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## **Cordocentrism and Natural Philosophy of Hryhorii Skovoroda in the Poetry of “Silent Poets”**

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### **Abstract**

The article has examined the influence of cordocentrism and natural philosophy of Hryhorii Skovoroda on the formation of worldviews and aesthetic program of “silent poets.” The motive and figurative constants of “silent poets,” the specifics of the creation of their poetic universe through the conceptual system of cordocentric and natural philosophical codes are clarified. It is proved, that in the poetry of Iryna Zhylenko, Svitlana Yovenko, Anatolii Kychynskyi, Volodymyr Pidpalyi, Liudmyla Skyrda, Leonid Talalai, Pavlo Movchan, Dmytro Cherednychenko the image of the heart became a symbol, which emphasized the spirituality of human, formed by the humanistic attitude to the world. The dominant place in the poetic creativity of “silent poetry” was occupied by the sensual imperative: love, love for relatives, and the native land. Emphasis is placed on the fact that the natural world endowed the lyrical hero of “silent poets” with mental harmony and freedom of choice, conditioned by moral foundations and beliefs, independent of the political situation of the second half of the 20th century.

**Key Words:** cordocentrism, natural philosophy, “silent poetry,” lyrical ‘silence,’ existential loneliness.



### **Introduction**

Worldviews which are focused on the philosophy of cordocentrism and natural philosophy, became the basis of the aesthetic program of “silent poets.” The position of passivity and contemplation was compensated by the philosophical content of the poems, which were skillfully enriched by intertextuality. The lyrical hero of the “silent poets” has understood the possibility of a happy existence in the USSR emotionally rather than rationally, that is the characteristic of the Ukrainian mentality.

### **Theoretical Framework**

“Silent poetry” of the 1960s–1980s has marked by sentimentality and sensuality, the ideas of spiritual purification and improvement of personality. At the center of the national universe was the heart – the basis of harmonious life, this was actively promoted by the philosophical tradition of cordocentrism. The statement, that this organ is an emotional center, belongs to Ionykii Haliatovskyi, Hryhorii Skovoroda,

Pamfil Yurkevych, Panteleimon Kulish, Dmytro Chyzhevskiy<sup>1</sup> and others, whose worldview concepts became the center of poetic creativity of "silent poets," emphasizing the features of the Ukrainian mentality, the sensuality of the nation.

### Cordocentrism

Ukrainian philosophical thought of the 19th–20th centuries is focused on the worldviews of cordocentrism and natural philosophy, was guided by the teachings of Hryhorii Skovoroda. For example, Pamfil Yurkevych attached great importance to understanding the psycho-emotional state of human, which depends on the heart – a value catalyst, "...which combines all the moral states of human," it is "the starting point of all good and evil in words, thoughts and deeds human beings; source of life."<sup>2</sup> This vision reflects the Ukrainian identity, which is characterized by "philosophy of the heart,"<sup>3</sup> poetized by the "silent poets."

Panteleimon Kulish, who also has studied cordocentrism, has popularized Skovoroda's concept of personality, the essence of which consists of two levels: human – rational and spiritual – irrational. Preferring the latter, the poet-philosopher distinguished the concept of the heart, the formant of national identification. Dmytro Chyzhevskiy also emphasized: "A person's heart is the most closely connected with the native land, a person forgets his native land only, when 'the external' dominant prevails over the 'internal person.'"<sup>4</sup> Cultural ideals and moral principles depend on their social pretext, in particular, on the customs and traditions that shape the identity of the people, and not on the ethics of collectivism or social servility, which were popularized in the USSR in the 1960s–1980s and what "silent poets" did not accept.

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1 Ionykii Haliatovskiy, *Kliuch rozuminnia. Pamiatky ukrainskoi movy* [*The Key to Understanding. Sights of the Ukrainian Language*] (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1985); Hryhorii Skovoroda "Narkiss. Razghlahol o tom: uznai sebe" [*Narcis. Talk about It: Find Out for Yourself*] (Kharkiv; Edmonton; Toronto: Vydavnytstvo Kanadskoho Instytutu Ukrainskykh Studii, 2011); Pamfil Yurkevych, *Sertse ta yoho znachennia u dukhovnomu zhytti liudyny, zghidno z uchenniam slova Bozhoho* [*The Heart and Its Significance in the Spiritual Life of Human, According to the Teachings of the Word of God*] (Kyiv: Abrys, 1993); Panteleimon Kulish, *Vybrani lysty Panteleimona Kulisha, ukrainskoiu movoiu pysani* [*Selected Letters of Panteleimon Kulish, Written in Ukrainian*] (New York; Toronto, 1984); Dmytro Chyzhevskiy, *Narysy z istorii filosofii na Ukraini* [*Essays on the History of Philosophy in Ukraine*] (Kyiv: Orii pry UKSP Kobza, 1992).

