

SEVEN SIGNS OF THE LION

MICHAEL M. NAYDAN



A NOVEL



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by Michael M. Naydan

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DISCLAIMER

If you see yourself or anyone you think you know as one of the characters in this work of pure fiction and unadulterated authorial imagination, you are sorely mistaken. It is definitely not you or the person you think you might know and you may have a problem distinguishing fantasy from reality. This book, however, might actually be for people like you, though there are certain dangers in associating yourself with characters of fiction. Real place names and real names of certain public figures are used for the sake of establishing setting. All scenes are fictional! None of this ever happened, though you might think it did, and who could blame you for that? Thinking is always allowed. Any similarities in the pages that follow to real living or deceased individuals would be purely coincidental.

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For the best of Muses – Yaroslava, Myroslava and Kalyna

HISSTORY

Stories all must start somewhere, so this one starts right here or maybe just before or right after. Where it will end not even the author knows sometimes. Some authors follow a well-designed plan with everything laid out in exquisite logical order, others just follow a path or a road, and no matter how much it zigzags or winds, goes uphill or down, it always *must* take you somewhere or back to where you came from. So if you follow it, you will end up wherever it takes us both, to a somewhere, because this author is not the kind who can ever lay out everything in advance like crooked cobblestones on a seemingly perfectly straight road. One should add, though, that tales could often come to a crossroads with a significant choice of three paths to take. At those crossroads a raven usually caws and speaks. He might tell you, in whatever language you speak, that one road may lead to great riches, another to happiness and love, and the third possibly to death. But, of course, heroes sometimes never know the true meaning of the raven's riddle. Riches can lead to ruin, happiness and love can end up in boredom, and the path of death can lead to a great quest, a spiritual awakening, and untold rewards. Or, then again, it might be none or a combination of the above.... I'm not sure what the raven would caw here if he would speak in his hoarse gravelly raven voice, since there is no raven to riddle us with the meanings of the choices about to be made.

WHERE DREAMS HAPPEN, JOURNEYS FOLLOW

This story begins with a dream. The dream of Nicholas Bilanchuk to be more precise. It was a murky, dark dream, one that left him brooding. It was a call, an invitation to take a journey to seek out something. One of those lucid dreams that makes you shudder when you wake up because it appears so real that you're not sure if it is, or whether you're waking up in the dream or in your reality. It's one of those dreams that make you question whether you even know what reality is sometimes. Even though the dream was lucid, Nicholas had waited too long before writing it all down, so he was left just with the patchy outlines of his fragmented memory.

It was a dark, misty night in the old downtown of a city with winding well-worn cobblestone streets. It looked centuries old, but there were slow-moving dark green tramcars screeching on tracks and people dressed in fairly modern clothes. So it couldn't have been that long ago, and it could have even been right now or tomorrow. There were older, heavysset women wearing scarves selling some kind of blackish beans in paper cups and scruffy beggars sitting in doorways in scratchy dark brown wool pants with matching oversized suit coats that seemed to be as old and dusty as the beggars were. There was a balding, bearded man dressed in a colorful bowtie and black tuxedo, who seemingly had come to life after having stepped down from a statue on one of the buildings in the city square. He was telling Nicholas he had something to show him, even though Nicholas could not speak the language that the statue-turned-into-a-man was speaking. The more he listened, the more Nicholas understood the language. Something about keys to unlock locks. The doors of tomorrow. Equilibrium. Universe. Powerful energy fields rising from beneath the earth. All over

the city. The eye in the triangle. Following every step. Dangerous passage. Restless spirits. Wandering. Steps to a cavernous cavern and an underground river where two worlds meet, or two sides of the same world, a line that was both a barrier and an interface. Something about signs. Signs of the lion. Seven of them. The signs needed to be found. Order needed to be restored. Order out of chaos. Out of the order – disintegration. Two worlds along the fault line of quotidian and non-quotidian time.

The man in the tuxedo and red plaid tie smiled and pointed at Nicholas. “You’re the one,” he seemed to be saying. “You’re the one.” Nicholas heard the thoughts even though he didn’t understand the language. And Nicholas felt a tug at his heart and mind. “Come to the city, the city of lions. All the answers lie there if you make the journey.” Nicholas looked up on top of a building and saw the head of the statue motionless and back in place on the roof. How it came down to speak with him he didn’t know.

