Review Essay
The Life of Hryhorii Skovoroda Revisited

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Leonid Ushkalov. *Lovytva nevlovnoho ptakha: Zhyttia Hryhoriia Skovorody* [*Chasing an Uncapturable Bird: The Life of Hryhorii Skovoroda*]. Vydavnytstvo "Dukh i litera," 2017. Postati kul'tury [Cultural Figures]. 368 pp. UAH 135,00, cloth.

I. Leonid Ushkalov and His *Skovorodiana*: In Memoriam

The recently departed Leonid Ushkalov[1] was, without a doubt, one of the most prominent (if not *the* most prominent) present-day experts on Ukrainian literature of the baroque period (the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), in general, and on the legacy of eighteenth-century philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda, in particular. He was also one of the most prolific writers in the field, having published more than a dozen books and numerous articles on the aforementioned topics. Ushkalov's general monographs include the studies *Z istorii ukrains'koi literatury XVII-XVIII st.* (*From the History of Ukrainian Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*), *Esei pro ukrains'ke baroko* (*Essays on the Ukrainian Baroque*), and *Literatura i filosofiia: Doba ukrains'koho baroko* (*Literature and Philosophy: The Ukrainian Baroque Period*). Among Ushkalov's book publications and essays dealing with Skovoroda, one will find *Hryhorii Skovoroda i antychna kul'tura* (*Hryhorii Skovoroda and the Culture of Antiquity*), *Narysy z filosofii Hryhoriia Skovorody* (*Sketches of the Philosophy of Hryhorii Skovoroda*), *Ukrains'ke barokove bohomyslennia: Sim etiudiv pro Hryhoriia Skovorodu* (*Ukrainian Baroque Concepts of God: Seven Studies on Hryhorii Skovoroda*), and the majority of pieces in his collection *Skovoroda ta inshi: Prychynky do istorii ukrains'koi literatury* (*Skovoroda and Others: Contributions to the History of Ukrainian Literature*). Ushkalov also compiled and edited the most extensive Skovoroda bibliography to date—*Dva stolittia skovorodiany: Bibliohrafichnyi dovidnyk* (*Two Centuries of* Skovorodiana*: A Bibliographic Guide*). And over

[1] Leonid Ushkalov passed away in Kharkiv on 25 February 2019.

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the years, he compiled and edited several volumes of Skovoroda's writings, most notably the essential fourteen-hundred-page academic edition of the philosopher's collected works, *Hryhorii Skovoroda: Povna akademichna zbirka tvoriv* (*Hryhorii Skovoroda: The Complete Academic Collection of Works*).[2]

Looking at this extensive list of publications, one might think that *Lovytva nevlovnoho ptakha: Zhyttia Hryhoriia Skovorody* is just another scholarly study by Ushkalov on the legacy of Skovoroda within the general context of Ukrainian baroque literature. But this simply is not the case. Although a careful reader will undoubtedly find here echoes of, and references to, Ushkalov's earlier studies, the book nevertheless has a special place among his *Skovorodiana* pieces. In contrast to his earlier monographs, which focus primarily on a scholarly analysis of Skovoroda's literary works and philosophical ideas, this publication is a "classic" mainstream biography. In fact, detailed discussion of Skovoroda's literary and philosophical texts is rather marginal here. Such discussion is placed within the main narrative, which focuses on the events of the philosopher's life and the environment in which he lived.

Ushkalov, as an erudite scholar and eminent specialist in the field, was well aware of the work done by his predecessors—the other scholars who before him had written books detailing the events of Skovoroda's life. I believe that we can better understand and appreciate the intended purpose of this new biography of Skovoroda within Ukrainian-language Skovoroda scholarship if we compare Ushkalov's approach with the direction of three important similarly themed books published earlier by Ukrainian scholars.

