

Vynnyčenko's Moral Laboratory

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In the well-known scene from the first act of *Hamlet*, old Polonius exhorts his son Laertes:

This above all, to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.¹

In time, Shakespeare's words "to thine own self be true" have turned into an aphorism, a condensation of a great moral truth. The essence of this "truth" is nothing more than Vynnyčenko's *bud' česnyj iz soboju* (be honest with yourself). Yet strange as it may seem, although the essence of both pronouncements is the same, no one has reproached Shakespeare that his words hide a formula for the legitimization or the approval of total amorality. Yet Vynnyčenko was condemned and still is condemned for propagating such a "new morality." The characterization of Vynnyčenko as apologist for and propagator of extreme individualism and total amorality grew and spread so freely that it has now become universally accepted as fact. It will suffice here to cite the *Encyklopedija Ukrajinovnavstva* (Ukrainian Encyclopaedia), a work, after all, meant to be informatively objective. One who has not read Vynnyčenko's works and would like to learn something about them will, upon turning to the *Encyklopedija*, read the following:

V[yunnyčenko] time and again returns to the portrayal of the egotist-cynic, who dismisses the moral code generally accepted by all in favor of "honesty with one's self," thus permitting any deed provided that "the will, the mind and the heart" uniformly approve of it. In sharp collisions there appears a rogues' gallery of hysterical, sickeningly irresolute personages who are wayward in their beliefs and behavior.²

¹ W. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act I, scene 3.

² *Encyklopedija ukrajinoznnavstva*, Slovnykova častyna, T. 1 (Paris-New York: Molode žyttja, 1955), p. 249.

It is not the aim of encyclopaedias to furnish exhaustive analyses of literature. Rather, they are expected to provide objective information. In the case of Vynnyčenko, however, it seems that the *Encyklopedija* did not so much present objective information as give an accepted opinion, an evaluation. This evaluation arose from the fact that Vynnyčenko's readers paid more attention to the application of the ethical concept of "honesty with one's self" than to the concept itself. Thus they were prone to accept the illustrative material as instructive. Vynnyčenko was chastised because his readers refused to understand, despite his frequent explanations, his own approach to morality and even less so his literary method of exploring ethical dilemmas.

It is naive to compare Vynnyčenko to Arcybašev or Dostoyevsky, and his views to Nietzsche's philosophy, even though one can find a more or less justifiable similarity in some themes, personages, or dialogues. Vynnyčenko, like Tolstoy (who suffered a moral crisis because of this), believed in the notion of the absolute consistency of human behavior. Above all, he was troubled by ever present hypocrisy, and especially the hypocrisy in personal matters which he noticed among his socialist companions. That this was by no means a pose or a temporary whim can be seen from the fact that Vynnyčenko continually insisted on publicizing this hypocrisy despite pressure from friends (here it is interesting to read the diaries of Čykalenko), or from publishers, who refused to publish his works, thus forcing him to publish them in Russian translations. Serhij Jefremov was undoubtedly correct when he wrote that Vynnyčenko himself "was tormented . . . by unresolved riddles placed before him by life; he passionately (a favorite word of Vynnyčenko) searched for truth, and curiously (also an expression from his vocabulary) unraveled the 'disharmonies' between what is and what should be."³ Vynnyčenko himself, when he finally had enough of the various attacks from people who did not understand the essence of the matter, was forced to explain himself publicly. In his article "Pro moral' panujučyx i moral' pryhnoblenyx" (About the Morality of the Ruling and the Morality of the Ruled) he puts forth his objections to hypocrisy:

³ Serhij Jefremov, *Istoriya ukrajins'koho pys'menstva*. vol. II (Kiev-Leipzig: Ukrajin's'ka Nakladnja, 1919), pp. 296-297.

I, for example, despite my belief in the bright clean teachings of socialism, felt myself a moral *criminal* —I frequented prostitutes, sometimes liked to have a drink, for the sake of conspiracy had to lie to my own friends, be dishonest with the closest people, perform often unjust and brutal acts. All of this did not correspond to the model of a socialist, a person of a higher morality, a hero and a saint. . . . Of course, this bothered me, forced me to struggle with myself, to pay even closer attention to my surroundings. But that which I began to notice here not only did not calm me, but rather created even a greater bewilderment and anguish. I realized that the majority of my companions also were not saints, that their daily and even party life did not correspond to the high models of former revolutionaries. To a greater or lesser degree they did, in fact, the same things I did.⁴