Snippets, just patches of words quilted together. Nicholas wished he could have remembered more. In those moments right after lucid awakening, everything is clear. Just a short time later the dream memory like a stained glass window broken by a thrown brick and fallen to the ground was now shattered in shards and losing its narrative. You could see parts of it in individual pieces, but its wholeness was gone. Perhaps the wholeness of it would have made more sense to him. But then again, it was now a mystery. Mysteries leave a trail to follow to solve and a pressing need to solve and resolve them. And Nicholas needed to find the glue to reconstruct the shattered stained glass narrative for himself.

HEROES

What should a hero be? Joseph Campbell says he can be of a thousand faces. A hero can be pure of heart, pure of spirit, a man of suffering, a man of forgiveness, a man of wildness tamed. Or a woman of all the above, since heroes are not just of one gender. There are all different kinds of heroes. Some show feats of strength. Some show feats of mind and mental acuity. Some stumble their way into situations backward. Some try too hard. Some don't try enough. Some who want to be heroes just can't be, some who think they can't be turn out to be the best of them. All heroes have doubts and failures because all heroes are human. It could be a random teenage girl with a calling to lead the armies of France, or Davids tossing stones at Goliaths, or a paralyzed Ilya of Murom who drinks the water of life to gain his strength back to defeat the evil Tartars threatening his homeland. Throughout all of recorded and unrecorded time one person has always had the capacity to make history turn, though most people may not believe that. All heroes must begin their journey with the first page. This is already the fourth.

SLIGHTLY REMEMBERED ANCESTORS

It was a journey he planned to the roots of the homeland of not particularly remembered ancestors, one that was foreign to him, since he grew up in the environs of the melting pot of the New York City area. Those ancestors simply weren't remembered by him in his own living memory, so he had to learn about them in other ways, and if such a thing exists, perhaps it was some kind of a genetic memory of them that he somehow still retained as well as bits and pieces of familial oral history. He was also forced to learn about them in the dreaded Ukrainian Saturday schools where he had to memorize poems by Taras Shevchenko, Ivan Franko and Lesya Ukrainka and where he was taught by laxative-intolerant refugee men and women in their seventies. In that way he learned about the language and country of what had become fossilized in their fading memory from the years 1943-1945 when these refugees were forced into Nazi work camps. They were later to be named with the more elegant euphemism – displaced persons. Nicholas's grandfather and father used to call them dependable people. His grandfather learned the trade of a mason even though he was a schoolteacher back in the old country. His university degree and education meant nothing in a land where he needed to learn English just to survive, much less find the money to return to school for more degrees even to approximate his previous social status. His first job was as a janitor, then a night watchman, and then an apprentice mason's assistant until he learned the trade from his toothless Italian mentors whose broken English was worse than his. It was easier just to work, though he kept on top of all the events going on back in the homeland including the Brezhnev years of repression, the Chornobyl explosion in 1985, the end of the Soviet Union in 1991 and Ukrainian independence. He didn't live to see the Orange Revolution of 2004. He would read his Svoboda Ukrainian daily newspaper out of Jersey City religiously as three

or four of them often would arrive on the same day. So he went from respected intellectual to respected manual laborer and craftsman, though he did make pretty good money until his retirement. He proudly bought his first black Buick with cash (he didn't believe in credit) and kept it for nearly twenty years. He pronounced the name something like "Boo-ick." In emigre Ukrainian it was his *kara* (taken from the English word "car"), which in real Ukrainian meant "punishment." It wasn't a punishment of course, but rather just something to get him to church, to work, and to the store. He barely put 5000 miles a year on it and it was always waxed to a lustrous shine. He bought the first family home in Queens the same way, with money saved and not a penny wasted on frivolous things. A lot of his friends from the old country squandered their money in bars and in the Ukrainian club called Tryzub, or Trident, but not he. (The trident was the emblem of Ukraine that was banned in Soviet times. It's made a comeback since independence.) He did love to drink whisky and Rolling Rock beer, but never to excess. He'd religiously have a shot of Seagram's Seven in the morning when he woke up, at lunchtime with the Italian crew of masons, and in the evening after dinner. Like a Japanese, he couldn't pronounce the "l" in "Rolling," so it came out sounding like "Rorring." He lived to the ripe age of 77, never having been sick a day in his life in his adopted homeland. He did, however, become a bit stooped over because of the heavy hauling he had to do. The years of heavy loads of mud, as the paesano masons called it, of mortar, in wheelbarrows and lifting sixteen-inch blocks curved his back into scoliosis and made him an inch or two shorter, though he never was one to complain – except about the "lyakhy" (the pejorative Ukrainian word for Poles) and the "prokliati Moskali" (accent on the last syllables – the damned Russkies).