The first such work is Dmytro Bahalii's classic monograph *Ukrains'kyi mandrovanyi filosof Hr. Sav. Skovoroda* (*The Ukrainian Wandering Philosopher Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda*). Originally published in 1926, this remarkable study even today may be considered the most comprehensive monograph on Skovoroda's life and works in the Ukrainian language (perhaps even overall). This four-hundred-page book is divided into two parts. Part 1 (Bahalii 9-194) deals with Skovoroda's life and character, and it includes various evaluations of him by others, as well as a discussion of the philosopher's impact on Ukrainian society at the time. The second, somewhat longer part of the book (Bahalii 195-393) is devoted to the description and interpretation of Skovoroda's works, a general overview of his philosophy, and a detailed discussion of Skovoroda scholarship up to the mid-1920s. Thus, only a fraction of this scholarly monograph is actually a biography

[2] A concordance to Skovoroda's complete works has been prepared on the basis of this academic edition (see Pylypiuk et al.).

proper. Only chapter 1 (Bahalii 9-91) of part 1, which constitutes less than a quarter of the book, provides the type of material that is presented and analyzed in Ushkalov's *Lovytva nevlovnoho ptakha*. As for its content, Bahalii's biography of Skovoroda is detailed and meticulously researched, but it represents the state of Skovoroda scholarship in the mid-1920s and includes a number of elements that have since been disputed and/or corrected by scholars.

The second important Ukrainian-language book on Skovoroda's life and legacy is Valerii Shevchuk's Piznanyi i nepiznanyi Sfinks: Hryhorii Skovoroda suchasnymy ochyma (The Known and Unknown Sphinx: Hryhorii Skovoroda from a Contemporary Perspective). This very extensive (over five-hundred-page-long) and richly illustrated monograph published in 2008 is also divided into two parts. Somewhat like in Bahalii's book, part 1 of Shevchuk's monograph (Shevchuk 17-352) is devoted to the life of Skovoroda. Part 2 (Shevchuk 353-495) presents the author's interpretation of the moral and ethical aspects of Skovoroda's teachings and provides three comparative studies of Skovoroda in juxtaposition with other literary figures (Sebastiian Klenovych, Mykola Filians'kyi, and Valer''ian Pidmohyl'nyi). Although all three chapters of part 1 (which together constitute two-thirds of the book) deal with Skovoroda's biography, Shevchuk's descriptions of the events of the philosopher's life are very often interrupted by various digressions, some of which are quite lengthy. Just two of the many relevant examples of this include an extensive analysis of the formal aspects of Skovoroda's poetry in chapter 2 (Shevchuk 200-10) and a detailed discussion of the entire cycle of his fables in chapter 3 (Shevchuk 270-78). Shevchuk, in his factual description of Skovoroda's life events, provides copious details and explanations and often polemicizes at length with the views of other Skovoroda scholars. All of this does not make for smooth or easy reading. Overall, Shevchuk's monograph is quite clearly written first and foremost for "the initiated"—that is, for other scholars and writers and for readers who possess an extensive knowledge of Ukrainian history and culture.

Ushkalov, in writing *Lovytva nevlovnoho ptakha*, chose a different path from the one taken by his two distinguished predecessors. His own, earlier publications on Skovoroda could certainly have been combined and expanded to form a very solid scholarly monograph that would challenge the monographs by Bahalii and Shevchuk. However, he decided to strictly limit the scope of his book to a discussion of the events of Skovoroda's life (and the legends that came to be associated with the philosopher) presented against the backdrop of relevant aspects of the eighteenth-century social environment in Ukraine and the Russian Empire. (Let us keep in mind that

there are generally very few reliable documentary sources on Skovoroda's life.) In taking this approach, Ushkalov does not follow the model of another major study within Ukrainian *Skovorodiana*—Leonid Makhnovets''s *Hryhorii Skovoroda: Biohrafiia* (*Hryhorii Skovoroda: A Biography*). Makhnovets''s book is perhaps the most detailed analysis of the documented and undocumented (frequently legendary) events of Skovoroda's life; it is over two hundred fifty pages long. It has been considered by many to be the definitive biography of Skovoroda. However, in style and format, it does not constitute the type of mainstream biography to which contemporary Western and Ukrainian readers have become accustomed. Makhnovets' spent many years meticulously researching various previously neglected archival sources, and he devotes large parts of his book to a detailed analysis of specific documents and to extensive explanations of his various theses and hypotheses. His book is not a chronologically organized biographic narrative of Skovoroda but rather a series of sections that are focused on discussions of particular events. Here, the author analyzes the available documentation and extensively polemicizes with the views of his predecessors (such as Bahalii and Mykola Petrov). As a result, his book, like Shevchuk's, appeals primarily to scholars who are interested specifically in Skovoroda, his immediate environment, and the various details of his life story.