2 Yurkevych, *Sertse*, 76.

3 Chyzhevskiy, *Narysy z istorii*, 196.

4 Dmytro Chyzhevskiy, "Panteleimon Kulish – ukrainskyi filosof sertsia [Panteleimon Kulish is a Ukrainian Philosopher of the Heart]," in Dmytro Chyzhevskiy, *Filosofski tvory u 6 tomah* [*Philosophical Works in 6 volumes*], vol. 2 (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 2005), 210.

I am all a solid heart. The body is the world.  
 And the heart needs to beat, woman.  
 I fight so that even a warm elbow is in the blood  
 and bruises boil on the knees.  
 So awkward, my friend, and inappropriate  
 our deeds are heartfelt.  
 One (either lyric or poet) –  
 solid millstone or fist.  
 Him make roads, sharp knives.  
 And the rest – God! – even without bark  
 (Iryna Zhylenko, “Heart”).<sup>5</sup>

The political situation of the collapse of the USSR of the second half of the 20th century left its mark on the literary process: poets became “poetic flatterers” or, trying to defend their beliefs, were creatively isolated or resorted to irrelevant for the industrial era “heart” motives.

“Silent poets” skillfully advanced the philosophical tradition of Hryhorii Skovoroda’s sensuality, whose image was close to Anatolii Kychynskyi (“Circle”), Pavlo Movchan (“Word of Hryhorii Skovoroda”), Volodymyr Pidpalyi (“Wild Pear”, cycle “Hryhorii Skovoroda”), Leonid Talalai (“Skovoroda’s Stick”) among others. After all, understanding the essence of the heart, the philosopher argued: it is possible, balancing the spiritual world of human, to push to mental activity. “Our life is like a digested game, full of successes and failures, and a healthy heart will digest it all for good. Everything will help it for good.”<sup>6</sup> “A healthy heart” is the transformation of “an old” person into a new one as a result of harmony in the psycho-emotional aspect, which the “silent poets” have divided.

The poets have popularized the concept of duality of Hryhorii Skovoroda’s personality with his division into external (physical instincts) and internal (sensory sphere) with the dominance of the latter. Hence the increased attention of the “silent poets” to individuality and the condemnation of equality and homogeneity, which objectively refuted Marxist ideology. As a result, the lyrical hero of “silent poets” – “homo interior” – a personality who is prone to self-concentration and self-study, nonverbal self-communication. This is what Volodymyr Morenets thought, describing the lyrical hero of the “silent poets”: “But does he need a listener, does he have the strength to overcome the threshold of silence between them – issues related to the deepening of poetry in the moral and philosophical sphere.”<sup>7</sup> The critic appropriately considers him far from the stereotype of the builder of a new society.

5 Iryna Zhylenko, *Yevanheliie vid lastivky [The Gospel of the Swallow]* (Kyiv: Aba-ba-ha-la-ma-ha, 2017), 152.

6 Skovoroda, “Narkiss,” 227.

7 Volodymyr Morenets, “...I kharakter lirychnoho heroia [...And the Character of the Lyrical Hero],” *Literatura i suchasnist* 18 (1985): 184–83.

Increased attention to Skovoroda's personality, who seeks freedom of thought, cultural and political independence, can be traced on the mental and verbal levels of "silent poetry," which calls for sentimentality and spirituality, emphasizing the peculiarities of the national worldview biased to the emotional sphere. The motif of the heart – the dominant concept of cordocentrism – encodes an aesthetic meaning, which is dominated by reflections on the laws of existence. "The heart for poetry is, first, a symbol of high, unusual, 'sign' of public unrest and love, a measure of spirituality and morality."<sup>8</sup> Aesthetic principles have long played a major role in the formation of a full-fledged personality, which is followed by "silent poets."

