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PAVLO TYCHYNA

THE COMPLETE EARLY
POETRY COLLECTIONS

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Translated by Michael M. Naydan

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PAVLO TYCHYNA:
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Translated with an introduction by Michael M. Naydan
and with a guest introduction by Viktor Neborak

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Pavlo Tychyna

1891 – 1967

INTRODUCTION

Since Ukrainian literature from the 18th century on has stood in the shadow of the politically more powerful Russian culture, few Ukrainian writers have achieved the international renown of their Russian counterparts. Nikolai Gogol (“Hohol” in Ukrainian) and Taras Shevchenko best exemplify the two divergent paths that have been open to Ukrainian writers. Gogol chose to become assimilated into Russian culture and achieved international fame, while Shevchenko preferred to write almost exclusively in Ukrainian, which led to his becoming the national bard of his homeland with less of an international reputation than Gogol. Nonetheless, the West, to at least some degree, still has been aware of Shevchenko’s stature since he always has been compared favorably to his Romantic contemporaries Adam Mickiewicz and Alexander Pushkin. Gogol, though, it must also be noted, wrote in prose (albeit a highly poetic prose), a genre much more accessible than poetry to the Western reader in translation.

The general neglect of Ukrainian writers in world literature partly is a result of tsarist and, during the Soviet period, Stalinist politics.¹ While Europe was recovering from the ravages of World War I, the newly formed Soviet Union was rebuilding from the war, revolution, and civil war. The free Ukrainian National Republic survived from 1918 to 1921. Rather than oppressively stifling the assimilated Ukrainian lands, Lenin and the Bolsheviks chose to harness the resurgent Ukrainian nationalism to their advantage in building a new Soviet state. The 1920s saw a great renewal of Ukrainian culture under Lenin’s New Economic Policy. Besides economic reforms geared to resuscitate a devastated economy, the period allowed for the relatively unrestrained development of the Ukrainian language and literature. This era marked the beginning of the transformation of a relatively uneducated and primarily agrarian population to an educated urban one, with concomitant cultural

¹ For a survey of the cultural politics of the early Soviet period of Ukrainian literature, see George S.N. Luckyj, *Literary Politics in the Soviet Ukraine: 1917-1934*, Revised and Updated (Durham: Duke U. Press, 1990).

development. The Ukrainian language was no longer banned in print as it was during tsarist times. A Ukrainian press flourished. A great amount of cultural activity took place, and numerous trend setters emerged in the arts, most notably the prose writers Mykola Khvylovy and Valerian Pidmohylny, the playwright Mykola Kulish, the filmmaker Alexander Dovzhenko, the theatrical director Les Kurbas with his experimental Berezhil Theater, and a number of others. The twenties particularly marked the development of a highly innovative poetry in Ukrainian belle-lettres, spanning from the Neoclassicist verse of Maksym Rylsky to the highly intellectual poetry of Mykola Bazhan. Pavlo Tychyna entered this period first as a Symbolist who, like his Russian counterparts Blok and Soloviev, predicted the appearance of Divine Sophia after a bloody conflagration.

Once Tychyna saw the reality of the bloodshed of revolution and civil war, he rejected it as the destruction of human values. These varied Ukrainian artists and literati continued the spirit of experimentation that was formulated in the visual arts by such Kyiv-born artists as Casimir Malevich and Alexander Archipenko. This experimentation, of course, paralleled artistic advancements in Europe and Russia, championed by such figures as Pablo Picasso, George Braque, Paul Klee, and Vassily Kandinsky. But the experimentation in Soviet Ukraine was short lived. Following the death of Lenin, Stalin crushed the cultural revival. The émigré scholar Yuri Lavrinenko has aptly designated this period of the late twenties and thirties in Soviet Ukraine as the “executed renaissance.” Stalin instituted a policy of Russification and brutally attacked the intelligentsia with arrests and executions. Then he proceeded to assault the agrarian population in the early 1930s with an artificially induced famine that killed over seven million peasants. The repercussions of the terror were felt throughout all of Soviet Ukrainian society, both in human and in cultural terms. The leader of the Ukrainian communist party Mykola Skrypnyk committed suicide as did Khvylovy. Pidmohylny, Kulish, and Kurbas were arrested and later died in Siberian labor camps. The few leading figures who survived were forced to compromise their principles and to acquiesce to the demands of the state. Tychyna was one who managed to survive, in part, by acquiescing.

