LITERARY READINGS OF HRYHORIY SKOVORODA'S POEMS IN ENGLISH

The 18th century Ukrainian philosopher, mystic, poet Hryhori Skovoroda, author of the collection of poems Garden of Divine Songs as well as several prose works, represents the end of the Ukrainian baroque, a period marked by a keen fascination with emblematics. The very course of Skovoroda's life is emblematic, forming a circle. He fondly remembered the place of his birth as a land of woods, hills, springs, and gardens.

Hryhori Skovoroda was born in the family of a poor Cossack in the village of Chornukhy near Lubny in 1722. He studied at the Kyivan Academy (1734-1741, 1744-1745, 1751-1753) but did not complete the full program. From 1741 to 1744 he was a member of the imperial choir in the capital of the Russian Empire. He spent the period from 1745 to 1750 in Hungary and may have traveled elsewhere in Europe as well. In 1750-1751 he taught poetics in Pereyaslav. For most of the period from 1753 to 1759 Skovoroda was a tutor in the family of a landowner. From 1759 to 1769, with interruptions, he taught such subjects as poetry, syntax, Greek, and ethics at the Kharkov College. After an attack on his course on ethics, he in 1769 decided to leave teaching for the last time. In the final quarter of his life he lived with various friends, both rich and poor.

This last period was the time of his great philosophic works. In this period as well, but particularly earlier, he wrote poetry and letters in Russo-Slavonic and in Latin and did a few translations from Latin. A lover of music, he played several instruments and composed songs.

Upon his death in 1794 he was buried, it is said, in a garden. Skovoroda reportedly asked that his epitaph read:

"The world chased me but could not catch me".

LIVEWORKSHEETS

To every city its customs and laws,
To each head its own thinking,
Each heart has its own love,
Each palate its own taste.
I have but one thought in this world,
Just one thought always on my mind.

Pete will kiss up to the nobles to gain status,
Ted the merchant will cheat on the measure,
One builds houses "in the new style,"
Another skims a percentage – just try to check the books.
I have but one thought in this world,
Just one thought always on my mind.

There the great jurist tunes the law to his key,
Here the student fills his head to bursting,
Another is troubled by Venus's amours –
Every head is tormented by its own foolishness.
I have but one thought in this world:
That I may die still clinging to my sanity.

Terrible Death with your free-swinging scythe,
You won't leave even the tsar's hair unmussed.
You don't look to see who's a peasant, who is tsar –
You consume them all, like straw in the flame.
Who shall spit on her razor-sharp blade?
The one who's conscience is clear as crystal.

Переклад

Всякому місту — звичай і права,
Всяка тримає свій ум голова;
Всякому серцю — любов і тепло,
Всякеє горло свій смак віднайшло.
Я ж у полоні нав'язливих дум:
Лише одне непокоїть мій ум.

Панські Петро для чинів тре кутки,
Федір-купець обдурити прудкий,
Той зводить дім свій на модний манір,
Інший гендлює, візьми перевір!
Я ж у полоні нав'язливих дум:
Лише одне непокоїть мій ум.

Той безперервно стягає поля,
Сей іноземних заводить телят.
Ті на ловецтво готують собак,
В сих дім, як вулик, гуде від гуляк.
Я ж у полоні нав'язливих дум:
Лише одне непокоїть мій ум.

Ладить юриста на смак свій права,
З диспутів учню тріщить голова,
Тих непокоїть Венерин амур,
Всякому голову крутить свій дур.
В мене ж турботи тільки одні,
Як з ясним розумом вмерти мені.

Знаю, що смерть — як коса замашна,
Навіть царя не обійде вона.
Байдуже смерті, мужик то чи цар, —
Все пожере, як солому пожар.

LIVEWORKSHEETS