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The Philosophy of Non-Soviet Belarusian Poetry in the 1970s and 1980s

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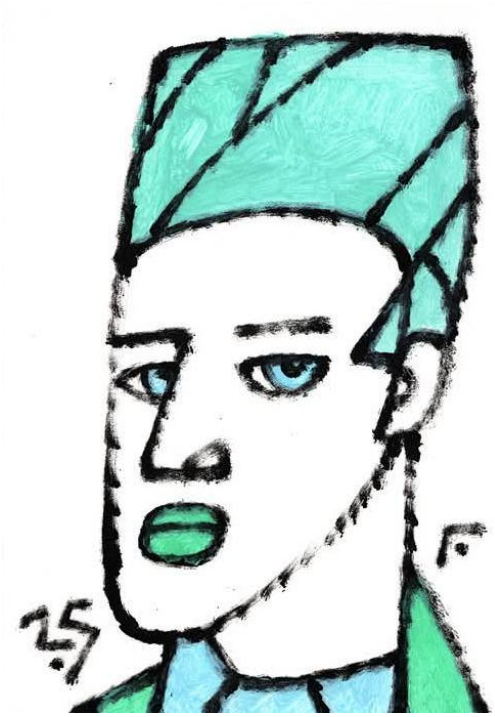

Abstract: The interview given by Adam Hlobus (Uladzimir Vyachaslavavich Adamchyk, born September 29, 1958), a Belarusian writer, poet, artist, and publisher. He began publishing poetry in 1981 (in the newspaper *Literature and Art* and the magazine *Maladosts*). He is the founder of the Society of Young Writers "Tuteyshiya" (1986–1988). Selected books: *Park* (poetry, 1988), *Loneliness at the Stadium* (short stories, 1989), *Death Is a Man* (1992), *Crossroads* (1993), *Damavikameron* (1994), *Just Don't Tell My Mom* (1995), *Koidanava* (1997), *New Damavikameron* (1998), *Post Scriptum* (1999), *Texts* (a collection of all previous books, 2000), *Braslav Stigmata* (2001), *Notebooks* (2003), *Home* (2005), *coParticipants* (2006), *Letters* (2006), *Fairy Tales* (2007), *Convolutus* (2008), *Castle* (2008), *PLAY.BY* (2009), *Krutahory Fairy Tales* (2010), *New Sky* (2010), *Sayings* (2012), *Names. Literary Portraits* (2013), *Fairy Tales for Adults* (2013), *Portraits* (2014), *Stories about Minsk and Its Surroundings* (2015), *Reverse Perspective* (2016), *Family* (2017), *Capital Fairy Tales* (2018), *Features* (2019), *Angel* (2021), *Snowflake* (2022), *Our Neighbor Karatkevich* (2025).
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Andrew Schumann: How could one distinguish Soviet and non-Soviet poetry in the BSSR of the 1970s and 1980s, thematically and formally? Are there any criteria?

Adam Hlobus: Of course. Non-Soviet poetry formed around themes and ways of expressing them that didn't align with Soviet propaganda. As a result, even recognized classics of Soviet Belarusian literature sometimes had works that didn't pass censorship. Take, for example, the works of Yanka Kupala – there's a large volume, a very large one, of his poems published in Munich that is entirely devoted to the part of Kupala's work that was banned [A. Sch.: Referring to the volume is Kupala, Janka. *Spadchyna, vybar paesi IAnki Kupaly / The Heritage, Selected Poetry*. Published by Backauscyna, New York, München, 1955]. So, the Soviet empire even banned the classics! That means the classics of Soviet literature were only partially allowed, and partially not. For me, someone born into this environment, it seemed normal at the time. Even the classics were censored, not to mention contemporary writers, who faced even more censorship. There was even a magazine, I don't know if it still exists [A. Sch.: it does], called *Index on Censorship*, published in London, which dealt with censorship issues and printed what couldn't be published in the USSR. That's why there was an underground culture. And within it, you could sometimes find works even by Soviet writers we considered classics. This is very important. Some people say: this writer was banned, and this one wasn't. But in reality, everyone was under censorship pressure, just to different degrees. Some completely, others partially. Because the empire constructed its own canon and included what it considered necessary, and banned what it didn't.