Mention the word "communism" or "revolution," and he would fly into a rage. He and his wife Olesya, who worked at the counter in a bakery shop in the Ukrainian neighborhood where they had settled, saved every nickel they could squirrel away to pay for the education of Nicholas's father, who graduated from high school despite

having to learn English as a teenager and who got an engineering degree from Stony Brook University and along with that a well-paying job with the local planning commission as their engineering consultant. Nicholas's younger brother Yaroslav (known as Jerry by his American friends) got his accounting degree from Stony Brook, while Nicholas got his in English literature from there, too.

Nicholas took a job at Nassau Community College and learned to hate it with a passion, a hate that grew with each year. The place wasn't bad. It just was stifling him, and he didn't know why. The students were getting worse each year (or he was getting smarter – *hardly!*), and the course load was way too heavy, though the pay was pretty good. He just was suffering from burnout. His brother with the malleable bicultural name Yaroslav-Jerry, who could have never even dreamt of forgetting his Ukrainian origins as a result of that first name, married the proverbial nice Ukrainian girl next door Rostyslava (Rusty in English), whom he met at church on Sunday, and was living the hyphenated Americrainian assimilation dream with three kids and a house in Syosset. He worked as an accountant for Pathmark, and his wife became the archetypal Ukrainian *hospodynia*, or housewife, making everyone gain pound after pound each year on Ukrainian *varennkyky* (potato dumplings), *holuptsi* (stuffed cabbage), and tortes of all kinds for special and even not very special occasions. Great torte making entered Ukrainian culinary life through the Austro-Hungarian occupation. Some colonial invasions have their upside. He and his wife became more and more Americanized and just as the church they attended switched to mostly English masses, their Ukrainian identity became more and more submerged and melting-potted as time went on. They spoke at home in English to the kids to the disdain of the grandparents, but made them go to the summer camps at the Ukrainian Soyukivka resort in the Catskills at Kerhonkson. But that attrition of language skills will happen when foreigners come to foreign lands and have children. Oddly, Nicholas, who wasn't particularly interested in the homeland of his ancestors when he was growing up, who didn't have kids of his own, got infected with searching for his ethnic roots later in his life.

Nicholas had gotten married much too early and his “mixed marriage” (i.e., to a non-Ukrainian Sicilian girl and also the child of emigrants, the latter of whom could barely speak English even after being in the US for over thirty years). Nicholas and Gina after several years of making a go of it just came to the mutual realization that they didn’t get along and couldn’t iron out the differences between them. They turned out to be just totally different people than the two people who married each other. Nicholas was both introspective and outgoing, that is, he became outgoing after overcoming his early teenage shyness. He was also a Libra and even-tempered, though he didn’t believe in any kind of zodiacal predetermination of personality. Gina was Aquarian, restive, fiery and even explosive, but also very introverted. Over time Nicholas constantly began to brood over his job, which bored him beyond tears. Unhappiness breeds unhappiness (Tolstoy must have said something like that, Nicholas thought, as he recalled it from one of the classes he had taken at Stony Brook with a professor of Polish extraction), and he bred a lot of it, though he and Gina thankfully neither birthed nor bred any children, though they tried. But you need the former to do the latter.

The dream to go to the homeland came a year or so after his marriage ended. There were no kids to divide Solomonicly; they had two separate but equal cars of the same vintage, so they could each take one, both of them Toyotas and no longer American-made Buicks like his grandfather’s; and both shared just an apartment as their abode, one that Nicholas was happy to move out of, taking with himself most of the Ukrainian trinkets he had recently accumulated in his search for his Ukrainian roots (a Kozak (aka as Cossack) *bulava*, or mace (a symbol of power); multicolored *pysanky* Easter eggs; a few embroidered shirts; inlaid enamel wooden boxes from the Carpathians; and a growing Ukrainian music and literature collection he had picked up from the Arka and Surma Ukrainian stores on Seventh Street on the Lower East Side). He particularly liked the Kvitka Cisyk folk songs he had picked up. Her voice was pure, gentle and powerful, and the instrumentation exquisite. Unfortunately, Kvitka, whose name means “flower,” withered away of

breast cancer in 1998. Her claim to fame in American culture was singing the “Have you driven a Ford, lately?” jingle and having had her name mangled when she appeared on the Johnny Carson show once. Gina decided to keep the embroidered tablecloths someone had given them as a wedding gift because they reminded her of the Italian ones her own mother had brought over from her mother’s home town of Sciacca in Sicily.