We see in this quotation two postulates that governed Vynnyčenko's thought. Neither was born of individualism and the superman of Nietzsche. It is not there that one should search for the roots of Vynnyčenko's works concerned with ethics, but rather in the foundations of socialism. The first postulate has to do primarily with the socialist attitude toward the cornerstone of society—the family. In 1891 in Erfurt the German Social-Democratic Party issued its program which was to become the foundation of the new social order proposed by the socialists. There is no reason to doubt that Vynnyčenko and his colleagues subscribed to it. That program, annotated by Karl Kautsky in 1892, assumed that the present form of the family was not the final form—the new social order would create a new family structure.⁵ That same socialist program maintained that in a socialist system the basis for a marriage would be ideal love,⁶ while under the capitalist mode of production prostitution becomes one of the pillars of society.⁷ Furthermore, under capitalism the family disintegrates, the husband, wife and children are torn asunder; only when the woman stands beside the man in large collective enterprises, will she become the man's equal and attain an equal position in society. She will become a free friend, liberated not only

⁴ Volodymyr Vynnyčenko, "Pro moral' panujučyx i moral' pryhnohlenyx," *Naš holos*, 1911, no. 9-10, p. 458. Hereafter cited as "Pro moral' . . ."

⁵ Karl Kautsky, *Das Erfurter Programm in seinem grundsätzlichen Teil*. (Stuttgart: J.B. Dietz, 1892), p. 41.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

from domestic servitude but also from the slavery of capitalism. She will become a mistress unto herself, and she will quickly put an end to all forms of prostitution, both legal and illegal; for the first time in history monogamy will become a real and not a fictitious institution."⁸

Out of that program came one of the two main postulates that occupied Vynnyčenko, that is, the equality of man and woman. The other postulate, having to do with the moral danger of the belief that the end justifies the means, also arose from Vynnyčenko's loyalty to socialism. It did not derive from the program itself but from the revolutionary activity of all those opposed to the existing order. The overthrow of this order and the attainment of the bright goal of a social utopia often served as an excuse for various misdeeds.

Being a man of principle and one who first and foremost intended to be honest with himself, Vynnyčenko could not overlook the contradictions and the hypocrisy that were brought about by the introduction of the above two postulates. Nevertheless, neither in the works themselves nor in their various explanations by the author can one find any grounds for the contention that Vynnyčenko was propagating a "new moral code." One cannot agree with the opinion of Sribljans'kyj that "the basis for Vynnyčenko's work is the struggle against the old world,"⁹ nor can one accept Xrystjuk's proposition that "there is in Vynnyčenko's quests a *strong desire born of life itself* . . . to create a new sphere of moral relations."¹⁰ Nor, finally, can one agree with the contention in Romanenčuk's *Azbukovnyk* (again a reference work meant to provide objective information) that because "socialism proclaimed revolutionary changes in society and in the social order, and old-fashioned morality, and sexual life, did not satisfy him [Vynnyčenko] and needed revolutionary changes, [Vynnyčenko] . . . proposed a new system of ethics based on extreme individualism and variable for every individual being."¹¹ In fact, however, Vynnyčenko does not proclaim anything at all (although some of his heroes do), nor does he establish any new set of

⁸ Ibid., p. 146.

⁹ M. Sribljans'kyj, "Borot'ba za indyvidual'nist," *Ukrajins'ka xata*, 1912, no. 2, p. 108.

¹⁰ P. Xrystjuk, "V. Vynnyčenko i F. Ničše," *Ukrajins'ka xata*, 1913, no. 4-5, p. 276.

¹¹ *Azbukovnyk*, vol. II (Philadelphia: Kyjiv, 1973), p. 114.

moral values. All he tries to do, in his own words, is "to have an exchange of views in an artistic form between other people and myself on the subject of my observations of life and of the consequences which arise from life."¹²

The juxtaposition of word and deed, of that which is desired with that which is possible—here lies the key to Vynnyčenko's works. The works serve as an artistic laboratory in which Vynnyčenko tried out his two postulates mentioned above—the equality between man and woman and the end as a justification of the means. Unfortunately, the populist conception of literature as an educational and moralizing instrument had so established itself by the beginning of our century that it made it impossible to read a literary work without identifying the words of the personages with those of the author, without perceiving that which is written either as a sermon for the people or as the personal experiences of the author. The author's protestations did not help. Once a work is about "the sexual question," it means that "the author's own sexual life is unsatisfactory." Once the hero of a work defends prostitutes, it means that the author is praising prostitution. Yet in the case of Vynnyčenko such attitudes are particularly unfair. One can accuse Vynnyčenko of the fact that some of his works are too tendentious, that in some of his works he pushes certain ideas toward absurdity (although always in keeping with a strong sense of logic), one can insist that some of his works are weaker than others or that some are completely unsuccessful and uninteresting. Yet "honesty with one's self" is not a new morality. It is but an ethical law which arose as the sole answer to Vynnyčenko's artistic experiments in the realm of those ethical problems which, in turn, arose from the proposed socialist program as well as from the methods employed by revolutionaries to attain their goals.

