

The Languages and Tongues of Mykola Markevych

Taras Koznarsky

Abstract: *This article explores the linguistic choices of Mykola Markevych (Nikolai Markevich) (1840–60)—a poet, translator, amateur historian, and ethnographer who published in Russian. These choices were illustrative of the social ambitions and colonial mimicry of the Ukrainian elites in the Russian Empire. Focusing on Markevych’s Istoriiia Malorossii (1842–43), an example of minor literature/historiography, I show how Markevych employed Ukrainian passages to animate critical moments in Ukraine’s history and to flesh out the heroic figure of Bohdan Khmel’nyts’kyi—not only through the lens of political action and national charisma but through linguistic agency as well. The article traces the sources of Khmel’nyts’kyi’s Ukrainian phrases and situates Markevych’s linguistic strategies within the broader context of Ukrainian Romantic cultural and national aspirations.*

Keywords: *Ukrainian educated elites, Little Russia, Romantic historiography of Ukraine, bilingualism, minor literature, mimicry, Romantic actualization of Ukrainian vernacular*

A scion of a wide-branched clan of the Ukrainian Cossack gentry, Mykola Markevych (Nikolai Markevich, 1804–60) was endowed with many talents, a loving family with connections to powerful members of the Ukrainian and imperial elites, and a sizable estate that generated, given reasonable oversight and initiative, a comfortable income.¹ As a child, Markevych exhibited a remarkable aptitude for music and languages: from the age of four, he read and wrote in

¹ For Markevych’s family background, see Vadym Modzalevs’kyi, *Malorossiiskii rodoslovník*, vol. 3 (Kyiv 1912): 388–432, especially 413.