# From Strength to Strength: Observations on Hryhorij Skovoroda and Vasyl' Barka

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А я желаю Вам итить от силы в силу![1]

Hryhorij Skovoroda's influence on subsequent Ukrainian literature, from Ivan Kotljarevs'kyj to Vasyl' Stus, has been immense. A survey article would have to consist of a rapid-fire list of authors and titles, with capsule summaries. I have chosen, instead, to concentrate on a single (possibly the greatest) living Ukrainian poet or, even more narrowly, on his two major works. The poet is Vasyl' Barka (born in 1908 in the province of Poltava, and now living in Glen Spey, New York) and the works are *Okean* and *Svidok dlja soncja šestykrylyx*.[2]

Skovoroda's influence on Ukrainian literature is twofold—through his verse

1. "And I wish that you might go from strength to strength." Skovoroda, "Alfavit, ili bukvar' mira."

2. There are two editions of the first volume of *Okean*. The earlier edition came out as a separate volume, and was later incorporated into the current two-volume edition. Between the first and the second edition of the first volume, Barka made quite a number of changes. To my mind, some of them are unfortunate. At the risk of creating chaos, my references to the poems in the first volume are to the first edition: *Okean* (New York: Slovo, 1959). The more recent edition, incorporating the new second volume, is: *Okean: Liryka*, 2 vols. printed in one (New York: Slovo, 1979). My references to this edition deal only with quotations from the second volume. All references to the two editions will be given within the body of the text, preceded by the letter *O*. *Svidok dlja soncja šestykrylyx: Strofičnyj roman*, 4 vols. (New York: Sučasnist', 1981), is a "novel in verse," consisting of four thousand twelve-line numbered stanzas. Because the numeration of the stanzas is featured at the expense of the page numbers, references to volume and *stanza* will be given within the text, preceded by the letter *S*. Because of Barka's complex style, quotations from his poetry will be given in Ukrainian. Skovoroda will be quoted in the original only when the discussion bears on his style.

and through his prose. The influence of Skovoroda's verse is most evident in early Ukrainian poetry, beginning with Kotljarevs'kyj and flourishing during the Romantic and early Realist periods. Skovoroda's prose begins to influence later Ukrainian literature, and that influence is far more complex, multidirectional and interesting.

We should not wonder that Skovoroda's prose has engaged modern writers, including poets, more than his poetry has done. Skovoroda is much more a poet in his prose than in his poetry. One can risk the judgement that he is much more a poet than a philosopher. Together with Plato, certain baroque writers like Burton, Browne, or Pascal, or more recent philosophers like Rousseau, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty, Skovoroda expressed his ideas in the very process of their unfolding. He thought them poetically: his dialogues and treatises are closely knit tapestries of metaphors—not so much exegeses of biblical images as their poetical re-embodiments. I shall, therefore, limit my discussion to Skovoroda's central prose works, omitting his poetry altogether.[3]

Skovoroda's profile of poet-philosopher tempts poets more than it does prose writers. Particularly in Barka's case we have an example of surprisingly close kinship with a spiritual forebear, a pure "elective affinity" of the kind that is found but rarely in literary history, all the more so since it has nothing to do with direct imitation. Not only is Barka aware of this relationship, but he carefully cultivates it. He has written an essay on Skovoroda[4] and frequently discusses or mentions him not only in his critical prose and fiction, but also in his poetry.[5]

Barka, in fact, has established for himself a poetical genealogy in Ukrainian literature: "Slovo o polku Ihorevi," Skovoroda, Ševčenko, Tyčyna.[6] I find it difficult to assimilate the "Slovo" in this context, but as for Ševčenko and Tyčyna, there can be no doubt—both poets owe much to Skovoroda.[7] In several

3. They are contained in the first volume of: *Tvory v dvox tomax*, ed. 0.I. Bilec'kyj et al. (Kyiv: AN URSR, 1961). I refer to the following dialogues: "Narkiss. Rozhlahol o tom: uznaj sebe," abbreviating it in the body of the text as NAR; "Simfonia, narečennaja kniha Asxan', o poznanii samaho sebe"—ASK; "Razhovor pjati putnikov o istinnom ščastii v žizni"—PJA; "Kol'co"—KOL; "Razhovor, nazyvaemyj alfavit, ili bukvar' mira"—ALF; "Knižečka nazyvaemaja Silenus Alcibiadis, sirěč' Ikona Alkiviadskaja"—IKO; "Dialoh. Imja emu—Potop zmiin"—POT.

4. "Apostoličnyj starčyk," *Zemlja sadivnyčyx: Eseji* (New York: Sučasnist', 1977), 99-111.

5. In Barka's poetry, we meet Skovoroda in *Svidok*, 1:613-15. An allusive portrait of Skovoroda facing death is found in *Okean*, 2:22.

6. See *Zemlja sadivnyčyx*, 59.

7. Ševčenko describes his encounter with Skovoroda in a lyrical poem, "A.O. Kozačkovs'komu," *Povne vydannja tvoriv*, 14 vols. (Chicago: Mykola Denysiuk, 1962), 3:44. He mentions Skovoroda several times in his Russian-language prose work. See *Povne vydannja*, where that short work appears in a Ukrainian translation as *Blyznjata*, 8:17, 19, 20, 27, 67. On p. 67 he is not altogether kind to the philosopher's memory. In his Preface to the "Second *Kobzar*," he praises Robert Burns as a great folk

essays on Ševčenko and Tyčyna,[8] and in book-length studies of the two poets,[9] Barka repeatedly links their work with Skovoroda's thought and art. Without Skovoroda, Barka insists in one passage on Tyčyna, "the brightest stream of light" in Tyčyna's central collection *Sonjašni kljarnety* would have been impossible;[10] in another, he calls Skovoroda Tyčyna's teacher.[11] As for Ševčenko, Barka calls him "in the main, a Skovorodian (*Skovorodjanec'*)."[12] His monograph on Ševčenko is grounded in that hypothesis so pervasively that it is in danger of distorting Ševčenko's image: Ševčenko is presented as an "evangelical" poet, an apostle of peace and passivity.

It is, however, Vasyl' Barka who remains the most consistent and the profoundest "Skovorodian" in Ukrainian literature. Skovoroda and Barka are poet-thinkers, expressing themselves both in poetry and prose, the difference being that Skovoroda's best work happens to be cast in prose, and that of Barka in poetry. Both have a well-structured view of the world that is almost a "closed system" and that (with a few important exceptions) is remarkably consistent within each writer's *oeuvre*. Both use language in similar ways: language is primarily metaphor, frequently imaging lived speech. This holds true even for so formal a poet as Barka: he manages to convey the typically Skovorodian dynamic, turbulent discourse, with its ellipses, colloquialisms, idioms, invective, and occasional humour, in his rigorously structured stanzas. It is in Barka's prose (both fiction and essays, although in Barka's case the line between the two is vague) that the similarity of his own style to that of Skovoroda becomes most apparent. Both men are similar even in their ways of life: they model themselves after *starčyky* (*starčyk*—which can be translated as "pious recluse" or "wandering

poet, and writes that Skovoroda could have been such a poet if he had not been deflected from his destiny by the Latin and Russian languages. See *Povne vydannja*, 2:138. Historical and critical discussions of Ševčenko's relationship to Skovoroda are far too numerous to list here. Tyčyna was much more generous to Skovoroda than Ševčenko had been. He edited Skovoroda's fables in Ukrainian translation, edited a collection of articles in his honour, dedicated his own politically "unsafe" collection *Zamist' sonetiv i oktav* (1920) to Skovoroda's memory, wrote a number of articles on him, generously peppered with references to Engels and Lenin (see, for example, *Tvory*, 5 vols. [Kyiv: Deržavne vydavnyctvo xudožn'oi literatury, 1962], 138-49, and 271-80), and worked for forty years on a controversial long poem about him, which remained unfinished at his death. See *Skovoroda: Symfonija* (Kyiv: Radjans'kyj pys'mennyk, 1971). For interesting reportage on Tyčyna's troubles with that poem, see Jurij Lavrinenko, *Pavlo Tyčyna i joho poema "Skovoroda" na tli epoxy: Spohady i sposterežennja* (New York: Sučasnist', 1980).

8. *Zemlja sadivnyčyx*: "Rečnyk obnovy," 36-41; "Vidxid Tyčyny," 58-70; "Kobzar i Biblija," 173-6.

9. *Pravda Kobzarja* (New York: Proloh, 1961) on Ševčenko, and *Xliborobs'kyj Orfej, abo Kljarnetyzm* (New York: Sučasnist', 1961), on Tyčyna.