Even though in his pamphlet "Pro moral' . . ." Vynnyčenko set out his ideas clearly and logically, the work of seeking answers in his artistic laboratory progressed slowly and chaotically, being complicated by the fact that the experimentation had to take place in a double dimension—the juxtaposition of the socialist social program to the existing capitalist social order and the juxtaposition of the ideal revolutionary to real fel-

¹² Vynnyčenko, "Pro moral' . . .", p. 455.

low revolutionaries whom he knew and with whom he worked. Complications arose at every step. When Vynnyčenko attempted to portray his hero in a way that would, in his opinion, reflect the behavior of the ideal revolutionary socialist, he was accused of portraying his hero as a "cynical egotist"; when, on the other hand, he portrayed his heroes from life, he was accused of insulting and blackening his friends.

Vynnyčenko himself approached the matter logically and in sequence. Taking as his base the socialist program, Vynnyčenko could not but notice that, in the words of Myxajlo Rudnyc'kyj "the slogans of liberty, equality, justice and fraternity had to touch one of the foundations of the social order — the family and individual morality."¹³ Having the inclination to seek harmony between word and deed and being a superb observer of life, Vynnyčenko saw very quickly that not everything proposed in the socialist program was possible without serious consequences, which must be taken into account. This was not all, however. What was more serious and disturbing was the fact that the majority of socialists themselves could not accept that which was being propagated in their program. It was fairly easy to say things, but to do them, to put them into practice—especially when it came to the postulate of equality between man and woman—complicated matters enormously.

Consequently, it was easy to proclaim the equality of the sexes but what exactly did this equality mean: equality at work, in sexual relations, in the family, in the party? To answer this question Vynnyčenko takes each one of these spheres and attempts to prove its workability by trying it out in his artistic laboratory. That this is the actual way in which Vynnyčenko worked, can be seen in the author's own statements about his play *Ščabli žyttja* (The Rungs of Life):

. . . I built a fictional character with such features as I had encountered among living people. I brought it into the sphere of my thoughts and feelings and then forced it to enter with them into real life. I wrote a play *Ščabli žyttia* where I described the *results* of the *introduction of these conclusions* to the surrounding life, *conclusions which I myself had experienced* in part and which *in a logical consequence flow out of the state of things*.¹⁴

¹³ M. Rudnyc'kyj, *Vid Myrnoho do Xvyl'ovoho* (L'viv: Dilo, 1936), p. 310.

¹⁴ Vynnyčenko, 'Pro moral'. . ., p. 472. Emphasis mine.

Although the above quotation refers to *Ščabli žyttja*, the "laboratory" method described in it is applicable to all of Vynnyčenko's works in which he deals with ethical problems.

Perhaps the least problematic part of Vynnyčenko's work was the theme of the equality of the sexes. The exploitation of woman in Vynnyčenko's lifetime was attributed to the sins of capitalism, but the same type of exploitation would have been possible under socialism as well. Vynnyčenko's perceptive eye was quick to notice this instance of hypocrisy among his socialist friends. Furthermore, it was most noticeable not in employment practices (after all, the socialists did not run factories) but in revolutionary and agitational activities.

Vynnyčenko submits this problem to a laboratory analysis in the play *Bazar* (Bazaar) where, despite all contentions to the contrary, neither the revolutionary Leonid nor the revolutionary Troxym can accept the revolutionary Marusja as a truly equal member of the group. Her *feminine* beauty stands in the way. "I have yet to see a fellow," she says, "who would not make a pass at me. Including the revolutionaries. At first I thought the revolutionaries were not like that, but . . . I see . . ." ¹⁵ And in fact Leonid leaves his wife because of her, Troxym is ready to jeopardize the mission of freeing comrades from prison because of his jealousy for her, while the leader Markovyč, in order to attain his conspiratorial ends, is ready to convince her to lie (to Troxym, to cool his jealousy), to exploit her beauty for the purpose of worker agitation (workers are ready to listen to her because she is beautiful), and to distract the police. Markovyč attempts to banish her qualms by bits of cynical sophistry, claiming that life is but a bazaar to which all come with those goods of value which they possess. Marusja is forced by all this to dissipate her beauty and then discovers that even Leonid who claimed to love her soul was interested only in her body—the goods which she could bring to the bazaar. Finally she forces her companions to treat her as an equal only by means of deception.