Andrew Schumann: You were the founder of the Society of Young Writers "Tuteyshya" [Belarusian: "Those from Here"] in 1986. Could you recall any interesting facts in the context of creative freedom and lack thereof within the BSSR as part of that group?

Adam Hlobus: Well, the main thing was that, for example, if we look at the Leningrad branch of the Writers' Union, where Alexander Kushner was active – I attended his poetry seminar, by the way, where Yevgeny Borisovich Rein taught, who was Joseph Brodsky's mentor – the average age of writers there was 66. So, there was a generational conflict. If you were 30, you were still considered young, even though Lermontov, Pushkin, and our own Maksim Bahdanovich had already become classics at that age. But you were still seen as a beginner. In the USSR, you could be a "young" poet until the age of 37. So, until the age Pushkin died, you were still considered young!

So beyond all the censorship, political, and aesthetic differences, there was also an age barrier. We simply weren't let in. That's why we had to create a youth organization.

I mentioned Leningrad because I used their documents to help form our group. It couldn't just be a kitchen gathering with a guitar. We needed an organization that could, for example, express a lack of confidence in the Communist Party for hiding the truth about Chernobyl. And when we expressed that lack of confidence at a meeting, we thought we wouldn't even make it home. It was a generational, aesthetic, and ethical conflict. And nobody expected it from us. Just as no one expected our people to go honor the dead at Kurapaty [A. Sch.: a wooded area on the northeastern edge of Minsk where mass graves of Stalin-era executions from the late 1930s to early 1940s were discovered]. That was one of the first rallies in 1988. Nothing like that had yet happened in Lithuania, Ukraine, or Moscow – but it happened here. That's very important.

Then, as now, for me, aesthetics was more important than ethics. Above all, we rejected the Soviet aesthetic canon. Unfortunately, that's where "Tuteyshya" came to an end. We all faced serious problems with the state, and after that, I decided not to engage in politics anymore and to focus on creativity. The resistance didn't stop, but it moved into the realm of pure aesthetics. Creative freedom is the most important thing to me.

Andrew Schumann: What was your fundamental rejection of Soviet aesthetics based on?

Adam Hlobus: For example, the word "militiaman" (*militsioner*) was aesthetically beyond the pale for me… All those "Uncle Styopa the Giant" characters were, you know, beyond the boundaries of good as I saw it. I really wanted to write detective stories, but the word *militsioner* held me back. I didn't want to write a police novel, a militsiya novel. So in my detective fiction, I wrote about a person. There's this form in detective fiction where the person becomes a victim of circumstance. Say, a citizen is accused of murder. And to prove his innocence, he has to investigate the crime himself. Because the whole state apparatus will be focused on locking him up. I couldn't use the word *militsioner* simply out of a sense of taste.

On the other hand, for strictly Soviet writers like Vasil Bykau, it was aesthetically unacceptable that my protagonists had sex, made love to mermaids – I was interested in erotica, and for them that was all taboo. Killing, for them, was normal. Killing a person, bombing a city. All perfectly acceptable. But to make love to someone? That's the problem. A paradox. Soviet people still live in that value system.

Andrew Schumann: And the Partisan Republic as a Soviet metaphor for Belarus?

Adam Hlobus: To me, that's purely a Soviet theme. First of all, the partisans were not all the same. There was the Polish *Armia Krajowa*, there were Soviet partisans, and then there were just bandits – but Soviet partisans were always presented to us as the ideal. In reality, for example, Valentyn Taras, who translated Márquez, killed one of our relatives. He was with the Soviet partisans, and our relative was with the Polish ones. At one point, the Poles came to our large family and said: "Give us one boy – he'll go into the partisans." Later, the Soviets came and took another boy. So, people from the same family ended up on different sides. And then Valentyn Taras, who had been with the Soviet partisans, brought my mother his war memoirs, published in the journal *Arche*, in a piece titled "Footprints in the Snow." He described how they killed those Polish partisans – local guys, really, also Belarusians, and in some cases acquaintances or even relatives. One of them dug himself out of the grave and ran. They had covered them with snow, but this guy escaped, and they chased him to finish him off. The most horrifying part of that story for me was the word "*finish him off*." He ran to Ivyanyets, but they were afraid to enter the town. He got to his house and knocked on his parents' window. But they didn't open – because who knew, in the night, who was knocking? A bandit? A partisan? No one knew. In the morning, he was found dead. His name was Anatol (Tolus in our dialect), and several people in our family were later named after him. And then Taras brings my mother his memoirs, describing how they chased that boy near Ivyanyets to finish him off. And my mother says to me: "Volodya, I don't know what to do. Maybe I'll forgive Taras." And I said: "I won't. I can't forgive that. Just the word *finish him off*, damn it! He already escaped. Let him go! Let him live!" But on the other hand, I understand why they chased him – to prevent him from talking. Because if he had told anyone, they might have been hunted down themselves.