Pavlo Tychyna (1891-1967) is acclaimed as one of the leading Ukrainian poets of the modern period. His name invariably surfaces along with

Mykola Bazhan, Maksym Rylsky, and Bohdan Ihor Antonych as the most brilliant Ukrainian poets of the twentieth century.² One critic assesses him as a “unique innovator in poetic expression” and “one of the most outstanding Ukrainian poets of this century.”³ Another considers him a “bold innovator, supreme master of his craft,...and a poet of the first magnitude.”⁴ Various sources prolifically attest to Tychyna’s poetic ability. For example, the leading Russian literary reference work, the *Brief Literary Encyclopedia*, refers to the “mastery of the poet-innovator” Tychyna, whose verse exhibits “musicality, richness of rhythm, [and] an organic fusion of symbolic and impressionist poetic devices with the folk song.”⁵ The now somewhat dated *Biobibliographical Dictionary of Ukrainian Writers* from the 1960s contains a list of more than twenty-five pages of Soviet-period critical works on him. A twelve-volume Soviet collected works edition of Tychyna appeared in the 1980s. And the monographs, critical articles, and memoirs by Ukrainian writers and literary critics continue to be produced at a steady pace. An unexpurgated version of his early works finally was published in Kyiv in 1990. There can be no doubt of Tychyna’s prominence in his native culture, yet little is known of this brilliant poet in the West. Tychyna’s virtuosity and innovativeness should have brought him to the forefront of world literature in his time with his European contemporaries such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Rainer Maria Rilke, Anna Akhmatova, and Federico Garcia Lorca. Yet few in the English-speaking world have been made aware of his talent and accomplishments. It is time for this situation to be at least partly rectified and for Tychyna to take his rightful place in the history of world

2 Antonych is currently available in several English translations. See Bohdan Ihor Antonych, *Square of Angels: Selected Poems*, Trans. Mark Rudman and Paul Nemser with Bohdan Boychuk (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1977). See also Bohdan Ihor Antonych, *The Grand Harmony*, Trans. Michael M. Naydan (Lviv: Litopys Publishers, 2007) as well as *The Essential Poetry of Bohdan Ihor Antonych: Ecstasies and Elegies*, Trans. Michael M. Naydan (Bucknell University Press, 2010). For translations of the poetry of Rylsky see Maksym Rylsky, Trans. Michael M. Naydan, *Autumn Stars: Selected Poetry of Maksym Rylsky* (Lviv: Litopys Publishers, 2008).

3 *Penguin Companion to European Literature* (New York, 1969): 777.

4 C.H. Andrusyshen and Watson Kirkconnell, *The Ukrainian Poets* (Toronto, 1963): 315.

5 VII (Moscow, 1972): 705.

poetry. While poets in the western tradition are all-too-often treated as aesthetes who write for a limited intellectual audience, poets (even in the modern period) in the Slavic tradition are honored with great reverence. They are often venerated as prophets and spokespersons for an entire nation or people, and the poetic word is treated as sacred. Much of Tychyna's early poetry fits the prophetic modality.

Tychyna's *Instead of Sonnets and Octaves* (1920) has been a work that far transcended an audience of merely literary critics and other poets. It influenced succeeding generations of readers to re-evaluate the revolution. Tychyna is less ambiguous about the nature and effects of the revolution than his Russian counterpart Alexander Blok, the author of *The Twelve*: Tychyna damns the violent law of the beast and calls for a return to spiritual and cultural values. The revolution is not the kind of "music" that Blok perceives in his poem, but rather a means for destruction of the true spirit of music, of culture.