When the dream of Mr. Viktor and the murky city had come to him, Nicholas took it quite seriously. He first decided to take an extended summer vacation and sign up for an advanced Ukrainian language class at the Harvard Ukrainian Research Summer Institute. He had started taking another class at the same time with a professor of Ukrainian literature from Yale or Princeton; he couldn’t quite remember where he was from, but it was one of the Ivies. The guy was SO arrogant and had SUCH a condescending attitude that Nicholas dropped it on the first day.

Nicholas’s homespeak Ukrainian was on the old-fashioned side and frozen in time circa 1943 when his grandparents had left – since they and his parents were the conveyors of his spoken language skills. He also remembered many of the Old Church Slavic words from church services such as “prysno,” “vonmim” and “paky, paky.” So at the summer class he had to unlearn those ingrained habits of kitchenspeak and churchspeak with his parents and grandparents, who lived in houses next door to each other in the Ukrainian neighborhood in Queens on 31st Street, to learn to speak in the way that Ukrainian was spoken now in the abandoned homeland.

Nicholas’s teacher Andriya in the summer program was from the Taras Shevchenko University in Kyiv and was super. She was bright, bubbly and kindhearted, and married to an energy company executive in Ukraine. Nicholas spent some extra time with her in the afternoons working on his spoken Ukrainian and she on her spoken English in the coffee shops and ice cream parlors of Cambridge, and by the end of the summer session, he had built up enough confidence to take the plunge for a journey.

Nicholas also met the Ukrainian writer Andriy Yurkevych there, who gave a reading from his poetry and prose works. Yurkevych was doing a writer's residency in the summer at the Tufts creating writing program. He had been invited by Rurik Denysiuk, who, despite the heavy-duty Scando-Ukrainian first and inescapably Ukrainian last name was Director of the program and a poet and novelist who wrote in English. The three of them (Nicholas, Rurik and Andriy) hit it off quite well and spent a lot of time in the evenings ruminating over the meaning of the universe as well as the blessings and curses of Ukrainianness, and sipping cognac and draft beer in the establishments of Cambridge like the B-Side Lounge and John Harvard's. The Ajanta Indian restaurant on First Street was also a favorite spot for them to meet. Nicholas loved spicy Indian food, and Andriy enjoyed both that as well as the exotic flavors he had never tasted before his residency abroad. He later wrote a cycle of poems called "The Tastes of India" that must have been influenced by the meetings at the restaurant. And Nicholas invited Andriy to come visit him on Long Island for a few weeks at the end of the summer and the beginning of the academic year where they spent some time at Long Island Beaches and visiting Nicholas's good graduate school friend Sarah at her family's summer home in Sag Harbor.

With speaking skills improved after the end of the summer in Cambridge, Nicholas decided to apply for a Fulbright to teach English during the course of the next academic year – and to his surprise managed to get one on the first try. He was granted a leave of absence from his teaching position for a five-month Fulbright stay and got a placement at Ivan Franko National University in Lviv, the city of lions, a city of about 800,000 people (and a good 120,000 of them students) in what was described to him as the western cultural capital of the country. It was the biggest city closest to the villages where his grandparents and parents were from, and, in fact, nearly equidistant from both of their respective villages. It was also the city that in a purely intuitive way he somehow understood *had* to be the city of his lucid dream. Some things you just seem to know.

FLIGHT 4772 TO WARSAW

The first leg of the flight to Warsaw was mostly uneventful except for one chance meeting. Though curiously Nicholas met a rather attractive woman by the name of Lilia from Poland on the flight. Her long pitch-black and naturally curly hair flowed down her shoulders and back. Unfortunately for Nicholas, he was able to speak with her mostly only for the last two hours of the flight. By nature Nicholas was shy, and it took him a while to start up a conversation with her, and she was extremely tired and slept for several hours before awakening from a deep sleep that seemed filled with dreams.

“Do you speak English?” He mentioned to her after she groggily woke up as the plane according to the flight-position tracker screen was flying over England.

“Sure,” she laughed with a nice sparkle in her warm brown eyes. “I did my Ph.D. at Harvard. I’ve lived in the States for five years.”

“Oh... I did my Ph.D. at Stony Brook in English. I wrote on Milton and Blake. You know, the heaven and hell stuff. Paradise lost and paradise gained. What did you write on?”

“Antonych.”

“Is he Polish?”

“Kind of,” she laughed. “He’s Lemko, but he wrote in Ukrainian. He was a poet who died in 1937,” she said in her mildly accented English. “Bohdan Ihor Antonych is his full name.”

“So what are you doing in Poland?”