This story shows why my rejection of the "Republic of Partisans" theme was both ethical and aesthetic. The Soviets created this myth of the ideal communist partisan, which was far from reality. That's why I never asked Vasil Bykau to help me get some Swedish scholarship or a grant to stay at a creative retreat. And he didn't like that my stories were full of genitals and body parts. We were just different. But when we sat at the same table, I treated him with a certain respect – as an elder – not because he was a great writer.

Andrew Schumann: How did Belarusian poets view the work of the so-called "free" Soviet authors like Voznesensky, Yevtushenko, Akhmadulina, and also the whole bard culture led by Vysotsky, Okudzhava, and Galich?

Adam Hlobus: It was all Soviet crap! Everything about them was Soviet – their work, their values, their psychology. How can I take seriously a man who said, "Take Lenin off the money"? That was

Voznesensky. And I saw him once, in Barcelona. He was standing with his wife by a store window, complaining about how expensive everything was. I looked at him and thought: "Damn it, you made a fortune praising Lenin and denouncing bourgeois values… and now you're whining that things are too expensive. Just don't buy anything. Be humble…"

There were other poets – better, more significant. I can't say I admire Brodsky to the skies, but I have to admit he was a better poet than the ones you mentioned. Among all of them, Brodsky was far stronger, both technically and in the depth of his thought.

As for poets I truly care about – it's the conceptualists: Dmitry Prigov (1940–2007), Lev Rubinstein (b. 1947), and Timur Kibirov (b. 1955). Great authors whose work existed for a long time in samizdat, outside the official literary channels – which only made their work more authentic and meaningful.

I also really admire the metaphorist poets, or "metarealists": Alexander Yeryomenko (1950–2021) and Alexei Parshchikov (Reiderman; 1954–2009). Their poetry was a major breakthrough in Russian literature, a new level in understanding language and reality. I believe they made a genuinely important contribution to the development of Russian poetry at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century.

Yeryomenko and Parshchikov translated my poems into Russian, and I always had great respect for them. They weren't just poets – they were part of a wave that truly changed literature. I remember one event: they had a literary evening – Yeryomenko, Parshchikov, Zhdanov performing. A hall full of people, the right vibe. And then suddenly Yevtushenko shows up – this elder statesman, all self-important. He comes up with his fake wide grin and says: "I came to support you." And Yeryomenko, without a second thought, just blurts out: "Get the fuck out of here!"

Now *that's* classic! Like that famous Brodsky line: "I wouldn't sit on the same toilet seat with him." But this was even more direct – no metaphors, no subtleties. Just "Get the fuck out of here!" And that was it. The moment of absolute truth. Because Yevtushenko, like so many others, was part of that Soviet system. They pretended to support the new wave of poets, but in truth, they were always aligned with power. Former Komsomol poets, those who once served the system and then reinvented themselves – we had plenty of those too. The ones who used to sing praises and then wrote lyrics for some second-rate pop bands like "Verasy" and others.

All these well-known poets of the USSR period – they were Soviet. And not just Soviet – they were in a sense the architects of the Soviet system. That's a key point people often miss when trying to separate talent from context. What is Soviet culture? It's not just ideology – it's also the people who formed it, knowingly or not. For example, whatever his talent, Vysotsky was part of Soviet cinema. He wasn't outside of it – he was a star *within* that system, with all its values. Sure, he was talented – no one disputes that. But he never stepped outside the Soviet canon. That's not his fault – it's just how the system works. If you're working in film, theater, or radio, you're part of the big ideological machine. There's no room for "outside the system." It's all ideology – nothing more. Even if you *think* you're free, you're still within those limits. And there's nothing you can do about it, even if you want to.