Besides extraordinary poetic virtuosity in technique, Tychyna's poetry expresses great philosophical depth and feeling. Tychyna introduced a new genre into Ukrainian poetry – the tragic lyric, based on elements of Ancient Greek verse. Tychyna's early work has had an enormous impact on the development of twentieth-century Ukrainian poetry, and his collections provide a microcosm of the cultural and historical events in Ukraine during the turbulent period of the 1917 revolution and its aftermath. One can observe the emotional impact of those times on Tychyna, who, in his poetry, strove to reconcile himself with the seemingly cosmic forces unleashed by the revolution. In this respect, he shares a distinct affinity with Blok. Tychyna's poetry spans the development from a neo-Skovorodian religious philosopher and proponent of "Clarinetism" in his early works, to a troubled panegyrist of the Soviet regime after the publication of his collection *Chernihiv* in 1931. Tychyna coined the term "Clarinetism" (Kliarnetyzm) to describe his verse: the term finds a partial counterpart in the Russian poet Mikhail Kuzmin's concept of *klarizm* (a sense of clarity and surface simplicity). Kuzmin rejected the density and opaqueness of Russian Symbolism in favor of a poetry grounded in a refreshingly simple and accessible style. Tychyna strove to create a poetry that fuses stylistic clarity with the pure and haunting sound of the clarinet. In light of Tychyna's musicality and close ties to the earth, the émigré poet Vasyl Barka has described Tychyna as a "tillerman's Orpheus" (khlivorobs'kyi Orfei), which fits aptly. John Fizer has also noted Tychyna's

close affinity with Walt Whitman's cosmism, particularly in the collection *In the Orchestra of the Cosmos*.⁶ Tychyna surely had read Whitman in Kornei Chukovsky's Russian translation, which may have been a strong influence on Tychyna's shift to a more prosaic poetry in *Instead of Sonnets and Octaves* and in parts of *Wind from Ukraine* (1924).

Tychyna was saved from the grim fate of some two-thirds of the Ukrainian intellectual community in the 1930s by his acquiescence to Stalinist literary requirements. His burgeoning fame also aided considerably in his survival. Yet the spirit of the Christian philosopher-poet Hryhory Skovoroda followed him throughout his life, culminating in his never completed lifelong project – the book-length long poem *Skovoroda*. Tychyna's poetry provides a concise compendium of the history of Soviet

Ukrainian culture from the early idealism of the revolution to the Civil War and its aftermath. The poems give a sensitive glimpse into the milieu of Soviet Ukraine of the 1920s, which reflects the cultural renaissance that occurred during the period of Gorbachev's reforms as well as after Ukrainian independence in 1991. The translation of Tychyna's poetry poses a number of specific problems since cultural, literary, and historical references abound. Tychyna was a renaissance man who exhibited an expert knowledge of Russian and European literatures, as well as the literature of antiquity. In order better to understand Tychyna, first and foremost one should look at the philosophical sources from which Tychyna draws, most importantly the eighteenth-century Ukrainian philosopher Skovoroda. As a Christian nature poet and in a sense a "sun worshiper" (the sun being a symbol of the illuminating force of God), Skovoroda provided a partial source for the generating force and half the title of Tychyna's first published collection, *Clarinets of the Sun* (*Soniashni kliarnety*, 1918). The cover illustration to that volume, a sunflower, visually creates the image of a clarinet, thus creating a representation of the metaphorical fusion of sight and sound so prevalent in Tychyna's early work. Skovoroda, in his philosophy, divided the world into the macrocosmic and the microcosmic, the latter comprising the inner human world. At the center of the macrocosmic world lies the sun, the source of light and life. *Instead of Sonnets and Octaves* opens with that

6 "Cosmic Oneness in Whitman and Tychyna: Some Similarities and Differences." *Canadian Slavonic Papers* (June 1986): 149-156.