The result of this experiment is quite clear. In theory man and woman are equals, but in reality one cannot avoid the question of sex. On a

¹⁵ V. Vynnyčenko, *Bazar* (Winnipeg: Ukr. robitnyči visti, 1921), p. 13.

more particular level (and more bothersome to Vynnyčenko), however, was the fact that his socialist colleagues were incapable of realizing their own inability to abide by one of the basic postulates of the socialist program. "A great achievement of Vynnyčenko," writes Rudnyc'kyj, "lies in the fact that he was the first in our literature to reveal behind the mechanically repeated sentimental word 'love' the sexual question which in society has more strength than all the so-called 'ideals.'"¹⁶

As in *Bazar*, so in *Dysharmonija* (Disharmony) and in *Česnist' z soboju* (Honesty with One's Self), Vynnyčenko analyzes another question related to that of equality between the sexes and the sex drive which hinders the realization of this equality. I mean the question of the possibility of "spiritual love" outside of the physical. The analysis gives uniform results—whether it is from the woman's point of view (Ol'ha in *Dysharmonija* in her attitude toward her sickly husband Hryc'ko, or Natalja's attitude toward Myron in *Česnist'*) or from the man's (Leonid's attitude toward Marusja in *Bazar*, Serhij's attitude toward his wife in *Česnist'*). In all instances it is apparent that a successful separation of spiritual and physical love is not possible. People fool themselves hiding their lust under the mantle of the spirit (Natalja or Leonid) or they find excuses for their lack of physical desire by claiming spiritual union (Ol'ha or Serhij).

Perhaps the loudest controversy arose around Vynnyčenko's analysis of equality between the sexes in the sphere of sexual relations. The suppositions for the "experiment" consisted of the following: if man and woman are equal, if because of their belief in socialism they disregard the tenets of the Church which proclaims marriage as the only sanction for sexual relations, if they believe that to have sex is a normal biological function which both man and woman must satisfy, and if in advance they can make certain that there will be no serious consequences—neither children nor disease—if such is the case, then can a woman go ahead and find sexual gratification, just as a man does? Vynnyčenko tests this question in the novel *Česnist' z soboju*, whose heroine Dara goes into a hotel and orders a young man to be brought to her. She

¹⁶ Rudnyc'kyj, p. 310.

wants to pay him for his services, just as a man would pay a prostitute. He fulfils his function, and Dara goes home. At first glance, the experiment seems to have been successful. But a closer analysis will reveal that Dara is not herself wholly convinced of the propriety of her act. She is incapable of dismissing her own betrayal of her husband Serhij. She narrates her escapade as if it were experienced by a friend who, supposedly, later shot herself. On the other hand, Serhij, expressing the man's view of the whole affair, cannot accept what has taken place. He knows that Dara does not love him, he suspects that she is in love with another man (Myron) and yet he never protests against this spiritual betrayal. As soon as it dawns on him that Dara is talking about herself, that it is, in fact, she who has been with another man, without bothering to observe spiritual restraints, he is appalled. Dara, who herself is not proud of her behavior, nevertheless accuses Serhij of hypocrisy and of having a double standard:

Spiritual love is important. And this love remained, let us assume. . . . Or, perhaps, this is but a theory and in reality everything is centered on this body which everyone degrades so? Eh? As long as she was betraying him with her soul he knew of it and did not push her away. . . . That is, one can live with this, but as soon as she just touched the body, then everything was finished? A crime and a degradation. . . . Vile hypocrites . . . Owners. You can go crazy, or die but don't you dare touch the belongings of the man.¹⁷

Again the results are the same: the differences between words and deeds are immense. The same may be said of prostitution. Vynnyčenko, together with other socialists, claimed that prostitution is an expression of the capitalist exploitation of woman. If this is the case, it would seem logical to look at prostitutes as equals of the other exploited workers, and therefore help them to gain their human rights and self-respect. But this is merely cant. The experiment conducted with Myron and his sister, the prostitute, proves that even though men are ready to frequent public houses, they are ashamed of this and find prostitution degrading. Only Myron, who is trying to be honest with himself, and wants to unite word and deed, finds the task of comprehending prostitution very diffi-

¹⁷ V. Vynnyčenko, *Česnist' z soboj. Tvory*, vol. X (Kiev-Vienna: Dzvin, 1919), pp. 184-6.

cult. Even though he seems to be indifferent to his sister's profession, he does everything in his power to stop her from going into prostitution, tries to talk her into quitting the profession and finally breathes a sigh of relief when she returns home.

