuitable for the stage (Halubovič 1994: 101).

Before returning to delusional ambition, it is worth recalling that even in a society that denied any worth to religion, the feeling of sacrilege appears to have survived. A poem by Kastus' Žuk (b. 1954), *U kožnaha paëta vorah ěs'c'...* (Every poet has an enemy...), was parodied twice. Firstly, the indignant and provocative poem:

(<sup>12</sup>) "And it seems to me that here I am an eternal guest, where all the books are mirrors of my life".

(<sup>13</sup>) "I push aside uncertainty and pity, did we poets really tremble so little? Each of my poems is a history, a tablet, and I myself am eternally inscribed in the annals! [...] Since that time I shall never forget how I had barely tuned my lyre, and with the already classical "To be or not to be" I helped the hapless Shakespeare".

У кожнага паэта вораг ёсць.  
 І хоць паэт не йдзе на кампрамісы,  
 Але паэт таіць не будзе злосць  
 Ні за падман, ні за паклёп наўмысны.

Бо ёсць святое слова на зямлі,  
 Якому ні на міг не здрадзіць,  
 Якое – не ўтапіць і не спаліць,  
 Імя якому пажыццёва – Праўда.

І я паклёўся з гэтым словам жыць.  
 А ворагі? Няхай ім будзе пуста!  
 Мяне распяць нялёгка на крыжы,  
 Я – чалавек, а не якісь Ісус там.<sup>14</sup> (Žuk 1988: 73)

The first parody, by Skobla, depicts Žuk as hastening to Golgotha, having abandoned his career as a poet, and after some more pseudo-biblical references, being disappointed at a crown of thorns rather than of laurels, and hoping to be anathematized like Tolstoj (Skobla 1993: 24-25). The second parody belongs to Anatol' Kudlasevič (b. 1961), showing him asserting his poetic identity, and pulling up his underpants before apologizing to Christ for his words, but, despite all of this, his wife mocks him as Little beetle-bone (Kudlasevič 2001: 137-38).

Are there too many poets? Ales' Harun (pseudonym of Aljaksandr Prušynski, 1887-1920) in his collection *Matčyn dar* (A mother's gift, 1918) had declared that "sam narod – pias'njar" ("the nation itself is a bard"), but several later writers have suggested that there are too many Belarusian poets. Kudlasevič took two strange lines from Anatol' Astrėjka (1911-1978), calling his parody *Bjaro-zavaja kaša* (Birch porridge). The original lines were:

Чаму у нас паэтаў, як бяроз,

(<sup>14</sup>) "Every poet has an enemy. And although the poet does not make compromises, but the poet will not hide his anger, neither at deceit, nor at deliberate slander. For there is a sacred word on the earth, which cannot be betrayed for a moment, which can neither be drowned nor burned, the eternal name of which is Truth. And I have vowed to live by this word. And my enemies? To hell with them! It is not easy to crucify me on a cross, I am a man, and not some Jesus or other".

Чаму у нас бяроз, нібы паэтаў?<sup>15</sup> (Kudlasevič 2001: 46)

The parodist's answer is unequivocal:

Шмат пішут вершаў, шмат здаецца ў друк –  
Таму у нас бяроз, нібы паэтаў...<sup>16</sup> (Kudlasevič 2001: 46)

A more common image for this phenomenon is given by Viktor Šymuk (1933-1988):

Як грыбоў у леташнюю восень  
Дужа шмат паэтаў развялося...<sup>17</sup> (Zëkaŭ 1994: 71)

In his parody, *Valtužnja kalja Parnasa* (A scrum around Parnassus), Zëkaŭ suggests that all poets dream of Parnassus and push towards it every day, going on to name a quantity of such poets, and ending with another couplet:

Як бы усё ж жылося лёгка,  
Каб пісаў адзін Шымук!<sup>18</sup> (Zëkaŭ 1994: 71)

Leanid Dajneka (1940-2019) believes he was famous in an earlier age, and does not relish having to start striving for Parnassus over again (Zëkaŭ 1994: 22). Stryhalëŭ, still dreaming of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in a poem *Lermantaŭ* (Lermontov), thinks that he would have been a real poet if he had been killed in a duel (Stryhalëŭ 1974: 38). Zëkaŭ's parody suggests that the end of duelling has led to the remaining of many rotten poets (Zëkaŭ 1994: 60).