Skovorodian burst of solar energy and specifically incorporates elements of Skovoroda's "Nineteenth Song" from his *Garden of Divine Songs*.⁷

The translations here are based on the following edition: Pavlo Tychyna, *Soniachni klarnety: poezii* (Kyiv: Dnipro Publishers, 1990). This particular volume comprises the first completely unexpurgated edition of Tychyna's early works to be published in Ukraine since the original publications in the early part of the 20th century. I have decided to translate Tychyna's first five books in their entirety for this volume, since this marks Tychyna's most fertile lyrical period before he began to write in the government-imposed fashion of Socialist Realism. These collections include: *Soniashni klarnety* (*Clarinets of the Sun*, 1918), *Pluh* (*The Plow*, 1920), *Zamist' sonetiv i oktav* (*Instead of Sonnets and Octaves*, 1920), *V kosmichnomu orkestri* (*In the Orchestra of the Cosmos*, 1921), and *Viter z Ukrainy* (*Wind from Ukraine*, 1924). With the approaching 100-year anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 in 2017, it is important to note that Tychyna's early collections also largely comprise a lyrical diary of the tragic events of those times in Ukraine from the Revolution, to the Civil War, to consolidation of Soviet power in the early 1920s.

Linguistically, Tychyna's poetry causes many difficulties for the translator.

Influenced in part by Dadaism and the Futurists, especially in his early poetry, Tychyna makes extensive use of paronomasia. The titled segment of *Instead of Sonnets and Octaves* that I translate as "Rock-a," as part of the formulaic rock-a-bye *liuli-liuli*, provides a prime example. The Ukrainian original is *Liu*, which, besides being part of the locution suggesting a child's lullaby, is also the typical first person singular ending of Ukrainian verbs. It also forms the reduplicated component for the Ukrainian word *liubliu*, meaning "I love." Throughout this entire section of the poem Tychyna makes use of assonances and alliterations, playing on the sounds "l," "iu" and "o." The poem "Fornarina" provides another excellent illustration of Tychyna's paronomastic play: in it sounds take on meanings of their very own. This aspect of his poetry is sometimes lost in translation. I also strive to create equivalents in English for Tychyna's striking Ukrainian neologisms. I try to convey Tychyna's musicality

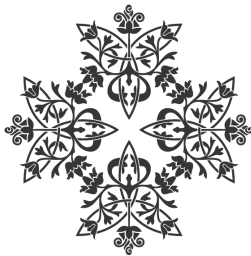
7 My translation of *The Garden of Divine Songs and Collected Poetry of Hryhory Skovoroda* appeared with Glagoslav Publishers in 2016.

whenever it can be done naturally in English, but for the full effect of this profound feature of his poetry, one should read him in the original.

I feel that certain of my translations are more successful in English than others, but I have published them in their entirety in order to maintain the integrity of the collections. By any measure these translations cannot even begin to convey the totality of Tychyna's talent. Some sound elements in the original texts are virtually untranslatable in English, so I have opted in favor of restraint over exactness in conveying the musicality and rhythm. I have toned down a bit of what critics have called Tychyna's "infantilism," a completely childlike vision of the world, since this is a feature less readily accessible to readers of English.

Since my initial bilingual edition of *The Complete Early Poetry Collections of Pavlo Tychyna* published by Litopys Publishers in 2000 has long been sold out, I have decided to publish this English-language expanded edition of Tychyna's early poetry to make his poetry accessible to a wider readership in the Anglophone world. For this expanded collection I have also decided to translate Tychyna's quite poignant longer poems "Mother was Peeling Potatoes" (1926) and "Funeral of My Friend" (1942) as well as his highly patriotic "In Memory of the Thirty" (1918), the latter of which was banned in Soviet times.

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My gratitude to Vasyl Byalyk and Alla Perminova for assistance with resolving sticky wickets in the new translations for this volume – and to Svitlana Budzhak-Jones for her excellent suggestions that have made my translation of “Mother Was Peeling Potatoes” significantly better.

The poem “Along the Azure Steppe” first appeared in the literary journal *Mr. Cogito*. And the two introductions to this volume, the footnotes, and the translations of Tychyna’s first five collections appeared originally in *The Complete Early Poetry Collections of Pavlo Tychyna* (Lviv: Litopys Publishers, 2000). Some translations have been slightly revised for this edition.