“That’s where I live. I teach Ukrainian at Jagiellion University in Krakow. But I’ve traveled a lot to Lviv. That’s where Antonych went to school and did most of his writing. He died of pneumonia there in a hospital in 37.”

“Wow!” He said. “That’s quite a coincidence. I’m going over to Lviv on a Fulbright. I’ve been learning Ukrainian and getting back into my family roots. You might think it’s a bit strange, but I had

a dream about seven signs of the lion that I need to find in Lviv. It intrigued me.”

“You know, Antonych has a poem called “The Sign of the Lion...” she said, and paused thoughtfully. “I have a copy of it in this book,” and she pulled out a volume from her travel bag and flipped through it until she found the poem. “It’s from his 1936 collection *Book of the Lion*.”

“Can you help me translate it into English?”

Here is the translation that emerged from their collaboration:

THE SIGN OF THE LION

A kingdom of dead flowers – the desert sleeps
in a golden red shirt of sand.

The stripling sedge is the devilry of foliage,
the chasing of the sun’s ecstasy and lightning.

Living candles above the coffin of the earth,
stiff weeds suddenly like a burning bush.

Like bushes bent over by a hand,
the bottomless abysses of faith bend aside.

And you see eternity – an opal sky
and the fluttering of the red streams of flame.
From behind mountains of centuries the Constellation
of the Lion leads, this is the sign
of monarchs, of warriors, of prophets.

The sun darkens in a cloud of gray birds,
the laurels of a storm crown it, brown, blue,
and thunder, like the golden signature in a book,
will endure on the pages of the desert.

The signature of thunder in the royal book of lions
written by the winds from below the Sinai,

from the slopes of the mountain that embellish the brocade
spire of sands with the garland of God's lightning.

Sinai wind, strike the open playing cards!
Without you I am an empty vessel of form.
On guard all the day over a prophetic spring,
and the night is like a bible red and black.

Nicholas thanked Lilia as they disembarked from the plane and took down her phone number and exchanged email addresses with her. Was the poem the first sign of the lion he was supposed to find? He was tired at that point since he couldn't sleep on the plane, so he'd have to mull it over another time.

ARRIVAL

Nicholas's first impression of the country after he arrived by plane from Warsaw was, to be honest, that of a third-world place. The sturdy but noisy Lot Airlines propeller plane that carried him to Lviv took about an hour and a half during a mildly bumpy ride. In looking at the name of the airline, Nicholas focused on the fact that it's strange how the same word means different things in different languages. "Lot" means "fly" in Polish, "lead weight" in Russian, "fate" in English (as in the English expression "that is my lot"), and in Ukrainian the same as in Russian. It is also the Biblical name of the single righteous man, whose family is saved by God from fiery destruction and whose wife's curiosity ends up turning her into a pillar of salt.

The cement runway looked weatherworn and pockmarked on the cloudy day. Lviv, Nicholas was to find out, was well known for its cloudy days and rain. Nicholas remembered a Natalka Bilotserkivets poem he read in his language class with Andreyka that started with the line "It always rains in the cities of Lviv and Ternopil." Bilotserkivets, whose name means "white church," was actually from Sumy and not from Bila Tserkva (the town of White Church – 400 kilometers away from Sumy) in Central Ukraine, though the latter is probably where her distant relatives might have been from. Your last name in Ukrainian can often reveal where you come from. Nicholas was learning that names could be quite meaningful in Ukrainian.

The plane landed and Nicholas got off with everyone else to board a dilapidated pigeon-blue and grimy white bus that took the passengers to the gray, green and dingy terminal room. Various declaration forms were strewn all about in different languages in antediluvian holders on the walls and on very short tables that were quite uncomfortable to write on. Nicholas couldn't find a

declaration form in English or Ukrainian, so he decided to do the one in Russian because he could at least understand it.

It took nearly an hour to get through the baggage check and customs at the airport. They questioned him on whether he had gifts for relatives (all his aunts and uncles had died, though he might have had some cousins left, but he didn't know them). But his name was a common one – so he could be related to half the country. Two faculty members from Ivan Franko National University greeted him at the airport – Marta and Roman, who were linguistics and history professors respectively. Roman was a bearded man of average height with long dark hair and an expert on the ancient world of Greece and Rome, and Marta was a sweet and animated comparative linguist specializing in metaphorical constructions in English as compared to the Slavic languages. They were his good and caring hosts for the duration of his visit and helped get him settled in his apartment at 13 Nechui-Levytsky Street and in learning the ways of his new land for the next five months. Their friend Marko, a photographer for the Lviv Gazette newspaper, happened to have a trusty, not very late model maroon Volkswagen, which Marko offered for picking Nicholas up. Nicholas was to find out that Nechui-Levytsky was a realist Ukrainian writer from the 19th and early 20th centuries. For Nicholas, the city of Lviv-Leopolis turned out to be far from a third-world land and more than a cold, gray, wet and stony city. It was, rather, a place of great beauty and history, and, apparently, of mystical dimensions and implications.