10. *Orfej*, 57.

11. *Zemlja sadivnyčyx*, 66.

12. Ibid., 103.

holy man"—is Barka's favourite "epithet" for Skovoroda), shunning the noisy, turbulent high roads of the world and making do with the bare minimum of worldly goods.

Barka's references to Skovoroda are so numerous and so vivid that they comprise a composite, mosaic portrait of the philosopher. To my mind, that portrait is not entirely accurate. In Barka's near-identification with Skovoroda, the poet gives almost as much as he takes, mirroring his own image in the philosopher's texts and personality; Skovoroda comes out too "evangelical," too angelic even—too much a *starčyk*. He also comes out as too much a grave mystic of the apocalyptic type. Barka seems to miss his forebear's robust sense of humour, the "dancing" of his thought, which occasionally borders on the deliberately donned mask of a "holy fool," and, generally, his sense of play and open enjoyment of life—a life virtually teeming and boiling in his texts (*veselije i kuraž*). Although the image of Skovoroda as a holy man may be seen as a healthy counterbalance to deliberate Soviet misrepresentations of Skovoroda as a teacher of a proto-materialistic philosophy and a prophet of the classless society, it threatens to be a distortion in its own right—not a deliberate ideological ploy (directly opposing Skovoroda's "materialism"), but a "misprision" in Harold Bloom's sense—a more or less unconscious "misreading" of a literary "father" with whom the writer must wrestle for his place in the sun, as a real son must compete with his real father. As we have already seen in the case of Ševčenko, Barka has a proclivity for such self-mirrorings in other writers' texts; needless to say, he shares this tendency with many other great writers and critics. Ultimately, there is nothing wrong with that: we all read texts as best we can, and that means re-experiencing them, re-embodying them in our own consciousness.

As I approach a more detailed discussion of the two writers, I should warn that many aspects of their view of the world, which may appear to result from Skovoroda's direct influence on Barka, actually stem from their common intellectual sources. Both are immensely learned men; in addition, much of their learning is esoteric, not readily accessible to the reader of our time. When Barka, in a passing reference to *On the Divine Names* by Dionysis the Areopagite, takes his reader's thorough familiarity with that text and its author for granted, he surely presumes too much.[13] Skovoroda, for his part, does not even bother to

13. *Zemlja sadivnyčyx*, 7. Sometimes such references in Barka are so casual as to be inaccurate. Barka writes that the text is attributed to Dionysius, who was a student of St. Paul. Although that philosopher himself claimed to be the same Dionysius Areopagite whom Paul mentions in Acts xvii, and hence indeed the Apostle's disciple (thus managing to deceive Christianity for a thousand years), he actually lived around AD 500 and was a student of the Neoplatonists Plotinus and Proclus. He is, therefore, often referred to as Pseudo-Dionysius. Even without recalling this detail, Barka should have distinguished between Paul's intellectual atmosphere and Dionysius' poetic, almost pagan, Neo-

attribute his casually dropped Latin and Greek quotations, with which his "Slavonic" texts are heavily peppered. We can manage, nevertheless, to point out a few obvious texts in which the two writers meet. In Barka's case, one may be surprised that such intertextual use of philosophical and theological texts occurs in poetry. Barka's *Svidok*, however, is not a romantic poem; more like a baroque work, it is openly an integral part of the "universe of texts."

The outstanding intertextual source that comes to mind, next to the Bible, is Plato. He is reflected in our two writers both directly and as he was filtered through the early Christian and medieval tradition. Like Skovoroda and Barka, Plato is a poet-philosopher; more than that, "Plato is a philosopher *because* he is a poet."[14]

Much has been written on Skovoroda's "Socratic dialogues," including warnings about their subtle differences from Plato. Barka's *Svidok* contains many similar dialogues, especially between the hero, Fedir Ozovynec', and the numerous teachers or "guides" who enter his life one by one, taking turns to lead him ever upward to the mystical fulfillment of his destiny. Another kind of dialogue in the poem is the sharp and philosophically elaborate political dispute, usually between the Christian protagonists and various representatives of the Soviet state, including Lenin, some "Old-Guard" revolutionaries, and Stalin. Although the poem contains many dialogues of another type—"natural" and casual conversations (which, as I have mentioned, are surprisingly lively, considering the rigorous structure of Barka's intricate twelve-line stanza)—these dialogues are much more studied, deliberate, and self-conscious. They are "set pieces," relentlessly pursuing a single philosophical (usually metaphysical) issue. They interrupt the narrative, frequently throwing it off balance, especially because Barka does not even attempt to integrate them into his plot. Much of their subject matter is similar to Plato's and Skovoroda's, revolving as it does around the duality of the visible and the invisible.

Both Skovoroda and Barka mention Plato with a great deal of fondness and respect. For Skovoroda, Plato's Socrates prefigures Christianity because he taught about Divine Love—the source of all happiness. He even had his own guardian angel (ALF 1:333). In a brief theological essay on the nature of truth, Barka also regards Plato's thought as a prefiguration of the teachings of Christ.[15] In *Svidok*, Plato's philosophy is discussed at length as the crown of idealism: its single,

platonist thought. See Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969), 576-93.

14. John Herman Randall, Jr., *Plato: Dramatist of the Life of Reason* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 3. Randall goes on to say that "true philosophy is poetry—poetic insight and vision, the imaginative enhancement of life." See further G.M.A. Grube, *The Greek and Roman Critics* (London: Methuen, 1965), 54.

15. "Ščo jest' istyna," *Veršnyk neba* (New York: Naša bat'kivščyna, 1965), 16-18.

although serious, drawback is that it lacks the grace of Christ. One of Fedir's early teachers is an atheistic Platonist: his heart is in the right place, but his visions of "platonic" (more accurately, pseudo-platonic) utopian communities for peasants—similar to Myxajlo Drahomanov's *hromady*, or to reformist dreams of gentlemen-populists like Tadej Ryl's'kyj, on whom that character might be based—are not only impractical but even somewhat silly (*S* 1:364-70). Prayer within the righteous soul of a peasant is finally stronger than that teacher's Platonic "bookishness," as the author himself calls it (*S* 1:658).

Another family of texts that serve as inspirational sources for our two writers are those medieval philosophies that carry the Platonic traditions into Christianity. It is precisely the Platonic (most frequently, specifically *Neoplatonic*) line, as opposed to the Aristotelian-Thomistic direction, that Skovoroda and Barka favour—the line that adapted the pagan Eros to the Judaeo-Christian and particularly Pauline tradition of Divine Love, as Bonaventura did. Augustine is the stronghold of that direction: "Augustine's view of love," as one commentator puts it, "has exercised by far the greatest influence in the whole history of the Christian idea of love.... Ever since his time the meaning of Christian love has generally been expressed in the categories he created, and even the emotional quality which it bears is largely due to him."[16]

The central text in the world-view of Skovoroda and Barka is the Bible. Because I shall allude to this source throughout the rest of my article, I will not discuss its influence on our two writers here. Suffice it to say for the present that the Bible serves them not only as philosophical ground but as a generous wellspring of their extraordinarily rich and frequently mysterious poetic imagery. David's Psalms and the Song of Songs from the Old Testament are the texts mentioned and used most frequently by the two writers; as for the New Testament, the Book of Revelation is of paramount importance for the imagery and stylization of their vitriolic, vituperative, and polemical passages. St. Paul is the centre not so much of their imagery as of their theology, particularly when it comes to the doctrine of Divine Love; we should remind ourselves, however, that it is, more often than not, a St. Paul viewed through the tinted lenses of Neoplatonism.[17] It might be worth mentioning that Skovoroda pays much more

16. Nygren, 450.

17. On St. Paul, see Barka's short essays "Polum"ja Damasku" and "Blahovisnyk neba," in *Veršnyk neba*, 64-6; 67-8. In *Svidok* Paul is favourably compared to Shakespeare as a much more important writer (1:177). Barka also claims that Skovoroda's thought stems directly from St. Paul. See *Zemlja sadivnyčyx*, 103. Also see Barka's interesting commentary on the central symbols of Revelation in "Orlyna knyha," *Veršnyk neba*, 91-114. He calls Revelation the crown of poetry of all ages (114). The conclusion of *Svidok* borrows heavily from Apocalyptic imagery, and stylizations of such imagery are dispersed throughout Barka's *oeuvre*. As for Skovoroda, he mentions St. Paul in a number of his works. Also, Apocalyptic imagery abounds in them, and some of the very titles of his

attention to the Old Testament than Barka does: a more "evangelical," soteriological thinker, Barka uses the Old Testament sparingly, most often as a source of his imagery.

