



*The Garden
of
Divine Songs*

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and
Collected Poetry
of

*Hryhory
Skovoroda*

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TRANSLATED BY MICHAEL M. NAYDAN

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY VALERY SHEVCHUK

TRANSLATIONS EDITED BY OLHA TYTARENKO

GLAGOSLAV PUBLICATIONS

The Garden of Divine Songs
and Collected Poetry of Hryhory Skovoroda

by Hryhory Skovoroda

Translated by **Michael M. Naydan**
With an introduction by Valery Shevchuk
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The cover shows a detail from *DNA of Ukraine* by
Mykola Kumanovsky from the Woskob Private Collection

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*This translation is dedicated to
Liliana Ursu, a poet who in our time
walks the same path as Skovoroda.*

*Many thanks to the Woskob family for
granting permission to use the artwork
of Mykola Kumanovsky entitled
"DNA of Ukraine" from their private
collection of art for the cover of this book.*

A note from the editor and translator

The preeminent Ukrainian philosopher and poet Hryhory Skovoroda (1722-1794) strikes me profoundly as a man who found the truth, who found love, who found happiness, all in a simple and rustic way of life with just the clothes on his back and a knapsack containing a Bible. He dedicated his life to the pursuit of knowledge and through that knowledge—wisdom. He saw the interconnectedness of all things, of God with man and nature, of man with nature, of past civilizations with the present. Skovoroda saw God's holy truth as a continuum stretching from the biblical times of the ancient Hebrews and the greatest thinkers of Ancient Greece and Rome—to his contemporary times. Skovoroda, too, saw the Old Testament of the Bible as one great continuum with the New. His is the God of Abraham as well as the God of Christ. Both his Old and New Testament scholarship are formidable in his logical and intuitive pursuit to extrapolate this unity.

It is not for nothing that Skovoroda has been called the Ukrainian Socrates, for he spent most of his life teaching and giving to others freely to help them find their way to God and true happiness. Skovoroda was the planter of the seeds of wisdom that he found in the good books and in his life experiences. At the same time that

Kant was shifting focus to the purely rational in neighboring Western Europe, Skovoroda was living his intuitive philosophy of the heart and explicating it to anyone who would listen. In his time Skovoroda appealed to all strata of society, from the poorest peasant to the wealthiest landowners and the most highly educated clergy, for he treated everyone as a special creation and as equal in the eyes of God. This unassuming, learned genius, who felt most at peace in the wilds of nature, lived his life as he preached it, at total peace with himself.

This first volume in a planned three-volume edition of the selected works of Skovoroda, whom I once heard Nobel Prize winning poet Joseph Brodsky call “the first great Slavic poet,” has been a labor of love for everyone involved in the task. Skovoroda’s life and thought have fascinated such luminaries of the Slavic literary world as Russian writers Leo Tolstoy and Andrei Bely, and master 20th-century Ukrainian poet Pavlo Tychyna. The impact of Skovoroda in his native Ukraine has transcended legend. This series of volumes will introduce this great poet and thinker to a wider audience and, hopefully, will generate additional interest in one of the greatest Orthodox religious thinkers of his time. The entire project has taken longer than expected since its inception partly because of the complexity of the language of the original texts as well as its ever-increasing scope. The planned three volumes will contain translations of all of Skovoroda’s extant poetry in the first volume, all of his extant correspondence in the second, and seven of his most seminal philosophical treatises in the third. Many of his letters border on the homiletic and comprise brilliant lyrically philosophical treatises in miniature. They also offer a glimpse into the warm and profound friendship that Skovoroda shared with his disciple Mykhailo Kovalynsky,

who is largely responsible for conserving Skovoroda's writings for posterity. Several of the poems, especially a number from the *Garden of Divine Songs* cycle and the poem "On the Holy Supper, Or Eternity," are Ukrainian literary Baroque masterpieces of the metaphysical.