Indirectly related to the question of the equality of the sexes is the matter of children. It is a law of nature that the woman gives birth, but must the woman be married, or can she, as in the story "Tajemna pryhoda" (A Secret Adventure), pick up a stranger, invite him to a hotel, question him to see if he has any inheritable diseases and if he is fertile, and then, without giving him any explanation, meet him in that hotel regularly until she is impregnated? In this story Vynnyčenko comes to the conclusion that, if one were to dismiss the laws of society, such parentage, as far as nature is concerned, would be quite normal. Single mothers after all, have existed through the ages. What interests Vynnyčenko, however, is not the state of the unwed mother as such but the woman's premeditated and seemingly cold decision: it is in this that the woman's revolutionary act consists.

The analysis of the "child problem" seems to be brought to its logical resolution in *Česnist' z soboj*. Olja is full of admiration for Myron and wants to have a child by him, but without any family ties. He refuses and explains his refusal:

This is, my dearest Olja, a most profound, a most important act. . . . Even to knit a stocking one needs expertise, preparation. And you say: 'Why can't she when she wants one?' And what about me? It would also be my child, wouldn't it? And how am I giving birth to it? Am I conscious of the fact that I am starting a new life? Did I examine myself? Can I in full conscience say that I have done everything so that my child turns out strong and healthy? Do I really want to have children with this woman? Did I approach this act with love and deliberation? Our moralists talk of animals, and themselves really give birth to children like animals. So what if I gave birth to a cripple, that is all right, that's the way it turned out.¹⁸

That these words belong not only to Myron but to Vynnyčenko as well can be readily seen when we compare them with a statement in Vynnyčenko's letter to Čykalenko of October 30, 1911:

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 74.

I married, that is, I got together with the woman with whom I want to have children, half a year ago, but until now I could not talk about it because this was a trial-period marriage. As yet we did not know each other and could not say whether we could establish a family. Now, it is, more or less, clear. My wife is Jewish, but we agreed that the family would be Ukrainian and that we would have children only when the mother is sufficiently prepared to raise them as Ukrainian. . . . I want to build a family that will answer its *natural* function and not one which is prescribed by some moral codes and laws. I want it to be useful and good for me and the community in which I live.¹⁹

For Vynnyčenko, childbearing was a serious and responsible affair. If the birth of a child was to serve frivolous or inauthentic aims, the result could be tragic. This is the proposition that Vynnyčenko examines in the drama *Zakon* (The Law). Inna, the heroine, cannot have children, but she is convinced that only a child can save her marriage to Panas. To attain that noble end—the saving of her marriage—she persuades Panas to find a young and healthy girl and to have a child with her, whom they will then adopt. Panas' protests against this wild, animal-like experiment are of no avail; Inna insists that they are justified in what they have set out to do, because their cause is "noble and great." "You have agreed that we have a moral right to reach it in such a manner."²⁰ The experiment, of course, fails. Ljuda, the child's mother, in accordance with the laws of nature, refuses to give up her child. Moreover, during this experiment, all existing, even if tenuous, bonds between Inna and Panas are severed.

In the play, Vynnyčenko touches upon his other postulate, discussed in the beginning of the paper: does the end justify the means? The noblest end, the purest goal, if it is not for the good of the community but only for the good of an individual, is never justified. But Vynnyčenko takes that question further: what if the end is indeed for the benefit of the group—does it then still justify the means? If this is really true then it logically follows that the means cannot be governed by any moral laws, or that the moral laws are not absolute and change in accordance with the means. How can one then decide if a given act is

¹⁹ Jevhen Čykalenko. *Ščodennyk 1907-1917* (L'viv: Červona kalyna, n.y.), date of entry is 10, XI, 1911, pp. 240-241.