It is the Slavic, and more specifically the Ukrainian, ethos that most consistently permeates the works of the two writers. One may even speak of a certain Slavophilism in both of them. The *Pečers'kyj Pateryk* (Paterikon), for example, serves both of them, more or less distantly, in their descriptions of the cult of *sxyma* and the already mentioned *starčyky*. In "Alfavit," Afanasij asks the "raisonneur" Lonhin: "And so, your poor preachers remain beggars?", and Lonhin answers: "Thorough beggars, so as to be ready" (ALF 1:361). Barka gives us powerful portraits of *starčyky* in *Svidok*, especially at the beginning of the poem. In connection with *starčestvo*, we might mention Paisij Velyčkovs'kyj, whom Barka in an essay directly links with Skovoroda.[18] Ukrainian folklore also has a decisive influence on both writers, particularly on the level of style. Like Ševčenko, they even manage to "Ukrainize" or "folklorize" some of the numerous foreign influences that enter their writing, mainly by stylistic manipulation.

The foundation of Skovoroda's and Barka's view of the world is the Platonic-Augustinian division of reality into the visible and the invisible. Skovoroda's central definition of that duality is formulated by Druh in "Narkiss": "The whole world consists of two *natures*: one visible and the other invisible. The visible nature is called 'creature' and the invisible—'God'. This invisible *nature* or *God* permeates and maintains the creature world" (NAR 1:57). The seeming absence of the invisible becomes true Presence, while the illusory presence of the visible becomes absence ("you see in yourself that which is nothing, and therefore you see nothing". NAR 1:32).

This idea crops up everywhere in Barka's prose. Speaking about works of sculpture, for example, he says: "The flesh, being only the 'shell' of the eternal spirit, suffers its tightness."[19] But it is embodied much more strongly and convincingly in his poetry, where the very structure of metaphors implies the world's unity-within-division. *Okean* is structured around the division of love and the beloved into the visible (which here means erotic) and the invisible (divine); Barka makes conspicuous use of the poets of *Hohe Minne*, Dante, and the

works are based on it. For the origin of "Potop zmiin," for example, see Revelation, 12:15-17.

18. *Zemlja sadivnyčyx*, 103. Velyčkovs'kyj (1722-94) was the son of the poet Ivan. He studied at the Kyiv Academy, but became dissatisfied with it, choosing the strict and ascetic life of a monk—*sxymnyk*. He became an influential theologian, preaching the return of the Orthodox church to the simple and "pure" faith of the Fathers of the Church. He lived on Mount Athos in Greece and then in Moldova. The ideology of *starčestvo* is based on him. His obvious influence on Dostoevskij clamours for thorough investigation.

19. Ibid., 145.

Petrarchan tradition.[20]

The double nature of reality is expanded and intensified in *Svidok*:

...через світ видимого кипіння
сама незримість неба проступила,
розсипавши огонь жемчужний. *S* 1:21

Through the world of visible teeming,/ the invisibility of the sky [heaven] itself penetrated,/ scattering a diamond fire.

The whole universe of that work (presented in four 500-page volumes) exists on a double level; not only love but friendship, war, work, art, politics, economics, etc., have their "other," essential being, overseen by angelic orders. Toward the end of the work, when Fedir and his beloved Sanna—now forced labourers in Nazi Germany—are about to die, they observe a German city set ablaze by Allied bombs. Almost imperceptibly, a real wartime situation is elevated to an apocalyptic "invisible" symbol:

"—Гляди на знак! пожари кольорові...
дозволено нам, Санно, як в пророцтві,
відчути потойбічні сили".
Дивилися, весь небозвід збагровів,
з вінечністю: вселенському кострові! —
навкруг, немов з окрас весільних.
"—Чого то сполох, ніби крильми орлій?" —
питає Санна, й очі їй спрозорить
від дива огняного відблиск. (*S* 4:3935)

"Look at the sign! Colourful flames.../ Sanna, we are permitted, as in the prophecy,/ to feel the otherwordly powers."/ They looked, and the vault of the sky became red/ with garlanding—for the universal pyre!—/ all around, as if with wedding decorations./ —"Why is there fright, as if eagle-like, because of its wings?"—/ Sanna asks, while her eyes become transparent/ with reflections of the fiery wonder.

In the burning buildings the couple sees the invisible miracle of their own *Liebestod*, which itself is raised to an even higher vision of the Revelation, with the Apocalyptic image of the fiery Serpent and the fleeing woman: "And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness...from the force of the serpent" (Revelation 12:14).

Skovoroda teaches that if the visible and mortal (*tlinnoe*) were to exist without the invisible and timeless, if the visible did not contain in itself the hidden and the mysterious, "flattery would exist alone, without truth, and cruelty without

20. On these traditions in *Okean*, see my "Rozkrylenist' hlybyn i gotyčne serce," *Terem* 6 (May 1979):21-60.

kindness, and old age without youth, and darkness without light, and floods without dry land" (NAR 1:69-70). In *Svidok*, monks who forget the invisible because they spend all their time working hard so as not to starve complain:

> ...відвернувшися, сидим:
> потоплені серцями в грішну сутінь. (*S* 1:22)
>
> ...turned away, we sit,/ our hearts sunk in sinful halfshade.

They, like Skovoroda's "sensualists," must live only in shadow, with no hope of light. The detail that the monks have *turned away* from the light is also significant; such "turning away" is represented by Skovoroda's image of the visible (particularly the corporeal) as the heel of a foot or a tail (NAR 1:32, 33, et passim).

Both authors make much of the medieval *topos* of the visible, and especially the human body, as *shadow*, which itself is a Christian reading of Plato. Skovoroda sums it up succinctly in his rather baroque "negative catalogue": "You have no ears, nor nostrils, nor eyes, nor yourself, except only for your shadows" (NAR 1:33). In an alliterative line from "Narkiss," Druh admonishes Luka: "Ty-to ten', t'ma i tlen'!" ("You are shadow, darkness and decay!" (NAR 1:37). And here is a startling greeting: "Druh: 'Dead shadow, how are you!' Luka: 'How are you, Thought! Spirit! Heart!'" (NAR 1:37).

Barka's *Svidok*, too, contains a number of images of body-as-shadow. The hero Fedir, for example, not unlike a baroque poet, meditates on the passage of a woman's beauty into the ugliness and decay of old age, and finally into death. He associates such gloomy thoughts with his absent beloved, Sanna:

> Страшить примара кістякова;
> то — Саннина! то — тінь, немов морозом
> побілена в скелет... (*S* 2:1637)
>
> A spectre of a skeleton frightens him; it is that of Sanna!/ It is a shadow, whitewashed into a skeleton,/ as if with frost...

But these meditations are quickly dispelled by the sudden realization that the body is organized and ennobled by the spirit, which comes both from inside and from above (*S* 2:1638). The strongest passages dealing with the body as shadow and decay (Skovoroda's *tin'* and *tlin'*) are contained in a number of stanzas on the hero's first reading of the parable of Lazarus and the tremendous impression that this makes on him—as once, I might add, it affected another confused and searching youth, Rodion Raskolnikov (*S* 2:1882-1912; 1945-1948). In rather elaborate, baroque detail, the poet describes the advanced decay of Lazarus' corpse (the hero's technical argument with himself as to the scientific possibility of such a resurrection provides the opportunity), in order to make Christ's miraculous call and gesture that much more dramatic.

Barka's pervasive love of life, however, does not permit him to dwell on such

images. The "lowly outer shadow of existence" (*S* 2:1752) serves to mirror the light of higher Being, just as a humble church structure mirrors heaven, or visible symbols mirror the profoundest mystery of creation:

Світ символів! мов свічі від хоромів —
до шлюбу, звістить світ недовідомий:
врочисто з скатертю неділь...
він — тінь від творчости: від Світла-Слова... (*S* 1:716)

The world of symbols! As candles, lit in a mansion/ [proclaim] a wedding, so it will proclaim the unknown world/ triumphantly, together with the tablecloth of Sundays.../ It is a shadow of creativity—of the Light-Word....

Compare this with Skovoroda's "world of symbols," described in *Ikona* (IK0 1:389 et passim).

It is interesting how Ovid uses the *topos* of shadow not as an image of the body but as something opposed and inferior to the temple of the body in his rendition of the myth of Narcissus. The following passage alone, incidentally, is sufficient to convince us that Skovoroda knew Ovid well when he was writing his "Narkiss," but deliberately "misread" the pagan poet for his own purposes. For example, he theologically interpreted the "shadow-substance" dichotomy, so widespread in classical thought, exactly as the medieval thinkers had done.