Two poems concern the Russian Symbolist Aleksandr Blok: Mikola Fedzjukovič (1943-1997) writes a heartfelt verse, "Mne Blok prys'niŭsja" ("I dreamed of Blok"), imagining him lost and bored in a crowd, weighed down with social concerns (Fedzjukovič 1976: 33). In Zëkaŭ's parody *Udvuch z Blokam* (Together with Blok) he suddenly recognizes the Belarusian, and the two walk along with, as the latter suggests, nobody knowing which was which (Zëkaŭ 1994:

(<sup>15</sup>) "Why do we have poets like birch trees, why do we have birch trees just like poets?"

(<sup>16</sup>) "They write many poems, much is given to print – that is why we have birch trees, just like poets..."

(<sup>17</sup>) "Like mushrooms last autumn, a huge number of poets has multiplied..."

(<sup>18</sup>) "How much easier life would be, if it were only Šymuk that wrote!"

64). A better parody, though unprovoked, is on the short-lived and very talented Janina Janiščyc (1944-1988), who writes in *Vjasna i Blok* (Spring and Blok) of the Russian reading to her, thus relieving her weariness (Janiščyc 1978: 80). Zėkaŭ's parody *Razmova z Blokam* (A conversation with Blok) depicts her as thinking of herself as an equal classic, and him reading to her and consulting her about the quality of his writing. Here is the second part of the parody:

Чытаў адной, не пры народзе.  
 Зрэдзьчас спыніўся і тады  
 Пытаў звычайна:  
 – А ці пойдзе?  
 І я ківала:  
 – Слабавата.  
 Ты, Сашка, тут падумай лепш.  
 І ён глядзеў, бы вінаваты,  
 А потым ціха крэсліў верш.  
  
 Сачыла я за Блокам збоку,  
 Калі карпеў над вершам Блок,  
 І папраўляла вершы Блоку  
 І знала:  
 З Блока будзе толк!<sup>19</sup> (Kudlasevič 2001: 384)

Two very different poets illustrate heartfelt amorous verse that was parodied. One of the best-known love poems of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century belongs to Raisa Baravikova (b. 1947): *Lja krynicy bruistae vjane...* (There fades beside a vigorous spring...), written with a passion that is not found everywhere in Belarusian verse (Baravikova 1981: 66). Skobla's parody, *Ljasnoe kachan'ne* (Forest love) of which this is the first stanza somehow brings the atmosphere down to earth:

Пах табакі ці водар капусны  
 не прытушаць шалёны імпэт

(<sup>19</sup>) “He read them to me alone, not to the public. Occasionally he would stop and then usually ask, “Will it do?”, and I would nod and say: “Not bad...” And sometimes I would say, “Rather weak. Think harder, Alex”. And he would look guilty, and later would quietly cross out the poem. I watched Blok from the side when he was working hard on a poem, and I would correct Blok's poems and I knew: something good will come of Blok!”.

хоць мае паэтычныя вусны  
захмялець не паспелі як след.<sup>20</sup> (Skobla 1993: 6)

Henadz' Buraŭkin (1936-2014) behaved with caution and loyalty in the Soviet era, but blossomed when it came to an end. Two parodies of his poems are both about his love for a far younger woman and the problems it brings. *Ja ne bajusja...* (I am not afraid...) is mainly about his indifference to the criticism of others, and the way they try to end his struggle to maintain a relationship with her. Here are its closing lines:

Я з табою,  
як вольная птушка,  
крылаты,  
захмялелы ад шчасця,  
ад шчасця цвярозы.