The basis of the cordocentric code was the concept of value of love, which depicts the intimate experiences of lovers accompanied by "lyrical 'silence,'" which subtly emphasizes the inner world of the Iryna Zhylenko's ("Vihola Love") and Liudmyla Skyrda's ("I Trust You, Love, as Earlier") lyrical heroine. Pavlo Movchan, reflecting on the origin of love, equates this state in the soul of the lyrical hero to silence:

In you are sanctified, united by love,  
and further extended by name, quiet word...  
Cheek to cheek – deep mirrors,  
between which the sun burns...  
Do not open the comprehensive time,  
which is multiplied by love for us.<sup>9</sup>

The author's neologism "quiet word" testifies to the importance of such a state, symbolizes the sanctity of eternal feeling.

The philosophy of sensuality in the conditions of totalitarianism was actualized, first of all, owing to love for the world, and for the native country. National self-identification was carried out through lyrical singing of the native land. "The poetry of the 'small homeland' is first and foremost a confession of the heart. We do not mean 'quiet' poems or some artificially selected types of lyrics, but sincerity, trustworthiness of intonations."<sup>10</sup> Addressing traditional images of land, home or relatives outlines the mental component of the nation in the best writings of poets. Without excessive patriotic rhetoric, as, for example, among the dissidents, Dmytro Cherednychenko ("Two Wings"), Iryna Zhylenko ("To the Cry of the Gentle, to the Pain..."), Pavlo Movchan ("Before the Mirror"), Leonid Talalai ("Expectation"), Anatolii Kychynskiy ("Ukraine") described a feeling of love to native land.

Volodymyr Pidpalyi's "Silent Elegy" is a kind of anthem to father's land: "When I am asked: do you love the land, / fields, lakes, apple trees in the garden? – / I am silent

8 Mykola Slavynskiy, "Rymy doby, hlybyny vitchyzny (Pohliad na poeziiu-82) [Rome of the Day, Depths of the Homeland (A Look at Poetry-82)]," *Rik'82. Literaturno-krytychnyi ohliad* (1983): 105.

9 Pavlo Movchan, *Tvory [Works]*, vol. 1 (Kyiv: Prosvita, 1999), 158.

10 Slavynskiy, *Rymy doby*, 108.

again: I will not separate / from them / myself even when I pass into the earth... ”<sup>11</sup> Here “lyrical ‘silence’” more accurately and objectively conveys the beauty of native spaces.

Being first of all a poet, Volodymyr Pidpalyi does not only glorifies nature and the beauty of the earth, but also merges with this beauty and nature: they seem to form a part of his essence, giving harmony and integrity to the poet’s inner world.<sup>12</sup>

Such deification of the environment is an attribute of the poet’s lyrical sincerity. The comparison of the country with nature emphasized the natural philosophy of poetic works “silent poets,” inherited and creatively modified by romantic poets (Panteleimon Kulish, Yakiv Shchoholiv, etc.).

Attention has increased to the locus of the house – the talisman of a human being (Liudmyla Skyryda, “The Last Leaf from the Plane Tree has Already Fallen”), the place where nostalgic memories of the paternal threshold of the lyrical hero are (Pavlo Movchan (“The Road, the Path from the Fatherland”) and Volodymyr Pidpalyi (“Morintsi Elegy”). The native house was identified with nature in the in verse of Anatolii Kychynskyi (“The Cobweb Rings”), Dmytro Cherednychenko (“Here and the Cloud does not Float so...”), etc., and its interior description was accompanied by a lyrical minor.

The author’s desire to pass on to the next generations the spirituality and moral and aesthetic foundations of the lyrical hero, which he inherited from his parents, in particular his mother, was extrapolated in their emotional descriptions. “The image of the mother was and remains sacred in poetry. Mother is conscience, universal kindness, universal understanding, mother is a person, who will appreciate, will see everything,”<sup>13</sup> Mykola Slavynskyi emphasized, analyzing the lyrics of the 1960s–1980s. We agree with the opinion of Liudmyla Tarnashynska: the image of the mother “has always occupied a central place in the Ukrainian consciousness, manifested in the national character of love for nature (mother-earth), for the mother-woman, in the poetic worldview.”<sup>14</sup> “Silent poetry” presented the noble essence of a woman in the lyrical guises of mother and wife, whose images are characterized by life wisdom, poise, intuitive sensitivity