...As he tried
To quench his thirst, inside him, deep within him,
Another thirst was growing, for he saw
An image in the pool, and fell in love
In that unbodied hope, and found a substance
In what was only shadow.[21]

For the Christian, the body has to be "lifted up" to the invisible in order to change from shadow into substance—a process almost opposite to that described by Ovid, where the "unbodied hope" is an illusion and is located *below* the face. Barka writes in a love poem in *Okean*:

А тайна поривання в небі синя
і в тіні — ми в привітнім місті.
Кривавлять губи гострого цвітіння,
але твій скарб, як квітка, чистий. (*O* 1:40)

21. Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 70. For a good discussion of Narcissus' sameness and otherness, see Hermann Frankel, *Ovid: A Poet between Two Worlds* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1945), 82-5. For Ovid's Narcissus in medieval poetry, see Frederick Goldin, *The Mirror of Narcissus in the Courtly Love Lyric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).

> And the blue mystery of striving is in heaven [sky]/ and in the shadow. We are in a friendly city./ The lips of sharp blossoming bleed,/ but your treasure remains as pure as a flower.

We recall that Barka dwells on the visible and invisible aspects of erotic love and the beloved. Because in this thematic area Barka is particularly firmly rooted in the Neoplatonic tradition, he does not reject outright the pleasures of physical love, as he cannot afford to reject the beauty of the world; physical love, however, being "wholly visible," must be permeated with the "invisibility" of spirituality. In *Okean* an intense love affair between the lyrical hero and his beloved, described with unabashed erotic overtones, runs adrift when the hero begins to see only the visibility of the woman. The invisible aura of her essential being wanes, causing her cupidity and cruelty to come to the fore; she becomes a Petrarchan "sweet enemy" (*dolce nemica*), torturing the lover. When she leaves him to go "across the ocean," only her reflection in the hero's pool of memories remains; it is that reflection which recaptures her near-saintly essence, combating and negating the woman's visible nature. In an instance of the Neoplatonic "ladder," the lyrical hero's reflections on her reflection become more and more removed from her physical being, until she becomes a pure symbol of transcendence. In the second volume of the cycle she is all but forgotten; she has served her function as the gate into the realm of the invisible where the lyrical hero now dwells, contemplating the suffering, the love, and the perpetual transfiguration of Jesus Christ.

The visible and invisible spheres of erotic love are even more pronounced and more dramatically rendered in *Svidok*. When Fedir is forced to leave his "true bride," Sanna—whom he found literally by means of the mystical "elective affinity," preordained in heaven, and through whose angelic (and, in literary terms, rather sentimentalized) visibility the invisible shines bright—he befriends another woman, Klavdija, who is Sanna's double (*S* 3:2351ff.). She appears when Sanna becomes physically "invisible," and only memories of her remain. Her uncanny "visible" similarity to Sanna, and even the fact that she, like Sanna, is a musician, does not at all mean that she possesses Sanna's divine "invisibility." Quite the contrary, she is Sanna's *intense* "shadow," exhibiting the mundane cupidity and carnality that Sanna herself lacks altogether, or perhaps possesses only potentially. (Sanna and Klavdija, incidentally, are reminiscent of romantic doubles and, on a more complex level, of the medieval *topos* of the two Venuses—the first representing divine harmony and the second earthly desires.)[22] The implied "humanistic" immorality of Fedir's behaviour when he

22. See Joan M. Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature: From the Twelfth Century to Dante* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 154.

woos and lives with a woman just because she reminds him of another, making her thoroughly miserable in the process, does not seem to trouble either him or his author; such insignificant errors of judgment are shrugged off and forgiven in the hero's determined climbing of the shining ladder toward Divine Love, while the blame is pushed onto Klavdija's mortal shoulders. As in *Hohe Minne*, in Barka it is not the visibility or even the invisibility of the woman that really matters, but the hero's own progress toward self-perfection and ultimately toward God. This, incidentally, is a very good example of Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of *mauvaise foi* ("bad faith"), especially since the two women are not even human, but serve as veiled allegorical symbols, thus substituting metaphysical evasions for life and its responsibilities.

In the elevation of the visible to the high level of the invisible, an interesting two-directional process of imaging occurs. While physical love is embodied in increasingly disembodied and "pure" imagery, "invisible" spheres are embodied in imagery that is often coquettishly erotic and even openly sexual. This phenomenon frequently appears in the Bible, Plato, and medieval literature, and has to do with the nature of mystical thought itself—the union of the sexes symbolizes the transcendent unity of the universe. Plato, for example, likes to dwell on the impregnation of ideas so that the soul might conceive, on the ensuing pregnancy of the soul, and on the near-sexual intercourse in the discourse of kindred spirits.[23] As for the Bible, the imagery of *The Songs of Songs* is of a richly erotic nature, its mysticism doubtless exaggerated by medieval hermeneutical exegeses. Note that in medieval thought as such (not, in this case, necessarily restricted to mysticism) it is women and not men who become vehicles of allegorical constructs. Considering this tradition, therefore, it is not surprising that we find traces of it in our two writers.

When we read Skovoroda's self-indulgent, almost narcissistic prose account of Narcissus falling in love with his own image (NAR 1:27-28)—a prose whose veiled innuendos far surpass not only Ovid himself but also such embarrassingly erotic descriptions of Narcissus as Rilke's poem "Narcissus"[24]—we might explain such sensuality as the stylistic embodiment of the visible that sinfully "falls in love" with its own image (we recall that in the Dialogue, Narcissus represents the visible, while the biblical David serves as his invisible counterpart). And yet, it is as if the message of Skovoroda's askesis were deconstructing itself by the voluptuous language in which it is stated. Here is a brief example:

> Наркісс мой, правда, что жжется, ражжигаясь угліем любви, ревнуя, рвется, мечется и мучится, ласкосердствует, печется

23. See *Republic* 490 a; *Symposium* 206 c–207 b, 208 e–209 c, 212 a; *Phaedrus* 2466ff., 251 a–252 e.

24. See *Sämtliche Werke*, 6 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1955), 2:101.

и молвит всѣми молвами, а не о многом же, ни о пустом чем-либо, но о себѣ, про себе и в себе. (NAR 1:28)

My Narcissus is the truth that burns up [or, "indeed burns up"], inflaming itself [himself] with the embers of love; being jealous, it [he] tears itself [himself] to pieces, flings itself [himself] about, and tortures itself [himself], becomes affectionate with itself [himself], worries and speaks in all languages, but not about many and frivolous things, but about himself, for himself, and in himself.

Our surprise increases when we realize that the author actually approves of Narcissus' behaviour; as in the case of Fedir's climbing the ladder of self-perfection, Narcissus' love for his own reflection—his intense concentration on himself, even if that self still belongs to the shadowy realm of the visible—is the first step toward self-knowledge.

But how should we take the following passage from *Potop zmiin* that describes Lot's daughter on the way to her father? Spirit is talking to Soul: "She goes straight...to her father. Love has inflamed her. She burns with the desire to enjoy herself with him and drink...new wine... She goes to Lot... She wants to sleep with the father. Just like the young girls with David (POT 1:562)." This, as Spirit soon makes certain to explain, is the image of the soul wanting to join her God. We see here Skovoroda the dancer, playing with language and ideas, dangerously teetering above the precipice of blasphemy, much like some early medieval philosophers, such as Origen—probably showing us how foolish the Bible can be if we read its visibility alone, without proper penetration of the surface veil that hides the invisible.

There is no such Zen-like play in the more serious Barka: his mystical-erotic images are much more elevated and "poetic," although they are no less sensuous for that. Their eroticism, in fact, is heightened by the thematic ambiguity between physical love and mystery which, as we have seen, is central in *Okean* and quite important in *Svidok*. They are, on occasion, even faintly redolent of decadence, thus courting danger in their own way. Look again at the stanza from *Okean* quoted above. And here are some other examples. In *Okean*, sexual passion is frequently represented by the orchid:

...ніби орхідеїне з стеблини
сіяння — пристрасть то твоя...
простерлася до уст мені і нині,
пожежа так не просія. (*O* 1:40)

Like an orchid-like light/ on a stem—such is your passion.../ even today it stretches up to my lips,/ a conflagration cannot be so bright.

This "conflagration" is negated by another sensuous, but here also mystical, image:

На грудях пахощами рідна вишні —
недужа ніжністю душа...