THE SENSES AND NONSENSSES OF PAVLO TYCHYNA

For Professor Ivan Denysiuk

1.

Tychyna is the greatest poet of the *revolutionary* (modernist) twentieth century. And yet almost no one knows that.

2.

Right now almost no one reads Tychyna's books of poetry, not even his early ones, even though some Ukrainians still can quote a number of lines of poetry by him or one of the parodies of his poetry.

3.

For Pavlo Tychyna is also the greatest (anthologized) poet of the *Stalinist* empire. The right was given to him to "prompt" (in a rhymed voice) the new Soviet watchwords to the Father of Nations – Stalin. Tychyna's "feeling of a single family" is about a new society of people – at that time the international Soviet one, and now a democratic universal one.

4.

The Ukrainian rhythm of Tychyna's anthem *The Party Leads* coincided with *Let It Be* of the legendary *Beatles*. The famous Liverpoolers performed their anthem – more than thirty years after Tychyna's own Communist Party "debut" – in the rock-and-roll sixties, in the years when Tychyna the singer of youth was already an older man. Music is wavelike, and the waves of music ceaselessly traverse the matter of Time, modifying, layering one on top of the other.

5.

Tychyna listened to the Music of the Surrounding. More precisely – he listened to Music. It seemed that Tychyna did not differentiate

between the music within him and the music of the external world. The subject and object in him was a single whole.

6.

Music has turned into rhythm, rhythm – to noise, noise – into death, death – into the renewal of life and the human being. I dwell in music, therefore I exist – the Poet in our era of inexact (Post-Modernist) quotations might proclaim.

7.

Moreover, Tychyna is the most distinguished *Ukrainian* poet of the end of the Age of Pisces, a caller to and a harbinger of the Age of Clarinets of the Sun. To be a Ukrainian poet is to be hidden from the rest of the world, to be *inconspicuous*. What is *inconspicuous* in Tychyna coincides with his *Ukrainianness*. For almost everything Ukrainian is still inconspicuous in the eyes of the world.

8.

Everything that in Tychyna is Leninist and Stalinist is all too conspicuous. But the more things are conspicuous, the sooner they become boring. It seems that Tychyna all too well knew the price for this *overly conspicuous* level of things. But he couldn't avoid it as his favorite teacher Skovoroda did. Tychyna just adequately reflected these overly conspicuous things. It turns out that in Tychyna's versions of poetry the Leninist and Stalinist categories are not as horrifying as they are comic. The Stalinist censorship that was deaf to music – along with its entire investigative punitive apparatus – failed to notice this now obvious fact!

9.

Resistance to the Leninist-Stalinist Evil through non-violence was Tychyna's Christian choice. He *sacrificed* himself as a sunnyclarinetingly Ukrainian poet – and he preserved himself as a sunnyclarinetian. Writing from the “we” point of view instead of the “I” – here is the Stepping-in-Columns Spirit of the twentieth century fixed by Tychyna. Where Tychyna writes from the perspective of “we,” false notes and primitive melodies appear. But “we” are not aware of it. Only the “I” can hear that falseness and primitiveness.

11.

“I was – not *I*...” (from the poem *Not Zeus or Pan...*). Perhaps the main question that the Sphinx of Time places before the poet is “who am I” with a capital letter? Perhaps might all the cataclysms, all the whirlwinds and all the plows of the twentieth century be just attempts to give an answer to this question?

12.

One way or another – melodies performed out of tune will not be listened to by those listeners who care about their musical ear. Ukrainians are divided by faith, by world view, by economics, by politics, by language. Perhaps musicality is the only thing that unifies Ukrainians today and is the only thing they have preserved in spite of all the world’s dissonances-temptations. Thus the Music of Tychyna will resound and will purify all those capable of hearing it, and the false note consciously allowed by Tychyna will remain a grotesque witness of our cabaret-marching era.