11 Volodymyr Pidpalyi, *Zoloti dzhmeli [Golden Bumblebees]* (Kyiv: Tvim inter, 2011), 164.

12 Oleksandr Kalenchenko, “Polifonizm poetychnoho dyskursu shistdesiatnykiv (Vasyl Symonenko, Mykola Vinhranovskyi, Volodymyr Pidpalyi)” [“Polyphony of the Poetic Discourse of the Sixties (Vasyl Symonenko, Mykola Vinhranovskyi, Volodymyr Pidpalyi)”] (PhD diss., Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, 2009), 115.

13 Mykola Slavynskyi, “Osvidchennia v liubovi (Poeziia ostannikh rokiv: tendentsii, problemy, perspektyvy) [Declaration of Love (Poetry of Recent Years: Trends, Problems, Prospects)],” *Literatura i suchasnist* 20 (1987): 144.

14 Liudmyla Tarnashynska, *Ukrainske shistdesiatnytstvo: profili na tli pokolinnia [Ukrainian Sixties: Profiles Against the Background of Generation]* (Kyiv: Smoloskyp, 2010), 575.

and stoicism. They attract attention with their lyric and drama in Dmytro Cherednychenko's poems "I Knock on Your Window," Liudmyla Skyrda's "Poems for Mother," Pavlo Movchan's "By the Edge of Your Own Shadow you, Mom, are Sitting..."

Mother in the poems of Leonid Talalai is a pledge of moral principles not only in the family circle, but also among the Ukrainian people: "No, let's not forget over the years, / Treading our paths / There is no truth higher than mom / And higher than her conscience"<sup>15</sup> ("There is no Truth..."), that amulet of life, which gives peace of mind, relieving depressive tension: "It dawns through the years / In the darkest nights, / One minute near mother, / One minute of gold. / You are not alone among strangers, / in a stranger – not an orphan, / Because between your minutes / One minute of gold"<sup>16</sup> ("One Minute with Mom"). The mother of "silent poets" is a life companion, her wisdom contributes to the formation of personality.

The cordocentric code reads the atmosphere of respect and love for the breadwinner of the family as a generic feature of Ukrainian ethnic mentality, which we observe in the lines dedicated to the father of Pavlo Movchan ("I Tore Myself from the World..."), of Dmytro Cherednychenko ("Father, Swallow!," "Cherry Snow") and others. Family sentimentality depicted the lyrical hero's desire to leave the outside world, which provoked existential loneliness in the dimension of family spirituality and traditions, which at the genetic level was deeply valued by ancestors.

Liudmyla Skyrda recreated the boundless devotion to her father, the best friend of her childhood: "More and more often / In my dreams / I talk to my father. / We sit on the veranda, / Wrapped in grapes, / Smells like Antonovka. / Sunny. Quietly. / We sit and talk"<sup>17</sup> ("Only Sleep"). The lyrical heroine is completely immersed in memories of the past years – a time, when the family still felt the power of the father. It is noteworthy, that the meeting of daughter and father takes place in a natural space, devoid of the sounds of society.

The poets realized, that the scientific and technological progress, and technocracy with urbanization absorbed the feelings and soul of the individual, who dissolved in the collective "We," losing his individuality. "Today we rarely meet phrases like 'eyes orbits' or 'eismographs of hearts'" – it was a metaphor of the 1960s, generated by the cosmic and intellectual wave, today in circulation are existential, essential categories,"<sup>18</sup> Mykola Ilnytski rightly stated in 1983. Thus, during the period of social crisis and stagnation, poetry, focused on Hryhorii Skovoroda's cordocentrism, became not only a form of internal escape of poets, but also a response to the realities of the Soviet times. This impressed the poets, who, practically abandoning the generally accepted party socialist rhetoric, delved into the idea of appointing a person in society with the characteristic mental features of *homo soveticus*.

15 Leonid Talalai, *Vybrane [Selected]* (Kyiv: Dnipro, 2004), 43.

16 *Ibid.*, 263.