In contrast to the three aforementioned authors, Ushkalov clearly intended for his biography of Skovoroda to be a straightforward and very readable book appealing to a broad range of readers interested in the history of Ukrainian culture. This is evident from the simple, primarily chronological structure of his narrative; the clear and uncomplicated (rather succinct) style of narration; the language that is not overburdened with scholarly lingo or complex terminology; and the virtual absence of the typical scholarly apparatus generally found in his other books. *Lovytva nevlovnoho ptakha* has neither a bibliography nor an index, and there are almost no footnotes, except for translations of foreign phrases and occasional references regarding the Biblical quotes found in Skovoroda's texts. The absence of footnotes could in fact be rather disappointing for a scholar wishing to know the exact source of a given quotation. But this type of format is generally preferred by the average reader. Moreover, as already mentioned, Ushkalov does not discuss in any significant detail Skovoroda's specific literary works, nor does he engage the reader in an analysis of the formal and stylistic aspects of these texts. Even the principal tenets of Skovoroda's philosophy are treated by Ushkalov in a specific way: he addresses them by organically (often almost imperceptibly) blending Skovoroda's philosophical ideas into the narrative detailing the philosopher's life story. Ushkalov also tries to

keep things simple in relating actual biographic events. He does not venture into lengthy discussions about the various views and interpretations of these events, nor does he (with very few exceptions) enter into a polemic with other Skovoroda scholars. Rather, in most cases, based on his thorough knowledge of the subject matter, he tends to choose one view of events as the most likely one and to present this view as part of a streamlined, naturally flowing story. This certainly makes his presentation of Skovoroda's biography much easier to read and follow than, for example, the non-chronological and somewhat convoluted discussion of selected aspects of Skovoroda's biography found in Makhnovets''s book.

At the same time, Ushkalov's biography of Skovoroda is not a "popular" book "for the masses." It does not follow a different tradition of Ukrainian *Skovorodiana* introduced in 1920 by Hnat Khotkevych in his book *Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda (ukrains'kyi filosof): Korotkyi ioho zhyttiepys i vybrani mistsia z tvoriv ta lystiv* (*Hryhorii Savych Skovoroda [A Ukrainian Philosopher]: A Short Biography and Selected Passages from His Works and Letters*). This tradition seeks to popularize among the widest spectrum of readers basic information about Skovoroda and simplified explanations of his ideas. Ushkalov's intention to make his book readable and accessible to a broader audience does not by any means transform *Lovytva nevlovnoho ptakha* into a simplistic text. In fact, the clarity of style and apparent simplicity of the narrative are somewhat deceiving. Ushkalov manages almost imperceptibly to "sneak" complex philosophical ideas into the text, which at times demand considerable intellectual effort from the reader in order to be properly understood and appreciated. Some parts of the book are not at all easy to grasp on the first reading. These sections deserve to be read and reread to uncover their deeper layers of meaning. We can see this already in the very first section of the book, which is somewhat unusually named "Prelude" (5-28). It is devoted to the greatly understudied topic of the influence of Skovoroda's teachings on the work of the most prominent Ukrainian linguist of the nineteenth century, Oleksandr Potebnia. This section should be read at least twice for a full comprehension and appreciation of the wealth of ideas expressed there by Ushkalov and the wider impact of these ideas on our understanding not only of nineteenth-century Ukrainian intellectual thought but also of the development of modern Ukrainian culture, in general.