Я з табою  
багааты,  
разумны,  
харошы...  
Дык няўжо ты дазволіш,  
Каб стаў я нічым  
Без цябе?<sup>21</sup> (Buraŭkin 1978: 51-52)

Malec's parody, *Kaho bajacca* (Who is there to be afraid of) uses a huge number of long, sometimes imaginary, words to suggest that Buraŭkin's rival is also a poet, but that neither of them has written a poem for a week. In the other poem, *Neznakomka* (The unknown girl) Buraŭkin meets a pretty young woman on a country path and feels physical attraction, although he realizes that to stop her would be awkward, and yet he would regret letting her go without speaking. For him it is an unwished-for disaster (Buraŭkin 1986: 244). The parody by Heorhij Jurčanka (1928-2014), *Hvaltoŭnaja sustrěča* (A violent meeting), makes fun of his going along a path with some

(<sup>20</sup>) "The smell of tobacco or the odour of cabbage do not dampen the crazed impulse. But my poetic lips did not become intoxicated as quickly as they should".

(<sup>21</sup>) "With you I am like a free bird, winged, intoxicated with happiness, sober with happiness. With you I am rich, wise, good... So will you really allow me to become nothing without you?".

of his poems and becoming obsessed by the mini-skirt and mini-blouse of the girl, and, when they meet again, she makes him kneel down before her. One stanza of the parody will suffice to illustrate the elderly poet's problem:

З тых пор яна штоноч сніцца,  
 Я часта сам сабе не рад.  
 У калчане міні-спадніцы  
 Навек заблытаўся пагляд.<sup>22</sup> (Kudlasevič 2001: 73-74)

Very different is the quasi-classical love illustrated in a poem by Mikola Maljaŭka (b. 1941), *Večny jablyk* (The eternal apple), describing the relationship of a modern Adam and Eve that ends in bliss, but Skobla's witty parody of it, *Neparazumelisja* (A failure of understanding) has a quite different conclusion. Here are the last lines:

– Саграшым давай, Адам!  
 Стала радасна і мляўка...  
 Ева яблыкі зграбла:  
 – Ой, прабачце, вы Маляўка?  
 Я не з вашага рабра?...  
 Яблык кінула пачаты,  
 Развярэдзіла душу.  
 З той пары я (эх, дзяўчаты!...)  
 Толькі рыфмамі грашу!<sup>23</sup> (Skobla 1993: 39)

The themes of food and parasitism are linked. The latter topic is popular with parodists in the case of poets who buy pre-prepared food rather than making it themselves on the land, or when poets visiting the country expect not only to be fed but also to bring back to the city bags full of produce. Zékaŭ's parody of *Pažezija* (Poetry)

(<sup>22</sup>) “Since then I dream, and am often not pleased with myself. In the quiver of the mini-skirt my gaze is lost forever”.

(<sup>23</sup>) “‘Come on, let's sin, Adam!’ It became joyful and relaxed... Eve gathered the apples: ‘Oh, forgive me, are you Maliaŭka? Am I not from your rib?...’ She threw away the apple she had started, maddening my soul. From that time (oh, you young girls!...) I only sin with my rhymes!”.



by Viktor Rakaŭ (1935-2000) is for eating ready-made products, and ends in a typically Belarusian way:

Карове сена не кашу –  
 Ёсць малако ў пакетах.  
 Адно што – вершы я пішу.  
 Закінуць бы і гэта!<sup>24</sup> (Zëkaŭ 1994: 57)

More surprisingly, in the first poem of arch-parodist Zëkaŭ's own book of verse, *Bol' sumlen'nja* (The pain of conscience, 1989) the same confession of parasitism seems to be made, for which Michas' Paz'njakoŭ (b. 1951) criticizes him mercilessly in *Ne kašu, ne seju* (I neither reap nor sow) (Paz'njakoŭ 1991: 142). The related theme of food is at the fore in Zëkaŭ's parody, *Barternaja zdzelka* (A bartering deal), of Žuk's claim that all his thoughts are flying over the horizon and that there are too many of them to send to his friend in an envelope, so that he had better bring them himself, albeit covered in dust (Žuk 1991: 175). The last stanza of Zëkaŭ's parody implies that the poet hopes to exchange the thoughts in his bag for *sala*, a favourite Belarusian snack:

Не, лепш складу я думкі ў сумку  
 І адвяза; трымай іх брат!  
 Магчыма, што ўзамен на думкі  
 Ён пакладзе мне сала шмат...<sup>25</sup> (Zëkaŭ 1994: 27)

A poem by the loyal and very self-satisfied poet Henadz' Paškoŭ (b. 1948) describes a collective farm in a long poem, *As'nežycy* (The village of As'nežycy):

На ферме, брат, парадак!  
 Паказчык таму яркі –  
 глядзі,  
 якія гладкія цялушкі...  
 і даяркі!<sup>26</sup> (Paškoŭ 1998: 33)

(<sup>24</sup>) "I do not cut hay for the cow – there is milk in packets. One thing I do is write poems. I should give that up as well".

(<sup>25</sup>) "No, I had better put my thoughts in a bag and take them there; here you are, brother! Perhaps in exchange for the thoughts, he will put in plenty of lard...".

(<sup>26</sup>) "There is good order on the farm, brother! The sign of that is clear. Look how plump the calves are... and the milkmaids!".

Šymuk's parody, *Aladki z mačankaj* (Fritters with a meat dip) comments not only on the farm but on Paškoŭ's writing:

Зноў дома на аладкі я  
 З мачанкаю налёг,  
 Таму такі і і гладкі я  
 Таму пішу, дальбог!<sup>27</sup> (Kudlasevič 2001: 250)

Before leaving Paškoŭ, here are three lines of an extraordinarily arrogant verse:

Я – аршысты  
 крылаты,  
 а душой малады.<sup>28</sup> (Paškoŭ 1981: 8)

The chorus is “Трэба жыць!” (“I must live!”).

A short parody by Jurčanka has the telling title *Buski ŭ vuški* (Kisses into moustaches), envisaging awkward intimacy for a long time to come (Jurčanka 1989: 170-71).

There are, unsurprisingly, many poems and parodies about alcohol and drinking. After all, in 2014 the World Health Organization declared Belarus top of the world for alcohol consumption. Anatol' Vjarcinski (b. 1931) writes eloquently about this problem in *Praces vydalen'nja alkalholju* (The process of getting rid of alcohol) (Vjarcinski 1981: 326), a poem that was parodied by Zėkaŭ, who suggests that this process is harder than writing poetry (Kudlasevič 2001: 90). A modest poem by Ales' Pis'mjankoŭ (b. 1957), *Na samom dne maěj samoty* (At the greatest depth of my loneliness) about drink being no cure for loneliness, is parodied by Zėkaŭ as *Vinnaja ělehija* (A vinous elegy), as an epic of alcoholism (Zėkaŭ 1995: 49-50). Valjancina Akolava (b. 1954) is taken to task by Malec in *Da-žyc' da pazaŭčora* (To live until the day before yesterday) for two enthusiastic lines about beer:

Час такі і век такі,  
 Піце піва, мужькі!<sup>29</sup> (Kudlasevič 2001: 37)

(<sup>27</sup>) “Home again I fell on fritters with a meat dip, that is why I am so plump and that is why I write, please God!”.

(<sup>28</sup>) “I am prickly, winged, and with a young soul”.

(<sup>29</sup>) “It's such a time and such an age, drink beer, guys!”.

Malec's parody adopts a high moral tone:

Каб Беларусь мы ўшчэнт не прапілі,  
Нас песнямі пра піва не цвялі!<sup>30</sup> (Kudlasevič 2001: 38)

Pavel Marcinovič (1954-2017) writes in *S'neh ihrysty...* (The sparkling snow...) that he can get drunk on water and snow (Marcinovič 1977: 38), but when in Zėkaŭ's parody he tumbles into a snowdrift, he hears from bystanders:

Гэта ж трэба набрацца,  
А яшчэ ж нібы й паэт.<sup>31</sup> (Kudlasevič 2001: 220-221)