це й не відвертість орхідеї грішна,
як сонце ласку приспіша. (*O* 1:40)

On the breast/ related to the cherry tree by its fragrance—/ the soul, ill with tenderness.../ This is not even the sinful openness of the orchid,/ when the sun hurries down its kindness.[25]

Barka deals with fictional models of living women which, as we recall, can be read as allegorical symbols. In Skovoroda such ambiguities do not exist—his females are immediate allegories of the soul, the Bible, and other more or less abstract entities. The vehicles of such allegories are frequently female personages from the Old Testament—themselves, more often than not, already erotically charged when they appear in the Bible. As we have seen in the startling example with Lot's daughters, Skovoroda transfers the erotic energy from mimetic representations in the Bible to abstract notions, thus charging such abstract notions sexually, to make them come to life. This, of course, is a technique often encountered in medieval literature.

In my discussion of the antithetical notions of the visible and the invisible in Skovoroda and Barka, I have attempted to imply the actual or potential unity of these two spheres of existence. Such unity is indeed central in both writers; in spite of the shadow/light opposition, frequently encountered in their texts, neither of them has anything to do with the irreconcilable dualities of Manichaeism. With a few minor exceptions in Skovoroda, neither author wants to shed the visible and to escape from it into the amorphous regions of pure spirit. As we shall soon see in greater detail, both of them talk about the heart more frequently than about the soul.

The presence of the invisible within the visible is imagined by our authors in one of two ways—by mirroring and by enfoldment. Although both sets of images are present in each writer (in Skovoroda, for example, even in a single sentence: "The husk contains a seed and the mother-of-pearl a pearl, and the moon throws back the sunlight," IKO 1:388)—Barka seems to favour mirroring, while Skovoroda concentrates on enfoldment. The reason for this might be that, with many exceptions, Barka seems to see the invisible as a realm apart, coming *down* to the visible as a ray of light, and reflecting upon its surfaces, as God's love *descends* upon us in St. Paul. (We are also reminded here of Jakob Böhme's ecstasy upon seeing sunshine reflected in a silver dish; this granted him a spiritual illumination so intense that it seemed to enlighten for him all invisible mysteries.) For Skovoroda—again, with many exceptions—the invisible seems

25. My prose translations of Barka's stanzas are so awkward because they attempt to convey at least some of the many maddening ambiguities of the originals, especially when such ambiguities bear on my discussion. The terribly un-English syntax of the present translation has provoked this explanation and apology.

to dwell within the visible, illuminating its surfaces from within. In this, Skovoroda seems more modern than Barka, prefiguring the way that the romantic Idealists were to think about the Idea some years after his death, while Barka seems to remain more faithful to the pure Platonic-Pauline model.[26]

In Skovoroda's "Narkiss," which is generally about mirroring, we have the following observation:

> When you behold God with a new and true eye, then you have seen in Him, as in a wellspring or in a mirror, *that* which has always been in Him and which you never saw... And so, you now see *two*—the old and the new, the visible and the mysterious. (NAR 1:52)

(Note that in the original the very language "mirrors" pairs by the device of near-rhymes: "*dvoe*—staroe i novoe, javnoe i tajnoe"). In Barka's *Okean* there is a whole system of mirroring that is much too elaborate to describe here in detail.[27] I shall restrict myself to a few examples. It is usually the sky, the sun, or *light* that descends to the things of this world, mirroring itself in them:

> Сьогодні мирне світло: все подвоїть
> при березі казок, де ти. (*O* 1:94)

> Today the light is tranquil: it will double everything/ near the shore of fairy tales, where you are.

A more complex structuring occurs in what Barka calls *poxreščennja* ("crossing," "pruning," with a possible pun on "blessing" and "relationship by christening"), where the nature of metaphor, and especially metonymy, itself is utilized as a thematic device. The sun, for example, becomes a flower ("svjati peljustky soncja"—"the holy petals of the sun," *0* 1:54); the sun becomes a bird ("Obtrusyt' sonce bilja raju pirja"—"near Paradise, the sun will shake its feathers," *0* 1:89); the sun has eyes and weeps ("Sl'oza nesvits'ka na vijax soncja pospadala"—"An unworldly tear fell from the sun's eyelashes," *0* 1:48). In another poet's work, such magnificent poetic metonymies could stand for themselves, without necessarily having to prove anything outside themselves; in Barka, however, they become integral parts of a complex philosophical system, and therefore may serve as examples of that system. We see such *poxreščennja* in Skovoroda also, when, for example, he asks: "Is not the sun similar to the ear of wheat? Why do you need purses when in them you find the same gold?" (IKO 1:393). Skovoroda even offers a theoretical explanation when he writes that a symbol is built of two or three figures that signify mortality and eternity (IKO

26. Reflections in mirrors and in water are a device by which Plato explains the function of images throughout his works. One's eyes would be ruined if one looked at the sun directly instead of observing its reflections in water.

27. I have attempted to describe it at some length in my "Rozkrylenist' hlybyn," 29-49.

1:387). "Ikona," incidentally, is an interesting theoretical treatise dealing with imaging and symbolization.

There are many examples of the idea of enfoldment of the invisible within the visible in both writers, but they are especially abundant and suggestive in Skovoroda. "Does not God contain everything?... In a tree He is the true tree, in grass—grass, in music—music, in a house—a house, in our earthly body He is the new body..." (NAR 1:40). Note in this quotation the interesting ambiguity between the inside and the outside, centering on the word "contains" or "maintains" (*soderzhit*)—God is in a tree, while at the same time the tree is in God. There are literally hundreds of such passages throughout Skovoroda's work.

Somewhat like Barka in his metaphors of *dzerkalennja* (mirroring) and *poxreščennja* ("crossing"), quoted above, Skovoroda uses oxymoron-like paradoxes that by their very form would symbolize the unity-within-diversity of existence. In contrast to Barka's images, which imply mirroring, each part of Skovoroda's paradox seems not so much to *mirror* its opposite as to *issue* from it. Beginning with a familiar thought from Ecclesiastes, but obviously taking it further than the Bible does, Skovoroda writes:

> Weep! But understand and differentiate between the time of tears and the time of laughter. Know: just as time exists, over it there is also a time of times, therefore, halftime and the blessed other time... blessedtime... Weeping leads to laughter, and laughter is hidden in weeping... These two halves comprise *a unity*; just as food is created by hunger and satiety, winter and summer create fruits, light and darkness—day, death and life—all kinds of creatures, good and evil—poverty and wealth God created [them] and stuck them together into *a unity*. (POT 1:567-8)

There is an almost imperceptible progression in this passage. First we have to *understand* the separation of laughter and weeping in *our* time, but soon we must *know* (note the contrast between *razumej* and *znaj*) that *our* time is contained within "that other time" (*onoe vremia*)—time transcended in eternity. From the perspective of "that other time," we shall behold the truth that oppositions are indispensable for the creation of everything—not only on the exalted levels of life and death, or darkness and light, but also on the mundane levels of food, fruits, and wealth. This is because everything is contained in the unity that God has created, and that unity must have both the hidden mystery, which is light, and the revealed shadow that implies the light (ALF 1:344). Note the joining of the words that denote time, with the resulting neologisms "halftime" (*poluvremja*) and "blessedtime" or "goodtime" (*blahovremja*), and the untranslatable ambiguity created by the absence of punctuation between "wealth" and "God." Here Skovoroda, like a poet, makes his form speak out his content.

We find the idea that opposites create unities (which, in their turn, create a transcendent universal unity) expressed more plainly in the following:

> You will not find a day without darkness and light and a year without winter

> and warmth. Neither will you find a condition in which bitterness [a pun on "grief"] and sweetness are not mixed. Thus all the world stands. [In the original, there is a play on the words *sostojanie* [condition] and *stoit* (stands).] The opposite aids the opposite. Sweetness rewards bitterness, and bitterness is the mother of sweetness. (ALF 1:354)

And here is the central passage of envelopment, expressed in a series of oppositions:

> And then I see in this entire world two worlds, creating one world: the visible world and the invisible, the living and the dead, the whole and the scattered. This one is the mantle and that—the body, this one—the shadow and that one—the tree... And so, a world within a world means eternity in decay, life in death, awakening in sleep, light in darkness, in a lie—the truth, in weeping—joy, in despair—hope. (IK0 1:381-2)