I'm trained as a monumental artist. And what is monumental art? Propaganda. But we were taught that you still had to keep your soul in balance – to clearly distinguish between hackwork for money and real art for the soul. And to keep that balance. If you dive into pure art just for yourself and your friends – you'll lose your income. It's the same among writers. You might write a propaganda song – but you should also write something that's from the heart. For your wife. A portrait of your wife, or your mother. No one cares if you painted your mother's portrait – people only pay for Lenin, or a Hero of Socialist Labor. But artists will respect you for your skill, for being able to paint your mother. Monumental artists always discussed this. And artists always had a bit more freedom than writers.

Andrew Schumann: When speaking of Russian poets in a creative context… What was the relationship between Belarusian and Russian or Russian-speaking poets during the Soviet period?

Adam Hlobus: We lived in the empire of the Russian language, and that must be understood. It wasn't just a language – it was an entire Russian-language system that provided privileges to its own. As a result, Russian-speaking poets, writers, and artists had completely different opportunities compared to those who wrote and spoke in Belarusian. And this wasn't some kind of accident or a natural situation – it was purposefully created.

Let's take, for example, Ales Adamovich. He had everything – publications, influence, opportunities. He had Vysotsky among the actors, writing songs for his films. He had Aleksandr Chakovsky as a co-author. And he coined a strange term at the time: "Belarusian writers who write in Russian." So, Belarusian writers existed. But they wrote, damn it, in Russian. And yet, Belarusian writers who wrote in Yiddish were never referred to that way. Even though they existed! Take Chaim Izrailevich Maltinsky (1910–1986) – our neighbor, a translator who published translations of Karatkevich and my father into Yiddish in the journal *Sovetish Heymland* (סאָוועטיש היימלאַנד). He was, in spirit, a Belarusian writer who wrote in Yiddish – but no one considered him as such. Because that's how the Russian-language empire worked.

Belarusian writers were always in a suppressed position, while Russian-language writers received full support from Moscow – they were given the best opportunities, resources, awards. Just two names are enough to demonstrate this: Ales Adamovich and Svetlana Alexievich. There wasn't an award they didn't receive. And all this happened through culture. It was clear: if you wrote in Belarusian, you were seen as secondary – as someone who didn't understand which language you needed to write in to succeed. And this continued constantly. A special colonial structure was even created – the journal *Druzhba Narodov* (Russian: "Friendship of the Peoples"). I don't know, maybe it still exists? [A.Sch.: Yes, it still does]. That journal employed Moscow ideologues who built literary hierarchies, created rankings, and formed the "top" authors. There was, for example, Lev Anninsky – a person specifically tasked with traveling to all Soviet republics and then, back in Moscow, determining the "top five" national writers for each ethnic group, including Belarusians. That's how the system organized the literary field, solidifying the names convenient for the authorities.

Lev Anninsky had excellent intuition. Once, when we were vacationing in Crimea in 1993, he said: "Alexievich will win the Nobel Prize." I just laughed: "I don't care – she's a Russian writer." He was surprised: "What do you mean?" I said, "Well, she writes in Russian – so she's a Russian writer." Anninsky was truly farsighted and very intelligent. He essentially curated national literary policy. Behind it stood an entire structure – the office of the colonial system, which constructed the appropriate hierarchies for each nation. Every literature was assigned its place, its ranking, its main representative "of the nation" in Moscow. By the way, even in that *Druzhba Narodov*, articles were published by Ryhor Baradulin and Kim Khadeev, who was considered a freethinker and dissident.

When I started writing prose, they told me: "Vova, we've put you down as a poet. You're being translated by the best, most brilliant Russian poets. Brodsky once said that after him, only one person wrote decently in Russian – that was Lyosha Parshchikov, and he's translating you. Why the hell did you start writing prose?" I replied: "I feel like it – so I'm writing." That was seen as eccentric. You were supposed to live as a Soviet poet – even if you were Belarusian – within the Soviet empire. And here I was acting out, writing some kind of prose. You could say everything was decided behind closed doors – who would be labeled what, which hierarchy would be defined, what place someone would be given.