²⁰ V. Vynnyčenko, *Zakon* (Prague-Berlin: Nova Ukrajina, 1923), p. 39.

righteous or if it is perhaps a crime? Besides, the experience of life has shown that such basic laws as "do not steal," "do not kill," "do not commit adultery"—all were proclaimed by a society which itself, in the words of Vynnyčenko, sanctioned "the robbery of one group of people by another," created "social institutions for killing," and considered adultery as lawful marriage.²¹

But the matter does not lie in the laws of society. Such laws, in Vynnyčenko opinion, have had but one goal throughout history: "the protection of the rule of the 'haves' against the 'have-nots'."²² The matter lies in the behavior of future society, in the behavior of the socialist-revolutionaries. Already in *Dysharmonija* Hryc'ko formulates the approach to such ethics: "I find that they [the 'black-hundreds'] do not differ in anything from us! We lie, and they lie. In what way are we now better than that *bosjak* [bum]? We sit here and lie for such and such a reason and he lies for his own reasons. . . . The essence is the same."²³

Vynnyčenko, in his pursuit of ethical absolutes, forces his hero to bring his thoughts to a logical conclusion: "I maintain that every minute, every moment I want to be righteous. And if I lie but once, that means I can lie always."²⁴ But Hryc'ko realizes that he must, in fact, lie; if he does not, he and his friends will die. Because he lies without being truly convinced of the righteousness of his act, a "disharmony" occurs between the will and the deed. In searching for a resolution of such ethical "disharmony," Vynnyčenko finds a single basic answer: the unity of thought and deed must be brought about on the basis of honesty with one's self:

It is all right to lie to a policeman for it is suggested to me both by my brain and by my feelings that by being truthful with him I will destroy myself and my friends. It is all right to lie even to a friend when by this lie I save him. But when I lie to my friend and by this lie save myself, then I lie not only to him but also to my social consciousness.²⁵

In order to test this hypothesis, Vynnyčenko analyzes it in the play *Hrix*

²¹ Vynnyčenko, "Pro moral' . . . ", p. 462.

²² Ibid., p. 465.

²³ V. Vynnyčenko, *Dysharmonija* (Kiev, 1907), pp. 94-5.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 99.

²⁵ Vynnyčenko, "Pro moral' . . . ", p. 471.

(The Sin). Here the heroine Marija agrees to cooperate with the policeman Stalyns'kyj in order to save her revolutionary comrades. At first glance it seems that her goal is most noble and therefore her means to achieve it are morally unavoidable. But Stalyns'kyj knows that she is acting also out of her love for Ivan. And playing upon this, he forces her to betray more and more members of the group. Marija finally realizes that she was fooling herself, that she was not honest with herself, that she was guilty of a crime which she had excused in the name of the common good. It is after this self-revelation that Marija manages to escape the clutches of Stalyns'kyj by poisoning herself.

When Myron in *Chesnist' z soboju* steals Kysylevs'kyj's money in order to save Olja from prostitution, the end indeed justifies the means, for he does this for the good of his fellow human being without any personal motives or gains. Yet, in order that this act not bring about "disharmony," he must be honest with himself as to what he is doing and why he is doing it.

One and the same act can be either moral or immoral, depending on the circumstances, on the "situation." But for this type of honesty one needs virtually ideal human beings. Vynnyčenko looked for such human beings among his friends, the social revolutionaries. But there he found only unconscious or, even worse, deliberate hypocrites. They were incapable of living in accordance with the law of honesty with one's self, nor could they understand what it was exactly that Vynnyčenko tried to portray.

A careful reading of Vynnyčenko's works reveals that he did not propagate extreme individualism, total amorality, prostitution, falsehood, free love, or an animalistic abandon to lust. Instead, he attempted to test certain ideas that in theory sound so beautiful, to see if they were realizable and what their consequences would be. If he were alive today, he would most likely analyze in his artistic laboratory such current phenomena as test-tube babies, or artificial insemination. We see that his subjects are but examples of that illustrative material for which he was so often chastised, but which was indispensable to test the essential: to what extent do people believe in that which they proclaim, to what extent every present-day Laertes wants to and is able to live in

accordance with the teachings of old Polonius (which, incidentally, he himself was unable to put into practice) "to thine own self be true." Perhaps today Vynnyčenko would not be attacked for the subject matter of his works (after all, ethics and mores, as well as attitudes toward sex have changed) but he would probably still disturb his readers. As Rudnyc'kyj so aptly captured it: "We always prefer a writer who believes in some ideal and defends it fervently over a skeptic who leaves us in his cold laboratory."²⁶ I would add: over one who shows us ourselves in a non-distorting mirror.

²⁶ Rudnyc'kyj, p. 312.