17 Liudmyla Skyrda, *AD Astra! [AD Astra!]* (Kyiv: R.I.K., 2000), 218.

18 Mykola Ilnytskyi, "Vysoka khvylia v sertse zaplyva..." ['A High Wave in the Heart Swims...'], *Rik'82. Literaturno-krytychnyi ohliad* (1983): 112.

## Natural Philosophy

One of the main components of Hryhorii Skovoroda's philosophy, the "macrocosm," revealed nature as the supreme essence (natural philosophy). The theo- and anthropocentric "microcosm," articulated in "silent poetry," appealed to poetic self-realization through self-awareness as an integral part of the environment. "Silent poets," like the thinker, condemned the leveling of personality and emphasized the problems of human existence in opposition to society, depicting her emotional state and contact with nature in a diachronic section. The poet's attention was focused on the natural philosophical image of the duality of human nature – real (specific actions in society) and unreal (moral, ethical and aesthetic components of personality). Such an existential dichotomy of the lyrical hero in "silent poets" caused a dilemma "literature – vocation." As a result, considerable attention in poetry was paid to the dissent, in which poets criticized the cult of the ruler-secretary general. It was represented in the vulgarization of art, depersonalizing, collectivism and even in the philosophy. Hryhorii Skovoroda appealed to spirituality, which, in his opinion, is formed under the influence of morality and aesthetics. The philosopher synthesized the Christian and pagan religions, identifying the Lord with the Universal Mind – the measure of moral qualities of human, and nature. The philosopher enriched the concepts of "God"–"morality"–"nature" with existential states of despair and fear, which cause a feeling of total loneliness. It is not in vain, that in his poetic collection "Garden of Divine Songs," the leitmotif of the poems is the life goal of human to comprehend the spirituality, that can eliminate the feeling of abandonment. Such inner harmony of human is obtained primarily in the world of nature, outside the urban world, which is relevant for "silent poetry." Let us agree with the statement of Taras Kremin, who believes, that "the achievements of 'silent poetry' are noticeable, above all, in the philosophical lyrics, which has a natural philosophy character."<sup>19</sup> The natural environment became the leading aesthetic category of "silent poets," which gave rise to literary criticism in the USSR. After all, under the influence of the political situation, Soviet scholars did not see a connection between landscape themes and the life of socialist society. They believed that the refusal to poetize technological progress in favor of nature testified to the degradation of thinking, so such poems were culturally marginalized. The official criticism did not perceive as autologous simplicity the image of nature, admiration for the environment, as well as landscape metaphor, which, suggesting associations, prompted deep reflections of the reader.

Hermetic writing in the lyrical description of the "silent poets" of nature was marked by natural philosophy, highlighted the subjectivity of the perception of the world of the lyrical hero. Hedonistic motives of spring revival and exuberance of nature

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19 Taras Kremin, "Kontseptualizatsiia istoriosofskoho mifu u lirytsi 1960–1980-kh rr." ["Conceptualization of Historiosophical Myth in the Lyrics of the 1960s–1980s"] (PhD diss., National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2005), 32.



symbolized the vital "elan vitale,"<sup>20</sup> spiritual growth, aroused admiration for the beauty of the environment, intensified by the contrast of silence ("lyrical 'silence'"). This characterizes the lyrical images of Iryna Zhylenko ("Golden Horseshoe"), Anatolii Kychynskyi ("Spring – a Potter. Her Hand..."), Leonid Talalai ("Quiet Waiting for the Tree..."), Dmytro Cherednychenko ("Blessed Growth"), etc. The landscapes of the annual cycle in their diversity dissonant with the stagnation of life in a country, in which the government trampled on the ideal of freedom, drove its citizens into a permanent internal crisis, turned them into hostages of life, formed "collectivism," which intensified the marginal position of human. Poems such as Leonid Talalai's "Luna" or Dmytro Cherednychenko's "Winter, Winter," and a number of others are artistic evidence of this. Their subtext and ideological content encouraged the intellectual cooperation of the author and the reader, which opened a wide range of individual interpretations of the ideological content and figurative system of "silent poetry."