When Tvardovsky became editor-in-chief of *Novy Mir* and published a piece by my father, people in Belarus reacted negatively – because Tvardovsky had published a young writer and ignored the older ones, like Yanka Bryl. After being published in *Novy Mir*, my father couldn't publish a new prose book for seven years.

But in my generation, the system broke down. That whole artificial hierarchy collapsed because of its own stupidity. I simply said: "I'm going to be a prose writer. And if I feel like it, I'll write American detective novels under the pseudonym Hill Patrick or Diana King."

Andrew Schumann: Who is your favorite Belarusian poet and Belarusian writer?

Adam Hlobus: Belarus is a country at the crossroads of cultures: on one side, Poles; on the other, Russians; nearby are Lithuanians, Ukrainians, the Poleshuks, and many micro-languages and dialects. A thousand problems, a thousand cultural layers, many of which are slowly disappearing. To preserve even one of them, my friends managed to publish a Yiddish–Belarusian dictionary – just to prevent an entire chunk of history and culture from vanishing. In this context, literature cannot be centrally managed.

There are writers the state loves – they get monuments, awards, they're included in official lists. There are writers loved by neighboring states – and we're told: "Here's your Svetlana Alexievich." Fine, let her be. In turn, our state offers its own: Yanka Kupala and Yakub Kolas. But the most important thing is that there are those whom the people themselves choose. And the people chose *Maksim Bahdanovich* as the greatest poet and *Uladzimir Karatkevich* as the greatest writer. The people themselves choose their heroes. And that's crucial: regardless of official policy or state directives, people read and reread those they feel close to.

So when we speak of Belarusian literature, we should evaluate it not by who the state supports, but by whom the people love. Because it's in Bahdanovich and Karatkevich that we see another path, an alternative. And the people voted for it – not in elections, but with their love and their reading. No matter what's said, I see how books sell. Let's print Bahdanovich again – and people will once again go and buy *Vyanok*. Let's publish *King Stakh's Wild Hunt* for the 105th time – and there will still be demand. Karatkevich cannot be called an anti-Soviet writer. But you can't call him Soviet either. He's simply a Belarusian writer, loved by the people. And that's the main thing [A.Sch.: This year Adam Hlobus published a successful book titled *Our Neighbor Karatkevich*. Minsk, 2025.]

You know, when Svetlana Alexievich won the Nobel Prize, many said: "That's it, Belarusian literature is finished. Now everyone will write in Russian – because that's the only way to gain recognition." People said it was a signal: if you want global fame, you don't need the Belarusian language. But I replied: "Don't rush to conclusions. The *Tuteyshya* will claim their own." And a few years later, the Nobel Prize was awarded to Ales Bialiatski – a man who defended Belarusian culture his whole life, a literary critic, the head of the *Tuteyshya* society. That was a response to those who claimed the Belarusian cause had lost. It was confirmation that Belarusian culture is alive – that it doesn't depend on official recognition, and that those who serve it will be seen nonetheless. Because the true value of literature and language is determined not by any prize committee – but by the people who read it and fight for it.

Every nation has not only great classics taught in school – but also a favorite poet, one whose words touch the heart, whose poetry is read not because it must be, but because it moves the soul. For Belarusians, that poet – again, I will repeat – is Maksim Bahdanovich. He is loved not for his official status, but because he is truly one of us – close, sincere. Of course, there are great names in world literature – Shakespeare, Pushkin – standing on pedestals. But beside them, there is always a poet chosen by the people themselves. For Russians, for example, that's Lermontov. Pushkin is an official figure – polished, censored, elevated to a national symbol. But Lermontov is a living, anxious, stormy voice that pulses with pain and truth. He was the one who "fired at God," knowing he'd be destroyed for it. And yet he did it anyway – and that's his power. Lermontov wasn't just a poet – he was a man who sacrificed himself for the truth. And in this, he resonates with Bahdanovich. In his verses too, there is that ultimate sincerity, that conscious self-sacrifice. He knew he had little time – that life was like the flame of a candle in a draft. But he kept writing anyway. And that's why his words still resonate, still move people, and still make him the *people's poet*.

