



Volodymyr Panchenko

*Literaturnyi landshaft
Ukrainy. XX stolittia*

[The Literary Landscape of Ukraine. The
20th Century].

Kyiv: Yaroslaviv val, 2019. 528 pp.

In Ukrainian.

ISBN 9786176050490

Reviewed by Oleksandra Sauliak

In the foreword to his book, *Literaturnyi landshaft Ukrainy. XX stolittia* (*The Literary Landscape of Ukraine. The 20th Century*), Volodymyr Panchenko opens his survey with the notion that the landscape of Ukrainian literature has been changing since the 1980s, when names previously eliminated from the Soviet canon resurfaced in the discourse of Ukrainian literature. Therefore, as an array of previously inaccessible material became available, it needed to be reconsidered, analyzed, and presented to the public. By the year 2019, when the book was published, a large part of this academic, editorial, and publishing work had already been done: the official literary canon of independent Ukraine showed its existence in various ways (from the school syllabus to topics of public discussion). Yet, as someone who, according to his own words, was present in the literary process of 20th century Ukraine for 46 years, Volodymyr Panchenko had something to add—his *personal* view on the matter.

Although the author insisted that he aimed to present neither a *history* of modern Ukrainian literature nor a personal canon (for this we have a bonus on the last pages of the book, namely a list of the top-100 Ukrainian 20th century literary texts), *Literaturnyi landshaft Ukrainy. XX stolittia* has features of both. This can be seen in the way the book is structured: it includes a selection of 26 prominent authors, listed in chronological order. This list, however, is intended to be read in parts (each selection dedicated to one author) and not as a linear (hi)story with a beginning and end point. A connection between these mainly biographical fragments—or slides, as Volodymyr Panchenko calls them, alluding to analog film photography—exists, but is not explicit. Each fragment is presented as an individual essay, sometimes with additional fragmentation within the essays (presumably because some of the texts in the book have been previously published as articles). For instance, reading about Mykola Bazhan, the reader will get acquainted with aspects of his biography and writings from four different perspectives:

the first provides a general overview of his life and work under the vigilant eye of Soviet censorship; the second presents a take on Bazhan's personality as seen by those close to him (with a "bonus" republication of an intelligence report on the poet; interestingly, Volodymyr Panchenko raises the topic of its authorship and gives clues on the informant's identity, but leaves the final estimation—of who he was—for the reader to make); the third presents a survey of Bazhan's connection to Italy; the final perspective centres the reader's attention on a personal story of two friends behind the plot of Bazhan's poem "Debora."

There are several features that make Volodymyr Panchenko's work distinctive from others of its kind. Despite the fact that actual literary matter often gives way to historical and political analysis (for example, there is a much more discussion of Volodymyr Vynnychenko's political ambitions and his relations with Pavlo Skoropadskyi and Joseph Stalin than of his writings), some fragments feature thorough interpretations of particular literary works. Most importantly, key individual texts in the common canon or each author's legacy are often excluded (and therefore need more detailed consideration that the book provides). Such texts include Lesia Ukrainka's drama *Rufin i Pristsilla* (Rufin and Priscilla), Volodymyr Sosiura's poem *Mazepa*, and Leonid Pervomaiskyi's novel *Dykyi med* (Wild Honey) among others. Besides, the author's attention to the socio-cultural context beyond the literary component brings insight to the understanding of the literary work and its creator's psyche. In terms of widening the existing canon, the importance of *Literaturnyi landshaft Ukrainy. XX stolittia* lies in the inclusion of additional figures who took part of the literary process but often remain excluded from the literature, namely historians of literature, critics, and publishers and editors, such as Hryhorii Kostiuk, Bohdan Romanenchuk, Anatolii Makarov, and others.

The author's approach to the topic and the covered material cannot be underestimated: Volodymyr Panchenko traveled to the home-places of the authors he wrote about, had personal meetings with some of them, conducted interviews that became part of his book (such as a conversation with Mykola Khvylovyi's daughter), and worked with archives that provide unique artifacts (such as internal reviews of Lina Kostenko's manuscript of *Kniazha hora* (Prince's Mountain) poetry collection). The author's presence in the text is strong and manifests itself in a style that is more publicistic than academic, spoken rather than written. Those who had the opportunity to attend Volodymyr Panchenko's courses (taught by him at the Department of Literature at NaUKMA) will recognize his manner of speaking that saturates the book: the language is highly metaphorical, the metaphors are highly naturalistic (the 19th century being "pregnant with socialism"—in reference to the age of Ivan Franko, revolution "eating its children"—on the tragic fate of Mykola Khvylovyi and his like-minded contemporaries). One might say that an implicit reader is replaced here with an implicit listener, someone who will provide answers to the only partly rhetorical questions left out in the book. This, as well as many "base" historical, biographical, and other contextual details that are also left out in the presentation of the material turns *Literaturnyi landshaft Ukrainy. XX stolittia* into a conversation with a prepared

and educated reader, who is well-acquainted with the topic (presumably Ukrainian literature students and scholars).

Other researchers become part of this conversation too. For instance, Volodymyr Panchenko addresses Ukrainian feminist critics and historians of literature, namely the works of Vira Ageyeva and Solomiia Pavlychko, to talk about “modernism-centrism” in contemporary Ukrainian literary studies that question the legacy of Ukrainian realism due to its political engagement. In a way, *Literaturnyi landshaft Ukrainy. XX stolittia* may be seen as an attempt to prove that for Ukrainian modernists (not to mention later generations of authors, such as the *shistdesiatnyky* and others) literature did remain a part of social action and the national cause.