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[*Soniachnyi hodynnnyk. Knyha pilihryma*]. Kyiv: Tempora, 2013

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**Volodymyr Panchenko**

*The Sundial.  
The Pilgrim's Book*

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*Reviewed by Leonid Ushkalov*

*Translated from the Ukrainian by Alina Tsvietkova and Oleksandra Viazinko*

## Ukraine Cognita

Professor of National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy Volodymyr Panchenko hardly needs introduction because he is undoubtedly one of today's best Ukrainian critics and literary scholars. In addition, Volodymyr Panchenko is a tireless traveller. He himself admits that the spirit of traveling captivated him in the early 1980s and is “associated with Hryhory Skovoroda” (p. 8), as one of his first trips lay through the roads of Sloboda Ukraine – following the Baroque philosopher's paths. It seems that adhering to Skovoroda's traditions and style of living, which is commonly called “skovorodynstvo” in Ukraine, forms the main subject line of his book, entitled *The Sundial*.

At any rate, mention of the itinerant philosopher occurs at the very beginning of the book, in an essay dedicated to Mykhailo Maksymovych. Why did Maksymovych steadfastly refuse various burdensome official jobs for the solitary work of a scholar? “Perhaps, thinks the author, it was the freedom-loving Skovoroda's principle telling him to run away from the

temptations of the world in order to meet up with the call of his heart?" (p. 23). Probably. Once again, we see the name of Skovoroda in an essay about Pavlo Chubynsky. As rightly considered by a respected author, the works of Chubynsky, Antonovych, Drahomanov, Zhytetsky, and other intellectuals "have given to Ukraine the opportunity to realize Hryhory Skovoroda's slogan 'Know yourself'" (p. 64). And when it comes to Mykola He, the author says: "...The spiritual component meant more than the material for the young He. Otherwise, why would he have, like Hryhory Skovoroda, escaped from the world..." Skovoroda is implicitly present in some other stories of the book, for example, in the epilogue of the essay "A Farmstead Called 'Hope,'" where the author talks about Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Offret*. The first book in the personal library of the director's father, Arseny Tarkovsky, was a tome of Skovoroda, which was presented to him by Panas Mikhalevich, who is also mentioned in the same essay. In his old age the poet had every right to say about himself: "I trampled on thyme in my native land / And I don't remember where I slept, / I lived subconsciously in imitation / of Hryhory Skovoroda..."

In short, Skovoroda symbolizes several key concepts in *The Sundial*: travel, freedom, spirituality, and self-discovery. Due to this, the twenty-four (precisely twenty-four!) trips through Ukraine should be considered not simply as "intellectual tourism," but as something much deeper and more important. I can hardly be mistaken if I say that the author turns travel along the roads of Ukraine into a journey toward himself. Undoubtedly, as the journey is "an opportunity for a deeper understanding of ourselves as descendants of those who lived on Ukrainian territory hundreds or thousands years earlier. And for Ukrainians, self-knowledge is an especially useful thing" (p. 413). I would even venture to call it a distinguishing feature of our national character. As a Hegelian follower, Klym Hankevych wrote in his "Essays on Slavic philosophy" that "the inherited from the Greeks call to 'Know yourself' remains the greatest challenge of human intellection 'for Ukrainians.'"

The image of Ukraine that appears on the pages of Volodymyr Panchenko's book is primarily visual. Perhaps this is because of the fact that

our land is truly beautiful. "Nature created this romantic nook in moments of high inspiration," the author writes about Stebliv, homeland of brilliant landscape master Ivan Nechui-Levytsky (p. 162). And I think that the same can be said about many, many parts of Ukraine. But even the most vivid verbal landscapes are hardly able to convey the beauty of our land. And then the author resorts to the aid of color and black and white illustrations. I counted them – there are 424 illustrations. Of course, there are not only landscapes. There are also portraits, genre scenes, reproductions of paintings, book covers, and photos of monuments... In short, truly wonderful visuals. But it is a troubling concern that there are so many ruins in our land today. And that the ruins are not "romantic." When I look at the landscapes presented in the book, I ask myself: is it true that Malaniuk was right when he wrote about Ukraine: "You, unutterable beauty of the earth, / For us, unwise, it is a useless gift."