NO ONE EVER PUTS CHANGE IN YOUR HANDS

Almost no one ever puts change in your hands in this country when you buy things. Very different from back home where everyone without a second thought will take the grubbiest-looking money from your hands and give you change right into your hands. They must think money is dirty by its nature here. It must have been remnants of socialism or an aversion to capitalism. Most shops and restaurants, and even food carts on the street, have a small plastic tray on the counter for money with an advertisement for beer, cola or something else emblazoned on it. You place the money on it and you get change back on the plate. They'll only put money into your hands if the plate is somehow covered with the half-loaf of bread you're about to buy or some other goods you're buying that have covered the tray.

EVERYBODY PLOWS THROUGH YOU ON THE STREETS

Leopolis is a dangerous place for walkers, of which there are multitudes. Everyone walks here, particularly in the downtown feeder streets to the Old Town areas. People nearly knock you over every time. It's utter madness with its own rules and regulations unlike the ones you're used to back home where you usually move to the right of anyone coming in the opposite direction. It's like a gray stone billiard table with tens of thousands of human billiard balls, but no one knocks into anyone else. Expect every driver here in this city NOT to stop for you. Half of them are in big SUVs or BMWs (status symbols) and most of them are talking on a cell phone, as they are about to plow through you. They only stop when a uniformed police officer sticks out a baton or a hand at them. They do also stop screechingly at the white-lined pedestrian crossings, of which there seemed to be at least a few in the city.

If Nicholas were to wait during the morning from 9-11a.m. or early evening from say 4-8 P.M. to cross Copernicus Street near his house, he'd still be there waiting. It's just a solid line of cars all the way to the light at Nechui-Levytsky Street. You learn to pick a spot to jump across the street in front of a car that had come to a stop and just started to pick up speed. When they're not gunning the engine, they'll slow down for you, or at least they won't step on the gas. There was the same problem crossing the street by the main post office near the university, but at least there were a lot of traffic lights where you could cross. There were also immense problems crossing the street at Sich Riflemen Street all the way to the center of town. Fortunately cars would turn left or right onto side streets, which gave you sufficient time to sneak across to get to the Puzata Khata (Pot-Bellied House) restaurant for your cup of coffee or

CONTENTS

DISCLAIMER	5
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	7
<i>HIS</i> STORY	11
WHERE DREAMS HAPPEN, JOURNEYS FOLLOW	12
HEROES	14
SLIGHTLY REMEMBERED ANCESTORS	15
FLIGHT 4772 TO WARSAW	21
ARRIVAL	24
NO ONE EVER PUTS CHANGE IN YOUR HANDS	26
EVERYBODY PLOWS THROUGH YOU ON THE STREETS	27
ALMOST NO ONE SAYS THANK YOU IF YOU DO SOMETHING NICE FOR THEM (EXCEPT YOUR FRIENDS)	29
THE LVIV-KYIV EXPRESS	30
PAN VIKTOR	34
THE TASTY RUMOR CAFÉ	36
THE BEGGARS AT THE DOMINICAN CATHEDRAL	38
THE LECTURE AT THE ETHNOGRAPHIC	41
NATIONAL IDENTITY THEFT	45
THE SEER OF SPECTERS	50