As has been mentioned, parodists often suggest that poets should simply give up, and several poets themselves seem to have doubts about their calling. For instance, the verse “Čamu ne staŭ ja les'nikom...” (“Why did I not become a forester...”) by Aljaksej Pysin (1920-1981), produced a parody in which Jurčanka seems to apportion blame for this uncomfortable dilemma, but offers no solution, such as abandoning writing. By contrast, the poem *Drovy* (Logs) by Mikola Kusjankou (1935-2004) about vigorously chopping wood was parodied by Zėkaŭ who suggests in *Lės-blytanik* (A muddled fate) that he should continue doing precisely that:

Пара, відаць, кідаць пяро  
І зноў сякеру ў рукі браць.<sup>32</sup> (Zėkaŭ 1995: 36)

A number of Belarusian poets have two professions. Artur Vol'ski (1924-2002), for instance, was half in the theatre and half a poet. Here are four lines from his poem *Uzrost* (Age):

І сэрца не рыпіць,  
І не займае дых,  
Я не адзін стары,  
Я двое маладых.<sup>33</sup> (Vol'ski 1985: 117)

(<sup>30</sup>) “In order that Belarus be not completely ruined by drink, don't tease us with songs about beer!”.

(<sup>31</sup>) “Did you have to get a skinful, especially as you are supposed to be a poet”.

(<sup>32</sup>) “It is clearly time to abandon the pen and again take up an axe”.

(<sup>33</sup>) “And my heart does not ache, and I do not lose breath, I am not one old man but two young ones”.

Zékaŭ's parody, *Razdvoennae žyc'cě* (A divided life) points out the double profession, ending somewhat unsympathetically:

Драматург я напалову,  
Напалову я паэт  
[...]  
Што рабіць мне з галавою,  
Бо адна ж яна ў мяне.<sup>34</sup> (Kudlasevič 2001: 86)

Like Vol'ski, Pjatro Laman (b. 1949) was strongly connected with the theatre. Skobla notes that as an actor he had played in hundreds of roles, but had produced only three books of poems (Skobla 2003: 629). In his satire, *Téatral'na-paétyčny tupik* (A theatrical-poetic dead-end), the parodist picks up on Laman's depiction of a flood, which may or may not be a flood of inspiration, and suggests that he was sacked for suggesting that the director had never seen such an inundation, so that with a heavy heart and dull head, he decides to become a poet (Skobla 1993: 32).

Aleh Lojka (1931-2018) has been parodied many times and for several things, including drink, women and money. In one poem he performs a drinking song with a chorus of "Lavi imhnen'ne!" ("Capture the moment!"). Zékaŭ takes up this theme in his parody, beginning with Lojka's dichotomous situation:

Хто я: прафесар ці паэт?  
Абы рублі былі ў кішэнях,  
З краямі палівай дацэнт, –  
Лаві імгненне!<sup>35</sup> (Zékaŭ 1994: 36)

Skobla in his parody *Sakrèt pospechu* (The secret of success) takes four lines as his basis, and ends on the same note as Zékaŭ:

Ізноў бянтэжуся, нямею,  
Хаваю ад другіх тугу,  
Што анічога я не ўмею,  
Што анічога не магу<sup>36</sup> (Skobla 1993: 33)

(<sup>34</sup>) "I am half a dramatist, I am half a poet [...] What shall I do with my head, for I only have one".

(<sup>35</sup>) "Who am I: a professor or a poet? Just so long as roubles are in my pockets. Pour to the brim, young colleague – capture the moment!".