Andrew Schumann: What did censorship look like in the BSSR?

Adam Hlobus: My first book was not allowed to be published – it was banned by censorship. The book was called *Hrud*. Try to find a whole book by another Belarusian poet that was banned by censorship – you won't find one. Often, regular editorial edits are passed off as censorship, but in this case, it was completely different. It happened in 1985. At that time, they decided to publicly "shoot someone down during takeoff," to set an example among young authors. They chose me and Alik Minkin (b. 1946), who now lives in Vilnius. The book was already ready for publication, but the entire print run was destroyed. Years passed. One day, Mikhás Skobla calls me and says:
— Listen, a KGB colonel died, and he left behind a library. His son is now selling the books. And you know what? He has your first collection!
— Mikhás, I'd love to buy that single copy – just for history.
— If you give him 10 bucks, he'll sell it to you.
We went to see the colonel's son. We started looking for it – but couldn't find it. Then he said:
— I remember it's somewhere around here.
I realized we needed time, so I suggested:
— Have some tea with him, chat. Let him remember where the book is.
After all, he's the colonel's son, probably already a colonel in the FSB himself by now – we had to give him space. Eventually, it turned out that his father had his own system for arranging books. When I was left alone, I managed to crack it – and I found what I was looking for. The banned books were shelved separately: Solzhenitsyn, Shalamov, and others. And there was my collection too, complete with all the censor's edits and markings. It's a real archival treasure. The parts that raised questions were marked. Next to them, penciled notes said things like: "God-seeking! Unclear what he's hinting at!" That's how the only surviving copy of a book no one was supposed to see ended up in my hands.

Andrew Schumann: Why exactly were you banned?

Adam Hlobus: Very simple. The guys from the Central Committee said, first of all, I'd survive because literature wasn't the main thing in my life as an artist – I wouldn't hang myself over the ban. And second, they didn't find a single proper Soviet poem in my book. It should have included partisans, Lenin, the Great Patriotic War, the proletariat, workers and peasants. And I had none of that. I was writing haiku and sonnets with octaves about nature.

Andrew Schumann: And that was enough reason to ban it?

Adam Hlobus: Yes. They even claimed that a haiku where I wrote "I wake up, drink cold water, and fall asleep" promoted alcoholism. As a result, the book was scrapped. I spent three years going through all the bureaucratic channels just to return to the literary world. They told me: "You're not a Soviet poet." But my generation was already different. Not Soviet. A Belarusian writer, but not a Soviet one. I wrote haiku inspired by Buddhism, classic sonnets about nature. I was interested in writing about love, not about society. That's why my works were banned.

Andrew Schumann: But you still had books published in the BSSR?

Adam Hlobus: Yes, two. And only one in independent Belarus from a state publisher. And that's a whole other story.

Andrew Schumann: You've mentioned having certain philosophical beliefs. How would you define them?

Adam Hlobus: I'm an anarcho-individualist. I've never hidden it. Although I do respect anarcho-syndicalism and various creative unions. I've always been more interested in people than their output. I spent my whole life around writers. It had a big influence on me. My relationship with Vera Nikolaevna Markova (1907–1995) was especially important. She translated Japanese classics into Russian. She was a brilliant translator, even recognized by the Japanese emperor. So I've always been interested in Russian Buddhism. The Japanese regularly send me their literary journals, which sometimes publish my haiku translated into Japanese. Since then, I've been drawn more to the East than the West.

Politics never interested me. I chose existentialism because for me, it was a way to distance myself from the state and society. I wanted to create my own world around me. Zmitser Kolas, our publisher, translated Sartre wonderfully. He recently published my book *Angel. Poems* (Minsk: Zmitser Kolas Publishing, 2021). He also translated Sartre's *The Wall*, a collection of stories – very well. He translated Camus' *The Stranger* too. And the most interesting thing is, I wrote a screenplay based on Camus' *The Fall*, and even played a small role in the film. We made a movie adaptation of *The Fall* in Belarus. When we went to television, we wanted to do something truly meaningful, to at least briefly touch greatness. We thought Camus' *The Fall* wasn't about salvation, but about doubt: whether to stay on the shore or jump into the cold water and save someone. Constant doubt and reflection – that's what brings me close to existentialism.