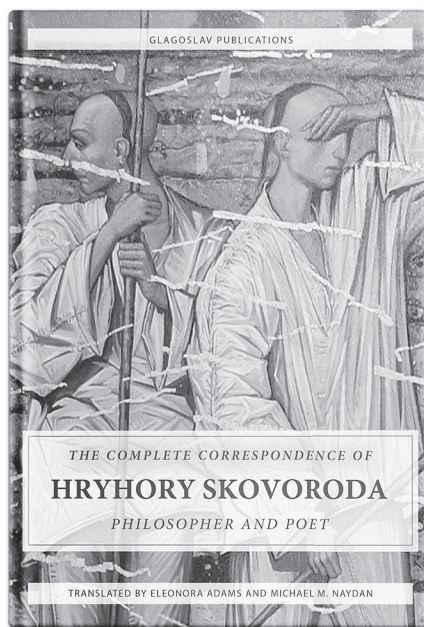
THE UKRAINIAN TUTOR	57
IF YOU AWAKEN SLEEPING LIONS	62
THE NICHE TO NOWHERE	64
KNOWLEDGE IS A SPIRAL	66
CLUB PICASSO	67
ICON OF THE SAINT AND DEMON	72
THE INVISIBLE RIVER	73
WHERE DOES THE WATER GO?	75
BARBARA THE SOUL-STEALER	76
KEYS TO THE IRON GATE	77
THE <i>CHUB</i>	78
RAMIFICATIONS	81
THE WHITE RAVEN	87
THE BLUE BOTTLE CAFÉ	88
THE BLIND SINGERS	94
THE HALL OF SYMMETRY	96
THE CHAPEL OF THE BOIMS	100
THE GOLDEN DUCAT	103
THE BLUE ROSE	106
HOHOL	109
THE GUN POWDER TOWER	110
THE TALL WISPY WOMAN	111
A PASSAGE TO NOWHERE AT THE WHIRLYGIG DZYGA	112
WHITE GLOVES AND THE BOOK OF SILENCE	118
THE ORBS AT PIDHIRTSI CASTLE	121

THE PLAY AT THE ZANKOVETSKY	124
KAVA	132
TRAIN 274: LVIV-FRANKIVSK	135
AKULA, THE SHARK	142
THE HOUSE ON SHEVCHENKO BOULEVARD	144
CELEBRATION FRANKIVSK-STYLE	147
THE ANGEL OF CHAOS	155
SKULLWORDS	157
A SOIREE	
AT THE DZYGA WHIRLYGIG CAFÉ.	158
HIGH CASTLE MOUNTAIN.	167
A MORNING AT STEFANYK LIBRARY	172
AN AFTERNOON	
AT LYCHAKIV CEMETERY	174
NADYA'S INDECIPHERABLE EMAIL	177
CITY OF DREAMS OR WHAT?	179
THE OLD APOTHECARY	180
SHADOW SPIRITS ON THE CEILING.	182
THE METROPOLITAN CATHEDRAL	183
TIME IS NO LABYRINTH	184
THE STATUES IN THE ITALIAN GARDEN.	185
THE DEJAVIEW AND THE INVISIBLE CAFÉ	186
THE ARKUBEET.	188
A MOLFAR BY ANY OTHER NAME	189
THE LABORATORY	
OF PARANORMAL ACTIVITIES	192

THE FOUR STATUES AT RYNOK SQUARE.	193
THE MANSARDS TO NOWHERE	194
NO CATS ALLOWED	195
TOURISTS IN THE OLD TOWN	196
ACUITY	199
THE MUSEUM OF ANTIQUITIES	200
THE BROKEN STONE STAIRWAY	209
THE CHURCH OF ST. MYKOLAI.	210
SHEVCHENKIV HAI FOR THE BLESSING OF THE EASTER BASKETS	212
AN SMS	213
EASTER DAY IN LEOPOLIS	215
THE GOLDEN DUCAT IS HER FAVORITE PLACE	217
VV	227
IN SEARCH OF THE HIDDEN RIVER.	230
HIGH CASTLE MOUNTAIN, BALD MOUNTAIN, AND SHEVCHENKIV HAI WITH ZHENYA	234
A CALL FROM A DISAPEARING AND REAPPEARING WOMAN.	242
THE WAY TO PARADISE	244
JOURNEY TO BABYLON AND BACK	246
THE PALACE OF CULTURE BOOK PRESENTATION.	247
IN SEARCH OF CHORTOVA SKELYA, THE DEVIL'S CLIFF	254
THE DEVIL'S CLIFF OR BUST.	256
THE LION AT THE GOLDEN DUCAT.	259

WAITING ON LIBERTY AVENUE	265
THE <i>KHALEPA</i>	267
KAMIANETS-PODILSKY.	268
THE NEXT DAY	278
THE ROOM	
AT THE EDGE OF TOMORROW	280
THE VALLEY OF THE NARCISSI	
AND THE CASTLE AT MUKACHEVO	281
DROHOBYCH	286
A RECEPTION AT THE ITALIAN COURTYARD	290
THE MAGIC MAN OF KOSSIV	298
THE GUY IN IVAN FRANKO PARK	304
VYNNYKY BY THE LAKE	308
FONDLY FAREWELLING TO THE CARPATHIANS.	310
THE PANICKED CALL	313
THREE WEEKS GONE	317
GREEN SUNDAY	320
SEVEN ANGELS, A TRIANGLE	
AND A FIRE IN THE BROW.	321
THE LAZARUS STEPS	322
THE ZODIAC CAFÉ.	323
THE GATHERING OF LIVING	
AND DEAD SOULS	325
SHAKESPEARE NOT THE BARD.	329
WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED	
IF NICHOLAS HAD GOTTEN ON THAT PLANE?.	331
POSTSCRIPTUM	334