(<sup>36</sup>) "Again I am anxious, becoming dumb I hide from others my sadness that I

\*

Ды з роднай песняй заручоны,  
 Дальбог, не знацьму іншых бед,  
 Бо між паэтаў я – вучоны,  
 А між вучоных я паэт!<sup>37</sup> (Skobla 1993: 34)

The themes of prosody and poetry itself are far from rare in Belarusian parodies, one example being the following two lines by Zékaŭ parodying a poem by Vera Vjarba (1942-2012) about her house becoming prosaic after she had been left by her man:

Дах абваліўся паэтычны –  
 І праязічны стаў наш дом.<sup>38</sup> (Kudlasevič 2001: 88)

*Sučasnyja rytmy* (Contemporary rhythms) by Uladzimir Skarynkin (b. 1939) drew a parody *Veršalabirynty* (Poetic labyrinths) from Zékaŭ. Here are the first 8 lines of the original followed by the first 4 of the parody:

Сучасныя рытмы –  
 Алгарытмы.  
 Сучасныя рыфмы –  
 Лагарыфмы.  
 Што не радок –  
 Гіпербала.  
 Што не радок –  
 Парабала.<sup>39</sup> (Zékaŭ 1994: 59)

\*

Спрадвечныя рытмы –  
 Хіба гэты рытмы?  
 Спрадвечныя рыфмы –  
 Няўжо гэты рыфмы?<sup>40</sup> (Zékaŭ 1994: 59)

do not know how to do anything, that I cannot do a thing”.

(<sup>37</sup>) “But I am wedded to my native song. Please God I may not encounter other misfortunes, for among poets I am a scholar, and among scholars I am a poet!”.

(<sup>38</sup>) “Our poetic roof collapsed – and our house became prosaic”.

(<sup>39</sup>) “Contemporary rhythms are algorithms. Contemporary rhymes are logarithms. Every line is a hyperbole. Every line is a parabola”.

(<sup>40</sup>) “Ancient rhythms – are they rhythms? Ancient rhymes – are they really rhymes?”.

Casual references to prosody are not rare in Belarusian poetry and Uladzimir Njakl'jaeŭ (b. 1946) is no exception. Prose writer and politician as well as poet. Author of probably the best poetry collection of the last century, *Prošča* (Lake Prošča, 1996); he has been parodied at least four times but only for his minor works. An early poem of apparent self-criticism, *Char'ei* (Trochees) (Njakl'jaeŭ 1987: 88) is gleefully taken up by Zëkaŭ who in *Aŭtarëcenzija* (Self-reference) advises the poet to give up writing and sell cassettes of his songs in a market (Kudlasevič 2001a: 235). Another early poem of devoted love, *Ljudmila* (To Ljudmila) (Njakl'jaeŭ 1979: 7-8) is parodied by Jurčanka as *Hulkija skoki* (Resounding dance steps) in a quite different metre; it seems, moreover, to have little to do with the content of Njakl'jaeŭ's verse, perhaps being mainly intended to refer to the poet's travels, which included prolonged visits to Poland and Finland. Perhaps the best of Jurčanka's parodies of Njakl'jaeŭ takes three excerpts from three of his works in *S'mech skvoz' s'lëzy* (Laughter through tears).

Finally, Ales' Razanaŭ (1947-2021) was an innovative and important but easily misunderstood poet about whose work there are two excellent monographs (Kis'licyna 1997 and Štejner 2010). He has also attracted parodists by the apparent illogicality of some of his unconventional thinking. Never content to remain in one place this poet has pioneered a number of new genres; the first example of parodying Razanaŭ here is by Jurčanka in *U netrach nepas'cihlas'ci* (In the bowels of inaccessibility) of which these are the last 7 lines:

Дзе вызнак?  
 Дзе працяг? –  
 Нашто гадаць:  
 І напачатку, і ў канцы – балота.  
 Мне любя тлом сябе –  
                                   таго! –  
                                   дражніць,  
 Калі асмяг звышпрэклю насцярожніць...  
 Ад сэнсу сам сябе я спаражніў.  
 Хто ж ад мяне паэзію спарожніць?!<sup>41</sup> (Jurčanka 1989: 182)

(<sup>41</sup>) "Where is the sign? Where the continuation? Why should we guess: both at the beginning and at the end there is a marsh, I like the decay of myself – and of it –

The parody by Pjatro Suško (1937-1996) of two of Razanaŭ's poems as *Kaardynaty večnas'ci* (The coordinates of eternity) is deliberately absurd, as may be seen from the opening of it:

Існуе ва мне няіснае  
калодзежам перакуленым,  
гляджуся ў яго сланечнікам,  
як у люстэрка сонечнае,  
слухаю вострым позіркам  
споведзь сваю чужую,  
нема крычу спінаю,  
яўляючы ўяўнае.<sup>42</sup> (Kudlasevič 2001: 266)

Zëkaŭ's parody *Na sëmy dzen'* (On the seventh day) refers to Razanaŭ's chronological eccentricity, as well as to his poetic experiments with new genres; he introduces it from four lines taken from two different works, using several of the same lines:

Звязаліся дні ў сем дзён.  
Прымроілася мне:  
сустрэнемся ў шасці,  
а ў сёмым разе – не.<sup>43</sup> (Razanaŭ 1976: 51)

\*

Звязаліся дні ў сем дзён.  
і ў міг прымроілася мне,  
што я шэсць дзён відзён,  
а вось на сёмы – не.  
А што, калі адчас  
так страчу дні усе?  
Я кінуў вершы ўраз –  
пісаць версэты сеў.<sup>44</sup> (Zëkaŭ 1994: 56)

but also! it irritates me, and when the dried-up smell of rottenness puts me on my guard... I have relieved myself of sense. But who will excrete poetry from me?!

(<sup>42</sup>) "In me there exists the non-existent like an upturned well. I look into it like a sunflower, as into a mirror of the sun. I listen with a sharp eye to my confession of someone else. I silently cry out with my back, imagining imaginary things".

(<sup>43</sup>) "The days are tied together into seven days. [...] I dreamed that on the sixth we should meet, but the seventh time – not".

(<sup>44</sup>) "The days are tied together into seven days, and suddenly I dreamed that on

To conclude, Belarusian parodists are no respecters of the status of their victims, but in the case of the weaker poets the parodists sometimes show more imagination than those they mock. Possibly unique to Belarus is the suggestion that some poets should give up writing altogether, especially when they show a nostalgia for rural life. Also particularly related to the long-lasting agricultural tradition there are a variety of parodies about eating ready-made food and perceived parasitism. The great majority of parodied poets were writing in the Soviet period, leading parodists frequently to write about poets' concern for material well-being and related to it the power of editorial committees and publishers. Other themes such as love and alcohol are, of course, found equally frequently elsewhere, as is the lively sense of humour that is brought to this genre.

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the sixth day I could be seen, but on the seventh – suddenly not. And what if sometime I should lose all my days? I immediately gave up writing poetry and sat down to versettes”.



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*Aspetti delle parodie in versi bielorusse*

Presente sin dagli inizi della letteratura bielorusca moderna assieme ai generi contigui della satira e del travestimento, la parodia è diventata particolarmente rilevante alla fine del Novecento. Tra i temi parodici più diffusi nella letteratura bielorusca contemporanea si osservano le esperienze oniriche del passato, il rifiuto delle mode del presente, il patriarcato, il femminismo, il ruolo delle donne come compagne e come ostacoli per gli uomini, le relazioni immaginarie con grandi scrittori del passato, il sacrilegio, i troppi poeti “ordinari”, l’amore tra passione e comicità, l’alcool, il cibo e il parassitismo. Diffusi sono anche temi come l’autocompiacimento, l’ambiguità professionale della letteratura, la scrittura poetica, implicando spesso che quest’ultima debba essere abbandonata, così come la prosodia, il privilegio dei viaggi all’estero e, infine, l’oscurità e l’incomprensibilità. Nessuno scrittore bielorusso è troppo importante per poter fare a meno della parodia. Ryhor Baradulin, di cui qui non si parla, Uladzimir Njakljaeŭ e Ales’ Razanaŭ non sono stati risparmiati dalla parodia, a volte con successo, altre meno. L’umorismo ha toccato allo stesso modo i grandi poeti e quelli più deboli. È difficile dire se questo sia da leggere come un segno di maturità della letteratura, come alcuni hanno sostenuto. Non saranno sicuramente le vittime o i loro carnefici a dirlo.