Overall, the great skill with which Ushkalov combines simple style and language (which make his book accessible to a wide array of readers) with extensive erudition and a remarkable depth of ideas (which make the book interesting for scholars and intellectuals) is a rather rare phenomenon in

contemporary Ukrainian scholarship. The final result of this special combination of straightforwardness and sophistication is a book that represents, in my opinion, the most engaging biography of Hryhorii Skovoroda produced in any language to date—a book that may serve as an excellent introduction to Skovoroda and his legacy both for the general reader and for scholars interested in embarking on the study of Skovoroda's philosophy and the cultural context of the late Ukrainian baroque period of the eighteenth century. After all, a valuable aspect (and a fairly uncommon one in current Ukrainian scholarship) of Ushkalov's book is that the material presented in it is not limited to a discussion of Skovoroda's works and personal experiences. Large sections of the book are devoted to an examination of the broader cultural and historical contexts in which the philosopher lived, as they to a large extent carved him into the man that he was.

II. *Ad fontes*: Skovoroda's Kyivan Alma Mater

Lovytva nevlovnoho ptakha contains many "subplots"—that is, historical and cultural digressions from the basic narrative of Skovoroda's life—which present a broader perspective on life in eighteenth-century Ukraine and the Russian Empire. However, these digressions never become extraneous to the main narrative; they never develop into separate, autonomous sections of text (existing by themselves and for themselves). On the contrary, they are seamlessly and masterfully blended into the story of Skovoroda's life and his spiritual and intellectual development. A brief overview of one of the book's chapters can shed some light on how Ushkalov achieves this.

Chapter 2 of *Lovytva nevlovnoho ptakha* (49-90) is devoted to the period of Skovoroda's study at the Kyivan Academy. The narrative begins with Skovoroda's arrival in Kyiv in 1734, when he was not yet twelve years old and when he probably "for the first time in his life saw the Dnipro River" (49).[3] Ushkalov then describes how Kyiv might have appeared to the young Skovoroda at that particular time of year (August) and at that stage in the city's development. (Many readers may be surprised to learn that at that time, Kyiv was a relatively small town with a population of some twenty thousand people.) A general description of Kyiv (49-50) naturally shifts to an outline of the district of Podil (50-51), where the buildings of the academy were located and where Skovoroda spent the next several years of his life.

A description of the academy itself follows (52), but specific reference is made to the exact period when Skovoroda initiated his studies there.

[3] All translations of quotations in this review are mine.

According to Ushkalov, this was a time when the academy "was flourishing" (52). Ushkalov goes on to discuss everyday aspects of life for academy students. He begins with the topic of the (remarkably democratic) system of admissions and enrolment (52). He then enumerates the financial-assistance options that were offered by the academy to students (like Skovoroda) who came from poor families (53). He describes the student uniform (53) that Skovoroda would have worn and so on. A little later in the text (54-55), we learn about the rules of the academy ("'Leges academicae'"), which shaped the general behaviour of the students. Starting on page 54, Ushkalov provides a fairly detailed (but not overly lengthy or tedious) description of the general, twelve-year course of study at the Kyivan Academy, which consisted of eight classes (or "schools" as they were called at that time)—from the lowest, *analogia*, to the highest, theology. Apart from this general course of study, optional "extraordinary classes" (54) were offered, where students could learn Greek, Hebrew, and German. The book informs us that Skovoroda attended all of these optional classes (66), which helps us understand how he came to have such a good knowledge of all of these languages (evidenced in his later written works and in some information related to his travels).

Many readers of this section of the book may be quite surprised to learn that the Kyivan Academy at that time (that is, already several decades after the takeover of the Kyiv metropolitanate by the Muscovite Church) granted a very marginal role to the Church Slavonic language as well as to the eclectic Ukrainian bookish language that was the literary medium of the Cossack Hetman state. Instead, the students of the lowest classes (*analogia*) studied and communicated primarily in Polish (56). Then, starting in the next higher class (*infima classis*), they switched over almost exclusively to Latin. As Ushkalov explains, students were encouraged to communicate among themselves in Latin, and in fact, "Latin became their language of thought" (60). Skovoroda's decision to write quite a few of his mature original works in Latin thus becomes understandable.