One of Skovoroda's frequent images of the unity of the universe is a coiled snake (serpent) holding its tail in its mouth. This is his emblem for the blessed unified nature (TRA 1:214), the sun (POT 1:550), the Bible (KOL 1:258-9), Christ (KOL 1:258-9), and finally God (POT 1:558). The snake belongs to the emblem family of the circle, the ring, the garland (TRA 1:214); together with those symbols, it embodies the mystical idea of unity within diversity (POT 1:558), of the beginning within the end, and the end within the beginning: "And the snake, holding its tail in its mouth, illuminates the fact that the endless *beginning* and the beginningless end ends by beginning and begins by ending" (IKO 1:383). The snake, therefore, is both good and evil at once, and these qualities, too, relate to the beginning and the end: "If the snake in the grass tempts our hearts away from paradise, let the snake, which has now arisen from the earth, return them there" (KOL 1:258). Like God Himself, the snake is "lying and truthful. A fool and all-wise. Evil, it is also good" (POT 558). Although the coiled snake as a symbol of the highest mysteries occurs in many civilizations, it is particularly powerful in Gnosticism, as the symbol of the Ouroboros. One-half of its body is light, the other dark. It is the base of the world, providing it with materials and energy, developing as reason and imagination, and also figuring as a force of darkness. Some Gnostics believed that the coiled snake lived in all objects and in all beings.[28]

Barka's snake or serpent, which makes its appearance in *Okean*, and particularly frequently in *Svidok*, seems to be actually opposed to the idea of universal unity. More a proper serpent than a snake, it is all evil, symbolizing disjunction, disorder, and ultimately the end of the world, but not its beginning. It stems, in fact, directly from The Book of Revelation, where it is represented as the Ruler of the Bottomless Pit, the fallen angel Apolyon, bringing the fire of destruction

28. See J.E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), 274.

upon the world (Revelation 9:11ff.). At times Barka's serpent is reminiscent of the dragon of medieval legend, thus reinforcing a possible interpretation of *Svidok* as a quest romance. In *Svidok*, peasants claim to have seen a dragon stealing a maiden (*S* 1:710ff.), which symbolizes Sanna leaving Fedir for distant cities, her spiritual battle with atheistic communism, and the impending famine of 1933. (In Barka's novel, *Žovtyj knjaz'*, the famine is consistently symbolized by images from The Book of Revelation.) The dragon as a symbol of Sanna's plight is revealed at the end of the work, when—the lovers having been reunited after a long separation—she tells Fedir that she escaped from the mouth of the dragon (*S* 4:3843). I found one image of coiled snakes in Barka's *Okean*, but it too has evil reverberations, without reference to the *alpha* and *omega* of Being; more precisely, it suggests Being as a negative, shadowy unity:

> І прокинувши гілля далеке,
> в сторону, де вмерла юність:
> ти погас, мов ґнотик, білоклене! —
> серед змій, вінцем отруйних. (*O* 2:16)

And extending distant branches/ toward the region [direction] where youth has died: you extinguished yourself like a wick, o white maple,/ among snakes, poisonous in their garland.

Nevertheless, the emblems of garland (*vinec'*, with a pun on "crown" and "end"), circle, ring, which in Skovoroda belong to the same family as the coiled snake, abound in Barka's work. In addition to a direct symbolization of the unity of existence, the garland and the ring (*persten'*), or more specifically the wedding ring (*obručka*), which is an important component of the love motif in both works, symbolize for Barka marriage as the highest mystical consummation of a union of the sexes (which in its turn symbolizes the union of opposites within the universe), with its roots as romantic love in the sphere of the visible. The symbols of the garland (also a wedding symbol) and the ring reach the highest levels of mystery in the second volume of *Okean*:

> Голосами в колосках прибратись
> тайні! — зв'язана, як перстень. (*O* 2:49)

The mystery in the ears of wheat should dress itself in [adorn itself with] voices!/ It is bound like a ring.

And here is an example of the transfiguration of Christ's crown of thorns (*vinec'*) into the sun-like crown (*vinec'*) of triumphant universal unity:

> Скрізь: свічення вінця, трисвітле в сплесках
> скрізь: на горі за нас розп'яте,
> що кров від терну — вмерла і воскресла,
> скрапаючи, в рятунок звати. (*O* 1:233)

Everywhere: the light of the garland, three-lighted in waves,/ everywhere:

> crucified for us on a hill [or "up high"],/ so that the blood, dripping from the thorns, would die and be resurrected,/ to call us into salvation.

As I have mentioned, it is Divine Love that becomes the energy of unity in both writers.[29]

While dividing the universe "vertically" into the two halves of the visible and the invisible, Skovoroda divides it "horizontally" into the microcosm, the macrocosm, and the symbolic level of the Bible (POT 1:536 et passim). The divisions of the macrocosm, occurring within the all-pervasive unity, are reflected in the microcosm; it is there that our two writers like to dwell. Following Christ, Skovoroda teaches that our happiness, our world, our paradise, and our God are inside us (ALF 1:328), shining from within, just as the invisible shines forth through all visible surfaces. But because man has a will, he can choose either to accept or to reject that inner light: "It is true that everything is done according to God's will, but because I agree with it, it is now my will." (TRA 1:231). Man has to will to find that inner light of the invisible within himself—hence the Delphic-Platonic motto: "*Know* thyself" (TRA 1:224 et passim). It is only in oneself that one can see the *alpha* and *omega* of existence, which is ultimately one and the same (ASK 1:96).

When one knows oneself, one knows one's *srodnost'*, which is perhaps the most familiar notion in Skovoroda's philosophy, and needs no elaboration. *Srodnost'* is the embodiment of the divine law that governs all life—"the similar flows toward the similar." A function of knowing oneself is the ability to recognize what in one's soul *responds* to a chosen task out in the world (ALF 1:343). It is such a response that becomes a true *calling*. By recognizing one's inner being, one knows one's destiny, which in this case means the direction of one's perfectibility. In opposition to animals, which have no will—there is no need for flying turtles (ALF 1:344)—man can easily be blind to his *srodnost'* and be led astray in the visible world; no matter what worldly successes he then reaps, he will remain unhappy (ALF 1:326, 329). Education can perfect a *srodnost'*, but it cannot help one if one has missed one's *srodnost'*. When education and *srodnost'* go hand in hand, learning is easy and pleasant. For the student, nothing that is difficult to learn is really necessary (ALF 328-9, 337).

The plot of Barka's *Svidok* revolves, in the main, around the hero Fedir's misjudging his *srodnost'* in his youth, and then searching for it within himself and "*without* himself." At the very beginning of the poem, he is near it but not really with it: he is a metaphysical rebel—Ivan Karamazov's twin brother—who

29. On the duality-in-unity of the universe and the importance of the accompanying symbol of light, so very crucial to our two writers, see Mircea Eliade, *The Two and the One* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969). Specifically on Biblical symbols and St. Paul as they relate to that theme, see pp. 55-66.

is angry with God because people's wounds hurt him, while he sees immorality ruling the church. As in Dostoevskij, although he is in opposition to God, that opposition is *dialectical*, the Negative of metaphysical rebellion bearing within it the potential Positive of faith. Subsequently he becomes a student, reads many books, writes poetry, teaches, does odd jobs, and joins the army, but nothing brings him peace. It is only after he recognizes his *srodnost'*, which he had known as a child but subsequently lost, that he becomes happy:

> ...маленьким я про схиму мріяв,
> а от забрала райдугу зневіра,
> руїну в грудях тінить крук. (*S* 1:184)

As a boy I dreamed of being a monk/ but disillusionment took away my rainbow/ and now a crow casts a shadow on the ruin in my breast.

Fedir finds himself only after he musters sufficient courage to declare himself a lay monk in Soviet society. His beloved Sanna, being more blessed than he is, never leaves her *srodnost'* with music, because in her breast that *calling* is wedded to her profound religious faith. She, however, strays temporarily when she leaves her native parts (something that Skovoroda never tires of warning us against) and follows her calling away from her land and her beloved.

*Srodnosti* are frequently implied in other contexts of the poem. For example, an episodic character, a painter, has genius because he:

> ...звик з посиленістю відкривати
> первинні вдачі, всюди — вряд. (*S* 1:244)

...is used to uncover with verve/ primary natures in everything.

Even more Platonic than the *srodnosti* that deal directly with individual striving are those that help one find the right friends. To intuit the affinity that links two friends is very much a part of *srodnost'*. A "native" (*rodnyj*, playing on *srodnost'*) road to unhappiness is to marry somebody against one's *srodnost'*, or to make such "uncongenial" friends (ALF 1:322). Skovoroda directly connects this phase of *srodnosti* with Plato when he writes that goodness lives only in beauty, and that God leads like to like (ALF 1:132). While two people, as in Plato, are attracted to each other by the outer covering of beauty, it is the inner core of goodness in each of them that ultimately strives toward union. Friendship "on high levels" is not chosen by us, but depends on a higher destiny (ALF 1:332).