*Keywords:* Belarusian literature, parody, parodic genres, 20<sup>th</sup> century poetry, subjects of parodies.



## INDICE

### BELARUS' EUROPEA

- Alessandro Achilli, Oxana Pachlovska, Laura Quercioli Mincer  
La Belarus' fra presente e passato, *nation building* e  
molteplicità culturale. Prefazione dei curatori ..... 9-24
- Oxana Pachlovska  
Perché la bielorusistica oggi? Al posto di un'introdu-  
zione ..... 25-60
- Mikhail Minakov  
The Belarusian Protest Movement of 2020 from An  
Eastern European Comparative Perspective ..... 61-83
- Marco Puleri  
Oltre l'“anomalia bielorusa”? Nuove concettualizza-  
zioni dell'autonomia politica e culturale nazionale nella  
Bielorussia d'età post-sovietica ..... 85-104
- Manuel Ghilarducci  
La riflessione linguistica nella poesia bielorusa tra au-  
toreferenzialità e performatività (1908-2016) ..... 105-126
- Gun-Britt Kohler  
Insights into the Belarusian Literary Market (1905-  
1932) ..... 127-152
- Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern  
An Alternative Modernity: Zmitrok Bjadulja and His  
Creation of the Belarusian Jew ..... 153-177
- Anna Belozorovich  
Il professore “elettrico” Jakub Narkevič-Iodko e la te-  
nuta Nadnëman: processi di memoria e ricostruzione,  
tra scienza e letteratura ..... 179-206
- Arnold McMillin  
Aspects of Belarusian Verse Parodies ..... 207-231

Giulia De Florio	
Dmitrij Strocev e la resistenza della poesia .....	233-255
Tomasz Kamusella	
Al’herd Bacharëvič’s <i>Sabaki Ęŕopy</i> : A Belarusian	
<i>IQ84?</i> .....	257-275

#### STUDI E RICERCHE

Lidia Federica Mazzitelli	
Impersonal Constructions in Belarusian and closely	
Related Languages: A Typological and Areal Account ..	277-310
Anita Kłos	
“Adoratore della scienza” o “raffinato cesellatore”?	
Stanisław Lem legge Italo Calvino .....	311-333

#### IN MEMORIAM

Maria Bidovec	
Andrea Trovesi (1971-2021) .....	335-339

#### RECENSIONI

Elissa Bemporad, <i>Eredità di sangue. Ebrei, pogrom e omicidi rituali in Unione Sovietica</i> . Castelveccchi, Roma 2021 (Simone A. Bellezza) .....	341-344
<i>Zbornik o Ljubomiru Marakoviću. Zbornik radova sa znanstvenoga skupa, Zagreb-Topusko, 25-26. travnja 2019</i> . Glavni urednik Tihomil Maštrović. Hrvatski studiji Sveučilišta et al., Zagreb et al. 2020 (Andrea Sapunar Knežević) .....	344-349
Predrag Petrović, <i>Horizonti modernističkog romana</i> . Čigoja štampa, Beograd 2021 (Luca Vaglio) .....	349-355
Alfrun Kliems, <i>Underground Modernity: Urban Poetics in East-Central Europe, Pre- and Post-1989</i> . Transl. Jace Schneider. CEU Press, Budapest 2021 (Alessandro Achilli) .....	355-358
Dmitrij Strocev, <i>Terra sorella</i> . Trad. e cura di Giulia De Florio. Valgie Rosse, Livorno 2020; Dmytro Strocev, <i>Pyl, što tan-</i>	

<i>cjuje</i> . Duch i litera, Kyjiv 2020; Dmitrij Strocev / Dzmitrij Strocaŭ, <i>Belarus' oprokinuta / Belarus' perakulenaja</i> . Trad. di Andrèj Chadanovič. Novye mechi, s.l. 2021 (Alessandro Achilli) .....	358-360
Note biografiche sugli autori .....	361-364
Elenco dei revisori per il volume del 2021 .....	365-366