In general, Ushkalov, in describing the various "schools" at the academy, presents them in the way that Skovoroda most likely saw and experienced them. He discusses the personalities of specific professors under whom Skovoroda studied and the textbooks that he most likely used. This information often sheds much light on the philosopher's future creative work. For example, Ushkalov hypothesizes that many of the emblems that were so important in Skovoroda's later philosophical treatises were probably seen by him for the first time in the textbook by John Amos Comenius *Orbis pictus* (*Visible World in Pictures*, 1658), which was used in three of the academy's "schools"—the lower class (*infima classis*), grammar

(*media classis grammatices*), and syntax (*suprema classis* [56]). As for Skovoroda's professors, perhaps the strongest influence on him (according to Ushkalov) was exerted by Symeon Todors'kyi, who taught the "extraordinary classes" of Greek, Hebrew, and German. A brilliant and erudite scholar, philosopher, poet, and translator, Todors'kyi had studied at the famous German University of Halle, among others, and had translated several works by representatives of the so-called German Pietism (64), including Johann Arndt. Since Skovoroda's later philosophy contains many ideas that seem congruous with the tradition of German Pietism, it is very likely that his development as a philosopher was influenced to a considerable degree by his studies under Todors'kyi and by his reading of Todors'kyi's translations. Ushkalov provides an example of the direct influence of Todors'kyi's Greek-language textbook on Skovoroda's ideas: he points out a quote from the textbook that Skovoroda inserted many years later into letters that he wrote to his favourite student and first biographer, Mykhailo Kovalyns'kyi (67).

After describing the educational system and curriculum at the Kyivan Academy (relating it as much as possible to Skovoroda's experience), Ushkalov goes on (starting from page 68) to discuss the daily life of the students in Kyiv—how they sang in the streets to earn extra money and food (68); what their theatrical performances were like (69); and what kind of academic and theological disputes arose among them (69-70). Then, on page 70, Ushkalov begins a discussion of the state of philosophical studies and education at the Kyivan Academy at the time when Skovoroda was attending the academy's seventh "school"—philosophy. (This was the highest class that Skovoroda completed at the academy; not intending to become a cleric, he did not enrol in the highest class—theology.) Of course, a thorough discussion of this complex and broad topic (that is, philosophical education at the academy) could only be accomplished in a separate monograph. Ushkalov was well aware of this fact. Here, he limits his focus to three specific themes: the dominant importance of Aristotle and his later interpreters in the academy's philosophical curriculum in Skovoroda's time (70-72); the ways in which the concept of time was treated by the professors of the academy—the philosopher of the mid-seventeenth century Inokentii Gizel' and several philosophers of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (Ioasaf Krokovs'kyi, Teofan Prokopovych, Stefan Iavors'kyi, Khrystofor Charnuts'kyi, and Heorhii Konys'kyi [73-82]); and finally, the views of various academy professors (primarily Prokopovych, Iavors'kyi, and Konys'kyi) on the issue of ethics (a topic that was very important in Skovoroda's own, later writings [83-88]).

In discussing the various perspectives of academy professors (views found in their books and course notes, which would have been accessible to the young Skovoroda and other students), Ushkalov frequently juxtaposes and compares those views with the ideas expressed by Skovoroda in his mature philosophical works. He delves into particular detail in his comparison of Prokopovych's ideas on the concept of time and Skovoroda's musings about time in his own philosophical texts and in his fables and poems (74-82). Overall, this section of the book clearly illustrates the degree to which Skovoroda was a product of the intellectual environment of the Kyivan Academy and the extent to which he developed and improved on the ideas of his professors and predecessors later, in his own philosophy.

At the end of chapter 2, Ushkalov thoughtfully contrasts the theoretical philosophical teachings that Skovoroda would have learned at the academy with the principles of the time and society in which he lived. The ethical lessons of the Kyivan philosophers, including lessons on what would later become the crux of Skovoroda's own philosophical oeuvre—the nature of human happiness and how to achieve a state of happiness in one's life—stood in sharp contrast to the realities of the mid-eighteenth-century Russian Empire, where "the wheel of fortune was spinning faster 'than in other places'" (89) and where Skovoroda's contemporaries were totally preoccupied with feverish materialistic strivings to promote their own careers. The chapter ends with Skovoroda's leaving the academy in December 1741 (90) to pursue a lucrative career as an imperial-choir singer at the very centre of the empire—St. Petersburg. There, the "wheel of fortune" turned the fastest.