Since Skovoroda knew the Bible so thoroughly in so many languages, including Old Church Slavic, Ancient Greek, Ancient Hebrew, and Latin, identification of Biblical quotations, as a result of variations in translation across languages and cultures, presents a significant problem for translators.¹ Leonid Ushkalov has done an admirable job of identifying Biblical sources in his complete works edition of Skovoroda.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to the editors of the 1973 two-volume collected works edition of Skovoroda—*Povne zibrannia tvoriv* (Kyiv) for having managed to publish such a profoundly spiritual author in the rather dismal times of the then virulently anti-religious Soviet Union. Another great debt is owed to the translators of Skovoroda into modern Ukrainian—Valery Shevchuk and Maria Kashuba, who have made my task easier as editor. To resolve numerous sticky wickets I have been able to check these English translations against the 1994 two-volume modern Ukrainian edition of Skovoroda: *Hryhorii Skovoroda: Tvory v dvokh tomakh* (Kyiv) as well as against the most comprehensive and authoritative volume to date of

¹ See George Shevelov's article "Prolegomena to Studies of Skovoroda's Language and Style" (pp. 93-132) in Richard H. Marshall, Jr. and Thomas E. Bird, ed. *Hryhorij Savyc Skovoroda: An Anthology of Critical Articles* (Toronto and Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1994) for a revealing discussion of Skovoroda's probable sources and method for biblical quotation.

Skovoroda's writings edited by Leonid Ushkalov—*Hryhorii Skovoroda: Povna akademichna zbirka tvoriv* (Kharkiv: "Maidan" Publishers, 2011). The notes in all of these modern editions of Skovoroda have been extraordinarily useful. I am especially grateful to Valery Shevchuk, the preeminent Ukrainian writer and one of the leading experts on the life and works of Skovoroda in the world, for providing such a comprehensive and thoughtful introduction to this volume.

The main goal in these translations has been to present the great thinker and poet Skovoroda in an accessible idiom in English while maintaining the poeticality along with some of the archaic feel in the originals. In the poetry, I have tried to include natural end rhymes whenever possible and internal rhymes (sometimes in a compensatory way) in order to convey Skovoroda's poeticality without drastically changing his essential meaning. Skovoroda does not, in fact, always use end rhymes (Song No. 3, for example as well as in many of the poems outside of the 30 contained in *The Garden of Divine Songs*). Words in brackets were added for the sake of rhymes and are not in the original texts. This will allow for more precise quotation for scholars yet permit readers to experience the playfulness of Skovoroda's style. While Skovoroda's writings may seem archaic to a modern speaker of Ukrainian or Russian, they were written in the scholarly idiom of the philosopher-poet's time and function as a testimony to the poet-philosopher's extraordinarily expansive and lucid mind.

Acknowledgments

A number of people have been generous with their assistance on the translation project, and I want to take the opportunity to express my gratitude to several of them. I am grateful to William Schmalstieg for taking the time to share his expertise on Old Church Slavic with me to clear up a number of my questions. Adrian Wanner was kind enough to check a number of Latin passages for me. Mykola Riabchuk elucidated a number of my questions on translation from Ukrainian, particularly in the introduction to the volume. My gratitude to Richard Gustafson for introducing me to Skovoroda's thought in graduate school at Columbia University in his fine seminar on Russian and Slavic thought, and to Ukrainian poet Vasyl Barka who, in living the life of a neo-Skovorodian philosopher-poet himself, so effectively conveyed the essence of Skovoroda to me at an early stage in my career. Extra special thanks to Olha Tytarenko for her meticulous editorial comments on the final version of the manuscript, which greatly improved the translations. My gratitude, too, to my daughter Lila Naydan for her quite useful comments on the final versions of the English of my poetry translations. I, of course, am responsible for any errors or omissions. Ukrainian writer and philosophy scholar Oksana Zabuzhko is most responsible for using her powers of persuasion to convince me to tackle this project. I am also grateful to Svitlana Kobets,

Steve Scherer and John Fizer for moral support, and to my mother Anna Naydan for having constantly given me gentle urgings over time to complete the project. Special thanks to Philip Winsor of The Pennsylvania State University Press for his early support of the project.