Liudmyla Skyryda in "Evening Road" described the positive dependence of human on the environment, resulting in mental recovery, plastically and simply conveying the beauty of his native land: "Our only refuge – a gentle womb / Nature omnipotent and defenseless. / It will forgive us and will not condemn us, / It is reckless, wiser than people. / And your soul, blackened by pain, / Washes with tears, living water. / And my soul, like a withered stalk, / Will teach a miracle to live, to shine incorruptibly. / Why in these moments of peace and quiet / In the soul all the brightest speaks?"<sup>21</sup> Dominant in "silent poetry" in the 1970s is the image of silence. The image of silence underlines the ability to get rid of the state of abandonment and to comprehend the harmony of "lyrical 'silence'" in the poetess.

The natural philosophy code was actively cultivated not only in seasonal but also in daily landscapes, where the central place was occupied by the image of nature as a sacred component in the world of people, which characterizes the poems "Summer Day will Die down like a Candle" by Anatolii Kychynskyi, "Kinship" by Pavlo Movchan. Reflections on the transience of human existence in totalitarian society and beyond, essential for Volodymyr Pidpalyi ("In the Steppe"), Liudmyla Skyryda ("The Moon Flowed Slowly and Quietly"), etc., were accompanied by silence (*naturalis silentio*) – the dominant "lyrical 'silence.'"

In Pavlo Movchan's poem we read: "Silk sadness in the evening / the blue air thinned, / and the smoke spread meekly / along the water... / And imperceptibly, barely orphaned / the grass by the river grew, / and the quiet joy of this year / rang at the head of the stem"<sup>22</sup> ("Silk Sadness in the Evening"). The elegiac mood of the lyrical hero is represented by an oxymoron, in which the "ringing" "quiet joy" marks the desire to be silent on the river. Typologically comparable description is found in Volodymyr Pidpalyi: "The earth sleeps sensitively, like a beehive. / Dewdrops first blue grass / hiding in the

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20 Anri Bergson, *Tvorcha evoliutsiia [Creative Evolution]* (Kyiv: Vydavnytstvo Zhupanskoho, 2010).

21 Skyryda, *AD Astra!*, 41.

22 Movchan, *Tvory*, 226.

palms of timid flashes. / And sweetly the silence falls, / as the mother falls to the cradle..."<sup>23</sup> Silence creates a state of calm and balance, compared to the maternal care of the baby. "Lyrical 'silence,'" expressed in a personified image of a silent evening, simulates "a sad landscape," which meant static.

Such landscapes indirectly hinted at the latent political direction of "silent poetry," especially characteristic of the 1970s – its apogee, marking the fundamental dimensions of existence in a totalitarian society. Thus, in Anatolii Kychynskyi ("Honeymoon of Summer July..."), Pavlo Movchan ("Darkness from the Meadow Erases") wordlessness becomes a way of learning the truth, in Dmytro Cherednychenko ("We Went with My Father at Dawn") affects formation of human worldview.

Therefore, the inseparable integrity of spirituality and nature in the ontological perspective, bringing the lyrical hero closer to the Absolute, forms a significant natural philosophy contents. Such an author's position can be boldly called a "quiet revolution," because the landscape becomes a means of projection of the inner world of human, his psycho-emotional state, and gets rid of unnecessary pathos, declarative patriotism and cosmism. This gives grounds to single out the natural philosophy of Hryhorii Skovoroda as one of the leading worldviews of "silent poets."

## Conclusions

The aesthetic pursuits of "silent poets," focused on the philosophy of cordocentrism of Hryhorii Skovoroda, resulted in images of human psychology, its emotional sphere, manifestations of piety to the environment of existence. The intimate experiences of the lyrical hero of "silent poets" marked morality, and most importantly – humanism.

"Silent poets" artistically arranged the sensitive sphere of the lyrical hero, where the leading place was occupied by the appeal to the origins of the ontogenesis of the nation, spiritual connection with the native land, parental center, the native country, relations between lovers.

Natural philosophical comprehension of the world of nature, formed under the influence of Hryhorii Skovoroda's vision, dominating in the ideological and figurative system of "silent poetry," depicts the restoration of the emotional state of the lyrical hero. The form of landscape miniatures prevailed, in which the concept of silence created an aesthetic atmosphere for meditative reflections not only on the past of the Ukrainian people, but also on its existence at that time. That was the nonpolitical position of the "silent poets," which was realized in the desire to distance oneself from the realities of the Soviet era.

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23 Pidpalyi, *Zoloti dzhmeli*, 167.

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