As can be surmised, at least generally, from the above description of chapter 2, Ushkalov accomplishes at least two important objectives in that section. First, he provides, in a lively and interesting fashion, a remarkably evocative and multi-faceted portrayal of life in Kyiv in the first half of the eighteenth century, and particularly of the Kyivan Academy; its professors, curriculum, and intellectual environment; and the daily lives of the students. Second, he masterfully blends this information with Skovoroda's biography by introducing his own descriptions of how Skovoroda must have lived (the most likely conditions of his life); by identifying the professors and books that had an impact on Skovoroda's development; by comparing the ideas of Skovoroda's teachers with some of Skovoroda's own, later views; and so on. Thus, despite the fact that actual documentary sources about Skovoroda's time at the Kyivan Academy are extremely scant, the reader of this chapter is left with a strong and vivid impression about the young Skovoroda's life in Kyiv. Moreover, Ushkalov's brief but poignant discussions of the

philosophical interpretations of the concept of time and of the various views on ethics expressed by Ukrainian baroque thinkers leave the reader with much food for thought beyond the narrow context of Skovoroda's biography. This, incidentally, is another remarkable feature of the book: throughout the text, Ushkalov consistently enriches the purely factual information about Skovoroda with his own reflections on much broader issues and on the deeper meanings of historical circumstances and events.

III. *Sic transit gloria mundi*: "The World Tried to Capture Me. . . ."

Further chapters of *Lovytva nevlovnoho ptakha* offer similarly multi-layered descriptions of other stages of Skovoroda's life. Overall, Ushkalov devotes (to a larger degree than the majority of his predecessors) a great deal of space and attention in his book to Skovoroda's life before the appearance of his major works and prior to his becoming a wandering philosopher. Eight of the (total) eleven chapters in this book (a section that constitutes roughly three-quarters of the text) deal with the time prior to 1769, when the forty-seven-year-old Skovoroda resigned from his teaching position at Kharkiv College and wrote his first philosophical dialogue, *Narkis* (*Narcissus*, 1769). This focus on the early (in relative terms) life of Skovoroda stems from the fact that, as already mentioned, Ushkalov (unlike Bahalii and Shevchuk) does not involve himself in detailed descriptions and discussions of the philosopher's written works, which play a pivotal role later in his life.

Another chapter in the book that most readers (both lay people and specialists alike) will tend to find particularly interesting is chapter 3 (91-122), which chronicles Skovoroda's life in St. Petersburg. This chapter offers specific insight into the mid-eighteenth-century court life and cultural scene in the imperial capital. The narrative starts with information about the coup staged in 1741, which led to the enthronement of Empress Elizabeth II (91), and proceeds to describe the personality and rule of this monarch, who happened to have a special sentiment toward Ukraine, the Ukrainian culture, and particularly—Ukrainian music. This feeling was greatly influenced by her romance with, and later marriage to, Ukrainian Cossack Oleksii Rozum (Rozumovs'kyi). Ushkalov calls their relationship "almost a fairy-tale" (93). After all, out of her love for Rozumovs'kyi, Elizabeth (who "herself was the daughter of a simple Livonian peasant woman" [93]) turned down marriage proposals from princes and magnates, committing herself to this simple Cossack and former singer in the very same imperial choir in which Skovoroda, later, also sang.

In this chapter, Ushkalov, cognizant of the fact that "Elizabeth simply adored all manner of celebrations, receptions, balls, comedies, and operas"

(99), provides vivid descriptions of an elaborate ball and other examples of the "storybook luxury" (100) of imperial court life. Within this context, he also discusses in considerable detail the lifestyle and obligations of imperial-choir singers. He suggests that Skovoroda, during his time in the choir, was among "the choir's best singers" (121). Also of particular interest is Ushkalov's colourful description of the staging of Johann Adolf Hasse's opera *La clemenza di Tito* (*The Clemency of Titus*), which was performed in Moscow in 1742 on the occasion of Elizabeth's official coronation (101-04). The details of this extravagant performance and the fact that Skovoroda took part in it as a choir singer were not known to many of Ushkalov's predecessors. Most of the earlier biographies of Skovoroda (for example, the biographic section in Bahalii's monograph) do not mention the performance at all. And although it is discussed by Makhnovets' in his book on Skovoroda, Ushkalov's interpretation, which is blended into a broader depiction of the culture and life of the Russian imperial court, is particularly effective. Moreover, Ushkalov connects some of the motifs in this opera to several themes in Skovoroda's later works, thus clearly implying that this majestic performance had an impact on the ideas and thoughts of the future philosopher.