I also owe a great debt of gratitude to the following individuals and organizations, who so kindly supported both a conference celebrating the 200-year anniversary of Skovoroda's death at The Pennsylvania State University in 1994, whose proceedings have been published in 1998 as a special issue of *Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, as well as this publication project with their contributions: the Woskob Family Endowment in Ukrainian Studies and the Myroslawa and Iwan Iwanciw Fund for Ukrainian Studies, both at The Pennsylvania State University, the Self-Reliance Federal Credit Union (New York), Self-Reliance Federal Credit Union (Newark, N.J.), Self-Reliance Federal Credit Union (Hartford, Conn.), Ukrainian Fraternal Association, Providence Association of Ukrainian Catholics in America, Ukrainian Future Credit Union (Warren, Mich.), Rochester Ukrainian Federal Credit Union, and Ukrainian Credit Union (Minneapolis); and Mr. Peter and Mrs. Katerine Caruk, Ms. Mary Chimow, Mr. Longen and Mrs. Marian Chuchman, Dr. Bohdan Chudio, Mr. Adrian Dolinsky, Mr. Paul and Mrs. Irene Dzul, Ms. Olga Fedirko, Mr. Joseph Gellner, Mr. Michael Hlady, Mr. Michael and Mrs. Mary Hojsan, Ms. Maria Iskiw, Ms. Daria Kozak, Mr. Wasyl and Mrs. Anna Makuch, Mr. John Orichosky, Mr. Jaroslav and Mrs. Jaroslava Panchuk, Dr. Julian and Mrs. Myroslawa Pawlyszyn, Mr. Michael Tansky, Mr. Dmytro and Mrs. Helen Tataryn, Ms. Lana Tonkoschkur, Mr. Peter Twerdochlib, Mr. George and Mrs. Nina Woskob, Mr. Roman Zaharchuk, Mr. Carl Zapotny, and other anonymous donors.

A Note on Transliteration

I have opted for the Library of Congress transliteration throughout the volume. Only parenthetical words and important quotations in Greek and Latin are left in the body of the texts, while everything else, whether originally in Old Church Slavic, Latin or Greek, has been translated into English. Translations of all the parenthetical expressions and quotations are glossed in footnotes or in brackets in the text. I use the principle of simplifying names for an English-speaking audience in the body of the text. Thus “Hryhory” instead of the transliterated “Hryhorii” or “Hryhorij.” I have also opted for Ukrainian versions of names. Thus “Hryhory” instead of “Gregory” or the Russian “Grigory.” “Mykhailo” instead of “Michael” or the Russian “Mikhail.” And place names such as “Kharkiv” in Ukrainian instead of the Russian “Kharkov.”

– Michael M. Naydan, *Woskob Family*
Professor of Ukrainian Studies
The Pennsylvania State University

Introduction

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF HRYHORY SKOVORODA

by Valery Shevchuk

To comprehend the phenomenon of Hryhory Skovoroda, one must characterize his life and his philosophical views both individually as well as in their interrelatedness, that is, in the central ideas that he worked out in his dialogues and treatises, as well as his literary activity. All these things comprise a single constellation, a single lesson, produced in various forms. Skovoroda lived as he taught. He taught through wisdom and, eventually, created his own teachings in images, with the aid of the art of the word, of music, of painting.

The life of Skovoroda now amazes us, because a roofless existence for the contemporary intellect is, in fact, unimaginable. Even in his time this impressed his contemporaries, in fact astonished them. Nevertheless it was the original mark of a special sphere of Ukrainian society called “wandering deacons,” “scholastics”—a unique variety of European vagantes.² Wandering deacons and scholastics of the 17th and 18th centuries

² Vagantes (from the Latin) were scholar monks who wandered about Germany, France, England, and Northern Italy from the 11th to the 14th centuries.

Hryhory Skovoroda is considered by many as the first great Slavic philosopher and poet. Written over a period stretching from the 1750s until 1785, his *The Garden of Divine Songs* is a unique collection of 30 poems, featuring a complex system of strophic structures and with only a few of the songs written in a traditional way. Skovoroda never repeats one and the same strophic structure; this being the case, his *Garden of Divine Songs* according to writer-scholar Valery Shevchuk functions as a “practical guide to the art of poetry”, exemplifying all the meters and strophic patterns that were possible in Ukrainian poetry of that time. The poet makes masterful use of the accomplishments of academic poetry; the so-called “songs of the world” are the most prominent poems in this collection.

These songs are an expression of Skovoroda's views in poetic form, and many ideas from *The Garden of Divine Songs*, such as the search for happiness in the world in song 21, would later form the basis for some of Skovoroda's philosophical treatises. Skovoroda's originality, and his ability to approach the most cardinal problems of human existence, stem from his capacity to combine known motifs, borrowed from literary sources such as classical texts, the Bible, and ancient Ukrainian poetic works, with his own system of thinking that focuses on his philosophy of the heart.

The complete poems of Skovoroda are appearing in their entirety here in English for the first time, accompanied by a guest introduction by prominent Ukrainian writer Valery Shevchuk.

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