Not without the direct influence of the romantic doctrine of "elective affinities" (which also comes from Plato's notion that like and like seek each other out), Barka constructs his elaborate love motifs both in *Okean* and *Svidok* around such "interpersonal" *srodnosti*. It is only when love is based on "native" affinities that it becomes "true love" and can lead to the highest levels of Divine Love.

At the very beginning of *Okean* we find that the two lovers are destined (*sudženi*) to be joined by the light of the invisible, no matter how strenuously the world of the visible attempts to keep them apart: "Bo serce den' vid sercja čulo" (because one heart felt the day in another heart [*O* 1:117]). Throughout the cycle, the lyrical hero reminds himself and his beloved (especially in her "visible" fickle and cruel mask, which is the disruptive work of the world) of that bright truth. In *Svidok* Fedir and Sanna develop their own heavenly "affinity" much more elaborately. It is Sanna—whose visibility and invisibility (as opposed to the nameless woman in *Okean*) are not split but remain in perfect balance—who declares her love to Fedir and who reveals to him the bright flame of their *srodnost'*:

Ми зріднені серцями! — в безконеччя:
між їх дзеркальця свічечка свячена
в два відблиски палахкотить...
обом на безліч повторя в глибинах
незнаний огник! і живуть обидва
від нього, ставши в світ простий. (*S* 1:58)

Our hearts are related!—into [for] infinity:/ between their little mirrors a blessed candle/ burns with two reflections.../ the unknown little flame gives them/ countless repetitions in the depths, and they both/ live by it, standing in the simple world.

In this passage the "simple world" of the visible and the mysterious "unknown" light of the invisible are clearly embodied, as romantic love becomes a "microcosm" of universal mirroring. Fedir answers Sanna:

"— Що ти побачила від ясновиддя:
найкраще! доля — душі споріднила,
колись при висоті ненашій...
де два світила, як зоря подвійна,
ведуть в життя в терпіннях і надіях —
аби розлуки ми не знали". (*S* 1:59)

That which you saw in your illumination [revelation]:/ is the most beautiful! fate related our souls,/ a long time ago, in a height that is not ours.../ where two lights, like a double star,/ lead us into a life of suffering and hope—/ so that we will never know parting [let us hope that we will never part].

The lives of the lovers are indeed *translated* or repeated by mysterious lights in the realm of the invisible that shone long before the lovers' embodiment. The motif of Fedir and Sanna's "fated love" emerges throughout the poem, especially when the lovers have to live apart (*S* 1:261, 1:357, 2:1277, 3:2240, et passim).

The centre of the microcosm and the wellspring of the energy of love that has the power to unite the Universe is the heart. It is in the heart that the *srodnosti* are born; it is the heart that joins the beginning and the end of the individual. A

central symbol of Skovoroda's philosophy, it is also at the centre of Barka's poetry.

For Skovoroda the heart not only defines but contains the individual. The frequently repeated motif in "Narkiss" is: "Vsjak est' tem, čie serdce v nem" (NAR 1:29) (Everyone is that whose heart is in him). We again note that the concept of the individual and the heart are linked formally by the device of rhyme. The heart and not the head is the organ of thought, ruling the whole man: "Your heart is the head of your interior. And if your heart is your head, you yourself are your heart. And if you do not approximate and unite with that which is *the head* of your head, you will remain a dead shadow and a corpse" (NAR 1:42). Skovoroda warns that vain passions may betray and ultimately destroy the heart. Such "death of the heart" is the only real sin against the self, equal to suicide (KOL 1:257). In a prophetic voice, he pronounces the following moving warning, stylized as an image of passionate, excited speech: "Syne! Xrany serdce tvoe!... Znaj sebe. Smotry sebe. Bud' v domě tvoem. Bereży sebe. Slyš! Berehy serdce." (0 Son! Save your heart!... Know yourself. Watch yourself. Live in your own house. Guard yourself. Listen! Guard your heart. NAR 1:47).

The lyrical hero of Barka's *Okean* lives in his heart as in his own house; the word "heart" seems to appear in almost every poem of that 600-page cycle. Indeed, the hero *is* his heart: it is his heart that reacts to all the joy and grief that the world holds in store for him.

> І я, що серце від півоній дужих
> поломеніє до весни,
> шепчу... (*O* 1:28)

> And I, [who am] the heart that flames from the strong peonies to the spring, whisper...

These lines are almost untranslatable, precisely because of the ambiguity between "I" and "heart," created by a complex syntactical displacement. They can be translated in two ways: "And I that am the heart flaming toward spring, and away from the strong peonies," or "And I, whose heart flames toward spring..." I am certain that the formal ambiguity between "I" and "heart" is intentional.

The essential being of the lyrical hero's beloved is also contained in her heart, and occasionally she is *his* heart; exploiting the Ukrainian idiom, equivalent to "dear heart," the lyrical hero addresses her:

> О, рідне серце! — все при тій святині,
> де я з тобою міг радіти. (*O* 1:45)

> O, native heart!—all by that temple/ where you and I were able to know joy.

When the beloved, in her visible worldly profile, begins to torment the lyrical hero, it is his heart that she tortures, perhaps because this heart is "in commu-

nion" with the invisible world that she is betraying:

> Над мак новонароджений все серце
> причасністю палаххотить.
> Від нього з сміхом на цеглиння стерте
> і рвеш, і губиш пелюстки... (*O* 1:18)

Higher than newborn poppies, my whole heart/ flames with communion./ Laughing, you tear off its petals, and lose them along a worn brick road.

Suffering the insults of his beloved, the hero begins to be afraid that he is not "guarding" his heart properly by dedicating it to visible love and its turbulent passions (*O* 2:5). But his fears are in vain: the heart, if it is in communion with the invisible, has the power to renew itself, to resurrect itself.

In its renewal, the "new heart" (another Christian *topos* of long standing) rededicates itself to faith, as it also does for Skovoroda. In *Svidok*, a monk predicts the atheist-rebel Fedir's future:

> "— А от, коли з посіяної іскри
> на серці дано вірі розігрітись..." (*S* 1:116)

And so, when from a sown spark/ faith will be destined to take flame upon the heart...

When the heart is ignited by the flame of faith, it becomes elevated to mystical heights. In *Okean* we read:

> І не спиниться на мить, не стихне
> серце, в славлення палавши... (*O* 2:27)

And the heart will not stop for a moment, will not be quiet,/ flaming into praise.

The hero's heart becomes Christ's flaming heart:

> То прикмета: до безсмертя кличе
> серце — від розп'яття в жертві. (*O* 2:45)

This is a sign: the heart calls to immortality—/ from the crucifixion in sacrifice/

The heart, finally, becomes the "carrier of God" (*bohonosec'* [*O* 2:27]).

In both Skovoroda and Barka, the heart steps out into the macrocosm and becomes something much vaster than the centre of the individual (the microcosm), although it does not cease to reflect that microcosm. We see this particularly in metaphors that cross the image of the heart with those of the sun and the ocean. In its macrocosmic being, the heart is most frequently compared to the sun, which is the heart of the macrocosm. Skovoroda compares the sun to the heart in "Potop zmiin" when he discusses the visible and the invisible—just as there is a sun within a sun, so there is a heart within a heart (POT 1:539). Comparisons of the heart with the sun are especially abundant in Barka's *Okean*; the poet fortifies the affinity by frequently exploiting the sonic similarity between

the two Ukrainian words (*sonce—serce*). In one poem the sun is called "the heart of the sky" (*O* 2:6). In another, Barka writes:

> Бившися, як серце з болю — сонце,
> чисте в грудях яблуневих. (*O* 2:88)
>
> Beating in pain like a heart, the sun,/ pure in the breasts of apple trees.

In both writers the heart, so to speak, internalizes the sun, as the sun externalizes the heart.

The ocean *has* a heart and the heart *is* the ocean: again we see universal "mirroring" or "crossing" of heights and depths in the microcosm of metaphor. In "Narkiss" Skovoroda seems to address "the heart of the sea" (NAR 1:28); also in that dialogue the heart becomes deeper than the ocean: "O heart, bottomlessness, wider than all the waters and skies... How deep you are! You embrace and hold everything, and nothing can contain you" (NAR 1:42). Barka "formulates" the following "equation": "The heart is an ocean" (*O* 2:99). In another poem he calls the heart "a mighty ocean" (*O* 1:43) and claims that the sea "sings with its golden heart," perhaps embodying in this image the sun's reflection upon the water (*O* 1:75). Note that in addition to the obvious visual metaphor of unity, we have here a "confounding of the senses" ("synaesthesia"), which implies unity on an even subtler formal level. Also consider the title of the work.