Overall, Ushkalov's narrative in chapter 3 profoundly reflects on Skovoroda's character and provides additional insight into his later fate. On the one hand, it vividly describes the world of luxury, fame, and splendour that Skovoroda experienced first-hand but deliberately abandoned in order to pursue a very modest and often impoverished lifestyle that instead offered him a sense of inner freedom. Ushkalov's descriptions of lavish imperial court life can be seen as an evocative symbol of the "world" that Skovoroda had in mind when he composed the inscription for his headstone: "'The world tried to capture me, but it did not succeed'" (332). On the other hand, Ushkalov demonstrates that this high-class society (which stood in stark contrast to the humble life that Skovoroda later chose for himself) and especially the cultural achievements of that society nevertheless deeply resonated within Skovoroda's soul, and they profoundly influenced his philosophical thought.

IV. *Sic itur ad astra*: Skovoroda and the Legends about Him

As in the case of any biography, two important questions need to be raised: How faithfully does the narrative present information derived from documentary sources, and how critical is the author regarding disputed and undocumented accounts? These issues are especially important in the case of Skovoroda's biography because there is a dearth of fully reliable

documentary evidence about his life and a significant number of semi-legendary and even fully legendary tales about him. One can generally say that Ushkalov, throughout *Lovytva nevlovnoho ptakha*, is quite careful in his treatment of sources, and he tends to err on the side of caution in separating actual historical fact from legend (certain legendary stories arose still during Skovoroda's lifetime). Ushkalov prefers to rely on preserved documents and Skovoroda's own words (the latter having been conveyed by his pupil and first biographer, Kovalyns'kyi). A good example of this approach can be seen in Ushkalov's treatment of the disputed topic of Skovoroda's European travels in the late 1740s, when he was stationed in Tokay, Hungary, in the service of a wine supplier to the imperial court, Fedor Vishenskii.

Kovalyns'kyi, in describing Skovoroda's journeys at that time, mentions only "Vienna, Offen (that is, Buda), Pressburg (that is, Bratislava), and some other nearby cities" (135). In spite of this, many scholars have claimed that Skovoroda's travels were much more extensive, that is, that he journeyed "through Poland, Prussia, Germany, and Italy" (135) and that he even spent some years studying at the University of Halle (137). The belief that Skovoroda both visited Italy and studied in Halle is even expressed by the diligent scholar Makhnovets'. Bahalii and Shevchuk both presume that Skovoroda studied at, or at least visited, Halle. Ushkalov is much more cautious in his assessment of the extent of Skovoroda's travels. In the end, he tends to fully depend on Kovalyns'kyi's words but offers very convincing hypotheses as to which of the "nearby cities" Skovoroda might actually have visited to meet and study with scholars. For example, according to Ushkalov, Skovoroda most likely visited the Hungarian town of Sárospatak, known for its "famous Reformed College" (141). Ushkalov also points out that Skovoroda's teacher Symeon Todors'kyi had taught for several years in Hungary and might have told his student about the various institutions of higher learning located there (66).

Ushkalov employs a convincing method to support his view regarding the latter point. Not having access to any documentary evidence detailing Skovoroda's travels, he quotes at length from the diaries of Ivan Fal'kivs'kyi (143-53), who also spent time in the town of Tokay (somewhat later, in the 1770s) and who studied at various educational institutions in the area. The material quoted by Ushkalov indicates that Skovoroda (who was in a similar financial situation as Fal'kivs'kyi) could have had contact with scholars and familiarized himself with German philosophical thought of the time without necessarily travelling to Halle and studying at that city's university.

