

# One managing to become well known in your lifetime

Belarusian literary critic, writer and Doctor of Philology, Professor Stepan Lavshuk explains in his interview how modern writers can attract more attention to their works from readers

By Yekaterina Medinova

According to current statistics in Belarus, almost four books are published per citizen annually. We don't lag behind European countries in this regard but what exactly are people reading?

Those who say nobody reads books these days are clearly not quite correct; besides which, there are no accurate studies on the subject. Those which have been carried out lack professionalism. Of course, much has changed since Soviet times, when Belarus was known as a country with a keen readership. People became truly excited about buying a new book, queuing to recycle their waste paper in return for discount vouchers for books. Moreover, they didn't just place books on the shelf to admire; they read them! People tried not to miss the latest editions coming out. Now, we read less — simply because there are more options available to us. Literature is of no worse quality. Television has not replaced theatre (as some predicted) and nor has the Internet replaced books.

**Why are people reading less?**

Literature doesn't have the status it once did and we no longer have a tradition of launching new titles in a grand fashion. We lack enough professional critics to keep up with the number of editions being released and, economic and political topics tend to receive more attention. At present, not everyone understands that the world is on a path towards humanitarianism. Capitalistic countries already understand that, unless there's a humanitarian element, technological and scientific achievements are worth nothing.

**Does talent really need advertising? Yanka Kupala, Maxim Tank, Vasil Bykov, Andrey Makayonok and other literary giants of Belarus didn't promote their works. Do writers and poets**

**need sponsors today, as artists do?**



One of the capital's book shops

**Great talent does not need advertising. However, it does help! Some Belarusian authors have acquired worldwide fame after moving abroad, purely down to advertising. Of course, an atmosphere of silence — or, even, suppression, hardly helps literary development.**

**Surely, those who need to blow their own trumpet must lack natural talent and, therefore, popularity?**

**I like to compare the literary situation of the 1990s with a flood. When spring waters rise, rivers overflow their banks, bringing everything**

**to the surface — including rubbish. Eventually, the water recedes again. Such self-regulation happens in all things — and is likely to be seen in literature at some point. Meanwhile, the Institute of Literature of the NAS of Belarus aims to restrict the amount of 'mud and rubbish' in the literary river of the country.**

**Why is it so difficult for playwrights to become known in their own homeland? Are our expectations too high?**

**The problem is rather that most modern Belarusian playwrights lack artistry, seeing themselves as postmodernists (despite Belarusian literature never having had a mod-**

**ern period to start with). European countries have experienced a similar situation - especially France. There, artists are required to pass a test to determine their skills: painting a simple realistic picture with paints and brush. Those unable to do so are told, 'Learn the artistic alphabet before you try to improve it.'**

**Most readers evaluate plot rather than writing style, with more grandiose works accused of being dull. Do writers, poets and playwrights need to work harder to obtain public appeal?**

**I think not; those that write in a 'popular' style are making a real mistake. Anyone with real creativ-**

**ity never thinks of such things, seeing their work as the fruit of their personal will, reflecting their soul, mood and citizenship. Such intensity and sincerity should ensure a readership.**

**What characterises modern Belarusian literature?**

**Belarusian literature distinguishes itself in refraining from mimicking foreign works; it is not influenced much by external factors. Our writers and poets embody the national spirit. A recent trend has been for them to focus on negative aspects of life. However, they'd do well to remember that literature is a tool for exploring beauty.**

## Idea gaining momentum

Everyone knows about the *Slavianski Bazaar* Festival so it's no surprise to hear that the universities of Vitebsk and Smolensk, which have been co-operating fruitfully for a long time, have initiated a student version of the event

By Sergey Gomanov

The idea is being supported by the administrations of our border regions, with Vitebsk chosen to host the opening concert of the 1st International Student Slavonic forum: the brainchild of Belarusian and Russian students.

Representatives of eight universities came to the opening, at which the host and co-ordinator, Alexander Solodkov, the Rector of Vitebsk State University (named after P.M.

Masherov) noted, "We should become university-partners, forming a university consortium. This forum is a venue for students' creative initiatives, for innovation and for the promotion of friendship and mutual understanding."

The heads of delegations shared their visions for the event and Mr. Solodkov summarised the programme. In April 2013, an international scientific and practical conference is to be hosted by Vitebsk, alongside a creative workshop called



Concert devoted to opening of 1st International Student Slavonic Forum

*Parade of Professions*. In May, the Summer Amphitheatre (the main stage of the *Slavianski Bazaar*) will hold the closing gala concert. In addition to the musical contest, there will be competitions in mini-football, swimming and athletics.

Smolensk is to host an international contest entitled *The Institute of Healthy Living*, in March, as well as street ball, kettle bell lifting and

arm wrestling events. Smolensk State University is also to organise intellectual contests, explains its rector, Professor Yevgeny Kodin. He believes that the event will make a significant contribution to the construction of the Union State. He tells us, "Any union of countries cannot endure unless it has public support. Our forum is a manifestation of student diplomacy, strengthening the

Union with real deeds and supporting the work of our politicians in many ways."

More students may yet take part, with Dnepropetrovsk National University and the universities of Khmel'nitsky (Ukraine), St. Petersburg and Novgorod expressing eagerness to join. Dnepropetrovsk took part in the opening with the aid of video conferencing.