Victor Neborak

June 7, 1999, Lviv

Translated by *Michael M. Naydan*



CLARINETS
OF THE SUN
(1918)

NOT ZEUS, OR PAN, OR THE DOVE-SPIRIT...

Not Zeus, or Pan, or the Dove-Spirit
Just Clarinets of the Sun.
I am in a dance, a rhythmic movement,
In immortal dance – all the planets.

I was – not *I*. Just a thought, a dream.
All around are ringing sounds,
And the tunic of creative darkness
And blessed tiding hands.⁸

I awakened – and already I am You.
Above me, below me
Worlds glow, worlds run
Like a musical river.

And I watched, and springtimed:
The planets harmonized.
Forever I learned that You are not Wrath,
But only Clarinets of the Sun.

1918

⁸ *Blahovisni*, translated as “blessed tiding” here, suggests “Blahovishchennia” (the Annunciation).

THE CLOUDS SWIRLED INTO CURLS...

The clouds swirled into curls. Azure settled into the depth.
O, dear friend – my heart is ailing again –
O, dear brother – it's crucified again –
My ailing heart is whistling like a swan.⁹
The clouds swirled into curls...

The winds race stampeding!¹⁰ Poplars bend their harps...
Out of my soul – like lilies –
Growing beautiful – oh, so bright –
Out of my soul, regrets and sorrow grow like flowers.
The winds race stampeding!

The sun's mood is mirrored on lakes. Smoke weaves about the past...
I want to be – how can I forget?
Do I want – a dark-haired beauty¹¹ – again?
I want to be forever young, immutably young!
The sun's mood is mirrored on lakes.

Laughter, bells, and warm joy. A rainbow of thoughts blooms...
Sorrow clenches my heart: – the sun! a song! –
In my soul I set you out – I praise you! –
In my soul I set out a bright sail, for sadness is in my heart.
Laughter, bells, and warm joy.

1917

9 The European swan's whistling is often compared to the sound of a clarinet or trumpet, which may offer a link of the clarinet metaphor to the collection's title.

10 Literally: "like fierce aurochs."

11 Or: "a marigold."

Pavlo Tychyna (1891-1967) is arguably the greatest Ukrainian poet of the twentieth century and has been described as a “tillerman’s Orpheus” by Ukrainian poet and literary critic Vasyl Barka. With his innovative poetics, deep spirituality and creative word play, Tychyna deserves a place among the pantheon of his European contemporaries such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Rainer Maria Rilke, Federico Garcia Lorca, and Osip Mandelstam. His early collections *Clarinets of the Sun* (1918), *The Plow* (1920), *Instead of Sonnets and Octaves* (1920), *The Wind from Ukraine* (1924), and his poetic cycle *In the Orchestra of the Cosmos* (1921) mark the pinnacle of his creativity and poetically document the emotional and spiritual toll of the Revolution of 1917 as well as the Civil War and its aftermath in Ukraine. Tychyna coined the term “Clarinetism” to describe his earliest works, which intrinsically exhibit the clarity and the haunting sound of a clarinet. He harkens back to ancient Greek literature to form what has been called the “tragic lyric” in his short collection *Instead of Sonnets and Octaves*, which gives a personal, humanistic understanding to the tragic events of the Revolution. John Fizer has noted Tychyna’s close affinity with Walt Whitman’s cosmism, particularly in his cycle *In the Orchestra of the Cosmos*. While Tychyna in many ways displays the moral conscience of his times in his early works, later in his life he acquiesced to Soviet authorities in order to survive the horrors of Stalin’s regime. He was forced by authorities to refuse a nomination for the Nobel Prize, the only reason for which would have been his Ukrainian ethnicity. This edition of Tychyna’s complete early works includes translations of all his major early collections as well as his poetic masterpieces “Mother was Peeling Potatoes,” “Funeral of My Friend,” and his highly patriotic “In Memory of the Thirty.” The volume includes a guest introduction by eminent Ukrainian poet Viktor Neborak.