In other places, Ushkalov tends not to give too much authority to the semi-legendary stories about Skovoroda's life, but he does not dismiss them

outright. For example, he presents in some detail the story recorded by Izmail Sreznevs'kyi about Skovoroda's alleged late-life romance, his intentions to get married, and his sudden change of heart just prior to his planned wedding (254-56). Ushkalov does not entirely reject this story, but he does insist that there is no actual evidence to support its validity. In addition, he shows how this tale possesses elements that are similar to the plot of the popular Ukrainian baroque play *Aleksii, chelovik Bozhii* (*Alexis, Man of God*). This suggests that the information about Skovoroda's romance is most likely a literary, fictitious tale rather than an actual historical account. In the end, Ushkalov refers to the central figure in this story as "Skovoroda, or rather the protagonist of this legend" (256), clearly indicating that he doubts the story's historical authenticity.

On the other hand, Ushkalov is less skeptical about one of the most popular "legendary" tales about Skovoroda, namely, the account of the philosopher's last days. As the story goes, on the eve of Skovoroda's passing, the aged philosopher dug his own grave, said farewell to his friends, gave instructions regarding his funeral, and then retired to his room and peacefully died in his sleep. Makhnovets', in his study of Skovoroda's biography, refuses to seriously consider this "charming legend" (Makhnovets' 253), saying that Skovoroda "did not have the strength to dig a grave. He could barely stand, as his exhaustion was 'extreme'" (Makhnovets' 254). In contrast, although Ushkalov refers to this story as "a folk legend recorded by Izmail Sreznevs'kyi" (331), he describes the events leading up to Skovoroda's passing without comment, simply in the way that they are outlined in Sreznevs'kyi's account. He does not claim that they are historically accurate, but he does not dismiss the events either. Ushkalov leaves the "charming legend" of Skovoroda's last days unaltered—as it is preserved by tradition—and ends the final chapter of his book (chapter 11 [307-32]) with that story.

V. *Non omnis moriar*: Reflections on Skovoroda's Legacy

The main body (eleven chapters) of Ushkalov's book is flanked by a prologue and epilogue of sorts, respectively entitled "Prelude" and "Finale" (333-63). The use of such musical terminology suggests that Ushkalov conceptualized his book in the way that a composer imagines and constructs a musical composition. One rarely encounters scholarly authors imbuing their studies with such "musical" effects. Ushkalov, in his endeavour, seems largely successful. *Lovytva nevlovnoho ptakha* is not only a solid, engaging, and very readable biography of Skovoroda (most likely the first mainstream biography of this philosopher published in any language), but it is also a well-

written multi-layered text that leaves the reader with the type of satisfying aftertaste that one gets after listening to a musical work by an accomplished composer.

Earlier, I mentioned Ushkalov's insightful and thought-provoking discussion of how Skovoroda's teachings influenced the work of nineteenth-century linguist and philosopher Oleksandr Potebnia. The section entitled "Prelude" very effectively sets the stage for a multitude of "polyphonic" themes that arise over the course of the book's eleven chapters. The section entitled "Finale" reflects on the impact of Skovoroda's work and thought on Ukrainian culture in the "cacophonic" and "dissonant" twentieth century. Here, however, Ushkalov has some difficulty in presenting his ideas effectively. In order to improve the weaker areas of this generally excellent book, I would insist in future editions on more footnotes throughout the text and perhaps a revision of the last section of the book. In "Finale," Ushkalov discusses the attitude toward Skovoroda and his legacy on the part of early twentieth-century Ukrainian avant-gardists, and particularly futurists. Although this section is definitely interesting and informative, it nonetheless seems to be the weakest part of the book. Personally, I find it to be rather anticlimactic: it is not entirely on a par with the finale of a grand musical composition. Also somewhat confusing is the fact that Ushkalov provides a very specific "current date" here—"the end of June 2001" (362). As far as I know, the book was written (and certainly published) much later than that.

But these are very minor and quite subjective critical comments that stem from my desire to see this very good biography of Skovoroda become even better. They in no way take away from the fact that Ushkalov's *Lovytva nevlovnoho ptakha* is a very significant scholarly achievement, an important contribution to Skovoroda scholarship, and the best biography of Skovoroda to date. An English translation of (a perhaps slightly revised version of) this book would serve as an excellent introduction to Skovoroda and his works for Western readers.

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