Although, why are we "unwise," when such wonderful people as the heroes of *The Sundial*, have lived and are living on our land? Moreover, Volodymyr Panchenko has a true gift for communication. Let me recall the essay "The Road to Khvylovy." In July 2002, the author travelled along the routes of the Sumy, Poltava and Kharkiv regions: Trostianets, Zubivka, Kolontaiv, Okhtyrka, Bohodukhiv, Demianivka, Rublivka, Oleksandrivka, Kharkiv. "I, he writes, have met people who remember Khvylovy's mother, the mother of his daughter Iraida, and *even Mykola himself!* A meeting with Khvylovy's daughter seemed nothing less than purely fantastic... After this trip the music of Khvylovy's prose suddenly sounded in a new way..." (p. 392). Perhaps the most moving pages of the book are devoted to Khvylovy's daughter Iraida. And in general, the author tries to understand human life as it is, whether he is talking about our contemporaries or about those who lived on the earth once upon a time.

Through Volodymyr Panchenko's lens, the life of Ukrainians appears in all its majesty and beauty as well as its fragility and tragedy at the same time... The wise hermit Mykhailo Maksymovych, who lived for nearly seventy years, bequeathed to write on his tomb the fifth verse of Psalm 142. "I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works

and consider what your hands have done.” But the life of Maksymovych’s daughter Olha was interrupted early. This lovely young idealist went to “the people” as a simple village teacher and [...] could not bear the burden. Death overtook her in 1891. And it was not accidental, as Pavlo Hrabovsky writes in an article mentioned by the author, “Something on the Cases of Female Types,” it was suicide...

In the end, *The Sundial* – is a book not only about Ukrainian writers and the places related to them. The author also describes the interesting characters of statesmen, artists, patrons, engineers, pedagogues... There is Ivan Mazepa, Nikolai Repnin-Volkonski, Ivan Soshenko, Hryhory Tarnovsky, Ievhen Chykalenko, and Lev Matsievych... I am especially impressed by the essay “The Gospel of Mykola He.” It is as if Panchenko continues his conversation about the great artist and his “Christology,” art which appeared in 1990 on the pages of the literary and critical journal *Suchasnist*, in Shevelov’s article “Mykola He and Taras Shevchenko, the Artist in a Perfect Context.”

The heroes of the book are also Polish and Russian writers whose works cannot be imagined without Ukraine. Let us recall the wonderful essays about Michał Grabowski and Anna Akhmatova, for example. And yet the foundation-stone of this book is a map of “literary Ukraine,” a place where Karpenko-Kary, Klymovsky, Kobrynska, Kostomarov, Kotsiubynsky, Kulish, Maksymovych, Nechui-Levytsky, Rudansky, Svydnytsky, Chubynsky, and Shevchenko used to live and create... Certainly, I am not able to recount all of the book’s subject lines in such a brief review. I will relate at least a few words about some of them.

There is an essay about Ievhen Chykalenko’s estate in Kononivka, where Kotsiubynsky wrote “Intermezzo.” It begins thus: “Mykhailo Kotsiubynsky dedicated his famous short story “Intermezzo” (1908) to the ‘fields of Kononivka’, and to understand better the logic of the occurrence of this somewhat strange dedication, we should begin with geography” (p. 269). However, the author does not limit himself to “geography.” He possesses a brilliant knowledge of Kotsiubynsky’s life collisions, his works, and their solely literary origins. For example, he says that a “trace”

of Hamsun's "Pan" in "Intermezzo" is very noticeable. Precisely! A major work on Hamsun and Ukrainian literature could well feature a separate chapter dedicated to "Intermezzo." And its final chord would be a conversation about the Ukrainian translation of Hamsun's last book, *On Overgrown Paths*, which appeared only a few months ago. The translator, Halyna Kyrpa, presented it to me "so that paths of good memories are never overgrown." And then we are told about "stream of consciousness," and a parallel between Kotsiubynsky and Proust and Joyce is drawn. A very interesting parallel, despite the fact that Proust and Joyce had a talent for drawing broad epic paintings, while Kotsiubynsky was a master of the miniature. Recall that Robert Plen once said: "Kotsiubynsky is a great master of literature, and yet his short stories do not embrace the wholeness and the entire depth of life, but only artistically completed fragments of it." I agree.