The Complete Correspondence of **HRYHORY SKOVORODA**



The religious philosopher and poet Hryhory Skovoroda (1722-1794) is described by many as the Ukrainian Socrates and was one of the most learned men of his time. He was a polyglot who knew the Bible virtually by heart, as well as the writings of the Church Fathers and the literature of Greek and Roman antiquity. The eminent literary critic Ivan Dziuba considers Skovoroda the greatest Ukrainian mind ever. And Yuri Andrukhovych, one of the most prominent Ukrainian writers of today, calls him “the first Ukrainian hippie” on account of his itinerant lifestyle and rejection of worldly life. The impact of Skovoroda’s life and works has been well documented on major writers in future generations, such as Leo Tolstoy, Andrei Bely and Pavlo Tychyna, to name but a few.

None of Skovoroda’s works appeared during his lifetime – they were first published in 1837 in Moscow. The texts of Skovoroda’s writings were preserved mostly by Skovoroda’s lifelong friend Mykhailo Kovalynsky, to whom he had given the manuscripts. Skovoroda’s extant writings consist of a collection of thirty poems entitled *The Garden of Divine Songs* along with other occasional poems, a collection of fables entitled *Kharkiv Fables*, which was published in 1990, and seventeen philosophical treatises. Most of the treatises were composed during the latter part of his life.

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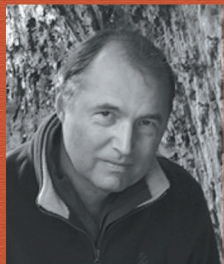
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The novel *Seven Signs of the Lion* is a magical journey to the city of Lviv in Western Ukraine. Part magical realism, part travelogue, part adventure novel, and part love story, it is a fragmented, hybrid work about a mysterious and mythical place. The hero of the novel Nicholas Bilanchuk is a gatherer of living souls, the unique individuals he meets over the course of his five-month stay in his ancestral homeland. These include the enigmatic Mr. Viktor, who, with one eye that always glimmers, in a dream summons him across the Atlantic Ocean to the city of lions, becoming his spiritual mentor; the genius mathematician Professor Potojbichny (a man of science with a mystical bent and whose name means “man from the other side”); the exquisite beauty Ada, whose name suggests “woman from Hades” in Ukrainian, whose being emanates irresistible sensuality, but who never lets anyone capture her beauty in a picture; the schizophrenic artist Ivan the Ghostseer, who lives in a bohemian hovel of a basement apartment and in an alcohol-induced trance paints the spirits of the city that torment him; and the curly-haired elfin Raya, whose name suggests “paradise” in Ukrainian and who becomes the primary guide and companion for Nicholas on his journey to self-realization.

The hero is summoned to the land of his ancestors to find the “seven signs of the lion” in a mysterious quest. The multicultural and unique architectural aspects of the “city of lions” with its medieval old town dating back several centuries is showcased. Part cultural history, the novel deals with the legends and myths surrounding the city and its environs. Anglophone readers will be introduced to a country, a people and a culture that largely remain undiscovered for them.



Michael M. Naydan, Woskob Family Professor of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the Pennsylvania State University, is a prolific literary translator of contemporary poetry and prose from Ukrainian and Russian. He has published over 30 books of translations and more than 100 articles and translations in literary journals.

His anthology of Ukrainian poetry, *A Hundred Years of Youth* (Litopys Publishers, 2000), co-edited with Olha Luchuk, includes over 100 of his own poetry translations alongside biographical sketches of 100 authors. His translation of *Perverzion* by the preeminent contemporary Ukrainian writer Yuri Andrukhovych (Northwestern University Press, 2005) received an Award in Translation from the American Association in Ukrainian Studies. His translation (with Svitlana Bednazh) of Larysa Denysenko’s novel *The Sarabande of Sara’s Band* (Glagoslav Publishers) was chosen as May 2013 Editor’s Pick by World Literature Today. He compiled, co-translated and edited *Herstories: An Anthology of Ukrainian Women’s Prose*, which was published by Glagoslav Publishers in 2014. And with Slava Yastremski he has published two books of Marina Tsvetaeva’s poetry in translation: *After Russia* (Ardis Publishers, 1992) and *The Essential Poetry* (Glagoslav Publishers, 2015).

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