Finally, I would like to discuss the *topos* of the Book, as our two writers develop it; that *topos* is indeed very important in their work. First of all, the Bible represents for Skovoroda the highest, symbolic level of existence, and it is also central in Barka's view of the world. And second, both writers are vitally interested in other texts, as well as in the process of writing and reading itself. For all their numerous formal images of lived speech, both are intensely "literary" writers. One can go on to say, with Northrop Frye and the later deconstructionists, that every great text, as part of the "order of words" of literature, a "universe" of literature, reflects other texts rather than "life."[30]

It may come as a surprise to us, therefore, that both Skovoroda and Barka warn against reading too much. Skovoroda admonishes: "Read little and chew well. Oh, what sublime taste!" (ASK 1:126). Intellectual greed dulls our sense of taste, bloats our consciousness and ends in boredom and depression (IKO 1:400).[31] In "Alfavit" we find a line that seems to be appropriate for sherry parties even in our time, and is worthy of quotation in the original: "Dovelos' byt' v hostjax i napast' na šajku učonyx" ("I happened to be a guest and happened to meet a gang of scholars" [ALF 1:320]).

30. See his *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 16-18, 352-4, et passim.

31. Søren Kierkegaard warns against similar dangers in many places of his *oeuvre*.

We find similar "attacks" on reading Barka's *Svidok*. In his search for his *srodnost'*, Fedir undergoes a period of voracious reading, not at all to the benefit of his spiritual health. He is searching for a book of revelation, without yet having found the Book of Revelation:

> Якби розвиднилось і в найдревнішій
> і в свіжій книзі: звідки руки ширить
> духовне сонце — всіх обняти....
> я гризтиму сухар і на горищі,
> чи на цепу в льохах, де щур ошкірився,
> аби мені книжки багаті. (*S* 1:445)

> If only it dawned in a most ancient/ and in a fresh book, where the spiritual sun/ would spread his arms to embrace everybody.../ I would even gnaw dry bread in an attic,/ or on a chain in a cellar where a rat bares its teeth,/ if I could only get rich books.

Soon, however, Fedir finds that he has been "contaminated" by books (*S* 2:1491, 1496); nevertheless, he cannot leave his reading—in each crisis, in each moment of grief, he returns to his books as if they were a narcotic (*S* 3:2827). He begins to lead a monk-like existence with them, but realizes that this is a false monkhood. Eventually he finds his literary *srodnost'* in the Bible. Incidentally, the fact that the hero read many books before his "conversion," and now condemns this practice as a vice of youth, strongly reminds us of Augustine's *Confessions*.

It should be obvious by now that for both our writers there are "good" books and "bad" books, and that the quality of books is determined neither by literary reviewers nor by best-seller lists. It is religious faith that hovers like an intermediary between the book and the reader. Skovoroda has no doubt that only the "Good Book" is worth reading slowly and deeply, although he manages to be very learned and erudite for that. For Barka as for Skovoroda, there are books, both ancient and new, which either prefigure the New Testament or are under its aegis. Barka frequently alludes to this in his poetry (see, for example, *S* 4:3372) and develops it at length in his critical essays.

In both Skovoroda and Barka, we find "battles of books." Skovoroda's "Narkiss" is a consistent dialogue between two texts: pagan classicism, particularly Ovid, with its worship of the body, and David's Psalms. More distantly, he counterposes the Bible and some of its exegetes. In "Asxan'", for example, a *starčyk* becomes prophetically irate in his attack against those interpreters of the Bible who read it too literally and fail to see the spirit behind the words:

> They have torn everything apart, gobbled up everything, chewed everything with the iron teeth of their father [Daniel's monster], without leaving anything. Where are your leftovers [in the original, *ostanok*—a pun on "end" and, more distantly, "salvation"]? Oh! You have trampled your leftovers ["end," "salva-

tion"]! Behold a sinful tongue! The serpent's seed! (1:128).

The "leftovers," in Skovoroda's paradoxical thought, are those ineffable overtones of the text in which the light of authentic signification is to be found.

The "battle of books" in Barka is more of a worldly philosophical bent, because generally he is by far more politically aware than Skovoroda. The mighty antagonists in *Svidok* are the Bible and Marx. Moreover, the Soviet Union, it seems, was born of texts—the wrong texts, "paper schemes," in the maze of which human imagination has withered and died (1:488). Like Skovoroda's "wrong" texts, in Barka the "wrong" texts of Marxism and atheism are seeds of the serpent—the lying serpent from the Old and New Testaments:

Бо з порожнечі книжної зміїнець
підман — самотнє серце, нерозмінне,
вкусив! і жала муку вносять. (*S* 1:985)

From the bookish void a petty serpent/ a lie—bit the lonely, honest heart,/ and his sting is pouring suffering into it.

Finally, the Bible enters into battle against itself. This is particularly evident in Skovoroda; for him the Bible, like the microcosm and the macrocosm, is split into the visible and the invisible. Skovoroda's very bold, and occasionally quite nasty, paradoxical attacks on the visible nature of the Bible are well known (the story of Lot's daughters, quoted earlier, may serve as an example of this; even more shockingly, he calls the words "And God created Heaven and earth" a lie, POT 1:551). We have the alternating images of the Bible as its body and as its secret, sacred, authentic content (its "leftovers"), which is the thought of its heart. Hence the Bible is "like a single man or Adam. His clay and body is visible to anyone, but his heart is hidden, and the spirit of life is invisible in him" (ALF 1:342, cf. KOL 1:267). Woe to him who takes the Bible at its "face" value and interprets it thus. Skovoroda's attack on the "wrong" exegetes, quoted above, refers to the sin of such interpretations. The reason is that the Bible is more than a text; it is also the symbolic embodiment of God, Christ and the serpent (POT 1:550, KOL 258), and *this* is its secret. After all, God's nature is the greatest secret of all.

This, of course, is not new. For example, medieval and early Renaissance thinkers, explaining the nature of allegory, thought of the Bible as a river that is both shallow and deep at once (compare this with Skovoroda's image of the Bible being like a river or like the sea, deep in some places, shallow in others, NAR 1:77). The difference between most such opinions and Skovoroda's is that Skovoroda does not believe in extended and complex exegeses: one should "understand" the secret meanings of the Bible intuitively and all at once, as one

"sees," in a flash, a poetic metaphor.[32] This is why Skovoroda speaks like a poet, rather than an "explainer," building metaphors that would parallel and reflect those of the Bible. This procedure, incidentally (with obvious differences of intent), is somewhat similar to that of philosophers like Heidegger and literary critics like the "deconstructionists."[33]

Barka also believes in the double nature of the Bible, although in his poetry this is not stated so directly and originally as it is in Skovoroda. What is more important to me here is that Barka's "interpretations" of the Bible proceed by Skovoroda's method. Although this is evident in his short essays on the Bible collected in *Veršnyk neba*, it is incomparably more effective in his poetry. Much of his poetry, in fact, may be read as a "synchronic interpretation" of the Bible, proceeding from one arresting metaphor to another. What is even more interesting is that the "obscurity" of his poetry, about which critics have been complaining for many years, is a deliberate "mimesis" or imaging of the invisible nature of the Bible and sacred writing. His stanzas, with such ravishing surfaces and yet such deeply hidden "hearts," are meant to reveal by concealing and, perhaps, to conceal by revealing. It is probably in this that Barka is Skovoroda's closest student.

The question of Barka as Skovoroda's "student" is broad and interesting: I have hardly begun to broach it here. For example, the numerous similarities in their language and style—idiomatic expressions that do not shy away from vulgarity, satire, invective, word games and puns, conceits; the general rootedness of both in the baroque tradition—all this would need another long article. Such an article should also touch upon the numerous differences between the two writers—the fact that not only Barka's interpretation of Skovoroda in his essays, but also Skovoroda's shadow (or, rather, his light) in Barka's poetical lines may be the result of a "misreading," a "misprision," perhaps even a wilfully determined one.

32. For an interesting discussion of the "visible" and the "invisible" meanings in the Bible, as they apply to contemporary literary theory, see Gerald L. Bruns, *Inventions: Writing, Textuality, and Understanding* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 17-43. See further Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: The Charles Eliot Norton Lectures 1977-1978* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979). Bruns points out that some medieval exegeses were meant not so much to disclose Biblical mysteries as to "reveal" them in the mystical sense, by refusing to violate their hiddenness and even by hiding them more deeply.

33. Much has been written on this question in recent years. Perhaps the best theorist (and, incidentally, practitioner) of the "visible" and the "invisible" in a text is the Heideggerian "deconstructionist" Paul de Man. See his *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971; 2nd, rev. ed., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), and other works.