Further on, there is an essay about Semen Klymovsky, entitled "Horace from Pryputny." If Mykola Levytsky is to be trusted, it is in Pryputny, which is not far from Znamenka, that the author of the song "The Cossack Rode Beyond the Danube," lived at the beginning of the 20th century. In truth, I do not believe in this for the following reason: Levytsky asserts to have seen Klymovsky in Pryputny in 1818. Meanwhile, as archival documents (q.v. Central State Historical Archives of Ukraine, file 1725, act 9, p.1) attest, a hundred years before that, in 1719, Klymovsky worked as a scribe in a Kharkiv regiment. A regimental scribe is a respectable position, which a greenhorn could not occupy. And earlier to that he had studied at the Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. How many years did this man live: 120, 130, 140? I don't know. I only know that at the end of the summer of 1724 Klymovsky presented Peter I with a poetic "volume," "On the Humbleness of the Loftiest," and a rather long treatise "On the Justice of Superiors, Their Truth and Vivacity," where he depicted the image of an ideal sovereign. It seems to me that this image (as was proper for an alumnus of the Mohylianka!) appeared on the basis of prominent works of Cicero, Thomas Aquinas, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Grotius, Lipsius, Spinoza, or on academic courses in philosophy, which included sections on "Philisophia politica

seu civilis,” and in moral theology, where the foundations of natural, divine, and civil law were examined (*jus naturale, divinum, civile*).

Finally, in a wonderful essay entitled “A Farmstead Called ‘Hope’” we read about the kin of Tobilevych and, in the first place, about Ivan Karpenko-Kary. Observing the twists and turns in the life of our splendid dramatist, one involuntarily recalls the ironic words of Karpenko-Kary’s good friend, Ievhen Chykalenko: “What good fortune that Ivan Karpovych was opportunely dismissed from his job: we gained the writer and artist...” I also mention this essay for the reason that it is almost the best reflection of Volodymyr Panchenko’s pencraft. Here, for example, we find his recollection of the middle 1990s when he and Oleksandr Zhovna lived on the farmstead “Hope”:

It was a magnificent many-coloured autumn. Probably, at that time Sashko was writing his movie-story “Experiment,” on the basis of which Roman Balaian later made the film *Bright Night*. And I was working on an article about Lina Kostenko’s *Marusia Churai*. A red squirrel, like autumn itself, was running about outside the window, jumping from tree to tree. At times the wind got entangled in the crowns of old oaks – and its tardy bearlike sound could be heard. Here and there on the branches of the apple trees the apples were reddening (p. 239).

As for me – a wonderful impressionistic sketch.

In fact, sometimes these generous impressionistic touches erase small details. Just one example. On p. 228 the author writes:

Panas Mykhalevych, who was exiled from Kyiv because of his participation in Drahomanov’s ‘Hromada’, arrived in the city, which became an important event for Ivan Tobilevych, as well as for Ielysavethrad in general. This happened in 1878...

First, should the Kyiv Hromada, a member of which Mykhalevych became in 1873, be called “Drahomanovite,” when Drahomanov’s *Hromada* was published in Geneva in 1878–1882? Second, in the Kyiv Hromada, Mykhalevych was closer to Antonovych, Rusov, and Vovk than to Drahomanov. Third, Mykhalevych was exiled from Kyiv not in 1878, but about three years previously: at first he lived in Nizhyn, then in Shyshaky, where he got married to Kateryna Shevchenko; during the Russo-Turkish War, he served as a doctor in Nizhyn, then he returned to Kyiv, and when he

was not permitted to stay there following Antonovych's advice, departed for Ielysavet.

Speaking of these details, let me draw attention to some "impressions" from quoting sources. For example, the adaptation of Mazepa's "Duma" on p. 40 appears as: "Nema zh liubovy, nema zh zghody / Ot Zhovtoii vziavshy Vody." ("There is no love, there is no consent / having taken from Yellow Water.") An extra syllable appears in the first line, and this ruins the syllabic poem. Let's compare: "Nemash liubvy, nemash zghody / Ot Zhovtoi vziavshy Vody." ("There's no love, there's no consent / having taken from Yellow Water...") And the lines from Klymovsky's treatise "O pravosudiyu nachalstvuyuschih..." ("On the Justice of Superiors...") are represented as: "Luchshe v nyschyh glad s pravdoyu y hlad terpety, / nezhely, tsarem byv, pravdy ne ymety" (p. 317); ("It is better to endure hunger with justice and cold, being a beggar, / than not to have justice, being a tsar.") In fact, they sound differently: "Luchshe v nyschyh s pravdy glad y hlad terpity, / nezhely, tsarem byv, pravdy ne ymity." ("It is better to endure the famine with justice and cold, being a beggar, / than not to have justice, being a tsar.") There are also other imperfections in the book which I, with your permission, will not point out, for in general they do not spoil a very good impression of *The Sundial*. I will only wish the esteemed author new interesting journeys, new discoveries, and new essays under the heading "Ukraine Cognita."