But I don't understand why our Soviet critics tried to include writers like Vasil Bykau among existentialists. That's not existentialism – his work centers on heroism and killing. But for existentialists, life and the little person are more important than the hero or war. The one standing on the shore who suddenly has to make a choice: leave everything and enter the unknown, or stay. And of course, Camus the artist is far more existential than Camus the philosopher. Although I love his essays and books, when he describes his mother's funeral and then goes to see a girl for sex – you find yourself in a situation you can't escape. You keep returning to that existential choice. So Camus the creator is undoubtedly more important than Camus the philosopher.

Sartre – he's something else. But I'll say this: my attitude towards him is shaped partly by the fact that my wife loves him. She's read *Nausea* more than five times. As for me, I'm more drawn to the work of Emil Cioran – a Romanian who learned French and moved to Paris. He was a very interesting person, a friend of Alexei Mikhailovich Remizov, who's also dear to me as a thinker and person. But Cioran's writing – it's pessimism. Deep and terrifying Romanian pessimism. He could dive into the darkest depths of the human soul and find what's usually hidden. And that's why his work is so important to me: it doesn't just depict grim realities, but offers a unique perspective on existence and human contradiction.

Andrew Schumann: Was there any non-Soviet philosophy in Belarus?

Adam Hlobus: First of all, we should begin with Ihnat Abdziralovich (Abdziralovič) – our first philosopher, who, in my opinion, is the most authentic Belarusian thinker. His real name was Ihnat Kancheuski (Kančeŭski; 1896–1923). Of course, his views contain a lot of socialist elements, but at the same time there is a clear idea of the survival of Belarusians as a distinct community, an idea of unity that doesn't come down to simple anarcho-individualism but leans more toward anarcho-syndicalism.

By the 1960s, another important figure appeared – Uladzimir Mikhailovich Konan (1934–2011), who continued the tradition of national philosophy.

As for me, my path in philosophy was different – I delved into Eastern thought, particularly Japanese philosophy. Later, ancient Indian philosophy revealed itself to me through an unusual angle – through the lens of J.D. Salinger's works. He had a special understanding of literature, where the text doesn't merely convey facts but creates inner emotions and evokes nine distinct feelings. For me, the ability of literature to affect emotion is the most important thing. And if we talk about writers, then for me, no one stands higher than Salinger.

My interest in philosophy began back during Soviet-era travels. One memory stands out, connected to Immanuel Kant and his grave. When we, as schoolchildren, were put on a train for vacation, we passed through the Brest Fortress, stopped in Vilnius, and then in Kaliningrad – which was once Königsberg.

Our tour guide was a German woman, and she led us to Kant's grave. The entire city looked gloomy; ruins stood where old neighborhoods once were, instilling a sense of dread. On the gable wall of the cathedral, built of red brick, someone had written the large word "TANYA" [A.Sch.: a girl's name in Russian] in white letters. Only nine Germans had returned to that ruined city, and those nine people took care of Kant's grave. "We come, we clean, because we don't have the strength for anything else," said the guide. At that moment, Kant himself was less important to us than this strange story – out of all the grandeur of Königsberg, only a grave remained, and nine people looking after it.

When I think about philosophy, I often return to that image. It seems to me that Belarusians have always had "nine philosophers" – something akin to those nine Germans. There's our own "Kant's grave" – some kind of spiritual legacy that we try to preserve, to comprehend, to approach. But there's no city, no solid Belarusian intellectual tradition, no established philosophical school – just a handful of people holding on to this legacy and not letting it disappear.

When I was working in publishing and planning to print philosophical books, people asked me: "Where should we start?" I answered: "Of course, with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*." And in return, I got surprised questions: "What a strange choice?" And I simply said: "It's a long story, but… nine Germans." And then we'd go on to publish everything – Buber, Derrida, many other thinkers. It was important to have a starting point. And the main thing is, that point must not disappear.